

# **The Smokey Generation: A Wildland Fire Oral History and Digital Storytelling Project**

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May 2015

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts from Prescott College in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Wildland Fire Management and Communications.

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## **Abstract:**

This contextual essay provides a full description of The Smokey Generation, an applied thesis project designed around creating an interactive website that collects and presents oral histories and digital stories of current and past wildland firefighters, with an initial focus on hotshots (i.e., specific teams of wildland firefighters notable for their high level of training and experience). The framework of the website is intentionally designed to influence the public perception of wildland fire to better support and align with its necessary ecological role. For this project, I analyzed stories collected during 36 interviews of current and past hotshots, using literary analysis techniques to determine the following: What tropes and schemes do hotshots most commonly use when describing fire in the environment and what meanings and values are revealed through those figures of speech? In addition to identifying tropes and schemes used in the collected stories, I compared the meanings and values put forward by those figures of speech with how the firefighters view the role of fire in the environment. My analysis revealed a disconnect, showing casual use of antagonistic figures of speech to describe wildland fires and firefighting actions; this, despite the interviewees' actual beliefs about the role of fire in the environment, which indicate an understanding and appreciation of wildland fire, particularly the importance of using fire to restore healthy ecosystems, and a desire to be able to better use fire as a land management tool. To conclude, I discuss how I approached framing and presenting those findings on the

website in order to develop a richer, more meaningful conversation around wildland fire through the use of digital storytelling and oral history. The project website can be found at: <http://thesmokeygeneration.com>.

**Keywords:**

Wildland Fire, Digital Storytelling, Oral History, Public Perception, Literary Analysis, Tropes and Schemes, Metaphor of War, Applied Critical Discourse Analysis, Framing Theory, History of Wildland Fire, Reader-Response Theory, Personification of Nature

## Dedication

**This work is dedicated to my life partner and 'husband,' Brett Loomis.**

I never would have imagined that our paths would have taken us down this road. Your tolerance of my propensity towards stupidly ambitious projects, willingness to listen to me work through problems, and your simple acceptance of my incessant drive to explore evolving ideas and opportunities is remarkable. Your support means the world to me. You have my heart.

## Acknowledgements

Many people have helped me on my journey — in life and in pursuit of this project. Here are a few words of thanks to a few of them:

**To my family:** Mom and Dad – thank you for your unrelenting care and encouragement. Heather and William – you've both been amazingly helpful and I feel particularly blessed to have such wickedly smart siblings at my back. Thank you for your keen eyes and critical feedback. To Uncle Joe and Auntie Hien – your enthusiasm, questions, and encouragement brought about a renewed sense of purpose at just the right times; thank you so much. To Uncle Steve and Aunt Sue – thank you for continually checking in with me, encouraging me, and for reminding me that I need to keep perspective. To Grandma and Grandpa Hannah, who taught me that joy can be found in a sense of purpose, and to Grandpa Kimmel, who taught me the importance of learning how to learn; you are greatly missed.

**To my former Superintendent, Gina Papke:** Without your willingness to take a chance on me, a 20-year-old girl who had never seen a forest fire, I wouldn't be where I am today. I am lucky that you stepped into my life during such transformative years. Thank you for your mentorship, friendship, and genuine care throughout my career. I feel enormously proud to have been able to interview you for this project.

**To my Prescott College community:** To Peter Sherman – thank you for your support, feedback, encouragement, and direction throughout my thesis planning and project implementation. I feel lucky to have come back to the program under your direction. To Jared – your support over the years has been phenomenal; thank you for your continual insight and encouragement. It's been wonderful to be supported by someone with shared interests and a passion for imparting knowledge. To Paul, my second reader – thank you for your support throughout this process (especially given your busy schedule). And to my Environmental Studies cohort – your friendships and critical feedback have been invaluable. Much appreciated.

**To my wildland fire participants and advocates:** I hope this project will make you proud. I feel privileged and honored to work with you all, to capture your stories, and to help preserve the legacy of fire. This community is extraordinary. Thank you all.

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## Chapter One:

# **The Smokey Generation: A Wildland Fire Oral History and Digital**

## **Storytelling Project Introduction**

Storytelling – history – probably originated around an open fire. But there is something very peculiar about such storytelling when fire is itself the object of the story...There are good reasons why so many myths end their universe with fire, and why a scholarship that seeks an alliance with fire must accept the unpredictable and the dangerous.

– Stephen J. Pyne (1995)

The story of wildland fire has been told in numerous forums and formats. It is told through the history of our land management policies, commencing when the nation transitioned from indigenous fire use practices to colonial burning for land clearing (White 1992; Pyne, *Fire : A Brief History* 2011). It's told through the media, with seasonal coverage often shrouded in hype mixed with facts (Smith 2006). It's told through the rings of trees, marking cyclic fire regimes in circular regularity (Jensen and McPherson 2008). It's also told by those living in fire-prone ecosystems, in the creation of defensible space around their homes (Nowicki and Schulke 2006). What I find interesting is that the story of wildland fire has its own vernacular — formed in the same way fire burns, with a beautiful complexity and frank purpose; it responds to its setting and creates change as it develops. The Smokey Generation is a project that is

rooted in understanding and examining that vernacular through the collection, preservation, and sharing of stories about wildland fire by wildland firefighters themselves.

The Smokey Generation is a multi-faceted project that revolves around the creation of [TheSmokeyGeneration.com](http://TheSmokeyGeneration.com), which is a website dedicated to collecting, preserving, and sharing the stories and oral history of wildland fire, and this contextual essay illustrates each element of the project. I took a mixed methods approach to my research, in part because this project has several distinct components. In its most basic form, The Smokey Generation has three purposes:

**Purpose #1:** The first purpose is to create an accessible compilation of oral histories that is available as a body of research for other professionals, academics, and historians, as well as accessible to the public as representation of wildland firefighting culture. This was accomplished through the collection of 36 interviews of wildland firefighters with experience on interagency hotshot crews.<sup>1</sup>

These interviews were captured on video, edited, and presented in a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Interagency hotshot crews are diverse, 20-person Type I handcrews (teams of wildland firefighters). hotshots are required to meet specific physical fitness standards, training requirements, and maintain consistent operational procedures. Hotshot crews are used primarily as initial and extended attack national resources and travel throughout the country completing wildland fire suppression activities under a variety of conditions.

formats on [TheSmokeyGeneration.com](http://TheSmokeyGeneration.com). This portion of the project is discussed in Chapter 2 of this essay.

**Purpose #2:** The second purpose of this project is to identify and analyze the use of common figures of speech in firefighter stories in order to determine themes and/or patterns about how firefighters view the role of fire in the environment. To meet this objective, I devised the following thesis question: What tropes and schemes do hotshots most commonly use when describing fire in the environment and what meanings and values are revealed through those figures of speech? To answer this question, I analyzed the transcripts of the interviews I collected using literary analysis techniques, such as Critical Discourse Analysis. This analysis is addressed in Chapter 3 of this essay. I also explored the possible meanings and values that are revealed within the stories and figures of speech. These are discussed in Chapter 4, along with the techniques I used to provide deeper context of the role of fire in the environment within the website itself. Presenting the conclusions of my analysis, this chapter also discusses how the language firefighters use when describing fire in the environment does not necessarily reflect their view of the importance of the role of fire in the environment.

**Purpose #3:** Recognizing that an accessible, interactive website like this could become part of the equation that drives the perception of wildland fire, I worked

to leverage the website to encourage a more balanced acceptance of fire in the environment. This was accomplished by creating messaging (i.e. strategic language used to communicate a message or lesson) and imagery that is aligned with the need for acceptance of fire in the environment. In Chapter 5, I provide a deeper discussion on the development of the website as a public-facing tool to share the stories of wildland firefighters through oral history and digital storytelling methods. I discuss the challenge of creating messaging on the website that properly frames the stories without detracting from the ultimate goal, which is to work towards better aligning the public perception of wildland fire with the ecological need for fire on the environment.

My aim is that the firefighter stories I gathered, and the subsequent analysis of the tropes and schemes used by firefighters when talking about fire in the environment, will become avenues to identify and relate the relationship, consequences, and actions of people with fire. Environmental historian William Cronon believes, "Narratives remain our chief moral compass in the world. Because we use them to motivate and explain our actions, the stories we tell change the way we act in the world" (Cronon 1992). We must strike up meaningful dialog that opens up a better understanding of the role of fire in our environment (Kerr 2006; Arno and Allison-Bunnell 2002); identifying the language we use in our storytelling will enable us to hear and better

understand fire's story as it relates to the individual and as it represents fire's ecological role.

Whether it be through creating a better understanding of the necessity of fire in the environment through the website, instigating a collaborative, unified message across agencies that encourages the use of fire as a tool, or simply stimulating conversations about how the words we choose to describe fire in the environment have wider-reaching effects than we realized, I hope to identify aspects of fire's story that could have great impact on how we act in the ecological world. If we understand the language used by practitioners, and the resulting views and meanings that are pushed forward, then we can help shape and/or re-shape the public discourse around fire. I believe influencing the discourse will enable us to change the context within which fire is burning, including the policies that are formed by the acceptance (or lack of acceptance) of fire on our landscape.

As my analysis shows, fire practitioners' stories incorporate a language that, in its raw form, is antagonistic. In order to show better alignment with their actual beliefs about the role and benefits of fire in the environment, these stories need framing and interpretation. With creative context and elucidation, fire's story takes on new meaning and transitions the use of casual, antagonistic language into discourse that embodies the firefighting culture while at the same time reveals their unique and enlightened

understanding of the beneficial role of fire in the environment. These stories, then, can be showcased and disseminated to a general audience, serving to change negative perceptions and instigate a better understanding and more progressive acceptance of wildland fire management.

### **The Cultural Manifestations of Wildland Fire:**

Fire is an element that has fascinated and sustained humanity throughout time. From the annual agricultural burning in Mexico, to the gathering around the samovar<sup>2</sup> in Russia, fire is deeply embedded in human culture (Pyne 1995; Snyder 2006). In the U.S., the romance of a candlelit dinner has shaped our society as much as indigenous burning once shaped our landscape. We are drawn to flame. It is a mesmerizing and enigmatic force, and yet we intrinsically understand the basic principle that fire takes its character from its context (Pyne 2006); that adding a log to a fire makes the flames burn higher and hotter. Understanding this principle sets us apart from all other species; we are the only creatures who can tame and manipulate fire (Pyne 2006). Whether it be to create a backfire on the fireline, or to set the mood for an evening meal, fire is our tool (Pyne 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> A samovar is a traditional teapot (a metal container used to boil water for tea with a spout or faucet located near the base), that was historically heated over the coals of a fire. Its design and use encouraged communal gatherings and protracted discussions.

Stephen J. Pyne, one of the foremost experts on wildland fire, states in his book *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (1997), “Man is the foremost source of fire, the primary vector for its distribution throughout the world, the greatest modifier of the fire environment, and the arbiter of those values and perceptions that select the fire regime.” In the U.S., our values and perceptions have altered the fire regimes through a history of fire exclusion on our landscape (Arno and Allison-Bunnell 2002). We’ve changed the type and arrangement of fuels in our wildlands through one hundred years of fire-adverse land management policies, in many cases placing value on resource extraction over resource benefit (Hirt 1994; Arno and Allison-Bunnell 2002). Essentially, we have changed the context within which fire burns and, as a result, wildland fires now have higher potential for large fire growth (Wuerthner 2006); they are creating more detrimental ecological impact when they burn and are putting more values at risk (Keane, et al. 2002).

For example, a recent assessment by the Bureau of Land Management documented that 19% of its range has been replaced by grand and white fir (and another 20% by Douglas fir) in Idaho and western Montana, with open ponderosa stands (a fire dependent species) remaining at only 25% of their historic range (Dombeck, Williams and Wood 2004; Hann 1997). This represents a significant change in fuel type, loading, and arrangement; shade-tolerant and fire-intolerant species have increased, with a corresponding decrease in fire-resistant species (Agee 1993). It is

estimated that the over-accumulation of trees presenting a severe wildfire risk in the Intermountain West has reached approximately 40M acres (GAO 1999). In an example of increased potential for large fire growth, the Kalmiopsis Wilderness in the Siskiyou National Forest (Oregon), which is characterized by fires that burn at mixed intensities (historically reaching as large as 96,000 acres), witnessed a fire that eventually joined others to burn 500,000 acres in 2002 (Odion, et al. 2004). So, even forests that are adapted to (and/or dependent on) large fires are experiencing notable potential for unprecedented large fire growth and complexity.

Historically, an increase of fires has triggered policies that support an increase of suppression efforts (Gill, Stephens and Cary 2013). The growing occurrence of large wildland fires will continue to influence land management policy in this way, due to the cultural and economic impact of wildland fires burning homes (Gill, Stephens and Cary 2013). And yet, because much of our landscape is comprised of fire-adapted ecosystems (Wuerthner 2006), we are faced with this simple truth: fire is as ecologically powerful removed as applied (Pyne 2011). By removing and continuing to suppress fires, we are setting up the conditions in our wildlands for a volatile future of catastrophic fire seasons (Arno and Allison-Bunnell 2002). Public outcry is often oblivious to the fact that in putting fires out, with the current health and condition of our wildlands, we're really just putting them off (Wolf 2003; Wuerthner 2006). This is complicated by the increase of wildland urban interface/intermix areas (Arno and

Allison-Bunnell 2002); more homes are being built in wildland areas that exacerbates the perception that all fires are a threat to human lives and property. In fact, the population increased significantly between 1990 and 2000 in many western states (i.e., 28.5% in Idaho to 66.3% in Nevada). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population increased 13.2% nationally during that decade (Dombeck, Williams and Wood 2004). As a result, it is estimated that wildland urban interface covers nearly 10% of the land mass across States (Paveglio, et al. 2009).

Undoubtedly, the most striking characteristics of wildland fire are reflected when homes burn. Fires know no boundary marker, no arbitrary border between countries, and certainly no difference between wildlands and urban interface (Jensen and McPherson 2008). Because of this, even though fire remains an essential component of our society on many levels, and certainly is a necessary part of the natural world, wildland fire is often portrayed and understood to be our adversary (i.e., when we are fighting a fire, we are fighting a foe) (Ingalsbee 2006; Pyne 2004; Wolf 2003; Rothman 2007; True 2001). Even on a global scale, whenever smoke from Siberian wildfires settles into Ulaanbaatar (Betz 2012), or agricultural burning in Indonesia sends tourism in Singapore into decline (Palanissamy 2013), and certainly when Canada is forced to clear-cut a 100 foot swath at their border to prevent U.S. fires from entering (Pyne 2012), fire becomes not only cause for alarm but elevates the concern with which all wildland fire is viewed by the public (Pyne 1995; Gill, Stephens and Cary 2013).

This, in turn, creates a new cycle of policy that is often contrary to the pressing ecological need for balancing the inclusion of fire on our landscape with protecting life, property, and resources (Stephens and Ruth 2005; Arno and Allison-Bunnell 2002).

It is necessary to embrace the fact that fire's context is rooted not just in ecology or the arrangement of fuels, but also in our cultural conditions, politics, socio-economics, and even the language we use to describe fire itself (Wuerthner 2006; Pyne 2003). For example, the 1988 Yellowstone fires were portrayed in the media "...as "raging" disasters that "menaced," "devastated," and "destroyed" forests" (Smith 2006); this emotionally charged language played on the public's concern for the protection of a national jewel. Conversely, President George W. Bush traveled to the historic Biscuit Fire<sup>3</sup> in 2002 and announced a plan he said would reduce the number of conflagrations: The Healthy Forest Initiative (later enacted as the Healthy Forest Restoration Act) (Aucoin 2006). For many, this strategically framed language (around an initiative designed to increase logging on public land), evoked a sense of environmental protection and personal safety (Aucoin 2006). Interestingly, this initiative, with its backdrop of the large Biscuit Fire, was presented to the public at a

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<sup>3</sup> The Biscuit Fire was located in southwestern Oregon. It was complex of five fires that joined together, becoming one of the largest (nearly 500,000 acres) and most costly fires (most than \$150M to suppress) in recent history (Azuma 2004).

time of significant fear towards wildfire (despite the fact that a good portion of the Biscuit Fire was ecologically beneficial for the health of the forest) (Snyder 2006).

The Smokey Bear mentality (that original notion ingrained into many generations that all wildfires should be prevented), is yet persuading the public to repeatedly oppose most progressive (and even corrective) actions (Kerr 2006). We need to move away from that mentality and, as Elizabeth Ann R. Bird states in her essay, *The Social Construction of Nature: Theoretical Approaches to the History of Environmental Problems* (1987), “We need [to] examine the social relations, structural conditions, cultural myths, metaphors and ethical presuppositions that constitute the social negotiations with nature...” In other words, we must study fire with an understanding that our negotiations with wildland fire are social in nature. We have reached the point where wildland fire cannot just be examined through the lenses of forestry or fire science, of politics or bureaucracy, or of good fire versus bad fire (Wuerthner 2006). I believe examining the culture and stories of wildland firefighters will help to illuminate the influence of the (sometimes subconscious) language that we are using in our social negotiations with fire.

Renowned author and one of the founders of environmental history, Donald Worster, considers nature to be more than a setting for his stories, but a character in its own right, deeply embedded in the plot (Cronon 1992). If one is to consider fire as the

main character in its own story, firefighters are probably the most apt narrators. They have a daily intimate relationship with fire, an understanding of fire's behavior, and an emotional connection that goes deeply into social relations, cultural myths, and ethical dilemmas. In some ways, both the men and women who fight fires, as well as their unique stories, help form the conversation and, therefore, the character of wildland fire. Through them, I believe, we will be able to consider what fire is "saying" in its ecological reaction to the changes and the corresponding impacts we have made through our policies and suppression actions. That is to say, firefighters become the voice of fire while illuminating the human element of this ecological occurrence.

Often, when something is difficult to describe, people reach for metaphors and various other figures of speech, using comparison to illustrate context. For example, the comparison of firefighting with fighting a war (e.g., "battling the flames") is prevalent throughout fire literature and media coverage (Arno and Allison-Bunnell 2002; Pyne 2004). Figures of speech like this essentially enable people to put abstract concepts into something concrete or relatable (Van Engen 2008). In the case of wildland firefighting, the military metaphor is within easy reach and is to be expected; wildland firefighting has strong historical connections to the military (Pyne 2004). For example, the Incident Command System, the organizational structure used by wildland firefighting agencies to manage incidents, is modeled on military command structure (State 2004).

Nevertheless, as I found through my analysis, the nuances and meanings behind the

figures of speech used by firefighters, including military and other metaphors, do not necessarily reflect their awareness of the important role that fire plays in the environment.

By using literary analysis to identify each contributor's narrative style, the conclusions they draw, and the value and judgment they apply, and then building a website to frame and share their stories, I worked to express and explain a small piece of humankind's role in fire's story. I believe identifying these patterns of speech and the tactics used in the storytelling itself, as well as examining the underlying meanings, unveil at least a portion of the relationship between people and fire. Fire creates such an immediate change in the landscape (Jensen and McPherson 2008), and yet the story of fire is ancient (Pyne 1995) and full of lessons we have yet to extract. This project has enabled me to begin to gather those narratives and extract those lessons. My hope is that within the narratives presented on the website, we (as a general public) will draw connections between fire and ourselves and become further engaged in the outcome of the story.

### **Metaphors, Personification, and Anthropomorphism:**

My thesis question is narrowly focused: What tropes and schemes do hotshots most commonly use when describing fire in the environment and what meanings and

values are revealed through those figures of speech? I chose to limit the scope of my project to hotshots because of my personal background as a seven-year hotshot (for both the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management). Also, interagency hotshot crews are diverse, 20-person Type I handcrews (teams of wildland firefighters) and though each type of wildland fire crew plays an important role in wildland firefighting, hotshots are unique in that they are utilized primarily as national resources<sup>4</sup> (often in extended/sustained attack modes) and are mandated to meet a high level of training and qualification standards. As a result, hotshots are exposed to a wide variety of wildland fire behavior throughout the country, fire size and complexity levels, fuel types, weather conditions, management philosophies, and fireline assignments. Though there are approximately 2,300 current hotshots employed by 114 crews (U.S. Forest Service 2014) and there are tens of thousands of former hotshots, the number of available wildland firefighters (including engine crews, Helitack crews, etc.) employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior in 2013 was close to 13,000 (Tidwell 2013). This doesn't include other federal, state, local, volunteer, and private industry firefighters, numbering in the tens of thousands. In essence, as an exploratory research project, I looked at a very small subsection of the

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<sup>4</sup> National resources are modules that are available throughout the country, as opposed to modules that are limited to specific geographic areas.

wildland firefighting industry and only a small component of each story gathered from 36 interviews I collected.

Of course, because examining tropes and schemes used by hotshots to describe wildland fire in the environment is such a specific focus of inquiry, there aren't previous studies on the topic. Nevertheless, when looking at tropes and schemes used by hotshots, I anticipated the use of military and sports related metaphors to be a primary, common story-telling tactic used by hotshots. For example, figures of speech such as, "we were combating high winds" have military connotations, whereas descriptive statements such as, "the fire was cranking" or "it was motoring" are rooted in sports analogies. I also anticipated the use of personification and anthropomorphism to describe fire components, such as "the [smoke] column was laying down," "the terrain was wicked," or "the fire had two heads on it." Even though there hasn't been a specific examination of the use of figures of speech by hotshots, there has been work examining the use of both military and sports metaphors in other industries, as well as studies on personification and anthropomorphism of landscapes and nature.

In reviewing the literature on these areas, I found several core ideas. First, the metaphor of war is pervasive in our society and has a longstanding literary history (Lakoff 1980). For example, we hear about the War on Terror, a term some have attributed to first being coined by Tom Brokaw in response to the September 11, 2001 when he stated, "The profile of Manhattan has now been changed, there has been a

declaration of war by terrorists on the United States, there's nothing short of that" (Brokaw 2001). Others attribute it to the characterization of the military campaign launched in response to the 9/11 attacks made by President Bush (Connection n.d.; Eichenwald 2015; Schmitt 2005; Wolfe 2008). Regardless of who first leveraged this metaphor to connect with the global public, it has continued to be widely used as a tool for reporting on and gaining support for actions that fall under a full range of military and non-military activities. In its current form, it's a "war on terror," meaning a war on an emotion - fear or anxiety, and no longer a "war on terrorists;" the value of the metaphor is that it connects the two concepts, blurring the lines between what causes terror and the terror itself. This distinction is important because, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain in their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, metaphors structure and shape our perceptions and our understanding (Patten 1998; Lakoff 1980). Connecting emotion to justification for a contrived action or advancement of public policy agendas is a common use of the metaphor of war, and one that shapes our perceptions of any given issue (Childress 2001; Stuart 2011). Some other examples of war metaphors used in public policy are: The War on Drugs, War on Poverty, War on Women, and War on the Middle Class (Dobbs 2007; Stuart 2011; Roleff 2004; American Civil Liberties Union n.d.).

Beyond public policy, one prevalent use of war as a metaphor is in the field of medicine (Childress 2001; Mitchell 2003). For example, the "fight against cancer"

dominates cancer related medical literature and research funding initiatives (Hauser 2015; Weaver 2013; Delbaere 2013). As James F. Childress illustrates in his essay, “The War Metaphor in Public Policy: Some Moral Reflections,” the war metaphor in medicine extends past “fighting” a disease, it can encompass nearly every facet of medicine:

The physician as the captain leads the battle against disease, orders a battery of tests, develops a plan of attack, calls on the armamentarium or arsenal of medicine, directs allied health personnel, treats aggressively, and expects compliance. Good patients are those who fight vigorously and refuse to give up. Victory is sought and defeat is feared. Sometimes there is even hope for a “magic bullet” or a “silver bullet.” Only professionals who stand on the firing line or in the trenches can really appreciate the moral problems of medicine. And they frequently have “war stories” to relate. As medicine wages war against germs that invade the body and threaten its defenses, so a society itself may also declare war on cancer or on AIDS, under the leadership of its chief medical officer — the surgeon general. (Childress 2001)

In war, there is an enemy to be battled, a threat to be addressed, a strategy to be developed, and a fight to win. By using these metaphors with military connotations to communicate medical situations, we’re simply communicating ideas by building links from one concept to another (Delbaere 2013). We talk, for example, about *battling* cancer, experiencing a heart *attack*, and the *fight* against SARS. By choosing this language, we are framing diseases as the enemy (Hauser 2015; Delbaere 2013; Weaver 2013). Even President Obama stated, “Now is the time to commit ourselves to waging a war against cancer as aggressive as the war cancer wages against us” (Lennon 2009).

This framing creates a paradigm that pits us against an adversary and creates sense of fear, as well as a sense of duty (Hauser 2015). Several studies and literary works discuss the need to stop using the war metaphor in medicine, because it limits how we examine the problems; it creates unrealistic and simplistic pictures of complex, dynamic interactions and in some cases can hurt certain prevention behaviors (Ending the War Metaphor : The Changing Agenda for Unraveling the Host-Microbe Relationship - Workshop Summary 2006; Hauser 2015; Sontag 1979).

Interestingly enough, sports metaphors intersect with metaphors of war. In the case of football, the premise of the game is rooted in offensive and defensive strategies, territorial control, and facing an opponent (Billings 2012). It uses militaristic language, such as a “blitz” (i.e., taken from the German blitzkrieg), which is used to apply pressure/swiftly charge the quarterback immediately after the snap (Dictionary.com n.d.; Billings 2012; Ammer 2011). Other examples of military terminology used in football include, the *trenches* (the area directly around the area of scrimmage), a *bomb* (which indicates a long passing play), *sacking* an opponent (tackling), and an *end around* (which originally referred to a submarine tactic) (Ammer 2011; Delaney 2009 ).

Alternatively, many military conflicts have been described using sports metaphors, so much so that sports imagery has become almost mainstream in the discourse surrounding actual military conflicts (Billings 2012). For example, U.S. General Norman

Schwarzkopf referred to one successful operation in the Persian Gulf War as a “Hail Mary” (Billings 2012; Nadelhaft 1993; Segrave 2000).

In some cases, sports metaphors imply a certain set of values (Segrave 2000). For example, football metaphors often imply a structure of teamwork and fortitude, boxing metaphors often imply toughness, and horse racing metaphors are used to describe the rank of political candidates (for example, so-and-so is a “front runner”) (Billings 2012). Using such metaphors gives the language force and vigor, but it also can trivialize serious issues, dividing outcomes as win or lose (Periyakoil 2008; Delbaere 2013; Childress 2001).

Just as military metaphors are pervasive in our society, the idea of life as a game also crosses industry types. In business, CEOs work to “level the playing field” with market competitors; even industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie stated, “...business is the greatest game in the world” (Segrave 2000; Tanner 2002). Similarly, in medicine, nurse-doctor relationships are sometimes framed as games and the patient is often playing in a win/lose environment where the illness is the opponent ((Stein 1990; Weaver 2013; Delbaere 2013; Periyakoil 2008). In another, more closely related example, Interior Secretary Donald Hodel told a group of reporters and local residents when talking about the 1988 Great Yellowstone Fires, “What I hope we can do is minimize the Monday morning quarterbacking right now - at least until we can get those fires out” (Schierholz 1988). In everyday life, we talk about “covering our bases”

when we want to make sure that we're preparing for all possibilities. We commiserate with others about someone being "out of our league." We discuss the "game plan" for the day when we want to make sure everyone is informed of the steps needed to obtain an objective. These metaphors help us to comprehend one subject within the context of another (Lakoff 1980) and sports presents an opportunity to quickly and easily develop that shared comprehension.

In addition to anticipating military and sports metaphors to be a common trope used by hotshots to describe fire in the environment, I also anticipated the use of personification and anthropomorphism – essentially applying human traits and characteristics to fire. I looked into studies on how personification and anthropomorphism are used to describe landscapes and nature and found that many of the studies are narrowly focused (i.e., looking at the use of personification by a single author). One common topic, however is the acknowledgment of one of the most recognizable uses of personification to describe nature: "Mother Nature." Though the term Mother Nature is rooted in myth (such as the Greek Goddess Gaia giving birth to the earth), some say terms like "raping the land," "virgin forests," and "Mother Earth" are extensions of this concept and reflect of our patriarchal/hierarchical societal values and traditions of objectifying nature and women – reinforcing these ideas through a language of dominance (Berman 2006; Schroeder 1992). In the context of natural disasters, personifications and anthropomorphisms, such as blaming "Mother Nature"

or naming a hurricane, imply that natural events are deliberate actions. In other words, nature is perceived as a moral agent, leading to the belief that nature is dealing out a meaningful punishment or exerting her will over the disaster victims, resulting in a reduction of a willingness to support natural disaster victims (Sacchi 2013).

Anthropomorphism and personification is often found in environmental discourse and in dialogue surrounding conservation (K.-P. S.-L. Tam 2013; Sacchi 2013; K.-P. Tam 2014). As an example, Al Gore, in his explanation of global warming in his Nobel Lecture, stated, “As a result, the earth has a fever. And the fever is rising.” (Tam 2013; Gore 2007) This use of anthropomorphism in environmental discourse suggests a shared belief that using this technique is effective for communicating important conservation related messages. Recently, one study concluded that likening nature to humans does, in fact, have an “important role to play in changing how people relate to and behave toward nature” (K.-P. S.-L. Tam 2013). Another study, looking at animal welfare, demonstrated that people are more inclined to help dogs who are described with anthropomorphic language relative to those described with non-anthropomorphic language, suggesting that using anthropomorphism may encourage a shift towards more humane treatment of animals (Butterfield 2012). However, similar to the belief that there is risk in extending the metaphor or war (by creating, for example, an enemy out of a political position) and over-using sports metaphors (creating only a win/lose scenario, thus simplifying complex issues), some studies suggest that

anthropomorphizing species can have negative impacts on conservation by risking the suggestion that only certain animals with certain attributed characteristics are worthy of conservation (Root-Bernstein 2013; Karlsson 2012).

What is evident, is that anthropomorphism and personification of nature, like metaphors of war and sports, are widely used and have impact on how we interact and perceive the natural world. But the level of impact, effect of the perceptions formed by these tropes, and scale of the consequences of using these techniques to communicate ideas, still needs further study (K.-P. Tam 2014; Root-Bernstein 2013). For example, I believe the way firefighters communicate about fire, including their use of figures of speech, influences how the media, politicians, and the general public speak about and understand fire – whether or not meanings behind the figures of speech are accurately interpreted. This is research I hope to conduct in the future, as it's a natural extension of this study.

## Chapter Two:

### **Interviewing, Oral History, and Digital Storytelling: The Process**

At the heart of The Smokey Generation is the collection, preservation, and sharing of the stories and oral histories of wildland firefighters. Initially, I approached this believing that it would provide a service by creating a compilation of oral histories that would be available for professionals, academics, and historians to use in the future. This is still valid, but as I began the process of meeting with interview participants, I realized that there is an equally important value to collecting these stories that I hadn't anticipated – showing people that their lives are culturally interesting and that their experiences are worthy of sharing and are important. One seventy-eight year old interviewee told me that he felt honored to be asked to speak about his career; I felt enormously privileged to have been able to record his stories and felt the honor was mine. Several participants expressed to me that telling their stories was fun for them, but that they felt they were just doing their jobs and the stories weren't anything special. After their interviews, many laughed with me and seemed proud to be a part of the project. All in all, there has been a large upwelling of support by the participants, some of whom were reticent about participating to begin with. This has included emailing and calling to check on the website's progress, sending photos to further embellish the stories they told, and helping to spread the word about the project. This

indicates they became emotionally invested in their stories once they felt I believed them to be valuable.

At their root, oral histories are stories that individuals tell about their past, often to augment written historical records (Platt 2011; Endres 2011). The Oral History Association defines oral history as “a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events” (Oral History Association 2012). It is a controversial field, with some critics calling out its subjectivity, questioning the accuracy and validity of memory (which can be faulty and skewed by time), and citing problems such as interviewee bias (Endres 2011; Kirby 2008). However, proponents and practitioners believe that oral histories help to broaden our historical knowledge and, in some cases, can shed insight into historical time periods that otherwise wouldn’t cause us to rethink existing principles (essentially by linking popular and academic history) (Kirby 2008; Cahn 1994). In the case of land management, there are clearly benefits to using oral history to create a more complete picture of ecological change and changes in land use and policy, as well as to provide insight into environmental issues and controversies that otherwise wouldn’t be documented (Semken 2011; Endres 2011).

What I find alluring about oral history is that it looks at the stories of “normal” people and allows us to examine the cultural, social, political, and environmental context during which notable historical events occur. I can read and understand, for

example, the controversies that surrounded the “let it burn” policies of the 1970s and 1980s (the policy that allowed for naturally caused fires to burn unimpeded if certain parameters were met), which were brought to the forefront of the public’s attention during the 1988 Great Yellowstone Fires (Fifer 2013). But my understanding is significantly sharpened to the impacts of the policy and controversies when I listen to the descriptions of the flames, the depiction of the total exhaustion of the firefighters, the stories about the environmental conditions that affected their strategies and tactics, and their estimations of the scale and complexity of the fires. These memories, and the stories tied to them, provide historical context to this ecologically complex event. I think this is particularly fascinating to consider when taking into account that people who were entry level, impressionable firefighters during the 1988 Great Yellowstone Fires are now Federal Land Managers who are developing and implementing policies and who struggle to address similar complexities and issues comparable to the “let it burn” policies. These individuals were shaped by experiencing fires (and the resulting controversies) early in their careers, and are now facing the hard task of balancing scientific facts (that push them to use fires for resource benefit), political pressures (that press everything from air quality to cost containment), and public perceptions (that range from fear of fire to support of prescribed burning), with their own personal worries about having a “Great Yellowstone Fire” emerge within their own area of

responsibility (whether it be forest, rangeland, or wildland urban interface).<sup>5</sup> These oral histories, then, import greater importance and these “normal” people are having greater impact on land management than we would perhaps customarily consider.

There is a constant commiserating among wildland firefighters about the loss of institutional knowledge as the “old fire dogs” (career-long operational firefighters) retire and pass away. This project is one way to capture some of that knowledge and share it with future generations. I believe, wholeheartedly, that the oral histories and stories collected will give not only firefighters, but other audiences as well, valuable insight into the ecological, social, and cultural intricacies of wildland fire management. It’s through the minute details, humor, sincerity, and genuine recounting of personal experience that we’ll be able to come to understand the greater impact of our fire management actions. It’s also through the telling and preserving of personal histories that we’ll be able to provide context for the institutional knowledge that is on the verge of being lost.

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<sup>5</sup> On a related note, interviewee John Locke stated about losing a prescribed burn in relation to the fact that we’ve been suppressing fire for so long we now have decadent fuel loading, “I don’t know how things can ever be rectified, as complicated as the system is (with AQMD and all of the other —). In not so recent years—and recent years—we’ve been dealing with the pile burning mostly. It’s just that the windows of opportunity and ways prescriptions are written, which are written to be safe—but the legal aspect of something happening—you lose it, or—. It’s a done deal. Nobody wants to be there; nobody wants to be that person. So, not very much gets done in this day and age, unfortunately.”

## **Study System and Selection of Contributors:**

Initially, I targeted 25 individuals to interview, hoping to secure a higher number of interviews weighted towards more experienced firefighters. I interviewed a total of 46 current and former firefighters, but chose to include only 36 in my analysis because one interview didn't elicit any in-depth stories and the other was an unexpected group interview of nine that I determined to be an outlier from the others.

My study system was limited to current and past hotshots, at all grade levels, who had (at minimum) experience filling in on hotshot crews. The goal of defining my study system in this manner was to collect a baseline of stories with an expansive set of circumstances that would appeal to a national audience. I included both current and past hotshots due to the physically demanding lifestyle that is required; many hotshots spend multiple seasons on crews but eventually move on into other types of positions. Also, including past hotshots enabled me to interview individuals that represent previous "eras" of hotshotting. This was particularly rewarding because I was able to speak with some hotshots who began during the time period when hotshot crews were first being formed (in the early 1950s).

I collected stories from three geographical Regions (USFS Region 3 - Southwest, Region 5 - Pacific Southwest, and Region 6 - Pacific Northwest) with stories spanning from the 1950s to present. Limiting interviews to these Regions allowed me to conduct

in-person interviews (instead of phone or internet-based interviews) since I could realistically travel to those areas. These Regions also represent the highest concentration of hotshot crews in the country.

I chose to include contributors from all grade levels. Grade levels (a federal pay classification scale) indicate, to some degree, an individual's experience level. As such, I targeted a mix of current and past superintendents, assistant superintendent/captains, squad bosses, lead/senior firefighters, and crewmember level contributors. I believe including contributors from all levels provided some interesting perspectives, contrasting "young" firefighters with the "salty old fire dogs." Initially, I thought to exclude hotshots with fewer than three fire seasons because it's generally accepted that you're being used primarily for your brawn, as opposed to your brain, for the first several seasons of employment on hotshot crews (assuming you start at entry level positions). Though this is somewhat of a generalization, I thought that gathering stories from hotshots who are in positions to observe and make tactical decisions regarding how fire is used in the fire environment, would elicit the most meaningful insights into how fire in the environment is viewed. However, once I began interviewing, I found that I couldn't turn away first year firefighters because they were just as eager to share their stories and had unique insight and enthusiastic opinions. In fact, many people who have been in fire for many years happily reminisced about their first couple of fire seasons anyway. I believe this can be attributed to the steep learning curve that

firefighters go through their first few years on the fireline; the excitement of your first fire is hard to forget and lessons learned during your first few years are pivotal to understanding hazards, safety, and productivity (and therefore stand out as significant within the context of an entire career).

In all, I traveled approximately 4,500 miles while collecting 25 hours of audio and video recordings. Of the interviews included in my analysis, I spoke with thirteen current and former superintendents, six captains/assistant superintendents, four squad bosses, six lead/senior firefighters, and eight crewmembers. This included two individuals from Region 3 (AZ), fourteen from Region 6 (three from WA and eleven from OR), and twenty from Region 5 (CA).

### **Ethnographic and Oral History Interviewing Techniques:**

I used a combination of ethnographic and oral history interviewing methods for this project. Ethnographic interviewing is essentially focused on exploring meanings that people assign to actions and events in their cultural worlds, as expressed in their own language (Roulston 2010). This approach takes more of a conversational style of interviewing and helped to elicit common vernacular used among hotshots. Whenever necessary, I obtained definitions of terms used for the purpose of helping inform the analysis of the narratives. I leveraged my own personal experience as a former hotshot,

since I was not conducting these interviews while embedded within a field setting (as is traditional within ethnographic studies) (Roulston 2010). Because of this, though I worked to keep the tone and feel of the interviews open and engaging, the traditional conversational approach was modified slightly to accommodate structured questions and focused dialogue.

Oral history interviewing methods focus on collecting oral narratives from ordinary people in order to record their lives and past events (Roulston 2010, Platt 2011). Oral history interviews seek a detailed account of personal experience and reflections, a critical focus of my project, and I used the Oral History Association's Best Practices to guide my interviewing technique (Principles and Best Practices 2000). Although my research is not specifically focused on examining change over time, which is a guiding standard of oral history, the stories provided by the participants are primarily based in the past and are essentially records that may reflect change over time in the future.

One of my initial concerns about the interview process was whether or not my gender dynamic would inhibit my participants. In order to address this, I remained cognizant of body language and other cues that a participant might have used to reveal their comfort level and adapted my communication style accordingly (i.e. employing similar techniques I used to develop camaraderie among fellow firefighters in the past, such as using firefighting humor to lighten the mood, etc.). I found, though, that

participants didn't seem inhibited by my gender, but were only initially uncomfortable because of the recording equipment (more on this later). I was also concerned about skepticism towards my goals and the belief that I was "hunting" a story, which I was concerned would impact what type of information the participants might decide to share. I tried to address this by providing a very clear description of the project and indicating that all stories and opinions were welcomed and encouraged. This seemed to help, but I also noticed that because these interviews were conducted in a formal setting (often in a training room or empty office), there was a sense of formality that prevented participants from speaking freely using their own causal language. For example, only one participant openly cursed during her interview, and from my personal experience as a firefighter, using gratuitous profanity while telling stories is common. This degree of formality, though nothing unsurmountable, was a little disappointing. However, it was understandable given that professional curtesy, normally granted in formal settings, dictates professional language. I believe, however, that if I had conducted the interviews in a more casual setting, say, for example, around a campfire, that participants would have felt more inclined to use more casual language when telling their stories, reflecting and revealing truer cultural nuances.

I also believed, going in to the interviews, that ego and pride might impede the openness of participants, with a concern about how the story might be perceived by their peers. I addressed this by assuring participants that they would be able to review

the audio files and transcripts prior to publishing them online. Interestingly, most participants told me that they didn't need to review the recordings and weren't worried. A few participants did, however, indicate on their release forms that they would like to review the material prior to it being posted on the website, and one participant asked that a portion of his interview be removed from the site due to concerns about how he might be perceived by his peers. All in all, though, I didn't get the sense that people were concerned about how sharing stories might somehow affect their reputation or social status. Nevertheless, I did get the sense that there was self-censorship occurring as a result of stories not reflecting adherence to agency standards, not aligned with societal norms, or outside of professional bounds. For example, I would ask participants at the end of the interview if there were any other stories they wanted to share, and on occasion they would respond with something along the lines of, "Not that I can think of...no G-rated stories"<sup>6</sup> or "There are plenty of stories—most of them are a little too crazy, or too—you know—[we] try to keep them under wraps."<sup>7</sup> This indicated to me that there are entertaining, revealing, humorous, or otherwise interesting stories that are not being shared due to concern about their positions as representatives of a government agency and/or reputation as a firefighter/employee. I think it would be an interesting future study to examine self-censorship among

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<sup>6</sup> Cameron Stinchfield, interviewed by Bethany Hannah, May 5, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Robinson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014. See appendix B.

participants who are currently employed by a federal agency (and thereby concerned about job security), recently retired firefighters (who still might have agency allegiance), and long-since retired firefighters (who have nothing really to lose by sharing stories that go outside of polite convention or might be considered illustrative of unprofessional behavior). These types of differences were somewhat apparent even in the few interviews I conducted of retired individuals within the scope of this project, with one recently retired individual outright stating, “Now that I’m retired, I don’t have to be popular amongst my peers.”<sup>8</sup> Another long since retired individual shared a sexually explicit version of the crew logo (from the 1950s), something that would be considered absolutely prohibited of a contemporary federal firefighter (and yet, it was historically interesting and quite entertaining to hear about).

As I progressed through the interviewing process, it was important to me that my voice was minimally heard during the interviews. So, although I utilized modified ethnographic interviewing methods (that were slightly more conversational in nature), I worked to refine my techniques so that I was able to ask as few questions as I could, to solicit the type of information and stories I was determined to acquire. In other words, my goal was to engage the participants with questions and banter in order to develop the relationship and allow them the space to open up, with the eventual goal of encouraging the contributor to direct the nature of their storytelling on their own. With

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Jordan, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014. See appendix B.

that, I allowed contributors to speak as long as they liked on any subject they wished to remember, even if it wasn't particularly relevant to my research. Finally, I approached the interviews with an understanding that it is important to build trust and emotional connections in order to make possible experiences of vulnerability and openness (Kaufman 1974). I worked to build that trust by actively listening and encouraging the participants and, in some cases, the resulting stories reflected experiences with highly emotional and personal subtexts (such as stories about surviving entrapment situations or the aftermath of fireline fatalities). These are probably the most engaging types of stories that I was able to capture; several are truly mesmerizing.

I believe that my background as a hotshot provided me with an "in," while having a firm foundation of understanding of interview and conversational styles enabled me to utilize adaptive interview techniques. Ultimately, I was able gather powerful, humorous, and engaging stories that provided excellent source material for my analysis. I believe that this success was, in part, due to creating meaningful interview environments and using well-founded qualitative interviewing methods.

### **Interview Collection Process:**

I utilized a semi-structured interview method, with each interview focused on collecting at least two stories: one dedicated to the interviewee's topic of choice (which wasn't guided by structured questions); the second story guided by structured

interview questions designed to elicit a story about fire in the environment. The following questions were be used at times during the interviews. Please note the indented questions (square bullets) represent possible follow-up questions designed to elicit stories. Many of these follow-up questions were dependent on the answer to the primary question and where only be asked if it was appropriately related to their initial answer.

Structured interview questions included:

- What do you see as the role of fire in the environment?
  - What experiences led you to that conclusion?
  - What are the conditions that need to be in place for you to feel that fire is detrimental to the environment?
- Tell me what you would like people to know and understand about wildland fire.
  - What experiences led you to want people to know/understand that?
- Describe your experiences with different management efforts (and/or strategies and tactics).
  - Describe an example of when you implemented \_\_\_ specific management philosophy.
  - Tell me about a time when you believed that a fire was benefiting the environment.
- How do you perceive the value of your work?
  - When have you felt the most proud of your actions on the fireline?
  - Describe an example of your favorite aspect of wildland fire.

Informal Topics:

- Favorite stories
- Personal histories
- Best shift ever stories
- Couth Vault stories.

Formal Topics:

- Initial attack
- Extended attack
- Line construction
- High desert fires
- So Cal fires
- Close calls

- At the station
- The saw shop
- Cutting fireline – Sawyer/Swamper
- Cutting fireline – Lead Pulaski, QC, tools
- Lookout
- Travel – crew hauls, flights, bumping rigs
- Travel – helicopter transport
- Wilderness fires
- Grass fires
- Alaska fires
- Big Timber fires Weather
- Eastern fires
- Couth Vault
- Coyote-ing out
- Spiking out
- Working with other crews
- Political Smokes
- Hiking into a fire
- Incidents within incidents
- Examples of good/bad leadership
- Basecamp - Chow/Food, Showers, Blue Rockets, Supply, Briefings
- All Risk Incidents (Hurricanes, Shuttle Recovery, 9/11, etc.)

I recorded each interview using a variety of methods. I used a digital recorder with a lavalier microphone to capture quality audio. I used a Cannon DSLR camera with a mounted shotgun microphone to capture high definition audio and video footage, and a standard flip video camera to capture back-up footage. I learned basic video and audio techniques by taking online courses on a variety of topics, including learning interview techniques (such as body positioning) to achieve a well-balanced look and feel for the videos. I also built a portable three-point lighting kit so that I could provide adequate lighting no matter the location. The redundancy in recording methods was invaluable; I had multiple minor equipment failures and made mistakes as I was learning. Having the redundancy in place enabled me to capture and produce quality videos and recordings for the website.

With the first couple of interviews, I struggled with getting the type of stories and descriptions of fire that I had hoped for. So, I slowly altered my technique to try to

get more descriptive stories from the participants. I found that by responding to one of their stories with a story of my own really opened up the flow of storytelling. It seemed to validate that they were on the right track and that any story was welcomed. If they got stuck, I gave them an opportunity to study the master list of topics/questions (as a brainstorming tool) during the interview – it usually stimulated at least one more story. However, I found that my list of structured questions didn't work to elicit stories like I had hoped; the questions were just too broad and formal. But, I was able to play off of the stories they told to ask additional questions and get better descriptions of fire in the environment. In most cases, I simply had to ask, "Any other stories come to mind?" and the interview would continue. All in all, every participant offered up at least one gem during their interview and at least one rich figure of speech or description.

At the start of the interviews, I initially prepared the participant with what to expect, where to look, and what types of questions I'd be asking. In line with a more ethnographic approach to interviewing, I started to build a relationship with each participant by bantering with them while I adjusted the lights, microphones, and cameras. I ask about what types of stories they wanted to share and about their general background. I shared my own background so that they knew where I'm coming from. I also explained what each microphone and camera was doing. For instance, I explained why I was adjusting the lights (usually to reduce shading from baseball caps), and what I'd be doing with the equipment during the interview. For example, I used

my tablet to control the DSLR camera; this allowed me to get out from behind the camera and simply have a conversation with the participant (keeping the tablet on my lap to check composition and focus on occasion). I also started to show the participants what they looked like on camera before I began. This seemed to make them feel more comfortable with the technology and put them at ease regarding the interview.

I collected anywhere from one interview to ten interviews in one sitting. I found that after three or four interviews, I was mentally exhausted and had to work especially hard to maintain active listening. The quality of my questions declined as the number of interviews conducted one sitting increased. However, given the time constraints and people's availability, I seized on my own tenacity to ensure the success of the interviews in those circumstances. In one case, I had ten people volunteer to interview when I had anticipated a maximum of five. Because I didn't want to turn down someone's opportunity to share their personal experiences, I adapted to accommodate all ten individuals. The later interviews were severely impacted by my energy level and mental fortitude, though I was able to get some good stories.

I was mindful of how my own personal perspectives in interview interactions might bias the information gathered, as well as thoughtful about how to address the concerns that human subjects may not provide accurate or truthful account. I also reflected on the idea that people's accounts might not accurately reflect their opinions. I addressed this by continually monitoring my position as a researcher within the

interviewer/interviewee relationship. This was done by reviewing audio files of the interviews to determine whether or not my questions were eliciting in-depth information, whether I led or baited the contributor, how I could develop the relationship in a quicker fashion (in order to best leverage the allotted time), how my communication style melded with the participants', and where I could make improvements to make the contributors feel at ease, and so on.

### **Interview Management and Transcription Process:**

Each participant was required to sign an informed consent form and a deed of gift. The informed consent form provided each participant with an explanation of the study and potential risks, while the deed of gift conveyed ownership of the recorded interviews to The Smokey Generation. Each participant was afforded the opportunity to place restrictions on the use of their interview; two participants requested that their interviews not be used online through this process.

Relationship management was a big part of the success of this project. People are emotionally invested in their stories and inherently bought-in to the project as soon as they started their interviews. In order to leverage their support and emotional investment, I designed branded 'Thank you' notes to send out to each participant. I also used the opportunity to thank them for their help and participation when I reached

out to inform them that their interview was ready for viewing online. This allowed me to give them a sense of fulfillment and also provided legitimacy for the project.

Each interview was transcribed using a two phased process. The first phase was near verbatim transcription from the audio recording using voice-to-text software. The second phase involved editing the transcripts to provide for clarity, grammar, and consistency. I used Baylor University Institute for Oral History's Style Guide (History 2015) as a guideline for editing the transcripts, including formatting and structure. I attempted to retain the authenticity of the participants' speaking style within the transcripts, but edited content in order to ensure proper grammar and understandable narrative flow. This included eliminating false starts and many crutch words (which naturally occur in spoken word). I also edited out much of my part of the conversations, leaving only my core questions in the transcript. The transcripts are included in Appendix B and are organized in alphabetical order.

## Chapter 3:

### **Tropes and Schemes: An Analysis**

Again, the question driving my studies is as follows: What tropes and schemes do hotshots most commonly use when describing fire in the environment and what meanings and values are revealed through those figures of speech? In this chapter, I lay out my analysis of the tropes and schemes and go into deeper discussion of the meanings and values revealed through those figures of speech in the next chapter.

In order to identify the tropes and schemes used by hotshots to describe fire in the environment, I employed basic literary analysis techniques, such as (re)reading the text with specific goals in mind, seeking out commonalities among the stories, etc. I was primarily looking to identify the figures of speech and rhetorical devices used by the interviewees. Through this process, I identified some real gems, such as when Dirk Charley told a story about a close call on the fireline. He describes, "...a huge snag in the middle that was weaving like a drunk man."<sup>9</sup> Or when Issac Naylor talks about people coming out of their homes looking at an approaching fire, "...just waking up in their robes, looking outside like, you know, with eyes as big as the moon."<sup>10</sup> These types of creative similes help give signification to the stories. Other examples include

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<sup>9</sup>Dirk Charley, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 16, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>10</sup>Issac Naylor, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

describing firefighters that “were just coiled like springs,”<sup>11</sup> talking about someone who “hit the nail on the head”<sup>12</sup> when making a decision, and describing building a crew as though it’s a “huge game of chess. Moving the right players around in the right positions, to accomplish our goals when we go to fires.” All of these wonderfully descriptive statements help to color the narratives and provide context by linking one idea with another.

By cataloguing the figures of speech scattered throughout the collected stories, I identified that the firefighters’ descriptions of fire as well as the descriptions of firefighting actions, needed to be viewed separately and doing so revealed interesting themes in their view of the role of fire as it relates to their role as firefighters. This discovery informed and directed further analysis.

Firstly, tropes and schemes are both considered to be figures of speech. They allow for an author to use language in an artful and unusual way (Burton n.d.). Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a trope as a “word, phrase, or image used in a new and different way in order to create an artistic effect” (Merriam-Webster.com 2015) whereas schemes are considered to be a change in the standard word order or arrangement (Cline 2014). At first pass, many of the tropes were readily identifiable.

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<sup>11</sup> Josh Parker, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 08, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>12</sup> Gina Papke, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 12, 2014. See appendix B.

Schemes and rhetorical devices, on the other hand, took multiple readings to identify, as it's easy to get lost in the story and miss changes or deliberate use of word order.

It's important, I think, to be clear that the people who participated in the interviews spoke off-the-cuff, using their typical speaking style to convey stories and respond to questions. Unlike an author, who has the ability to play with words over time to contrive artful expressions, the interviewee's stories were captured in the moment and the participants didn't have the luxury of time to think about crafting a specific message or using particularly creative language. That's what makes this study interesting to me; the stories that were told, though perhaps self-censored by way of a perceived necessity for a standard of professionalism, were told by every day, typical people — not trained storytellers. So the language they used is authentic and extemporaneous, providing raw material from which to determine patterns and themes.

### **Schemes and Devices:**

As far as literary devices used to tell stories, the most common storytelling structure used by the interviewees included setting the scene by identifying his or her position/role on crew (at the time the story took place), identifying the name of the crew (though some preferred to not name any crews at all during their interviews), the fire name and/or year, and/or type and length of shift. Most importantly, however, they would describe the fire environment, including: type of fuels, weather conditions, fire

behavior leading into the story, relative humidity, and/or geographic location. By identifying some or all of these elements upfront in their stories, they are conveying a wide variety of cultural and conditional messages. For example, among the wildland firefighting community, if you are talking about your time as a Senior Firefighter in Oregon during 1997 (a lower level position during a notably slow fire season) it would have an entirely different context and weight than if you were telling about your time as a Squad Boss in Colorado during 2002 (a transitional leadership position during a particularly busy season with several notable large fires occurring in the Rocky Mountains). Because they were talking to me, a former firefighter, there was no need to provide explanations or structure their stories in a different or more creative manner. They were able to say things like, “low RHs; single digits” and I’d understand the significance of how single digit relative humidity readings affects fire behavior and all interrelated conditions and responses. Often, despite having this shared understanding, interviewees used multiple parenthetical statements to clarify their train of thought or to provide further explanation on a given piece of the story. Most of the time, it appeared that they would remember something as they were telling the story, and simply used parenthetical statements to add that tidbit in as an aside.

There were several people who told stories using identifiable schemes, such as Adam Hernandez,<sup>13</sup> who used a classic climax scheme to tell one of his stories (i.e.,

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<sup>13</sup> Adam Hernandez, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

building up the thrill of a hard fireline shift full of physical and mental challenges, only to end the story with, “And so, as soon as we get to camp we hear a call on the radio that they have a spot fire—and we lost the whole thing.”). He arranged the telling of the details within the story in an order of increasing importance, generating anticipation towards a successful outcome, and found humor and irony in telling that the effort was all for naught. Because the story is entertaining and represents a typical hotshot assignment, it is featured on the Contextualized Stories page on TheSmokeyGeneration.com.<sup>14</sup>

The most common scheme used by the interviewees, however, was polysyndeton (the deliberate use of many conjunctions, sometimes to stylistically emphasize a sense of overwhelming effect) (LiteraryDevices Editors 2013). The following are examples of interviewees using polysyndeton in the telling of their stories.

In the first example, Brain Anderson is talking about an initial attack fire in Southern California. By using polysyndeton he is able to convey a sense of achieved personal satisfaction by addressing a challenge with hard work and persistence. The tempo and style of this statement suggests an effort and pace similar to rapidly hiking up a steep hill.

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<sup>14</sup> Located here: [http://thesmokeygeneration.com/?page\\_id=42](http://thesmokeygeneration.com/?page_id=42)

*Those are always the most intense, and the most fun, and the most sweat, the most adrenalin rush, when you're chasing a grass fire, trying to keep up with it as you see it running up the hill.<sup>15</sup>*

Next, Stephanie Rogers is talking about fighting fires in Alaska and being challenged by the constant daylight. She is able to convey a sense of exhaustion by indicating that time seemed to have stopped while the work remained seemingly unending.

*It was maybe one in the morning and we were just prepping and prepping and cutting and brushing and swamping, and it looked like it was noon outside, and you're eating a really late dinner at what looks like lunch time, and that's kind of when the delirium starts setting in.<sup>16</sup>*

In the next example, Brian Janes uses polysyndeton to describe a typical “good” day on a fire. By using “and” multiple times to transition through activities, he expresses achieving a sense of accomplishment through persistent work ethic and by overcoming challenges.

*I think just in general, the feeling is probably a fire that is up and running and you're getting line in and just chasing it and chasing it and you know you're making headway, which is a really good feeling.<sup>17</sup>*

Charlie Caldwell uses polysyndeton while telling a story about a fire in Minnesota, evoking a sense of size and loss.

*I got out there, you know, they're trying to stop this thing and it had mowed down acres and acres and acres of trees—tamarack—and just laid them down on the ground.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Anderson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>16</sup> Stephanie Rogers, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Janes, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 2, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>18</sup> Charlie Caldwell, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 14, 2014. See appendix B.

In all cases, using polysyndeton as a scheme worked to emphasize an experience and helped provide context to their story.

## Tropes:

The more evident use of figures of speech lay within the use of tropes. Most notably, participants used similes, metaphors, and personification. Additionally, there was some use of metonymy, hyperbole, and paradox. Here are some examples of each (my emphasis in bold):

**Simile**<sup>19</sup> (allows the reader/listener to relate what they're hearing/reading to their personal experiences, drawing resemblance using the words "like" or "as.")

(LiteraryDevices Editors 2013)):

*...you're actually walking around throwing fire into the trees trying to get the black spruce to burn. As soon as it does, it just takes off, **just like a rocket** through those trees.<sup>20</sup>*

*...one of the most gratifying things is when you pull something off, because **it almost feels like it's by the skin of your teeth.**<sup>21</sup>*

*But it's in that really cool fuel type that, you know, you get the spectacular burnouts **and it looks like the world is coming to an end**, and then it's all totally over—like within seconds.<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines a simile as, "An explicit comparison between two different things, actions, or feelings, using the words 'as' or 'like.'" (Baldick 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Gallivan, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 05, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>21</sup> Jeff Locke, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>22</sup> Erin Kimsey, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 05, 2014. See appendix B.

**Metaphor**<sup>23</sup> (allows the reader/listener to comprehend a concept through comparison of one thing with something else that has a common characteristic (LiteraryDevices Editors 2013)).

*I mean there were times where you could hear that **freight train** coming and then your superintendent would be, just, 'line out and let's move it.'*<sup>24</sup>

*Then like two months after that happened, we had the Whitewater Baldy [Fire] come through and just **nuked out** all of that.*<sup>25</sup>

*...it was amazing, we had a pretty intense **wall of flame** coming at us, it stood up in the crowns; we had a running crown fire coming at us.*<sup>26</sup>

**Personification**<sup>27</sup> (substitution of a descriptive word or phrase in which a thing, idea, or animal is given human attributes (LiteraryDevices Editors 2013)).

*Let's see, there was another one actually here on the forest, one of my first years as well, and it just kind of, same thing, the wind just picked up just a little bit and it had preheated all of the fuels and it pretty much just **stood up** into the timber **and ran** for, I think, one or two thousand acres—which isn't a substantial amount, but to see it right in front of your eyes is a pretty spectacular thing to see.*<sup>28</sup>

*We're triaging a house and this family, they had fire **creeping** through their yard.*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines metaphor as, "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them" (Merriam-Webster.com 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Speaking about a moving crown fire, the sound of which is often compared to the sound of a freight train. Gina Papke, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 12, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>25</sup> Erin Kimsey, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 05, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>26</sup> Brian Laird, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>27</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines personification as, "attribution of personal qualities; especially: representation of a thing or abstraction as a person or by the human form" (Merriam-Webster.com 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Nick Robinson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>29</sup> Issac Naylor, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

*We just kind of one at a time, from the back of the line, kept rotating and smacking down the grass and throwing dirt on the **head** as much as we could (while the guys in the back were bringing hand line up one of the **flanks**).<sup>30</sup>*

**Metonymy**<sup>31</sup> (substitution of some attributive or suggestive word for what is actually meant; gives more profound meaning to otherwise common ideas (LiteraryDevices Editors 2013)):

The “scrape” (i.e., crewmembers who form the group that physically constructs fireline by scraping layers of organic material away to expose mineral soil (thus making a break in combustible fuel). Crews are split into two main groups during fireline construction, the scrape and the saws (saw teams). The scrape represents a place within the order of the hierarchy and can represent a sense of camaraderie (e.g., you’re among a group of other people working in the same manner towards a common goal).

*I am a grunt. I am a **scrape**...The scrape is constantly trying to catch up with the saws and when we do, the saws hate it, which is fun, but...<sup>32</sup>*

Another example is, “backyard.” Many interviewees referred to fires that occurred locally on their home Forest as being in their backyard.

*...on a ridge that we were on, there was the Tahoe Hotshots (**it was their backyard**), us, Payson, and I believe there was another crew there. It had to have been at least a couple miles worth of hand line we had to put down this ridge.<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>30</sup> Brian Anderson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>31</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines metonymy as, “a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated” (Merriam-Webster.com 2015)

<sup>32</sup> Stephanie Rogers, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 05, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>33</sup> Rigo Flores, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 15, 2014. See appendix B.

**Hyperbole**<sup>34</sup> (exaggeration of ideas in order to emphasize something (LiteraryDevices Editors 2013)):

*“You live for hotline assignments; yeah, you mop up and you burnout—there are a lot of different things that you do, but those assignments you love.”<sup>35</sup>*

*“...we were actually up and going for pretty much the whole 40 hours that we were going. Pretty much the **walking dead** when we were done with that shift and went back into camp.”<sup>36</sup>*

*“We were **in the middle of nowhere**, so to speak, so there was a bunch of miscellaneous resources that increase the challenge to get in communication with everybody as fast as we could.”<sup>37</sup>*

**Paradox**<sup>38</sup> (an apparently contradictory statement that nevertheless contains a measure of truth (LiteraryDevices Editors 2013)).

The concept of a “good” fire, “good” shift, and “good” fire season is a common paradox used throughout the stories. Often, to a firefighter, a “good” fire is one that was burning actively with high intensity, had multiple “problem” components (e.g., not enough resources, inaccessible terrain, etc.), and/or was high complexity (e.g., wildland urban interface, decadent fuel, tumultuous

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<sup>34</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines hyperbole as, “language that describes something as better or worse than it really is” (Merriam-Webster.com 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Ron Garcia, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>36</sup> Joaquin Marquez, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>37</sup> Brian Anderson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>38</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Paradox as, “something (such as a situation) that is made up of two opposite things and that seems impossible but is actually true or possible” (Merriam-Webster.com 2015).

weather, etc.). It generally has nothing to do with ecological benefit, environmental or economic impact, or any other factor that might be defined as “good” to the general public. Similarly, a “good” shift is one that was extremely challenging, exhausting and/or with long hours (24+), and there was a sense of shared misery, typically resulting in a sense of accomplishment regardless of tangible progress. It has nothing to do with whether or not objectives were successfully obtained during the shift (in fact, many “good” shifts include accomplished work becoming obsolete due to changes in tactics or fires burning over constructed containment lines). Likewise, a “good” season is one that had a significant number of fires, long hours with lots of travel, and 1000+ hours of overtime or 120+ days committed to incidents. In other words, a “good” season to a firefighter is one with many fires, whereas a “good” season to a non-fire person might better be defined as one with few fires. This use of paradox is particularly interesting because it reflects the greater wildfire paradox, “Wildfire suppression, effective 95% to 98% of the time, inevitably leads to ecologically significant wildfires with higher intensities and rapid growth that are unable to be suppressed. This, in turn, produces increased wildfire management costs and increased likelihood of escaped, disastrous fires” (Calkin 2014, Brady 2014). In other words, a “good” fire season, as implied in the meaning behind the use of the word by the interviewees (many fires that were actively suppressed), is

actually reflecting the use of ecologically detrimental practices and policies.

Here are some examples of how “good” is used by some of the interviewees:

*We did do a pretty **good burnout** last year on the Klamath. **And by good, I mean it kicked our butts** and we were going fast and we were going all day. There is something really gratifying at the end of the day, when your feet hurt and your body hurts and you don't know how you went that long, but you did it and you feel accomplished, bad ass.*<sup>39</sup>

*They have some **good fires**; if you go to the eastern part of Montana you get into the grasslands, you get some **really good grass fires** out there. We had one last year, I think it was, you know, the Dakotas — on the borderline of Montana and the Dakotas — and **it was a rager**.*<sup>40</sup>

*Wyoming's not known for big fires (or fires in general). They do have some **good seasons**; they've had some good fire.*<sup>41</sup>

### **Breakdown of Tropes:**

Before I dive into my analysis of how firefighters describe fire in the environment and how they describe firefighting actions, there are a couple of interesting portrayals of fire that fall outside of those two categories. The first is the use of personification. There are many ways that the interviewees used personification throughout their stories, such as the idea of “watching the fire dance”<sup>42</sup> or referring to fire as having a gender (e.g., “Fire hasn't changed, I don't think; it's the same old guy”<sup>43</sup>). However, the

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<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Rogers, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 05, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>40</sup> Rigo Flores, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 15, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>41</sup> Andy Thorne, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 04, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>42</sup> Issac Naylor, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Youmans, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 14, 2014. See appendix B.

most notable patterns were in the use of terms that describe physical body parts to identify areas on the fire (e.g., the head, flank, and heel of a fire). This might explain why news reporters have so easily described wildfires as “monsters” who “consume” and “chew” through our forests;<sup>44</sup> as an industry, we’ve provided a relatable physical form by giving fires human attributes (we can then effortlessly relegate these entities as enemies to be battled). In firefighting terminology, the “head” is the most active part of the fire (the most rapidly spreading portion of a fire’s perimeter) (National Wildfire Coordinating Group 2014). The flanks are the sides of the fire, the parts of the fire that are roughly parallel to the head (or main direction of spread). The heel refers to the rear of the fire, typically the location of the point-of-ignition or the portion of the fire opposite the direction of the prevailing wind or slope. By using these terms, fires almost become anthropoid in nature. Here are some examples of these figures of speech used within interviews:

*Fire was moving progressively throughout the day, ships—well, fixed wings—were putting retardant drops just trying to knock the **head** down and helicopters were keeping the **flanks** cold for us.<sup>45</sup>*

*It was this particular piece of [the fire], it was essentially the **heel**. We’d had some really difficult time influencing what we thought was the best method of suppression.<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>44</sup> See: <https://vimeo.com/110620729>

<sup>45</sup> Steve Zavala, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>46</sup> Brian Anderson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014. See appendix B.

Another prevalent theme is the concept of fire as a mess. This idea is also perpetuated through the use of common fireline terminology, such as “sloper” and “mop up.” The National Wildfire Coordinating Group defines a sloper as, “a fire edge that crosses a control line or natural barrier intended to confine the fire,” and mop up as, “Extinguishing or removing burning material near control lines, felling snags, and trenching logs to prevent rolling after an area has burned, to make a fire safe, or to reduce residual smoke” (National Wildfire Coordinating Group 2014). These terms give the impression that fire is creating a messy situation that firefighters are forced to deal with. This concept is further compounded and confused by firefighters implying the benefit of fire “cleaning up” the forest floor (i.e., fire burning smaller, ground level fuels through low intensity burning). So, in some cases, fire is portrayed as making a mess, and in other cases, fire cleans up a mess. This begins to showcase some of the complexities and paradoxes behind the values and meanings of the language firefighters use to describe fire in the environment and how they describe their own actions. Here are some examples of these figures of speech:

*—after the fire goes through and they’re like, ‘Alright saws, go take care of the hazard trees that might be out there so we can get in there and **mop up**.’<sup>47</sup>*

*In any case, the day started out, we were just going to be doing a little bit of securing and patrolling, a little bit of **mop up** on some ground we had burned the previous day.<sup>48</sup>*

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<sup>47</sup> Brent Corkish, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 15, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>48</sup> Josh Parker, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 08, 2014. See appendix B.

*We ended up flying back out, trying to go back in and pick up where it had blown over a road already, and tried securing the **slopo**ver.<sup>49</sup>*

*And the piece above us—they're picking up spots and they were having a hard time picking it up—and we went up there and helped them out and picked up a small piece of **slopo**ver.<sup>50</sup>*

*It **cleans up** the forest floor, opens pockets here and there in the canopy and just kind of eats its way around and does a lot of good.<sup>51</sup>*

*Well, I always thought fire in the environment was just Mother Nature's way of **cleaning house**." And "I've seen some high elevation fires that just do really well, they just **clean up** the underbrush...<sup>52</sup>*

Fire as a display is another interesting theme that is portrayed by figures of speech throughout the interviews. Firstly, the term "show" is a common way to describe certain types of operations. For example, walk-in show (meaning it requires hiking to access the fire area, instead of driving), burn show or firing show (an operational technique), hotshot or engine show (an operation best suited for a particular module type), direct show (requiring direct fireline construction), etc. They are phrases indicating often the most prominent action taken to control a fire. These terms are used as internal jargon or slang. For example, a burn show is slang for a firing or ignition operation (something strategically caused by firefighters). However, that translation can easily be lost to an outsider if you consider that "show" can mean a spectacle or

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<sup>49</sup> Steve Zavala, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>50</sup> And Zink, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 02, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>51</sup> Drew Derrick, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>52</sup> Steve Griffin, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 04, 2014. See appendix B.

entertainment (a primal drive to see and be seen) and could also easily lead people to believe it's descriptive of fire behavior from the main fire itself (not necessarily something intentionally created). So, although these figures of speech provide context within the firefighting culture, using the terms outside of that community can trigger a full range of interpretations that may or may not be accurate.

Another example of fire as a display is the idea of a political smoke. Political smokes are areas of visible smoke from burning material that don't threaten the control of the fire but may cause political or social concern about the fire's containment. Common causes of political smokes are large stump holes that are still burning underground but located far from any edge of the fire's perimeter. Usually political smokes are extinguished regardless of the overall effectiveness of the action on containment objectives. Put plainly, if something out in the middle of a burned area is putting up a lot of smoke, fire managers direct firefighters to put it out so that it looks like everyone is doing their job (regardless of whether or not it actually needs to be extinguished from a management or ecological standpoint); extinguishing political smokes display to the public that progress is being made in the fire suppression efforts. Here are some examples of figures of speech that illustrate the concept of fire as a display:

*We're going home on day fourteen and we're leaving a **mop up show** for the folks that were coming in behind us.*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Brian Anderson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014. See appendix B.

*We had been on—I think it was June or July—we had been on a few fires, pretty easy ones—some **burn shows** off the road and stuff like that.<sup>54</sup>*

*So not too much action, there's the big stumps putting up smoke—at that point it was just more **political smokes**, people would see them and stuff like that—but it was pretty mellow for the most part.<sup>55</sup>*

There are also a few descriptions of fire events and fuels/landscape that are worth noting. As far as fuels and descriptive statements about the landscape, terms like “steep, nasty terrain” were used to indicate terrain features that include slope and fuels that make traversing difficult. Another example included, “explosive fuel” to indicate highly volatile fuel types, such as chaparral, or fuels that demonstrate rapid combustion due to current conditions (such as drought stressed fuels). Metaphors like, “dog hair thickets,” a phrase that describes an area of thick, young trees, and, “huge toad” or “big ole hog” (figures of speech used to describe large trees) add interesting character to the stories and also feed into the larger conversation about the character of fire and the landscape it's burning in.

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<sup>54</sup> Brent Corkish, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 15, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>55</sup> William Sanders, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 05, 2014. See appendix B.

Lastly, descriptions of wildland fire events are almost entirely rooted in the military. These terms include: campaign fires,<sup>56</sup> project fires,<sup>57</sup> a fire siege,<sup>58</sup> and a fire complex.<sup>59</sup> There is a significant history of military crossover with wildland firefighting, from firefighting agencies using surplus military equipment, implementation of aviation techniques (like having an air attack platform), organizational hierarchies, and using military time, to the founding of the incident command system (which contains positions with military titles, such as task force leader and incident commander). So, it's not a surprise that metaphors of war should appear as common themes throughout the wildland firefighting culture and language. The very term "firefighting" supports this metaphor of war, there is a history of framing firefighters and fire suppression as patriotic, while casting wildfire as the enemy that must be put down (Wuerthner 2006, Pyne 1995). Here are some examples of these terms in use:

*I didn't know hotshotting existed until we went to **one of the big campaign fires**; it was going on for a long time and we'd see these hotshots out there, and we'd been mopping up for like four or five days straight, and there was*

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<sup>56</sup> Campaign fires are large, long-term interagency wildland fire incidents, often spanning multijurisdictional areas (though not always) with multiple agencies sending firefighting resources.

<sup>57</sup> Project fires, a term used interchangeably with campaign fires, are also large, long-term interagency wildland fire incidents, but are sometimes distinguished as having extensive indirect fireline used as a primary strategy (making it a large project to complete).

<sup>58</sup> Fire siege is used as a term for multiple (and often concurrent or overlapping fires) that occur during an extended period of time within a confined geographical area. For example, the "California Fire Siege of '07."

<sup>59</sup> A complex is the name for multiple fires that are under the command of one incident management team or a unified command structure.

*a big piece that blew up and at the end of it—I remember it was all said and done—and they went in there and got it.*<sup>60</sup>

*I remember going to a fire in 1977, before the **big siege**...*<sup>61</sup>

*Also 1987, the great fires that happened here, in the California area, the **Stanislaus Complex**, the lightning bust up there on the Klamath was very exciting. Some of the best—some of the most exciting fire behavior in fire seasons that I ever had.*<sup>62</sup>

Outside of the use of military terms as descriptions of fire events, the metaphor of war and military terminology is wide-spread throughout the firefighting vernacular, used in both describing fire and describing firefighting actions. For example, the term “nuke,” which is slang for a nuclear bomb, is used to describe what the landscape looks like, in some cases, after a fire goes through an area and consumes all available fuel; it looks, for some, like a nuclear bomb went off (leaving only ash and nothing apparently living). The term is used as a way to describe what a fire can do:

*We were going to Colorado, saying to the crew “we need to be paying attention” because of, remember the Missionary Ridge—what happens is the fire will burn underneath that scrub oak and will pre-heat the brush. It won’t completely blacken everything and **nuke it out**, the fire will run through again.*<sup>63</sup>

And also an action that can be taken by a firefighter:

*Typically when we’re burning, we’re not trying to **nuke it** or, you know, make it look like to moon.*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Andy Zink, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 02, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>61</sup> Andy Thorne, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 04, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>62</sup> Dirk Charley, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 16, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>63</sup> Gina Papke, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 12, 2014. See appendix B.

<sup>64</sup> Johnny Clem, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 02, 2014. See appendix B.

Other military terms used to describe firefighting actions include, “flanking” a fire (which has origins in a military maneuver – to move around the side of an enemy), “blowing” a canopy open or “blowing” holes through a canopy (describing a firefighting technique (or outcome of the fire or firing operation) that fully burns portions of the canopy of a timber stand; similar to a bomb blowing out a portion of a building), and “attacking” a fire (defined as acting violently against someone or something (Merriam-Webster.com 2015)). Other military related figures of speech used to describe fire itself include: a fire “blowing up,” “blowing out,” or “blasting” an area (similar to the effects of a bomb), a fire “taking out” a home (slang for destroying something or killing someone), and “explosive” fire behavior. These figures of speech help extend the paradigm of fire being an enemy to be annihilated and firefighters as patriotic soldiers fighting a battle.

### **Describing Fire and Describing Firefighting Actions:**

As I began cataloging the figures of speech, I began to recognize that there was slight shift in the tone from the figures of speech used to describe fire in the environment, to the figures of speech used to describe firefighting actions. As a result, I created two separate lists of tropes, one showcasing the figures of speech used to describe firefighting actions and the other showcasing descriptions of fire in the environment. Appendix A has the full lists, with associated examples. Each list

includes an accounting of the number of times each trope occurred within the stories (in a meaningful way).<sup>65</sup> This was a rudimentary way of determining frequency of use; it does not account for the instances where one person may have used the same particular figure of speech multiple times, while no other participants had. However, as an exploratory investigation, this gave me enough insight into the use of tropes to look at the overall effect of those used to describe fire in the environment.<sup>66</sup>

As previously noted, the 36 interviewees, when describing fire in the environment, made significant use of personification. This is particularly evident when you look at the four most frequently used figures of speech to describe fire. Three of the top four tropes are personification (e.g., running, pushing, cleaning), whereas the fourth has military connotations (blowing up):

**Table 1:** Top four most frequently used figures of speech to describe fire.

Descriptor	Rate	Example Quote
Running/Run	35	<i>As I came out, where before there were only two spot fires, there were 15, and I'm hiking out of this dozer line and I can literally hear and see the fire <b>running</b> through the crowns. (Derrick)</i>
Pushing down/made a push	17	<i>It made a massive <b>push</b> and RH's were high and it kind of had that mossy, Alaska tundra stuff that doesn't look like it could burn but definitely did. (Janes)</i>
[The fire] cleans up [the forest floor]/clean it up	15	<i>I've seen some high elevation fires that just do really well, they just <b>clean up</b> the underbrush... (Griffin)</i>

<sup>65</sup> For example, when tallying the frequency of occurrence for the word, "attack," I did not count the use of "initial attack" or "extended attack," which are accepted tactical techniques and used in a manner that didn't inform the analysis of tropes and schemes.

<sup>66</sup> This could be further examined, particularly from the standpoint of whether or not the repetition of a term used by a single person within the same story increases the impact of its meaning on the reader, as compared to the impact of multiple people using the term only once within their separate stories.

Blow up/blows out/blew up (or out, or by)/ blown over/blasted	11	<i>It just took off; we could just watch it roll over the hills and we just chased that thing for a couple of nights — just trying to keep some kind of line along it — but basically it was just really following it. It just <b>blew up</b>.</i> (Youmans)
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Compare this to the top four figures of speech used to describe firefighting actions, and we see a slight difference in tone. The figures of speech are progressively more antagonistic:

**Table 2:** Top four most frequently used figures of speech to describe firefighting actions

Descriptor	Occurrence	Actual Quote
Catch/catching/caught [the fire]	37	<i>...it was like I said, it was seven hard days of firing and finally, on day seven, we <b>caught it</b>.</i> (Marquez)
Chasing [a fire/spots]	17	<i>...everybody had had tools and we started <b>chasing</b> this thing up one of the flanks as fast as we possibly could while our Supt. was calling for more resources.</i> (Anderson)
Lose/lost [the fire]	17	<i>We <b>lost</b> our burn area, it blew by our line — or it spotted over — and there was way too many [spot fires] for us to catch.</i> (Marquez)
Beating/smacking down/knocking down/knocking out [the fire]	10	<i>You just kind of spray the edges, <b>knock it down</b>, and keep moving, keeping one foot in the black at all times.</i> (Farmer)

This antagonism is even more evident when you look at the full range of tropes (see Appendix A). Fire is personified (it stands up, chases firefighters, lays down, runs, and cleans up) or cast as a destructive or negative force (it rips, blows up, is explosive, mows down trees). The antagonism is heightened, though, when describing

firefighting actions. For example, we catch, chase, throw, and beat/smack/knock down fire, punch in line and strip ridges, rip, run and gun, and put fires to bed.

When left in the context of the stories, many of these antagonistic tropes seem innocent; they create an engaging and colorful description that is comprehensible because it allows an unknown quality to become relatable. For example, I can imagine what a fire looks like when it's "cranking" because I understand that the description is related to how a crankshaft in an engine works (it moves very fast). However, the innocence is set adrift when you consider the seemingly guileless use of terms such as "nuked." For example, the average person might say, "I have seen images of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the history books, so I can imagine what an area looks like after a fire "nukes" it." This metaphor leaves no room for discussions or interpretations of stories that are set in ecosystems that have fire regimes that rely on high intensity, full stand replacement fires. In this case, the characterization of full annihilation that the term, "nuke" brings on, isn't accurate and could be considered irresponsible.

The cultural reasons for using these tropes and schemes needs to be further examined. Surely, the military terms and metaphors, as well as the sports metaphors (such as "motoring out" of an area), can be easily traced (in part) to the historical intersection of the military with firefighting and the pervasiveness of sports within our society. But the personification of fire and resulting antagonistic language used to

describe firefighting actions presumably has roots in colonial attitudes towards controlling nature and dominating wilderness, policies of placing resource extraction above the health of the ecosystem, “hero” mentalities associated with firefighting, and the perpetuation of the concept of fire as an enemy by the media (among many other cultural and social influences). But the point of this study was to find out what tropes and schemes exist, examine what meanings and values are revealed through those figures of speech, and then to create a product, in the form of the website, that effectively deals with the findings. As it turns out, these findings can open up many possible avenues for future exploration.

## Chapter 4:

### **The Role of Fire in the Environment: A Practitioner's Perspective**

By acquiring personal accounts and reflections of hotshots' experiences with fire, I uncovered that the types of figures of speech commonly used within their stories do not necessarily align with or reflect their views of the role of fire in the environment. I was able to do this because I collected both stories about fire in the environment and pointedly asked them how they perceived the role of fire. Almost to the last, the firefighters I interviewed expressed a belief that fire plays an important and necessary role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. They also expressed a desire to see more fire used as a "tool," or for resource benefit, in order to restore a better balance in various ecosystems. Many acknowledged historical Native American burning practices as representative of a sustainable way to live with and use fire to maintain landscapes. And, several expressed a concern that we've altered the ecosystems (due to our past and present policies of full fire suppression) to a point that we are now unable to repair the damage (or mitigate the fuels problems) fast enough to prevent large, "catastrophic" fires from impacting vast areas.

For a more in-depth analysis, I selected five stories that each contained numerous tropes and/or schemes and compared the stories to how the interviewee stated they perceive the role of fire in the environment. As I reflected on the identified figures of speech in each story, I utilized Critical Discourse Analysis, which is a way of

conceptualizing and analyzing language (Wertz, Charmaz and McMullen 2011), to uncover the meanings and values behind them. Discourse analysis approaches texts and talk as social practices; it views language not as simply a tool for description and a medium of communication, but as a way of doing things (Wood and Kroger 2000). It looks at socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, symbolizing, recognizing, and interacting (Gee 1999).

I began my analysis by first evaluating the context in which the story was told, determining what was absent or present from it and what the general position of the interviewee was, as presented against their response to the question of how they perceive the role of fire. In each of the following sections, I present each story and response separately in pairs (alphabetically, by interviewee) with my analysis following each set. Many of the tropes are emphasized in bold:

### **Story told by Brian Anderson<sup>67</sup>**

In 2006 or 2007 we were actually on our way home from a fire in northern California and traveling down one of the local freeways. We just happened to have a utility truck with us, along with our two crew carriers and our Supt's truck. We happened to have a utility truck that had a pump on the back of it, because we had had some extra personnel with us and we were doing some trainee assignments. Anyway, we were on our way home from a fourteen day shift, and we're driving down the freeway, and we see almost a—it was broad daylight out and we're traveling down the highway—and we see almost a campfire sized fire that had looked like it had just started (there was a CHP unit on scene and that was it).

It was campfire sized when we showed up and our Supt. had pulled over and explained to everybody what we were going to do. We all got out and got ready, just like we do on our initial attack on the Forest, but the fuel

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<sup>67</sup> Brian Anderson, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014. See appendix B.

type was all continuous grass (it was about knee high). As we we're getting out of the trucks and grabbing all of our tools to get ready to **attack** this thing, **it started racing up the hill**. Those are always the most intense, and the most fun, and the most sweat, the most adrenaline rush, when you're **chasing a grass fire**, trying to keep up with it as you see it **running up the hill**. You know, all the guys got out and we just kind of in unison—there was no need for chain saws; everybody had had tools—and **we started chasing this thing up one of the flanks** as fast as we possibly could while our Supt. was calling for more resources. CHP was stopping traffic on the freeway. We just kind of one at a time, from the back of the line, kept rotating and **smacking** down the grass and throwing dirt **on the head** as much as we could (while the guys in the back were bringing hand line up **one of the flanks**).

**We chased it** for probably a good hour before we got water support and additional engine support. We were **in the middle of nowhere**, so to speak, so there was a bunch of miscellaneous resources that increase the challenge to get in communication with everybody as fast as we could. That made it a little bit more fun and a little bit more challenging too, in the position that I was in. But, that was probably one of the funnest, so to speak. It wasn't too hot outside, so it wasn't too bad. We had a good time on it afterwards.

#### **Response to "How do you view the role of fire in the environment?"**

You know as I've progressed in my career, I use to think that—I've been raised in a southern California environment and have always been raised under the pretense is that our mission is to suppress it at all cost because we have other values to protect. Not just people and property, but watershed. But I've also come to realize that fire has been here for thousands and thousands of years. It's been here much longer than man, and when man started to suppress it is when more—when we started to see some bigger issues come as a result of it.

I actually have a bit more appreciation for using fire in the environment to do what it is designed to do—kind of renovate and rejuvenate the ecosystems. It's good for the ecosystem as a whole; it's good for, not just the animal environment, but for promoting fresh growth and new growth and that sort of thing. I see it as a huge benefit in that role; I think there's a lot to be accomplished using it in the prescribed sense and taking the opportunity and taking the advantage of using prescribed fire to our advantage—not just to reduce hazards and whatnot, but also to promote some fresh growth, new growth and provide fresh ecosystems. You know, I think it has a bunch of roles to play. I think that we as people and managers of fire tend to maybe overthink it sometimes and think that there's more of a

need (or less of a need), when it's the latter. It can be a huge benefit to us depending on how we use it.

In this story, Brian uses personification to describe the fire (e.g., it runs and races up the hill, and has a head and a flank) and a little bit of hyperbole when describing the fire's location (e.g., in the middle of nowhere). Industry accepted terms like racing and running enable him to communicate the fire's rapid spread, while head and flank orientates his crew's position as it's related to the direction of the spread of the fire during the operation. Shifting to the way he describes firefighting actions, Brian pairs the fire running and racing with imagery of the crew chasing the fire. These actions become slightly more antagonistic when combined with his imagery of attacking the fire and smacking it down. Overall, the intent of his story is to express a sense of accomplishment by addressing a rapidly evolving incident, one that is notable because they arrived on scene by happenstance. Though his story contains imagery that can be construed as painting fire as a lawless entity being chased by heroes who use justifiable force to bring it to heel, the essence of the story doesn't come across as negative.

His perception of the role of fire in the environment, that it's been a part of the environment for a long time and is necessary to rejuvenate ecosystems, is not reflected anywhere in his story. Delving deeper into the fire ecology and the possible ignition source might provide an explanation for this. For example, human-caused, roadside ignitions (likely, alongside a highway) are mandated to be fully suppressed by policy, but light, flashy fuels (such as those found in grasslands) naturally experience more

frequent fire return intervals, something not at all considered in his story. More than likely, the values he reveals through his story are fully aligned with his initial statement regarding the role of fire in the environment: the southern California mentality that all fires should be suppressed in order to protect resources with higher value (i.e., human life and property, over ecological or resource values) influences his experience with fire regardless of his more evolved appreciation of using fire as a good tool for ecosystem health and hazard reduction. So, although Brian would like to see more fire used to manage the land, the figures of speech he uses to describe his experience with fire (common throughout the industry) position fire as an adversary who needs to be chased and caught.

### Story told by Erin Kimsey<sup>68</sup>

A couple years ago we were on a really cool fire on the border of Nevada and Oregon, and for the life of me I can't remember what it was called, but it went to like a couple million acres. It was really huge it just because it was in that grassland and it moved super quickly. That was one of the strangest fires I've ever been on. Very light, flashy fuels and then, I don't know if it was an extra dry season or something like that, but the first day that we rolled up, there was like thunder everywhere, and they called us in (and I forget what size it was), but we literally got there while it was still like—it was a Type 5, or something. We were just trying to suppress it and then like, “boom,” there would be fire over here and fire over there. We're having to, like, move our buggies—and then we finally got an anchor point. So, we're cold trailing, because that's what you can do with that kind of grass; it's going to just go out if it stops moving—it's going out.

So we're cold trailing, and then we **leap-frog** with another crew, and they're below us and we're coming up this hill and **nobody was really**

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<sup>68</sup> Erin Kimsey, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 05, 2014. See appendix B.

**checking our backdoor** (but we had pretty good eyes back to where we had started). Then, we started to see—and it's like these big sort of steep but still rolling hills—and we start to see this smoke come up from below where we had started. And then we just see this **wall of flame, like, shoot up**, paralleling the line that we had been cold trailing and just—.

Of course in that situation it's scary, but you just go further **into the black** and you're totally fine. But it just, you know, just a **wall of flame**. Like, "where the fuck did that come from?" And, you know, it was just because they had just missed something really—that crew below us had missed something really minor and **it had completely blown out**. Like I said, **extremely volatile**. I'm not sure what the story was that year but—.

It was ranchland, so these ranchers—so that first shift we were just running all over the place and just trying things that just didn't work. But it's in that really cool fuel type that, you know, you get the **spectacular burnouts and it looks like the world is coming to an end**, and then it's all totally over—like within seconds. You know, a couple chains back you can just hop right into it because it's already cold and it's like a safety zone already. But there were a whole bunch of ranchers who had a lot invested in that area. And they were like, "No, you're not going to make this fire any bigger by burning out, you're going to go direct with the dozers" or whatever. And so we just kept trying to go direct and kept trying to cold trail and we kept trying to, like, back off because shit, excuse me, "stuff," would just get too crazy. Then we went to go do—we went to a section to go burn off of a road—and this whole time we've been there, for maybe a week by this point, we'd just been **chasing spots** and running around, and then discovering that a spot that we had spent, you know, well into the night lining was actually totally interior—and it was just big and confusing. It was so big that none of us really—people in charge didn't really know what was going on.

So we were doing a burnout with another hotshot crew and it was like, maybe 1300, and so we're burning along the slope—I'm sorry, at the top of the slope—that goes down and there's a drainage and then, on the other side is the fire **backing** down the drainage. So, I was kind of the lookout and I was taking weather. And as a lookout, I was kind of like a mobile lookout, so I went down into the area we were burning so I could get eyes on what that fire across the drainage was doing. It was kind of a weird lookout situation. So I'm looking at it and I'm like, "All right, I like that, it looks good, cool." And I'm taking weather (and stuff) and we're doing this burnout. This little thunder cell comes up and **parks over us**, like a T-cell, or whatever. Which was weird because you know, in the southwest that's like a standard thing like at noon or whatever—you get a cumulus buildup that turns into storms after July. It's like the pattern you have every day. But this was like Nevada,

so—first time fighting fire in Nevada, too—so I was not really sure what the standard weather patterns were. So this **little nugget of a storm** comes up and like, **he's** like right over our burn and then like, within seconds we get this burst of precip. And then, “boom,” that fire that was on the other side of the drainage is **racing up underneath us**. It is like fully hooked under, and it's like, you know, **bombing towards the line** and towards our vehicles and everything.

So, we ended up having to run out and hop in the vehicles and drive out as fast as we could. But obviously, it's like a two-track and our Supt ride, it had been getting flat tires the whole time, too. We'd been getting flat tires all over this place for some reason—the Supt ride, it's like a big toolbox dually. It was on four tires by this point, and so it was just terrifying. If you got another flat and then, like the Supt ride holds up everybody else, and we all get burned over. So we ended up getting out of there in time but somebody on the other hotshot crew that had been on the line ahead of us, actually ended up sort of in a bad situation—but they ended up totally fine.

That was just a really interesting day and that whole fire was just so fucking weird. But at the very end of it, the ranchers, I think, or somebody was finally like, “You know, let's just burn it out a little bit, like, we've actually made a dent.” The fire is way away from the ranchland now. It's kind of, it's almost kind of **died out**—you know what I mean? We ended up doing this awesome burnout for—I forget how many miles, but it was sort of like my first one—**where we just burned and burned and burned** and the burnouts, they just looked perfect. We had perfect winds the whole time and it was just like the quickest solution, as opposed to all the crazy, stupid stuff we had been trying for the week and a half before that point. But anyway, yeah, it was a **good fire**.

### **Response to “How do you view the role of fire in the environment?”**

I think that fire is completely necessary to the environment and I personally view homes as another fuel type. I think that, especially in places like Region Five where I just came from, down in Southern California, for instance, that area is tremendously fire adapted. It's just part of what all of the plants in that environment are designed to do. I think that's a situation where, not only does it belong in the environment, but we're never going to be able to subtract it from that environment because it's so volatile. But in other places like the Gila [National Forest], for instance, and the Whitewater-Baldy [Fire Complex], there were these areas where fire had been suppressed there for so long, before they kind of got more lenient about suppression (which has happened recently). I was talking to some old dude who owned a cabin kind of near our firebase, and he said that when he was young—coming out

there—that you could see through the trees to the mountains behind, and that it looks really different. Now it was so crowded you couldn't see—just really unhealthy. Just too much—what's that called? Too much growth; it was too closed and this is because of the fire suppression. Then like two months after that happened, we had the Whitewater Baldy come through and just nuked out all of that. And so I think that fire's a role in the environment is really crucial and I also think that years of fire suppression is causing a lot of really extreme fire behavior and it's making fire way more destructive than it would be, had a natural burn cycle been allowed to occur.

In Erin's story, she tells about a dynamic fire situation in the grasslands of Nevada. She uses a number of tropes and schemes, including similes, metaphors, metonymns, paradoxes, and polysyndetons to enrich the story. Most notably, she talks about the fire being extremely volatile, a wall of flame shooting up, the fire blowing out, racing up, and bombing towards the fireline, compares it to the world coming to an end, and then concludes by saying it was a good fire. This story is one of the more authentic stories that I was able to capture, in that I recognized her patterns of speech as representative of those typically used between firefighters (its tone and flow is more along the lines of what I would expect to hear while sitting at a pub with a fellow firefighter reminiscing about the fire season). In this particular story, though she does seem to be deliberately using colorful figures of speech and descriptions to embellish the story and heighten the emotional commitment of the listener/reader, the content is not necessarily derogative towards fire nor critical of firefighting actions.

As far as how this relates to how Erin perceives the role of fire in the environment, she informs her view of the role of fire through her own personal

experience. While acknowledging that it's necessary to the environment, particularly in fire-adapted ecosystems, she cites examples of how fire suppression policy has created conditions for fire to be detrimental. Nevertheless, she believes that fire is crucial and natural, an opinion that isn't reflected in the figures of speech or descriptions she uses to describe fire in her story. Instead, the personification and metaphors create a feeling that the fire is simply a weird phenomenon that they are tasked to deal with.

### Story told by Dan Mallia<sup>69</sup>

[When asked about the fire behavior of the fire in a previous story] It was a lightning strike that had actually struck down on a pretty—not far down—but quite a ways down on a slope. It was a brush/timber model; there probably hadn't been fire there in a long, long time. So the fire made a really—once it got established down there—**it made a big push** to the top of the ridge and then just, petered, you know. **It threw some spots** over to the other side; we had helicopters and air tankers working that top and they'd pretty much **knocked that out**. The biggest thing was just **taking care of the flanks**. It was steep; it was nasty; lots of poison oak in the bottom of the drainage; and then, you know, old, tall Manzanita and pine over-story. And the crew just – yeah, **it was good living in there**; the **fire moved well** in that. It was surprising. But once it made that **big push** to the top, it got in there and just **kind of laid down**, just kind of **skunked** around a little bit, once nightfall came in—and we got to go in there and **do some good work on that**.

#### Response to “How do you view the role of fire in the environment?”

It needs to be in the environment, and we all know that we do a really good job of putting fires out. We're really good at that job. With that has brought on all the fuel loading, and the unhealthy forests, and things of that nature. I know for me, there's times where we go in to a fire and the team, and the Forest, and the locals, and everybody, they want the fire out. They don't want to deal with the smoke. They don't want to deal with whatever—all the stuff that comes with a fire—they don't want to deal with it. But when

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<sup>69</sup> Dan Mallia, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 4, 2014. See appendix B.

you get out on the ground and see what the fire is doing, and it's doing nothing but good, it's really hard for me to put the crew — especially in some of the places that, some of the places where —. This past summer, we spent a bunch of time on the northwest Forests, over there, on fires on the northwest Forests that were doing nothing but good for the forest. And it was, "Put it out, put it out, put it out," you know, "We need to put it out." With that you're putting — now obviously there's always inherent risk with our job, we're always putting people at risk. But it's one of those things like, "Wow, we could put a little fire on the ground here, we could straighten this up, we can even this out, we can keep ahead of the wildfire, and we could do some really awesome prescribed burning right now on this fire." I know that's probably not the — probably not the most popular — I don't want to say it's not popular, I'm sure there's a lot of folks that feel the same way. But yeah, I would love to see a lot more fire. Especially the ones that are doing good; just let them burn. We'll deal with the smoke.

An old Fuels guy I used to work for, when I worked on the Mendocino, told me, "Everything gets treated eventually." It's just, is it under your terms or is it under Mother Nature's terms? I see that now, all the fire that we were on last year, up there, like on the Klamath and the Six Rivers — all that stuff we went on last year — I would probably say, you know, this is just, I'd say 75 to 80 percent of that was all low intensity. I mean, we spent three tours on one fire up there. I mean, you see it, it's doing nothing but good. It's doing nothing but good. I would love to see more fire in the environment, but I know that there is a lot of political stuff that goes on, that goes on with that.

Dan describes the fire behavior of a fire on a northwestern forest in California, the same area that he references in his response to how he views the role of fire in the environment. He uses personification, mainly, including referencing the fire making a push, throwing spots [spot fires], laying down, and as having flanks. He also talks about the fuels and terrain making it a "good living" for the fire, as well as the fire moving well in the area. The descriptive language he uses to describe firefighting actions is antagonistic in that he talks about knocking the fire out, but he also talks about doing good work on it once nightfall comes in. This is an interesting contrast to

his opinion about the role of fire in the environment, where he talks about some fires doing “nothing but good.” His story and the accompanying explanation about the role of fire is particularly revealing in that he illuminates the cultural juxtaposition between fire doing good and firefighters doing good work. The meaning of doing good work in the story is limited to the crew going into the fire area and implementing strategies and tactics that meet operational objectives while at the same time achieving the personal satisfaction gained from working hard. However, as revealed in his explanation of how he views the role in fire in the environment, Dan very clearly indicates that doing this type of “good work” can have detrimental impact on the fuels conditions (leading to bigger, higher intensity, and more detrimental fires) and resulting in exactly the opposite effect of the outcomes of what he views as a fire doing “nothing but good.” In essence, he is relaying that firefighters are working against themselves in some cases, often simply because of political pressures. This paradox is difficult for firefighters, people who love the fire suppression work but also care about the health of the environment, to come to terms with and this is illustrated by Dan’s story and response.

On a related note, the adage “Everything gets treated eventually” is similar to what another interviewee shared, “Pay me now or pay me later.”<sup>70</sup> Both of these are referring to the idea that if we take deliberate action to treat the fire prone ecosystems, either by prescribed burning, burning for resources management (e.g., letting natural

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<sup>70</sup> Gina Papke, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 12, 2014. See appendix B.

fires burn under certain conditions), or mechanical treatment (e.g., thinning, masticating, etc.), then we'll potentially stave off environmental and economic costs. In the case of Dan's adage, if we treat the landscape now through controlled means, we'll have a better chance of ensuring a desired outcome, than if we allow Mother Nature to treat the land in her own way (potentially through large, high intensity fires that sterilize the soils, for example). In the other adage, we can pay a firefighter a base salary to complete fuels management work before a fire occurs (that will make conditions less favorable for large fire growth), or we can pay base, hazard, and overtime pay to respond to a potentially hard-to-control wildfire in the same area in the future, again without assurance that the wildfire won't transform the landscape in an undesirable way. These examples, and Dan's story and opinion on the role of fire in the environment, really show the cultural, social, and political paradox that exists within fire management today.

### **Story told by Issac Naylor<sup>71</sup>**

The Cedar Fire—Ron said he mentioned that—but it was—it was one for the books. I mean, it was one of those fires it where, you know, it's point protection. It's going where you think the fire is heading, there was no real direction; there was really no command system set up at that time—it was just really chaotic. Public rushing out and you're rushing in. So we're just going to wherever people were making the announcements over the command channel and heading that direction. But it was day and night, it just all blended in together after that first 24 hours. It's just, you just feel that **punch-drunk kind of feeling** after you've been up so long, and you're trying to take **cat naps** and kind of sustain yourself and keep going—. Yeah, but

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<sup>71</sup> Issac Naylor, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

after the first 24 hours, it just started blurring—because after that it went into like three days, just nonstop—I mean it wouldn't let up, it just kept going.

The first area we went into it was a suburban area, kind of a rural area, into the brushy area there. The fire was **backing** on top and, I can't remember who it was, it wasn't the Forest Service, I think it was like a city municipal person came to us, gave us directions to start burning out and trying to save that community that we were assigned to. We looked at it and there was no way we could burn it. There were no lines, there was no place to tie it into. And, plus, it was **backing**; it was sheltered from the wind where was at, so it was doing nothing but good. So the **backing** fire was just slowly **creeping** back down. You know, you're only talking maybe half a chain an hour; slow rate of spread, not doing much—fuel type was maybe, you know, three feet average. It's the chemise; the button-brush type stuff. But yeah, so that was our first kind of assignment and that was about one o'clock in the morning (because we were released from a previous fire), so we just rolled into this one here and that was our first assignment. So we kind of just took advantage of it; we bedded down for a few hours and then by four o'clock, somebody else came up on the radio—on the command channel—and started talking. I think it was Viejas Casino area—Interstate 8, east of San Diego—that's where **the fire was starting to push, making its push** to the south. And so **we rallied** everybody up, you know, shook their bags, ran around and, "Hey, we got to go. Let's go."

So we headed there, tied-in with that battalion chief, and he was, I think a local right there in the town of Alpine there, and he's the one that was giving us direction. He actually gave a good brief of what was going on; gave us a layout. By that time the sun was coming up, but it was really smoky, real hazy. So it's kind of **like an overcast day**, but it was all smoke. Yeah, just **laid, laid down**. So he gave us directions doing the same thing, point protection around some communities. There were rain gutters on some of those communities, they have rain gutters on the backside so it diverts the rain. So we kind of used that as our line, because it was all cement entrenched, clear around this community. So it was pretty good, it was already done, so why do anything else?

The only other thing we had to do was like go around door-to-door and make sure everybody was out. Come to find out as the fire was approaching, as we were getting ready to do the firing show, there were people coming out, like just waking up in their robes, looking outside like, you know, **with eyes as big as the moon**. Kind of staring at that fire coming down and we were trying to get people back down, like, "Hey, you need to pack whatever you need, whatever's important to you, you have like five, ten minutes. Put it in your car and get on the south side of Interstate 8. That's

where you need to go right now because that fires coming." So that was all within, I don't know, 30 minutes or so trying to get those folks out, and then **the fire was on us.**

It was **pulsing** down as it came down; it **pulsed down** towards us and it as we started to feel that in-draft again, that's when we started lighting. It was maybe, I don't know, maybe 100 yards away from us. So we took advantage of that and started just from our starting point, we just kind of just started anchoring off of each other, using that cement trench and just using that piece all the way around. That kind of went off fairly well, except for one of the guys, he had fusees instead of a drip torch. He was trying to light and it was breaking all of his fusees. So that kind of slowed one section down but, I remember that and he had to take shelter behind, like a water tank. He really wasn't in that big of a danger because we already had fire coming towards him but that's where he ended up saying, "Hey, I can't get this going, I'm just going to have to **ride it out** right here." And it wasn't that big of a deal. You know; our flame was going at it already. It was already **pushing off**, maybe five-feet of flame lengths. Same type of fuel type—that chemise, button-brush type stuff, with about three foot average. It was pretty good clearance around those homes. It wasn't that bad until you got maybe a mile out or so. Then it was that thick, heavy, you know, Southern California—just heavy brush. We went around him, we picked him up as we went around the tank and he just jumped in line with us as we kept going.

So it was a good thing and that ordeal lasted from, that call being at 4:30 in the morning until about one o'clock—after we lit that whole thing off. And it felt like it was an hour—like less than that. It went so quick. So fast. You're just—your brain is just running in high gear and you're just functioning at the level, you know, where you're just on top of everything, trying to just make sure everybody is safe. Then the folks that were there—we had some municipal folks with their type one engines sitting there just kind of, for the ready of us—they kind of backed off and went to the freeway. They kind of thought we were nuts because that whole thing was just a **big wall of flame** coming at us. I mean, for like three mile stretches, as far as you can see, east to west, **just flames rolling off the mountain.**

But I think it's just understanding how fire burns and knowing when to do what you've got to do—at the time, when it's right. Understanding when you get some of those cues from just the wind direction, the weather itself, watching your smoke column, the flames themselves—it's just **watching the fire dance**, kind of, across the landscape and as you feel what's right and time to light, then that's what you do. It was a satisfying burn show that we did. It was good.

But that's about the clearest thing I can remember after that, because as soon after that we were headed to—God, what was that place? There's a town up top, can't remember the town but they said it's known for its pies and it's on the Cleveland National Forest. I know some of the Supts down south, they know that place because they've been there on many-o-fires. But that's what they said, "Save the pies." That's all I remember, "Save the pies." And that's where we ended up, and I can't remember the name of that town, but once the winds died, that's where it came back up slope and that's where we were, Julian. That's the name of the town. **The fire was coming on all fronts**, you know, south, west, north, and that's kind of where everybody **rallied** to because that was where the fire was coming back upslope.

But after that, it gets really vague. I just remembered drinking coffee one day, and all the spots just landed all around us. And we had media all around us, like, right then and there (because we were in Julian). It was just one of those things, it just all blended, it was just so, it's just a like—this isn't a real. But it was, and you are in there.

That day, when all that happened, is when that fire **laid down. It finally ran out of steam.** Just the fuel type and a lot of the work that was done on the backside. There were dozers **pushing**, because we knew it was kind of coming back up, and then they already had it, kind of, set up to **catch it** as it came around. And, basically just a lot of burning. But it was just three days of just, you know, night and day just all rolling into one.

There were homes lost. Tanks, you know, propane tanks—oblivion. I mean it was loud and you could feel it, you know, the concussion, the blast of it. And like I said, it was like **rolling through** the community, and trying to get people out, because it's just coming and you can't save everybody's home, you just got to get out of the way. We tried a few times and we lost our burn shows, too, because of it. I remember that much of it. Yeah, it was just really chaotic—that Cedar Fire. For at least about two, three, four—up to about five days, it was just a nonstop. It just would not end.

### **Response to "How do you view the role of fire in the environment?"**

The role of fire. I think it needs to be in any natural form as it comes. Just here on our Forest alone, with the lightning fires that we do get, a lot of the stuff we're still putting out. In areas you can—we want it to burn in some areas, but policy and the way things are—the direction that we get is, you know, we have to put them out. Unfortunately, this year is one of those years—the drought year that we have—is probably going to be one of those years where we're snuffing everything out because we'd lose too much. It would just burn too hot. The vegetation's not up to its hundred percent; it's less than 50—and then the recoveries of some of the fuel moistures—. But

some areas you can. I believe you can. We do a lot of prescribed burning here on the district itself, on the High Sierra here. And we've been pretty successful with a lot of stuff we've been doing here. And, you know, it's just knowing how to use it, when to use it, and it's a vital; it needs it.

In my native culture background, being Paiute from the Owens Valley on the east side of the Inyo's—that's where I grew up—a lot of our families, you do that, do that cleanup—the late fall type stuff, you know, leave your areas and they would use fire to clean out some areas. It was beneficial then and then just the studies alone, seeing the history of it, you know, it worked. It keeps fire to the ground. It doesn't destroy everything. It doesn't engulf all the trees, you know, it just cleans up the ground. Puts the nutrients back where it needs to be and it's a continuous cycle. Fire is a part of it, and that's what I believe. Fire is a very good tool that we need to continue to use.

Isaac uses an interesting mix of personification and metaphor in his description of fire. He personifies the fire by talking about the fire backing down, creeping, pushing, laying down, and pulsing. He uses metaphors like the fire dancing, being a wall of flame, running out of steam, and rolling through communities. The figures of speech that he uses to describe firefighting actions are rooted in military terminology. For example, he talks several times about rallying his crew, much like rallying the troops, against a fire that was coming at them on all fronts (as though they were fighting an enemy in a war). He also talks about pushing machinery to catch the fire as it came around their location. This story shows a fairly common mentality to fighting fire in wildland urban interface environments and projects values that place life and property above the health of an ecosystem while also casually dismissing (through lack of acknowledgment) the inevitable consequences of humans living unprepared within fire adapted and fire prone ecosystems.

In his view of the role of fire in the environment, Isaac makes a point of identifying fire as good in its “natural form,” indicating a distinction between those and human caused (arson) fires. He indicates that he believes that policy can hold back the ability to use fire as a tool, even if it may be benefiting the landscape. He also advocates for prescribed burning, calling it vital, and uses his own cultural identity as a Native American to support his understanding of using fire as a way to manage the health of the land. In contrast to the values he depicts in his story about fighting fire in the wildland urban interface, in which he positions fire as an enemy to be battled, he indicates that he believes that fire needs to be a part of a continuous cycle for land management.

### Story told by Steve Zavala<sup>72</sup>

Oh, it was a Rodeo–Chediski Fire; 2001; Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona. I was working—I was a lead saw at the time also. We were attempting to fire out a road and we knew that the fire had a lot of force and **it was coming for us**. Well, not coming for us, I take that back, it was moving towards us. But yeah, we attempted to fire out the road; we had good safety zones on each side of the road (or meadows, excuse me). So we tried lighting the road off. We had everybody establish the hold and the Supt’s truck was out ahead, and he had firers just staying out in front of him.

We thought we had plenty of time and, before we knew it, the fire was moving a lot faster. And, if I could describe the sound—because it was within my first five years, it was like one that just stays in memory—but if I could describe the sound, **it would be like standing five feet away from, maybe, a freight train as it’s going by, you know, at full speed. Or I’ve had a jet fly over, you know, and F-16 just fly over *low* and while you’re standing there and it just shakes everything and it’s just, you hear this rumble and a roar.**

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<sup>72</sup> Steve Zavala, interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 01, 2014. See appendix B.

**You feel the intensity. Your hair starts to tingle and stand up.** That was the feeling. So, I remember looking back and just seeing ember wash. The winds were blowing across the road and, from one minute to the next, the winds were more of a switch—where the fire intensity was actually drawing more air into itself; **it was calling for more oxygen.**

So smoke was **laying over** the road but then started drafting back into **itself**. I do remember that and I remember looking back and seeing us all spread out as the guys were still firing out ahead of us and looking back and saying, to myself, "I think it's time for us to pull out." You know, RTO, and as I turned back to look, my squad leader looked back at me, at the same moment—and I just remember—we pointed at each other and we were like in agreement, and we just called for RTO (which is a reverse tool order). For everyone to turn back and head back to our safety zone.

We established our safety zones, within a, you know, a good distance; we time them so we can make them in a feasible time if we had to get out, if things **went gunnysack** or worst-case scenario. So that was definitely mitigated before and it made us feel safe. But at the same time, this fire was—I believe it they said it was a **half a mile head** of fire. It was **ripping** through ponderosa pine and I just remember seeing embers starting to fly across and we're sitting there, literally starting to run out of there, and it was probably, maybe 50 yards at the most that we had to get back, but it just made that **50 yards feel like 500 yards**. Because it got so hot, embers flying.

We get back to the safety zone and everything is fine, but were sitting there—it was midafternoon about 3 o'clock—but just from the size of the flames, 200-foot flames coming off of it and the **wall of fire** that was coming towards the road, **the whole sky turned dark and it just felt we were at night**. And we just watched this **fire run** past the road, watched it move up and go over a ridge beyond us, and just keep going. It was just like, "Well, we gave it a shot fellas. We'll try again later." But yeah, that's one of the memories that sticks in my head there, as far as trying to fire a road and just hearing that, the old saying, "**the freight train coming.**"

### **Response to "How do you view the role of fire in the environment?"**

Fire is a good thing, you know. A lot of people perceive fire as something that, you know, it's bad because there's been a lot of mishaps. But as far as its role, what it actually does out in the forest? You know, it does a lot of good. It does more good than bad. Media puts it out there that, you know, "This thing has charred, damaged so many acres." But, you know, if you come back and look in retrospect a year or two later and what it's actually done, it's helped regenerate a bunch of seeds and get that stuff established in the ground—nutrients, the soils. You know, it's just starting the

process all over again, which is what every forest needs. You go back to history with Native Americans; they used to do that. That was their use for managing land and it works just fine. Now with the influence of urban interface, there's a lot more reason not to put fire on the ground and use it as a tool, but overall I think, you know, it's probably the best for the forest.

In this story, Steve anthropomorphizes fire by talking about it coming for them (though he retracted that statement), it drafting back on "itself," and it "calling" for more oxygen. He personifies both fire and smoke by referring to them either running, ripping, and/or laying over. He also employs a common metaphor used to describe the sound of a large fire burning in close proximity, the sound of a freight train, and elaborates further by comparing it to the sound and feeling of a large jet engine flying low overhead. This creates an ominous sentiment directed towards fire that is further supported by his description of a stress and anxiety related physical response to the fire: hair standing up and a tingling sensation. His depiction of fire as antagonistic can additionally be found in his use of the terms like, it went gunnysack, his description of the distance they had to run feeling longer than it actually was (indicating a sense of pressing fear and concern), and description of the wall of fire turning the whole sky dark so that it felt as though it were at night.

These descriptions are in direct contrast to his view of the role of fire in the environment, which he believes to be a good thing. Though in this specific story, he describes a particularly hairy situation as far as firefighter safety, he generally believes that fire does more good than bad. What's interesting, though, is that he cites the media

putting out a message that fires are destructive and yet the language he uses to describe fire in this story can be construed as upholding that supposition, as well (despite the fact that he, personally, does not).

### **Providing Context Within TheSmokeyGeneration.com:**

The use of antagonistic language by fire practitioners and the meanings and values put forward are, in the case of many of my interviewees, contradictory to their actual view of the role of fire and its importance to restoring healthy ecosystems. These men and women, by sharing their stories, have revealed one aspect of the form, format, and character of the conversations surrounding wildland fire. By doing so, they are revealing the character of wildland fire itself, as it's defined by our social relationships, cultural conditions, political structure, economic values, and ethical assumptions. Although the stories that were told were not in any way overtly supporting the idea that all fire is bad, the tropes and schemes used by the interviewees revealed a fair amount of antagonistic language that creates an opportunity for any number of negative interpretations about the role of fire in the environment. In other words, the stories just don't do a phenomenal job of supporting the message that fire plays an important and necessary role in maintaining the health of our ecosystems. So, by having insight into the fact that the language used by fire practitioners to describe fire in the environment is not necessarily advancing a productive message aimed toward a

better acceptance of progressive fire management (despite their personal beliefs of the importance of fire and wish for the ability to better use fire as a tool), we are able to look, now, at influencing the discourse around fire to eliminate the subtle, yet pervasive, antagonistic language and reshape it to better align with and represent ecological needs. This will help enable us to change the social and political context within which fires are burning, including the policies that are formed by the acceptance (or lack of acceptance) of fire on our landscape.

## Chapter 5:

### **Creating the message: TheSmokeyGeneration.com**

So, I was able to collect some engaging, entertaining, realistic, and relevant stories to share on [TheSmokeyGeneration.com](http://TheSmokeyGeneration.com) website (which is designed to be a platform for archiving, sharing, and promoting the stories and oral history of wildland fire). But, as my analysis revealed, many of the tropes and schemes used in the stories don't do a great job of upholding the ultimate goal of the site: encouraging a more balanced acceptance of fire in the environment. This is where creating the messaging of the site moves the project from an academic inquiry to practical application. The design of the site, including everything from the color scheme to the imagery, was selected and created in a deliberate and calculated fashion in order to best serve the site's purpose — helping to shift the public perception of wildland fire.

I created the website over several months using the WordPress platform, a content management system that is fairly intuitive and inexpensive. I purchased the theme and several plugins to help support some of the desired functionality and, because of that, I was able to complete the entire development process without the assistance of a developer.

I worked with a marketing firm (in trade for some work I had done for them in the past) to develop a color and font scheme. I wanted colors that evoked both fire and regeneration and font that suggested a solid professionalism. The color scheme that I

selected was a combination of light and dark green, with an orange accent. A slate grey color is also used to soften the look and feel of the site. I also posted a logo contest on Freelancer.com to further develop a logo. I received 59 logo submissions and developed the following variations:



**Figure 1:** The Smokey Generation logos: banner (left) and medallion (right).

At the heart of the logo is a tree, with the trunk and branches evoking a sense of graceful movement that blends together with the movement of the flames (which create the tree's canopy). The flames are not consuming the tree, but are rather a part of it, demonstrating a symbiotic relationship between fire and forest; it was important to me that the logo was subtle and not in any way menacing. The image of the tree and color scheme is prevalent throughout the website, incorporated into the design, artwork, and videos. Although this seems like a superfluous aspect of the project, the look and feel of the website is crucial to the messaging of the site, one that should illustrate fire as regenerative and transformative, not destructive or negative.

Also prevalent throughout the site is the use of videos (nearly 200 at this time). This sets the site apart from many other oral history sites. In most cases, I was able to split apart each interview into multiple individual videos. This allowed me to present different pieces of material from each interview in different ways throughout the website. For the video editing process, I created a standard intro and end slate that I was able to modify for each independent video. The intros include audio of crackling flames, slides with the interviewee's name and title, title of the video, and proper transitions. The end slates include website information, a disclaimer, and logo slide. The disclaimer states, "The views expressed in this video are those of the participant's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Smokey Generation, its sponsors, the participant's employers, or other associates." This serves as a secondary point of protection against any backlash that firefighters participating in this project might face from employers (after the participant informed consent form and deed of gift).

Each video required audio and video editing with transitions to put together appropriate topics, edit out my voice or background noise, and to shorten the length of the total interview itself. I also developed short descriptions of each video that appear in the video players. To do this, I crafted language that avoided heightened emotional content but still was descriptive and interesting enough to engage the viewers and encourage them to view the video.

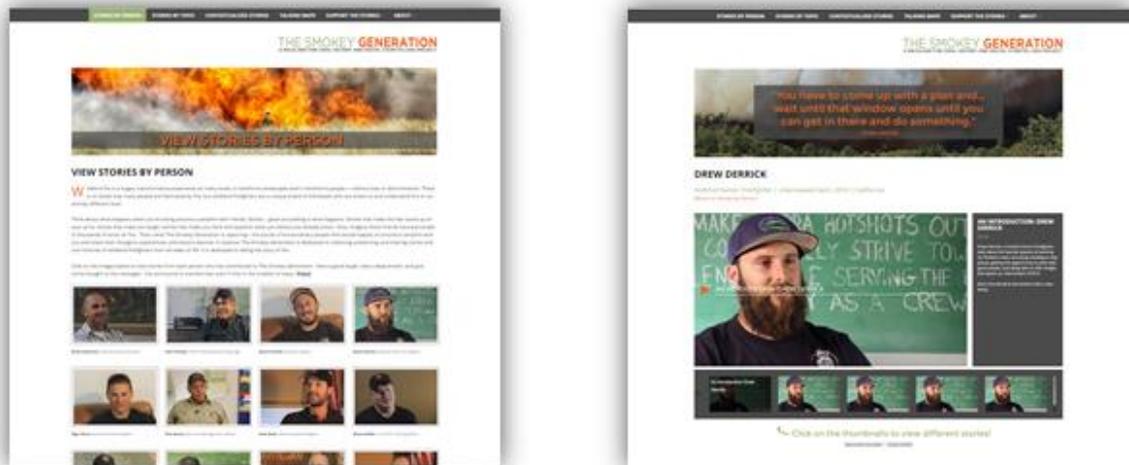
## Website Concept and Components:

The initial focus of this project has been limited to past and current hotshots. However, the structure and branding of the website allows for additional future development to include oral histories and digital stories from: handcrews, helitack, engine and water tender, prevention, fire management, and smokejumpers. The name of the site, The Smokey Generation, is a play on the fact that the generations of firefighters involved in these histories have grown up under the Smokey Bear mentality.

The website has four major components, along with multiple peripheral elements that support the project. The four major components include pages with the ability to view the stories by person, stories by topic, contextualized stories, and talking maps. Following is a summary of the four main components:

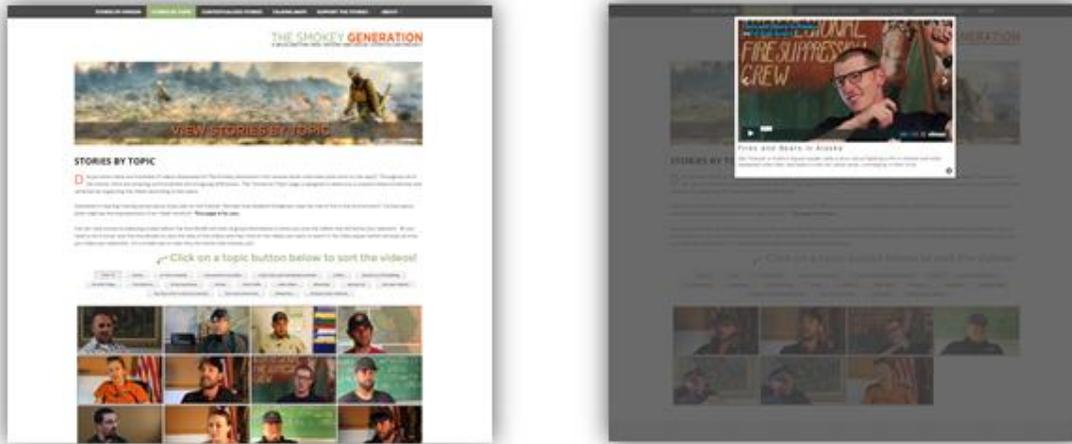
**Stories by Person.** This page is a portal to all full-content interviews. It lists all of the participants in alphabetical order, along with a still image of the interviewee and their title. Clicking on the image brings you to a page where you can watch videos of each individual's interview. Each interview is separated into smaller videos; these are comprised of just the interviewee speaking (my questions and voice are completely removed). In some cases, the videos have been embellished with photos provided by the participants. Each separate video within each person's page is titled and includes a short description of the content. This allows the viewer to navigate to videos that he or

she is interested in within the larger interview set. These individual pages also include a banner image with a quote taken directly from the interview, along with a snippet of the participant's response to how they view the role of fire in the environment.



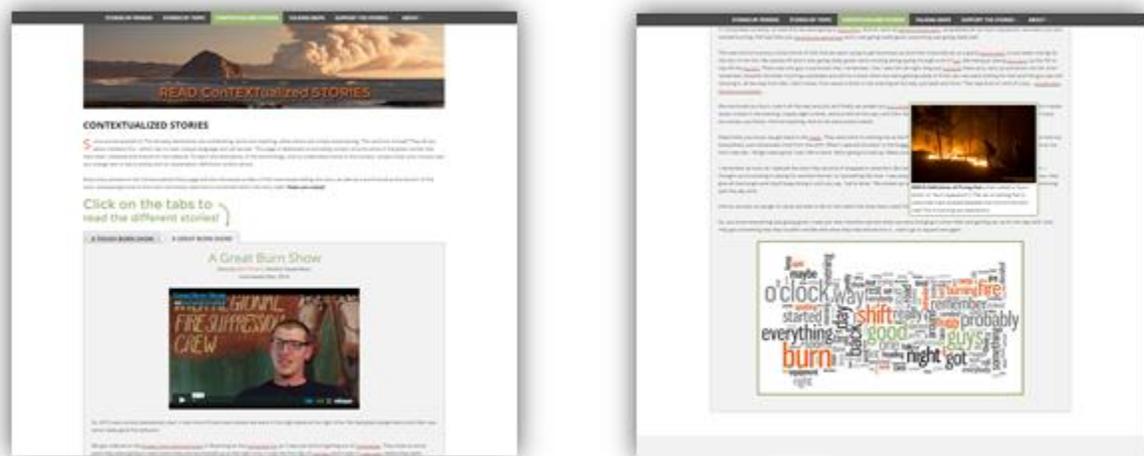
**Figure 2:** Screenshot of 'Stories by Person' page (left) and layout of an individual participant's page showing header image, video player, and thumbnails (right).

**Stories by Topic.** This page shows a majority of the videos hosted on the website in the form of a video library and allows the user to click on various topics to sort the library into categories. Once the user clicks on a topic, the library displays only those videos within that category. Then the user can hover over each video to see the title, and click on a title that interests them in order to view the video. Every video is displayed in a player with its title and short description.



**Figure 3:** Screenshot of the 'Stories by Topic' page (left) and the page with the pop-up video player after sorting the video library by topic (right).

**Contextualized Stories.** This page presents several select stories in two main formats: a video of the interviewee telling the story, and an edited transcript with interactive tooltips (pop-up windows) that display definitions and images to provide context for each story. Each story also includes a word cloud that showcases some of the most commonly used terms contained within the story itself. The font coloring in the word cloud is modified to impress certain aspects of the stories, as well.



**Figure 4:** Screenshot of the 'Contextualized Stories' page (left) and example of a pop-up tooltip and word cloud (right).

**Talking Maps.** This page presents the stories of select interviews by way of artistic maps of the United States. Clicking on each map brings the user to an interactive version of the map that allows the user to click on visually representative areas to view videos of stories from that location. Each video is accompanied by a title and short description. The idea is to provide the user with some visual context in a way that doesn't color the story itself, but helps to frame it instead.



*Figure 5: Screenshot of the 'Talking Maps' page (left) and example of the video player pop-up on an interactive map (right).*

The peripheral elements of the site currently include pages to upload photos and videos (i.e., users can submit their own stories), donate and sponsor the site, give feedback, an “about” page for the project and founder, a thank you page, and a contact page. The entire site is carefully curated and the comments and submissions are moderated.

## Where the Website Fits into the Larger Scheme:

There are several great digital storytelling and oral history sites online, including StoryCorps, but there are at least four other specific wildland firefighter oral history projects available online:

- <http://library.nau.edu/speccoll/exhibits/fires/intro/intro.html> This was a Northern Arizona University project called Fire on the Plateau and looks to have been completed in 2003. The website is a fairly basic listing of audio files, with stories focused on a specific geographical location.
- <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0E8606B961754DFC> This is a video project by the Lessons Learned Center that is capturing fire career stories from individual fire managers. The main focus of the Lesson Learned Center is to research and provide insight/recommendations about incidents within incidents, close calls, fatalities, accidents, etc. I believe that their oral history projects will continue to be limited in scope.
- There are two Smokejumper oral history projects:  
<http://idahohistory.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p15073coll1/id/135> This project, which focuses on Smokejumpers, is called the Smokejumping and Forest Fire Fighting Oral History Project, through the Idaho Oral History Center. The actual histories are not available online. The second is:

<http://scholarworks.umt.edu/smokejumpers/> This site hosts the audio and transcripts for a moderate collection online.

There are also several other oral history projects that include interviews with wildland firefighters, including the Fish and Wildlife Service Oral History Project. Generally, they are individual or small collections of wildland firefighter oral histories, but they are fairly limited and certainly not widely known. The Smokey Generation will represent the largest collection of wildland firefighting oral histories/digital stories available online.

### **Digital Storytelling and Oral History:**

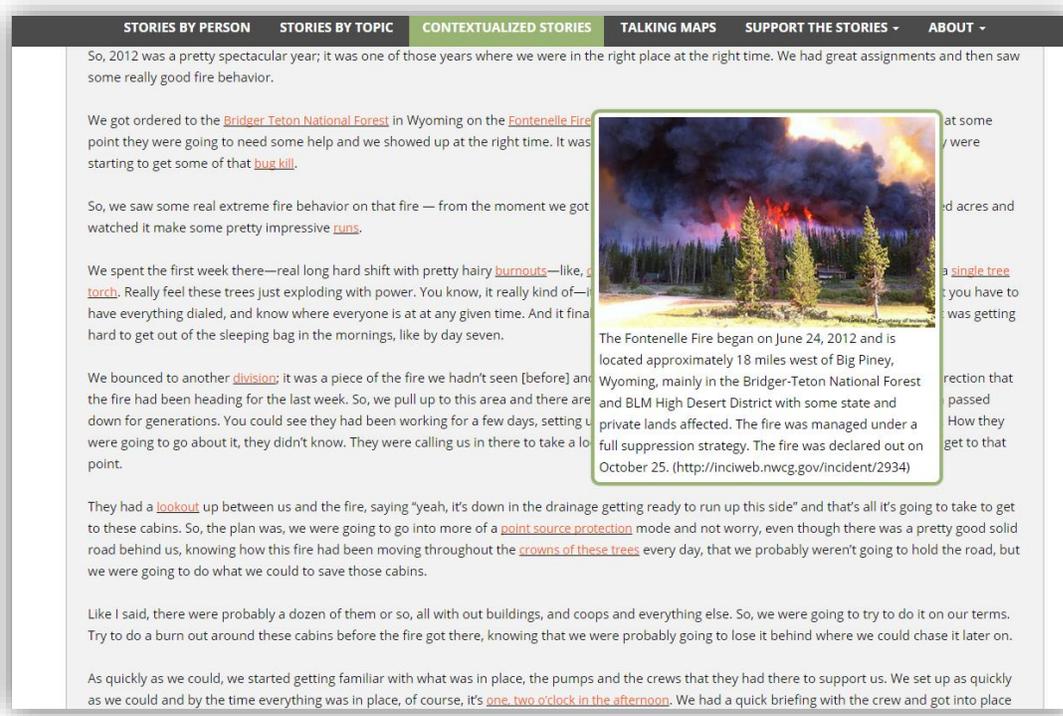
I believe it's important to frame the website portion of this project as a merging of oral history and digital storytelling techniques. Although storytelling is probably as old as spoken language itself, digital storytelling is a relatively new and emerging field and is still being defined. Digital storytelling is described as a short form of digital media designed around first-person narratives created by combining recorded voice, images, and sounds (Center for Digital Storytelling n.d.). Digital stories can engage viewer's visual and auditory senses in a manner that written word cannot do unaided (Suwardy 2013). Using contemporary technology to convey knowledge through storytelling allows us to connect with people on multiple levels: visually, cognitively, and emotionally. In fact, digital storytelling is being used in contemporary classrooms

as a way for students to gain knowledge in a personalized, contextualized manner and there are several studies that examine the use of digital storytelling as a way to enhance community building and cultural identity (Sanchez-Laws 2010, Rodrigues 2014, Lal 2015, Cushing 2013).

Though a digital story is typically created by the person telling the story (most often in the form of photographs and sound put together in video format with narrative voice-over) (Sanchez-Laws 2010), very often to illustrate a specific life experience, I've taken the approach that digital storytelling is *the process of coupling personal stories with broader public issues by leveraging digital technology and media* to showcase stories and the storytellers. I also consider digital storytelling to be the process of community building. With this in mind, the three major components of the website that I consider to be forms of digital storytelling are the Contextualized Stories Page, the Talking Maps page, and the Stories by Topic page.

The Contextualized Stories page (or ConTEXTualized Stories, as it's presented on the site—with “text” capitalized to highlight and differentiate the textual component from the normal video component displayed on the rest of the site) was designed to provide broader context to selected stories by allowing the user to see photographs and definitions of terminology used by the storyteller. As previously mentioned, each story showcased on the page includes the video of the storyteller telling the story, text of the edited transcript, and a word cloud that displays some of the most commonly used

terms contained within the story itself. The contextualization occurs when the user hovers and/or clicks on selected words within the transcript (identified by underlined orange font). Once the user does that, a pop-up tooltip appears that contains an image and/or definition of that term. The photos that were selected for each tooltip show standard firefighting practices and/or photos of the actual event/place/thing (carefully curated as to avoid heightened emotional evocation or inappropriately menacing imagery). For example, if a story tells about a specific fire, I've included a photo of that fire. Below, Figure 6 shows a tooltip created for a story about the Fontenelle Fire in Wyoming in 2012; the image was taken from the InciWeb Fontenelle page and shows the fire burning in similar conditions as those described in the story.

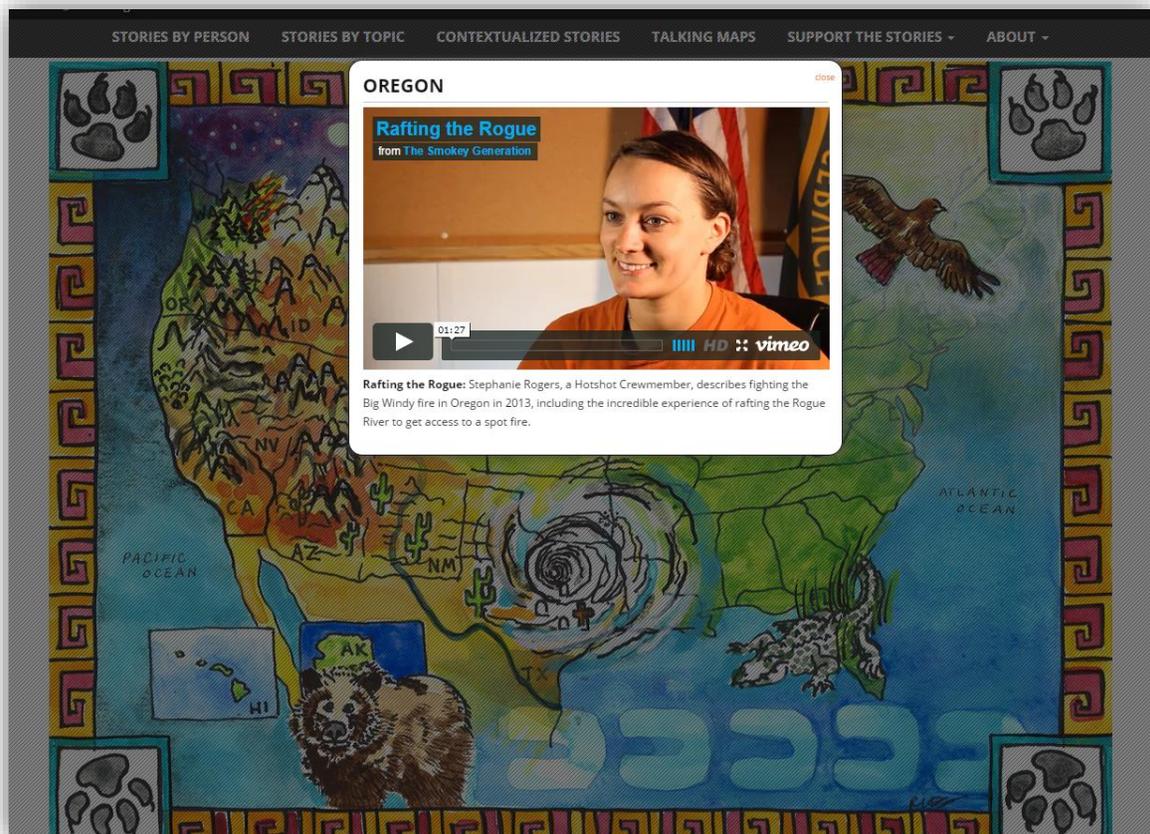


**Figure 6:** Screenshot of a tooltip for one of the stories on the 'Contextualized Stories' page, illustrating imagery and content that provides customized context for the story.

This use of technology allows for the user to interact with the story in a way that's determined by the user him or herself. This, in turn, creates opportunities for the user to connect with the storyteller in a virtual manner that bridges the experience of the storyteller with the personal experience of the user (critical to the success of a digital story). The technology allows me to provide and frame the context of the story in a way that supports the larger goal of the site, thereby helping to bridge personal experience with the larger public issue of wildland fire. As digital stories go, it's presented in an untraditional format, but I believe it to be a further advancement of digital storytelling techniques in that it generates an opportunity for the creation of meaning and the acquisition of knowledge through the use of *interactive* media (in conjunction with the digital story). This is in contrast to simply observing a digital story by viewing a short film. The level of participation is heightened through additional interaction between the viewer and the story (and, by extension, between the viewer and the storyteller).

Similarly, the Talking Maps page allows for the user to direct his or her own exploration of stories through the use of digital art. For the Talking Maps, I worked with several artists to produce artistic renditions of maps of the United States that showcase location-based wildland fire stories. Users can click on the separate maps to view the geographically inspired stories. They do this by hovering over each internal image, viewing a short description of the story, and then clicking to watch the related video of the storyteller telling a story that takes place at that location (hence the name,

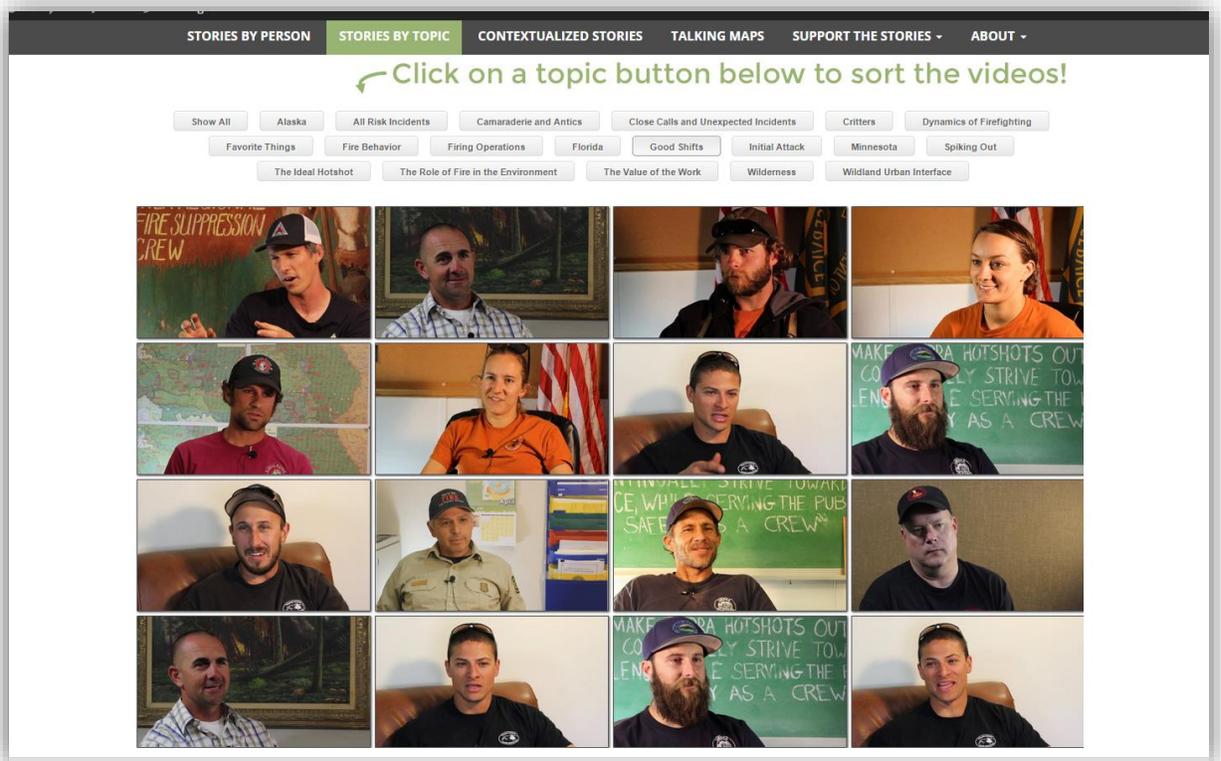
Talking Maps—the videos embedded in the maps “talk” to the users). Again, the self-directed exploration of the stories is what helps drive creation of meaning for the user, while the art provides context.



**Figure 7:** Screenshot of the video player on the 'Talking Maps' page showing the video and description for a selected geographic location.

The last digital storytelling component of the website is the Stories by Topic page. This page allows for users to sort the stories on the website by topics ranging from “The Role of Fire in the Environment” to “Close Calls and Unexpected Incidents.” The value behind this page, in terms of digital storytelling, is that the users own interests dictate the types of stories he or she experiences. By leveraging simple sorting

technology, the broader issue of wildland fire is winnowed down into consumable portions that directly appeal to the user's tastes. Each video is accompanied by a short description, which works to frame the message and creation of meaning. In the future, I may include facts relevant to each story that support the role of fire in the environment (to provide further context to each story's description).



**Figure 8:** Screenshot of the 'Stories by Topic' page, showing the different available sortable topics and the video library display.

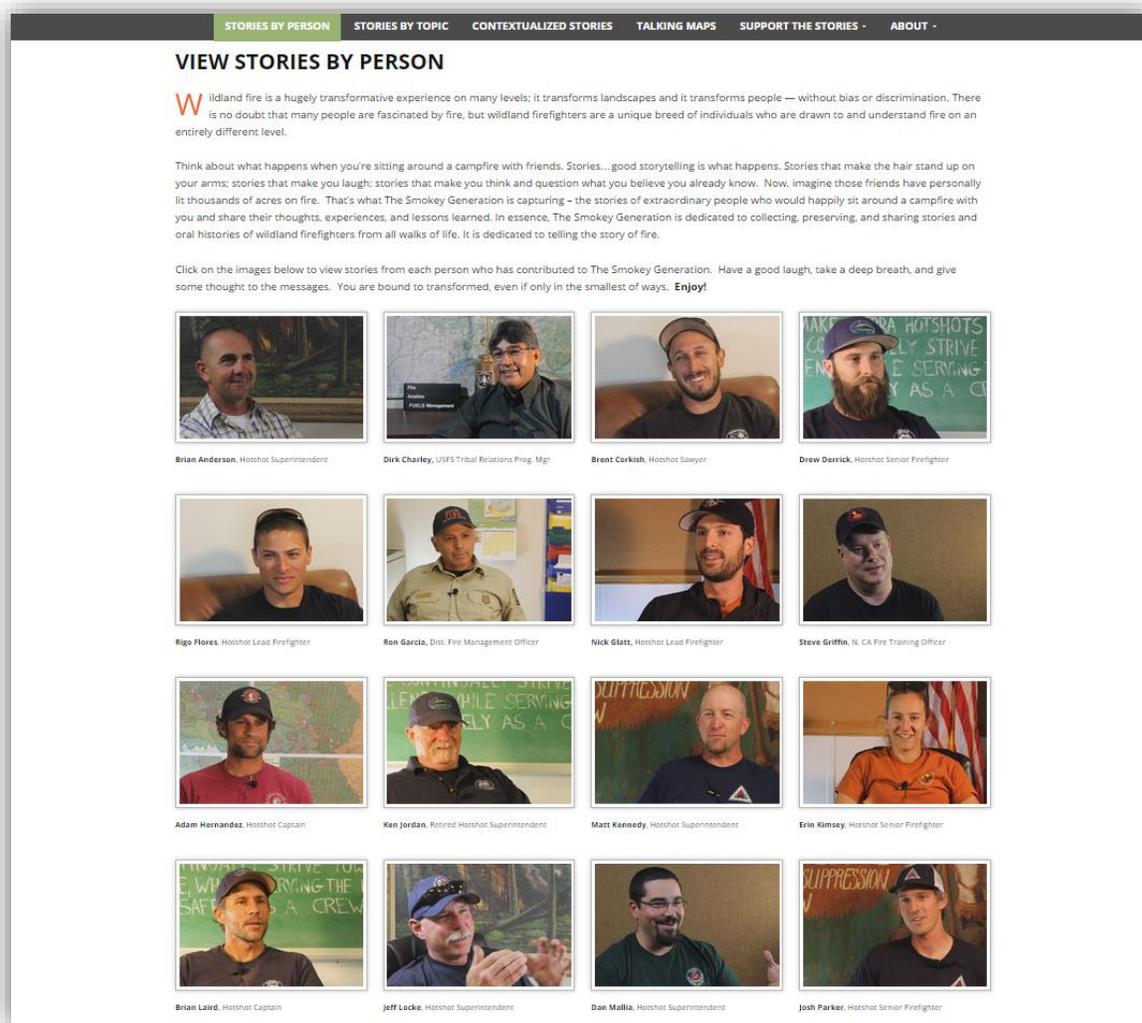
An interesting connection between digital storytelling and oral history is that both are focused on everyday people. Whereas oral history generally focuses on capturing the stories and life experiences of “normal” people, digital storytelling is understood to be typically performed by amateurs (Center for Digital Storytelling n.d.).

Both of these practices allow for an authenticity in the telling of the stories that is equally appealing and imperfect. This brings me to the main oral history component on the site, the Stories by Person page.

According to the Oral History Association,

Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives (Oral History Association n.d.).

The content on the Stories by Person page showcases digital stories and oral histories through the use of abbreviated portions of larger interviews. Although this is a deviation from the typical way oral histories are presented (i.e., full-length recordings), in this day and age of digital media consumption, shorter videos are considered more appealing and palatable. In the future, the site will also include a page with a basic table that allows the user to see all of the full audio histories/interviews, the associated subjects, transcripts, keywords, and contributor information. This will serve as the true archive of these oral histories. This page will include the full recordings, thereby meeting standard oral history expectations.



**Figure 9:** Screenshot of the 'Stories by Person' page, showing the clickable images that bring the user to each individual's page.

In addition to presenting the collection of oral histories and digital stories, the website has been developed to educate and influence the public perception of wildland fire to better support and align with its ecological role through the use of imagery and messaging. The creation of strategic messaging can be seen in several design elements throughout the site, primarily through graphical means in deliberate support of contemporary science on the role of fire in the environment.

## **Identifying and addressing the audience:**

In order to create quality messaging (i.e., the “text” of the website), I defined the primary website’s audience. Since I had determined that I would be using social reader-response theory to analyze and conceptualize potential messages (so that they best fit with the purpose of the messaging and mesh with the reader as they are creating meaning), I kept in mind that social reader-response theory is generally associated with the idea that “what we take to be our individual subjective response to literature are really products of the interpretive community to which we belong” (Tyson 1999, Fish 1980). I identified, with that, the interpretive communities to whom I wanted to focus the messaging.

Interpretive communities can be described as a group of people who have shared discourse and collective interpretations of events; their interpretation of a text is dependent on their own subjective community (or communities) (Fish 1980). In other words, a text does not have meaning beyond the scope of a set of cultural assumptions (which consequently dictate what the “characters” mean in a text and how they should be interpreted). Literary theorist Stanley Fish writes, “...it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or reader, that produce meanings (Fish 1980).” Put simply, a person’s worldview (and everything that comes into play with creating that worldview – from biases to demographics) impacts the way he or she derives meaning from the text itself.

When considering this in terms of the website, I wanted maximum control over what meanings were formed as users viewed and interacted with the site. To do so, I needed to determine my goal(s): I want people to understand that wildland fire has an important and necessary role in our environment. To that end, I realized that I needn't focus on an interpretive community made up wildland firefighters (who already have varying degrees of understanding), nor need I focus on (or try to persuade) people who adamantly view all fire as bad. Conversely, I determined that the interpretive communities I want to target are people who experience fire in some way on a regular basis (either through direct exposure to fire in and around their communities, or by consistent exposure through the media) but who have not yet formed a definitive opinion on how they view fire. My target audience most likely views fire as they do a flood or hurricane: emotionally, as a natural disaster; that is, fire is viewed as traumatic for people (their cultural assumptions and collective interpretations of fire are anthropocentric in nature).

To determine the most effective messaging for this particular interpretive community, I used the principles of reader-response criticism to identify how best to present purposeful messaging within the website graphics and design. This represents an untraditional use of reader-response criticism, though not completely unheard of. For example, there are some interesting uses of reader-response theory as adapted to consumer research for improved advertising results (Scott 1994).

By setting interpretive parameters through strategic placement of graphics and text, I'm essentially using a form of target marketing – selecting specific, applicable markets and shaping the messaging to nudge those who are already open to the message to commit, while encouraging those who are not yet open to the message to at least consider it. In literary theory, this would be considered authorial intent and reader-response interpretations would look at how the text (i.e., creation of content with or without intent) works with the reader's expectations, probable knowledge, and motives (Scott 1994). My assumptions as an "author," or website creator, is that the website users will approach their interaction with the site using conventional expectations (i.e., the website will inform and entertain), their probable knowledge heading into the site is that they understand that fires occur and that firefighters act "heroically" in suppressing them, and their motives for accessing the site could conceivably be as simple as curiosity.

The basic concept behind reader-response criticism is that "...readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature" (Tyson 1999). By approaching the creation of the messaging on the website as though it won't have true meaning until it is read, I am able to deliberately craft the language and graphics so that it works within my selected/targeted interpretive communities to subtly persuade the readers towards accepting the view that fire is important to the health of our environment.

The readers of the website will approach the presentation of information I've analyzed and gathered from the interviews, through the lens of their own personal experience (as a part of an interpretive community). From that perspective, they will construct meaning that fits best within their own worldview. As a result, I have worked to provide strong, relatable context (such as on the Contextualized Stories page) and utilize persuasion (through the selection of engaging messaging and graphics) to better ensure readers draw the desired conclusions.

The best example of this is the use of quotes taken directly from each interview and incorporated into graphical headers on the individualized View by Person pages. For example, in the image below, I extracted a quote by Steve Griffin, the Northern California Fire Training Officer and Geographic Area Training Representative for the Pacific Southwest Region, during his interview, "Not all fire is bad, and not all of the same fire is bad."<sup>73</sup> I paired this with an image that shows the beautiful, soft green growth and regeneration that occurred after a fire, with the goal of framing his stories with imagery that shows fire as transformative, not destructive; this imagery is supported by his statement.

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<sup>73</sup> Steve Griffin, interviewed by Bethany Hannah, April 4, 2014. See appendix B



**Figure 10:** Example of a graphical header that was created to be displayed at the top of a participant's interview page.

### **Creating Messaging through Imagery and Design:**

As I worked on creating messaging throughout the website, I was cognizant of the theory of motivated reasoning and framing theory. These two theories fit hand-in-hand with my use of reader-response criticism to target interpretive communities and forecast the creation of meaning by website users. The theory of motivated reasoning “refers to the unconscious tendency of individuals to process information in a manner that suits some end goal or goal extrinsic to the formation of accurate beliefs” (Kahan 2011). In other words, people often hear what they want to hear (by way of aligning information to their beliefs) (Kunda 1990). We are motivated to be accurate and we use our belief structure to achieve (and justify) our desired conclusions.

It really comes down to the fact that we are quite bad at disconnecting our emotions from our reasoning; our brain is wired to react emotionally well before it really even knows what it's reacting to. Our belief structure and emotions impact our ability to process information and our need to remain committed to our desired

conclusions leads us to interpret and react to information in ways that don't necessary align with actual facts (Kahan 2011).

In terms of wildland fire, when you have someone who is emotionally fearful of fire because they have a certain understanding of it (for example, a rancher who's concerned that a fire will destroy his cattle's ability to forage for the season), they are going to view fire through that lens and often times hear what it is they want to hear, despite what you're telling them (for example, you might be telling him that without fire, the pinion-juniper stands will continue to encroach on the rangeland and choke out native forage, thus completely changing the ecology of the landscape making it inhospitable to grazing over time). It's easy to believe that if we just provide people with more knowledge, more data, and more information, they will be better equipped to agree with us, the experts. But it's not quite that easy, particularly when you consider motivated reasoning or the impacts of emotion on reasoning. The rancher is emotionally concerned about his livelihood, and perhaps, for example, motivated to disagree with you because you represent a government agency (who he generally dislikes because maybe his political affiliation leads him to do so). This is just one invented example, but it could just as easily be applied to a municipal structure firefighter who is motivated to extinguish a wildland fire simply because they are trained (and emotionally accustomed) to suppress all fires at any cost (regardless of a particular incident's resource management objectives). Or a homeowner in the

wildland urban interface who is motivated to protest a local prescribed burn after seeing nearby smoke because they're afraid of his or her house burning down like they've seen on television.

So how do you persuade someone, who is emotionally or even intellectually motivated to believe one thing, that there is another side to it? One approach I took on the website is in the development of a teaser video placed on the homepage.<sup>74</sup> This video starts with text on a black screen that leads the viewers through a series of statements that reflect common conceptions about wildland fire put forward by the media. For example, "Flames consume, devour, and chew through our forests." In the background, you hear various newscasters using antagonistic and/or negative language to describe actual fires, and there is an accompanying audio track with flames crackling underneath. Then I ask a question of the viewer to ascertain if they believe what it is the newscasters are saying (e.g., fires are enemies to be battled). My question is, "Aren't they?" By that question, I posit the idea that there is a different side to the story. From that point forward, I introduce several audio clips from various interviews I collected that support the idea that fire is important to the environment and not all negative (i.e., not an enemy). This is accompanied by footage of actual fires and firefighters. I conclude the video with snippets of footage of various interviewees to further draw the reader into the stories.

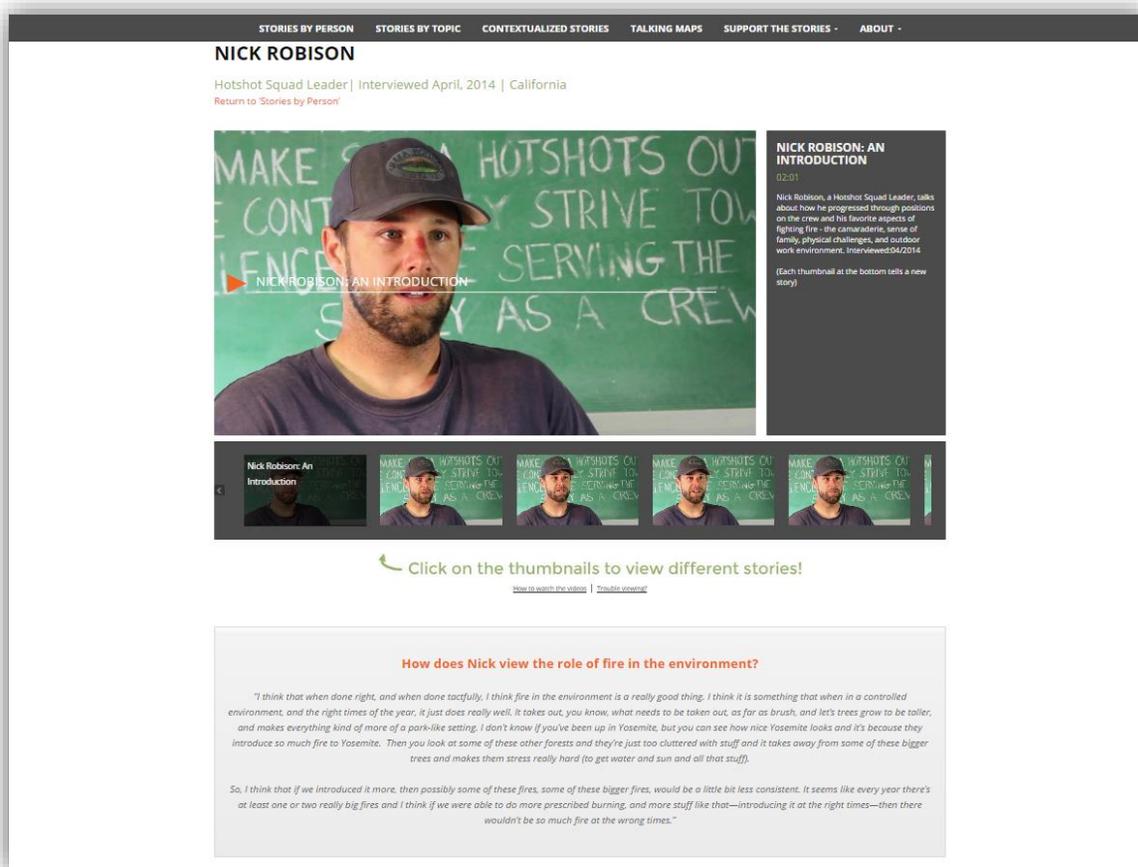
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<sup>74</sup> Also available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/110620729>

Basically, I am capitalizing on (and acknowledging) the emotional aspect of fire in the beginning of the video. I then take the opportunity to pose a question to get viewers to at least consider the idea that their perception of fire might not be the only correct interpretation (or at the very least, recognize the influence of the media on the way fire is understood). I offer some alternative views as presented by the “experts,” or fire practitioners, and invite them to engage in further exploration of the idea by continuing their visit through the site. Personally, I believe that when we can get people to be open to at least considering the motivations that drive their perceptions, we can then really begin to explore acquiring their support and engaging them in constructive dialogue about fire. This video is attempting to do that.

In addition to motivated reasoning, I also took into consideration framing theory as I developed the messaging throughout the site. Basically, a frame in communication tries to influence and interpret what is being presented and persuade the audience to accept one meaning of a concept over another (Littlejohn 2009). The whole website is designed around leveraging the natural draw of storytelling to lead people to a particular conclusion – either through the story itself, or incorporating additional imagery and messaging, etc. But, as the results of my analysis revealed, the language used by firefighters to describe fire in the environment (and related firefighting actions), doesn’t necessarily reflect their understanding or belief about the essential role of fire in the environment.

So, I was faced with the knowledge that the language used in the stories, such as the fire “ripped” up the canyon, potentially portrays an antagonistic image of fire, while the firefighter telling the story might passionately accept that it’s okay and even desired as a part of a natural process. This is in contrast to the potential likelihood that a person without that same intimate knowledge of fire might view that particular representation of fire as damaging, devastating, or even destructive, based on the use of language alone. The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications on multiple levels and values. The practical use of framing within the website addresses that through the use of graphical headers on each of the individualized View by Person pages, as well as the incorporation of quotes taken from each individual’s response to the question of how they view the role of fire in the environment stylistically incorporated at the bottom of each of those pages.



**Figure 11:** Screenshot of an individual's interview page with a stylized quote on the role of fire in the environment appearing below the video player.

By including these text quotes, I am able to promote a particular definition (or interpretation) of the stories and information being conveyed. I also use the brief descriptions of each video to eliminate emotion and antagonistic language from the context surrounding the interaction of the viewer with the story. I do this through very strategic and deliberate word choice so that even if the viewer encounters tropes and schemes that portray fire with antagonistic language, they are framed using language more aligned with the message that fire is important and necessary.

So, throughout the site, the messaging is conveyed through a variety of means, from the design (e.g., the font, colors, layout, graphics, and imagery), to the actual textual content found throughout the pages and videos. Beginning with targeting specific audiences, remaining aware of how meaning is created so that the messaging is always crafted with purpose, and consistently framing the stories in a way that pushes the idea that fire plays an important role in the environment, The Smokey Generation has been developed into a rich and entertaining digital story and oral history website.

### **Next Steps for The Smokey Generation:**

By looking at the tropes, schemes, and storytelling devices used by hotshots, as well as examining and framing their underlying meanings, The Smokey Generation has evolved from an academic inquiry to become an interesting, accessible resource that helps to reveal the relationship that many wildland fire practitioners have with fire. The lesson is that there are many, many facets to this relationship and not all aspects are in agreement with each other. For example, the dominant tropes and schemes used by the interviewees revealed the use of both blatant and subtle antagonistic language within the narratives. These included the personification and anthropomorphism of fire, sometimes as aggressive (e.g., the fire made a run at us), other times as sinister (e.g., the fire was creeping around), and still other times as simply descriptive (e.g., we were at the head of the fire); the use of metaphors and similes, ranging from military

metaphors to describe firefighting actions (e.g., nuking an area) to comparing wildland fire to the human experience of death; the use of polysyndeton as a direct reflection of the landscape (the composition of statements reflecting pace of hiking up a hill, for example); and the use of other tropes such as hyperbole, paradox, and metonymy.

Though the firefighters I interviewed had deep understandings of the role of fire in the environment and felt strongly about its necessity, they utilized figures of speech that can be construed as perpetuating the discourse that leads people to misunderstand it and oppose progressive and/or corrective fire management actions. Without context or an intimate understanding of the firefighting culture, their chosen figures of speech can be interpreted as enforcing a fear of wildfire, positioning fire as an enemy that needs to be battled, situating firefighters as heroes saving the day, portraying fire as a monster who chews through the forest, etc. These concepts and positions are contrary to their actual beliefs. The task, then, is to become aware of the language we're using and start to modify the language we use as fire practitioners and champions of fire, so that our beliefs about the important role of fire in the environment are reflected, supported, and promoted within our everyday discourse and vernacular. In the meantime, if we are to continue to work towards shifting the negative public perceptions of wildland fire, communications, fire information, and general messaging to the public needs to be properly framed, include creative context, and provide interpretations that lead people

away from uninformed emotional responses to a place where they can think critically about the issue and discuss wildland fire in a proactive manner.

Specifically for The Smokey Generation, moving forward, I will to continue to adapt framing techniques throughout the website that present and reveal progressive messaging in a manner that is comparative, interpretive, or demonstrative. Practically, this may include an interpretive glossary of terms and figures of speech found throughout the site, featured videos that present views of fire in the environment from multiple interviewees, and incorporating more imagery and graphics to help provide appropriate context.

Ultimately, the goal of the site will be to continue to gather more narratives and extract more lessons that help contribute to shifting the negative perception of fire to one that's more accepting of fire in the environment. In doing so, The Smokey Generation will help to draw greater connections between fire and ourselves and begin to shape some of the discourse around fire in a way that acknowledges our history with it while affirming its necessary and important role in the environment.

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## Appendix A: Catalogue of Tropes

### Descriptions of Fire:

Descriptor	Rate	Example Quote
Running/Run	35	<i>As I came out, where before there were only two spot fires, there were 15, and I'm hiking out of this dozer line and I can literally hear and see the fire <b>running</b> through the crowns. (Derrick)</i>
Pushing down/made a push	17	<i>It made a massive <b>push</b> and RH's were high and it kind of had that mossy, Alaska tundra stuff that doesn't look like it could burn but definitely did. (Janes)</i>
[The fire] cleans up [the forest floor]/clean it up	15	<i>I've seen some high elevation fires that just do really well, they just <b>clean up</b> the underbrush... (Griffin)</i>
Blow up/blows out/blew up (or out, or by, blown over)/blasted	11	<i>It just took off; we could just watch it roll over the hills and we just chased that thing for a couple of nights—just trying to keep some kind of line along it—but basically it was just really following it. It just <b>blew up</b>. (Youmans)</i>
Ripped/it'll rip/ripping	10	<i>...the fire just blew up and <b>ripped</b> through that drainage and we pretty much never saw it again. (Derrick)</i>
Backing	10	<i>It was really low intensity, just <b>backing</b> down towards the houses... Just creeping, <b>backing</b>, not too high intensity. (Gallivan)</i>
Wall of flame/wall of fire	10	<i>Just to make it a long story short, they got way too many fires going, way too fast, and before we knew it we had a giant <b>wall of fire</b> coming towards us on our line... (Laird)</i>
Lays down/laid down	8	<i>The flame front was so large that—and it <b>laid down</b>—and it was just incredible. (Thorne)</i>

Creeping	8	2012 we were in Wenatchee and it was basically so smoked in you couldn't see the fire all day, <b>creeping</b> around towards the houses... (Gallivan)
Consume [fuels]	8	Fire behavior in the extreme varies from fully contained independent crown fires (where fire gets up into the tops of the trees and will run completely through the tops of the trees and <b>consume</b> everything) to independent running crown fires in the brush. (Anderson)
Chasing	7	So we get on top of the mountain and watch the fire <b>chasing</b> these trucks back downhill. Just coming right after them... (Caldwell)
Nuked	5	Then like two months after that happened, we had the Whitewater Baldy [Fire] come through and just <b>nuked</b> out all of that. (Kimsey)
Torch/torching out	5	Spent the first week there, really long hard shift with pretty hairy burn outs, like over slung along roads where the trees, you can feel, even a single tree <b>torch</b> . Really feel these trees just exploding with power and really kind of—it gets you on the edge and the hair stands up... (Pickard)
Cranking	4	The fire activity was picking up pretty well throughout the day especially as it was getting hotter, I believe we even had a thunderstorm. But the fire was pretty active in itself, you know burning—it was <b>cranking</b> actually, a lot. (Farmer)
Racing/raced	4	And then, "boom," that fire that was on the other side of the drainage is <b>racing</b> up underneath us. (Kimsey)
Stood up/stand up	4	The fire pretty much <b>stood up</b> on us into the trees and just started kind of moving pretty fast. A little bit faster than we had planned and we didn't light that fire but it was coming towards us so we ended up having to do a big backfire. (Robinson)

Explosive	3	<i>So everything was there, as far as the fuel type, everything was there for pretty <b>explosive</b> fire behavior—and we saw some for sure. (Laird)</i>
Skulking around	2	<i>...it burns pretty well when the wind is blowing, and then, as soon as the wind stops, the fire just drops out of trees and then you just get it <b>skulking</b> around the sweat moss... (Janes)</i>
Moonscape	2	<i>It wasn't like that sort of apocalyptic like explosive burning that you get from the brush down in So Cal (or in southern Arizona) where it's like just giving off so much heat and it's terrifying and then once it's finished burning, like it's <b>moonscape</b>. (Kimsey)</i>
Getting away from them/got away from us	2	<i>I talked earlier about the fire on the—clear back in 1967—the fire was <b>getting away</b> from them every night, every night, with the moss on the trees and so on. (Caldwell)</i>
Died down	2	<i>And just the daytime tactics weren't really working, but we were able to figure out some ways to make it work in the evenings just because fire behavior <b>died down</b> and put us at an advantage there. (Hernandez)</i>
Pulsing down	2	<i>It was <b>pulsing</b> down as it came down; it <b>pulsed</b> down towards us and it as we started to feel that in-draft again, that's when we started lighting. (Naylor)</i>
Took out [homes]/took off	2	<i>It blasted into there and <b>took out</b> a bunch of houses... (Locke)</i>
Chunking off/away	2	<i>It was making really big runs; it was running a lot, <b>chunking</b> off. (Farmer)</i>
Putting up a header	2	<i>I guess it was kind of a big, controlled-chaos situation because there were a lot of local government engines and they were kind of freaking</i>

		<i>out a little bit at this big <b>header</b> of fire coming up. (Mallia)</i>
[The fire] will just eat it up/ Gobble up [trees]	2	<i>You're up close and personal with fire and when it's, you know—you're trying to moderate it from that smoldering to that little flame to, you know, when it starts to <b>gobble</b> up some trees, you know, it was gaining ground and you just got to know where you're going at all times. (Naylor)</i>
Throw spots/fire	2	<i>So the fire made a really—once it got established down there—it made a big push to the top of the ridge and then just, petered, you know. It <b>threw</b> some spots over to the other side... (Mallia)</i>
Ratty	1	<i>It was a wind driven fire when we first showed up and then after the first couple of days the wind stopped and there was just a lot of edge out there to go in and pick up. And it was really <b>ratty</b> and really scattered and just a mess. (Zink)</i>
Mowed down [trees]	1	<i>I got out there, you know, they're trying to stop this thing and it had <b>mowed down</b> acres and acres and acres of trees—Tamarack—and just laid them down on the ground. (Caldwell)</i>
Skunked around	1	<i>But once it made that big push to the top, it got in there and just kind of laid down, just kind of <b>skunked around</b> a little bit, once nightfall came in—and we got to go in there and do some good work on that. (Mallia)</i>
Scabby	1	<i>We were in Utah, well I was on Crane Valley, and the Pinion-juniper type fuels that they have, the fires actually burns through <b>scabby</b>; it's wind driven, and it's really hard to find that direct edge and kind of work the edge. (Derrick)</i>
Bombing	1	<i>It is like fully hooked under, and it's like, you know, <b>bombing</b> towards the line and towards our vehicles and everything. (Kimsey)</i>

Jump the corridor	1	<i>They had like four shot crews on that flank and it was getting ready to <b>jump the corridor</b>, so they were burning from the road. (Olson)</i>
Got away	1	<i>We had one night shift where the fire kind of <b>got away</b> from us. We lost a burn, had some fire almost impact some houses so some of the guys ran in their really quick and grabbed some hoses and, you know, saved some property. (Miller)</i>
Piddling around	1	<i>But it was just piddling around, it was early in the morning and just <b>piddling</b> around... (Youmans)</i>
Roll over	1	<i>It just took off; we could just watch it <b>roll over the hills</b> and we just chased that thing for a couple of nights... (Youmans)</i>
Kicking ass	1	<i>We're just barely, kind of, making that and were about ready to put the torch on the ground. The last two to three days, it's really been <b>kicking our ass</b>. (Kennedy)</i>
[the column] had a lot of fallout	1	<i>There was a lot of fire activity, a lot of <b>fallout</b> and multiple spot fires when we were holding. (Glatt)</i>
Rager	1	<i>We had one last year, I think it was, you know, the Dakotas — on the borderline of Montana and the Dakotas — and it was a <b>rager</b>. (Flores)</i>
Ran out of steam	1	<i>That day, when all that happened, is when that fire laid down. It finally <b>ran out of steam</b>. (Naylor)</i>
Falling on its face	1	<i>...it'll run, like in Alaska, it will run right into an old fire from two, three years ago and <b>fall on its face</b>. (Gallivan)</i>

## Description of Firefighting Actions:

Descriptor	Rate	Actual Quote
Catch/catching/caught [the fire]	37	<i>Took it all the way into town and it was like I said, it was seven hard days of firing and finally, on day seven, we <b>caught it.</b>" (Marquez)</i>
Chasing [a fire/spots]	17	<i>...everybody had had tools and we started <b>chasing</b> this thing up one of the flanks as fast as we possibly could while our Supt. was calling for more resources. (Anderson)</i>
Lose/lost [the fire]	17	<i>We <b>lost</b> our burn area, it blew by our line—or it spotted over—and there was way too many [spot fires] for us to catch. (Marquez)</i>
Beating/smacking down/knocking down/knocking out [the fire]	10	<i>You just kind of spray the edges, <b>knock it down</b>, and keep moving, keeping one foot in the black at all times. (Farmer)</i>
Attack everything/something (excluding initial and extended attack)	9	<i>So we send some folks down and started <b>attacking</b> it, you know, it got—I don't remember—it was under an acre in size but it was so dry it started picking up. (Zavala)</i>
Leap frogging / take a leap on us	8	<i>It was an indirect piece that we were putting in, talking about a 30 foot swath with a 2 foot dig, I mean, it's thick, really, really thick. So we were <b>leapfrogging</b> crews the whole time. It took, I think, 3 to 4 days to put the line in with that many crews and we were tying into the American River at the bottom. (Flores)</i>
Punching line	7	<i>We wake up and just start going to work and <b>punching</b> line down this ridge. (Corkish)</i>
Big Box tactic/boxing it in	6	<i>And so, for a lot of that fire, we put in good chunks of line to kind of <b>box it in</b> and some critical points. (Hernandez)</i>
Hooking it	5	<i>We ended up working until probably about, pretty much until it got daylight, so probably an hour of sleep with 50 to 100 spot fires during the day, <b>hooking</b> a 70 acre slopover... (Laird)</i>

Flanking [the fire]	4	<i>...it was steep, you know, we were just chasing that fire, we were <b>flanking</b> the fire. (Farmer)</i>
Throwing everything at it/throwing people at it	3	<i>With California it's just, <b>throw</b> everything at it, if it's available you put firefighters on the ground. (Robinson)</i>
Buttoning up [the fire]	3	<i>This was kind of a pretty critical chunk of line that we were trying to get <b>buttoned</b> up and then it [would] set us a good anchor point to just keep moving for the rest of the fire. (Hernandez)</i>
Put [the fire] to bed / put [the fire] away	2	<i>Burn this road out and then handed off to another crew, and then they were going to hand it off to another crew, and then they were going to hand it off to another crew, and we were going to put this fire away—<b>put it to bed</b>, kind of thing. (Mallia)</i>
Throw(ing) fire	2	<i>...you're actually walking around <b>throwing fire</b> into the trees trying to get the black spruce to burn. (Gallivan)</i>
Corralled/corralling [the fire]	2	<i>We spiked out for 14 days and we were working this little lightning fire and we were just trying to <b>corral</b> it... (Derrick)</i>
Blow holes through the canopy/blowing the canopy open	2	<i>Yeah, typically we will <b>blow holes</b> through the canopy once and awhile... (Clem)</i>
Slick off a hillside	2	<i>Of course, we never intentionally, when we can, <b>slick off</b> a hill side during a burn out on a wildfire. Whatever we can do to try and bring it down—well, there was none of that on this fire. (Pickard)</i>
Ripped/rip [a fire area]	2	<i>Of course it got pretty hot, the fire was coming down, we didn't have much choice so we <b>ripped</b> off a section. (Locke)</i>
Turning the corner on it [the fire]	2	<i>You're trying to <b>turn the corner</b> on the fire, you're going hot, you're going out to the edge... (Garcia)</i>
Nuke [an area within the fire]/ Moonscaping it/make it look like the moon	2	<i>Typically when we're burning we're not trying to <b>nuke</b> it or, you know, make it look like to</i>

		<b>moon.</b> In that particular case we were... (Clem)
Auger in	1	<i>...we're going to hold the road, so everybody unloads, <b>augers in</b> for about an hour and a half worth of prep work, creating a fuel break along the road... (Parker)</i>
Seal the deal	1	<i>It was pretty cool to be a part of that, just to be the last crew to <b>seal the deal</b> after knowing that we put in a lot of good line and put in a lot of good efforts throughout the whole duration of it... (Hernandez)</i>
Motor out of [the fire area]	1	<i>But honestly in my career I've been, I don't want to say fairly lucky but I haven't really had a "I need to <b>motor out</b> of here" moment. (Janes)</i>
Running and gunning	1	<i>We were down on a fire already, Camp Pendleton, and went over to the Cedar fire and commenced to work in a 40 hour shift which was burning, doing a little bit of <b>running and gunning</b> and doing all kinds of things trying to catch this thing. (Marquez)</i>
Squared away	1	<i>The fire will run through again. I was just making sure that we would be all <b>squared away</b>. (Papke)</i>
Stripping [a ridge – i.e., cutting line]	1	<i>We were <b>stripping</b> this ridge and the crew had started off ahead of me and they were up working... (Mallia)</i>

## **Appendix B: Transcripts of Interviews**

The views expressed in these transcripts are those of the participant's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Smokey Generation, its sponsors, the participant's employers, or other associates. Please note, The Smokey Generation is not affiliated with, nor endorsed by, any federal or state agency.

## Brian Anderson

Hotshot Superintendent, Bear Divide Hotshots (Angeles National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014 in Santa Clarita, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:06:48> For the camera, tell me your name, your position—you don't have to name crews—how many years you've been a hotshot, and how many years you've been fighting fire.

Anderson My name is Brian Anderson; I am a superintendent. I've been in the service for 17 years and 14 of those have been spent as a hotshot.

Hannah <00:07:24> Tell me your favorite hotshot story.

Anderson Favorite hotshot story has to be my rookie season. We have a little friendly competition in the hotshot culture called the four, four, and forty and essentially, what it is—or what I learned what that it was—was the little challenge that you drink four quarts of water in four minutes and you have to hold it down for forty seconds afterwards. You know, obviously it's designed to warrant a very certain reaction. We had started going—we were on a fire, and the fire was in wind-down stages—so we decided to make the shift a little exciting and boost the morale just a little bit. We had three guys go and obviously we had gotten the result that we wanted—and in excess—and got a good laugh out of it. Until our superintendent at the time decided to try it himself because the stakes were boosted significantly (in the monetary sense). He had given it a shot—and we were laughing hysterically the entire time—until he had started in. By the time he was done, we were shocked because he had actually done it and we didn't get the reaction that we wanted out of it. We all left that fire very disappointed because it cost us a lot. So, we had to, we had to eat that; everybody left disappointed and we never asked him to do it again.

Hannah <00:09:19> Lets go with a “best shift” ever kind of story?

Anderson I have two number ones. Everybody in our culture seems to think that they need to tell everybody that cutting hotline is the most

exciting and the biggest adrenaline rush and the most fun, and I don't know what's wrong with them, but I don't think that there is anything to terribly exciting about cutting line. I'm more of a, get more excitement, and I think there is a lot more learning experience to be had, when it comes to burn shows.

I've been on a couple of fires just in the last three years in my career, where we've gone to places where the temperatures were extremely hot and we're fortunate enough to land night shifts. All of the really hard work, and all the prep, and all of the line construction, and that sort of stuff, was taken care of during the day. And we were fortunate enough to work the entire fourteen assignment and had night shifts—and we burned all of the hand line and all of the dozer line and all of the perimeter that was put in by the day shift resources. So we didn't spend any time doing anything other than waking up, eating, and getting what we needed for the night to burn all night line. We'd go out and burn all night long for the entire time. I've had two shifts like that, one was in southern Arizona, and one was in northern California. By far the best shifts, the biggest learning experiences, the biggest eye openers, some of the most extreme fire behavior we've seen in two different fuel types. All the way from the timber country to the southern Arizona type sage and mesquite fuel types. Some of the most extreme fire behavior, but both fourteen day assignments were extremely successful and everybody learned something from it for sure.

Hannah Can you describe the crew configuration and objectives and things like that?

Anderson Certainly. Essentially there's a lot that goes into putting on a back firing operation (or a burn out operation), all the way from getting the right approvals to proper crew configuration, additional resource support and that sort of thing, depending on how extensive the burn out operations are. Essentially, on any one shift, of what I described before, we were essentially burning entire divisions at a time. So, there was a lot of resources involved. Probably three or four additional crews, a lot of water support with engine, water tenders, and that sort of thing. Our medical support and what not.

So, you know, when we set up to do something like that, there's a briefing that goes on just within the crew and usually the overhead's responsible for facilitating that briefing and describing what is going to go on (as far as where the stopping and starting points are), what kind of burn patterns we're going to use, who the lighters are going to be, who the holders are going to be, and who the responsible parties are for each of those. So everybody knows who to contact if something goes good, bad, or indifferent. You know, if we need to call support to suppress spot fires that may result from anything we're doing and that sort of thing. If we need to change burn patterns and what not.

We typically like to have our newest folks doing the lighting itself. One of our more experienced firefighters to a squad leader-type doing the lighting boss or filling the ignition specialist role. And then, you know, we'll have the squad leader/captain doing the holding/coordinating. Usually myself or one of the other experienced captain will do the burn boss role and coordinating with all the other resources and division supervisor to ensure that the operations are successful.

We put the new folks on the torches or in the lighting role because, usually see their eyes get really, really big, while they're trying to put everything they just learned in the classroom, that they've been getting in the year, and then into practice in the matter of a shift. So it's really exciting to see that; at the same time it's really a good, positive thing for us as experienced folks to be able to teach them while there going through that process. To be able to explain some things as we're going through it. Especially if the burn out operations are more calculated and not so last minute we have a little bit more time to teach and facilitate some training while we're going through the process. It's always good for us to do that, that will mix it up a little bit, and throw some of our more experienced crewmen in there, too, because they always get a kick out of it (and their adrenaline always gets going even though they know a little bit more). So that the new folks see what they're going to end up like, if they stick around.

You know, the fire behavior can vary depending on what kind of result we're looking for. If we're looking for 100% consumption,

which is typical on a wildland incident, we'll use more heat, we'll change up the burn patterns as necessary to make sure we get 100% consumption. Typically in the summer times, if we're on a wildfire it means conditions are extremely hot and dry and we don't usually have a hard time once we touch fire to the ground getting complete consumption. Fire behavior in the extreme varies from fully contained independent crown fires (where fire gets up into the tops of the trees and will run completely through the tops of the trees and consume everything) to independent running crown fires in the brush. We get the same kind of extreme fire behavior in southern California and in northern California, depending on what the precipitation levels have been like and what the fuel moistures have been like. This year, I think, we are going to see some of the most extreme, for sure. We usually see the most radical fire behavior when we're creating it. It's interesting.

Hannah

<00:18:09> Tell me about the nuances of burning at night vs. daytime? What makes it so fun?

Anderson

You know, you're not dealing with all the elements during the day that you are at night. I mean, each one of them has it's, I guess, pros and cons. But I think there's a lot more pros at night because you're not dealing with all the elements that are present during the day. Typically during the day the weather is a little bit hotter and dryer, the RH's are a little bit lower, so it makes things a little bit more technical; there's a little bit more coordination that needs to go into it—a lot more communication. Your windows of opportunities are a little bit smaller if you want to avoid the peak burn periods.

When you're doing things at night, your RH's typically go up and you have a little bit lighter breezes coming down slopes, down canyons as opposed to up slope ups (up canyons during the day). The temperatures get a little bit cooler. The visibility factors is the one thing that is just not in your favor, but at the same time the conditions are a little bit better at night. It makes things a little bit easier; things are a little bit more controlled, if there was such a thing. You can always use the day time hours to gather all your intelligence and do all your scouting, and then you're not so

blind going into the nighttime hour. We typically prefer to do things at night because we can facilitate a little bit better control.

Hannah

<00:19:43> Do you have a good initial attack story?

Anderson

I do. In 2006 or 2007 we were actually on our way home from a fire in northern California and traveling down one of the local freeways. We just happened to have a utility truck with us, along with our two crew carriers and our Supt's truck. We happened to have a utility truck that had a pump on the back of it, because we had had some extra personnel with us and we were doing some trainee assignments. Anyway, we were on our way home from a fourteen day shift and we're driving down the freeway. And we see, almost a— it was broad daylight out and we're traveling down the highway, and we see almost a campfire sized fire that had looked like it had just started. There was a CHP unit on scene and that was it.

It was campfire sized when we showed up and our Supt. had pulled over and explained to everybody what we were going to do. We all got out and got ready, just like we do on our initial attack on the forest, but the fuel type was all continuous grass. It was about knee high and as we were getting out of the trucks and grabbing all of our tools to get ready to attack this thing, it started racing up the hill. Those are always the most intense, and the most fun, and the most sweat, the most adrenaline rush, when you're chasing a grass fire, trying to keep up with it as you see it running up the hill. You know, all the guys got out and we just kind of in unison— there was no need for chain saws; everybody had had tools and we started chasing this thing up one of the flanks as fast as we possibly could while our Supt. was calling for more resources. CHP was stopping traffic on the freeway. We just kind of one at a time, from the back of the line, kept rotating and smacking down the grass and throwing dirt on the head as much as we could (while the guys in the back were bringing hand line up one of the flanks).

We chased it for probably a good hour before we got water support and additional engine support. We were in the middle of nowhere, so to speak, so there was a bunch of miscellaneous resources that increase the challenge to get communication with

everybody as fast as we could. That made it a little bit more fun and a little bit more challenging too, in the position that I was in. But, that was probably one of the funnest, so to speak. It wasn't too hot outside, so it wasn't too bad. We had a good time on it afterwards, so—.

Hannah <00:22:40> Any close call type of stories that you want to share?

Anderson Yeah, I want to say 2003, a local fire on a southern California forest. It had been a campaign fire by this point and I was second or third season in and up in the front of the line with the saw group. We were putting in a piece of—what we thought was indirect line—the briefing that we had received that morning from our Supt. was that we were going to have, you know, all of our safety stuff was in place, so to speak. We had a couple of lookouts, a safety officer, and a division supervisor who were going to be our lookouts for the day. We had already pre-identified our escape routes and safety zones.

Our assignment was essentially to cut a piece of indirect line from a little camping area up to the black, so that we could start going direct and start suppressing this piece of the fire direct. So, as we progressed, our indirect line was probably only, I don't know, three hundred feet worth. We had progressed up the line and got probably within twenty five to thirty feet of the black and one of our captains, one of the more experienced captains—probably had about twenty-three years at the time (of straight hotshot time)—he had just kind of got hit with one of those hunches, so to speak. His curiosity got the better of him and he decided to take a walk out toward the main fire to see what the main fire was doing. Because he had smelled something funny. And as he progressed on out toward the main fire through the black, we'd received three messages within, probably, five minutes of each other. The first one was, "hurry up and finish cutting line; tie into the black." The second one came shortly after that and was "get it tied in now." And the third one was, "finish punching line in the black and get the crew up into it," because what had happened, for whatever reason, our lookouts had not communicated the way that they should have and another chunk

of the fire had started to stand up a little bit (and was essentially wrapping around our piece of indirect).

So we had a couple of our drivers take off down the hill—the rest of the crew went up the hill and sat in the black for a little while—and our drivers went down the hill and moved our crew carriers to our pre-identified safety zone and sat in the black for a little while. They essentially ended up having to light a little bit around the safety zone just to, kind of lessen the impact, so to speak. They would have been totally fine but it increase the level of the resources comfort level they were sitting it. From that day to this, the crew has made it standard practice that we don't rely on other people as lookouts, we use our own.

Hannah <00:26:08> What do you see as the role of fire in the environment?

Anderson You know as I've progressed in my career, I use to think that—I've been raised in a southern California environment and have always been raised under the pretense is that our mission is to suppress it at all cost because we have other values to protect. Not just people and property, but watershed. But I've also come to realize that fire has been here for thousands and thousands of years. It's been here much longer then man, and when man started to suppress it is when more—when we started to see some bigger issues come as a result of it.

I actually have a bit more appreciation for using fire in the environment to do what it is designed to do—kind of renovate and rejuvenate the ecosystems. It's good for the ecosystem as a whole; it's good for, not just the animal environment, but for promoting fresh growth and new growth and that sort of thing. I see it as a huge benefit in that role; I think there's a lot to be accomplished using it in the prescribed sense and taking the opportunity and taking the advantage of using prescribed fire to our advantage—not just to reduce hazards and whatnot, but also to promote some fresh growth, new growth and provide fresh ecosystems. You know, I think it has a bunch of roles to play. I think that we as people and managers of fire tend to maybe overthink it sometimes and think that there's more of a need (or less of a need), when it's the latter. It can be a huge benefit to us depending on how we use it.

Hannah <00:28:05> Are there any particular fires that stand out in your mind where you thought “this fire is doing nothing but good, what are we doing here?” Or vice a versa, “this fire is not doing what it should be doing and we should be more aggressive?”

Anderson Yeah, as a matter of fact, last year, in reference to the second part, I definitely had an experience last year on a fire. We had gotten called to southern Nevada for a 10-acre lightning start that was just kind of a headache and just wouldn't really go out (and there weren't sufficient resources). There was an engine module, a local engine module, that was on the fire and were having a little bit of trouble because of some of the inconsistencies in the weather putting it completely out.

So we got called to go in and essentially put it to bed, put it out completely. Well we were there, there was a couple more lightning starts that were discovered and the local division chief who was there on a detail, we had known previously (because he was a superintendent himself). So I met up with him, we exchanged—we had some conversation about local season stuff and that sort of deal, and just kind of made small talk for a minute. He'd expressed some concern about one particular lightning fire that was in a place that he really hadn't liked and had spent some time early on in the season before it got started, talking about what they were going to suppress and what they weren't. He had spent some time talking to his local boss about how much time they had spent in prevention and whatnot and the importance of suppressing this particular fire.

For whatever reason, he had met some resistance. It was a really, really tiny single Juniper lightning strike and hadn't moved for a couple of days, and this division chief's boss, for whatever reason, wanted a little bit more justification as to why our division—that division chief—had felt that it was necessary to put some people in on it and put it out. It sat there for, at maybe an acre—an acre total—for a couple of days and we had done some intelligence work on it. I had taken an employee of mine to scout it, had planned some routes in, and had identified some safety zones and whatnot to use if we needed them. I thought it could have been handled with two people and brought that

intelligence back to him. He presented it to his boss; his boss was still a little bit reluctant, he didn't see the value in it quite yet and didn't see the risks, so to speak, versus the gain.

So, we were asked to take a flight, myself from suppression, along with a local battalion chief, and then somebody from the resources side of it, to offer that perspective. We flew it had some discussion, took that discussion back, and had all agreed that we were going to take that discussion back and present the idea that it was probably good to suppress it.

By the time we were headed back, one of the local helitack squad leaders was calling the local dispatch unit, placing orders for additional resources because it had grown quickly to about 200 acres and was running towards a local community. I had heard all the traffic on the radio, proceeded back, and then obviously driven right back around to where I had initially scouted to initiate some suppression action and do some structure protection in the local community (as we were getting some more resources). Definitely a lesson learned to me on how important it is to trust subject matter experts and whatnot. So that was an experience.

Hannah <00:32:06> What would you like people to know and understand about wildland fire?

Anderson Probably the most important thing is to know that it's there and it's going to happen, one way or the other. The very real fact about people is that we make mistakes. Whether or not we're 100% educated as far as how wildfire goes all the time, the more people that are present, obviously the more potential there is for mistake. And if people aren't 100% educated on how wildfire is and can be caused, there's always the natural elements and the natural ways to go about creating wildfire anyways. The potential is much greater in the more heavily populated areas, obviously; accidents are happening constantly. We've been on fires out here anywhere from overheating vehicles to abandoned campfires, to glass on the ground—over-magnification of glass on the ground—all kinds of different factors come into play as far as the cause of wildfires. So I guess the understanding that it's here and that it's going to happen, is probably what I'd give to

people as much as I can. To know that it can happen and to pay attention to what we're doing and realize the potential there—the same as an earthquake or a flood or any other natural disaster.

Hannah What is your favorite part of hotshotting?

Anderson Gotta be the fellas. I was raised playing sports my whole life, I've always been a team guy and obviously, over the years through my sports experience and through my hotshot career, my role in the team environment has changed significantly. I'm a huge proponent of the team aspect of what we're doing, you know, we're essentially playing a huge game of chess. Moving the right players around in the right positions, to accomplish our goals when we go to fires. The camaraderie, the esprit de corps, the relationships that develop. And seeing different people take shape in different ways, seeing careers molded, seeing boys and girls become men and women. It seeing those things happen and being, kind of in that key position to be able to help develop and create that environment. It is thoroughly enjoyable for me.

We get beat up pretty good throughout the season, our job is not easy it physically and mentally; it's not easy on our families; it's not easy to do the job necessarily. We're trusted by the taxpayers, we're trusted by our supervision, and we're trusted by each other to perform something that's pretty taxing. I think to see a group of people come together, who don't necessarily know each other in the beginning, adapt to all kinds of different elements, from start to finish and work together doing it. To see all the little gripes, the little complaints that kind of get pushed aside for the greater good. I've seen some real, true relationships and friendships develop; to see some really successful teams come together and be successful year after year, is probably my favorite part.

Hannah <00:36:06> My longest shift, I think, was 39 hours. I remember it was my rookie season, and I remember after getting some rest just feeling proud and just a sense of reward. Do you have a fire, or a shift, or just a circumstance where you experienced that, or your crew experience that?

Anderson

Yeah, there's been a bunch. The one that's freshest in my mind is last season. We had a relatively experienced group of folks that it worked together for a long, long time. This fire that we were on was—it had some pretty heavy influence, not just from the supervision on the fire, but from the supervisors of the employees that were working on the local forest there (and working on the fire). So we knew there was a lot of political pressures involved and there were some pretty heavy values-at-risk; there was a major power company involved.

It was this particular piece of [the fire], it was essentially the heel. We'd had some really difficult time influencing what we thought was the best method of suppression. We had elected—essentially a couple of the hotshot crews had elected—to use a big piece of indirect line that was on a pretty steep slope, coming down a major ridge that they had used on a wildland fire in the past and had had some success with it. In talking to the locals and gathering all of the intel there, that was the method that we had elected and we thought was the best bet. It gave us the most margin for success, gave us a little bit of extra time.

So we essentially asked for the kitchen sink. It was five hotshot crews; it was in direct line; it was 90, 95°. We put all the guys on it, we essentially split it open. We put a 30 foot cut on it, we plumbed it all with the proper water handling equipment and had portable tanks set up. We had gotten everything on the same page and when it finally came time to burn it, we started in on it a piece at a time and had slowly seen it become successful as we went through. We ended up having to split it up into two shifts, which we originally didn't anticipate, and at the end of that first one, our bunch was so close they could taste it and were really, really starting to see the start-to-finish piece of our fire that makes everybody is so happy. Leaving it that first shift, I think, it was a little bit nerve-racking, and they were anticipating completing it the next day. The adrenaline was starting to go, we're all on our fourteenth day—on our last shift—and we have just this little piece to go and we didn't have the window the next morning when we woke up.

We sat until about 6 o'clock that night wondering if we were going to get the window of opportunity to burn it. The winds had done something we hadn't anticipated it, so the opportunity just wasn't right for us. Inversion was sitting over the top of it again; we couldn't get to the air support we needed. All told, about 6 o'clock that night, guys were starting—you could kind of hear it in their voices—they were getting a little bummed out. They knew we were going to go home when there was just this little piece we had left.

Essentially at about 6 o'clock that night, I was just talking to a couple of the other Supt's and decided to take a walk on the very bottom portion of this piece that we needed to burn. As I was walking, I talked to one other guy that I had positioned as the lookout and had explained to him that the conditions in the creek bottom (that we were going to use to tie into) had completely changed from the way he described it, because he had originally walked at that morning. The window of opportunity had opened up, so for the last two hours of that shift, the guys spent the last two hours completing that burn. Had walked out, right at the end of our shift, about eight-thirty, nine o'clock at night. It got to the point where I had to call back to camp to make sure they held the kitchen so the guys could get fed on their last shift.

You know, I could see smiles, I could see sweat, I could see smiles, I could see dirt, I could see black faces and black teeth, but big smiles. And that sense of accomplishment, that sense of completion, and we're going home on day 14 and we're leaving a mop up show for the folks that were coming in behind us.

Hannah <00:40:59> [Repeat for the camera] Tell me your favorite hotshot story.

Anderson That's my favorite story, hands down. There's a bunch, but I'll never forget my rookie season: learning a bunch of the hotshot culture as I go and trying to be a sponge. I was told, very specifically, how to be as a rookie: to volunteer for everything, to learn as much as I can, to always be ears open and mouth closed. I'd had not learned about the four, four, and 40 until my rookie season on the crew. You know, I had learned what it was

designed to do—and essentially what it was, was four quarts of water in four minutes and you have to hold it down for 40 seconds; and there was a significant monetary award for it.

We had some downtime on a fire and I was listening into the description of this challenge and obviously I volunteered. So not only did I participate, but a couple other people had participated. It, you know, everybody on the crew who had known what it was before, had gotten the results that they sought. It's not designed for you to succeed, obviously, in the monetary sense, but very much designed for a good laugh and thorough enjoyment and a little bit of morale boosting.

For whatever reason, a couple of the guys had decided to try and challenge the Supt. at the time, which we heard shortly after was a bad idea because they doubled the monetary award and our superintendent had been known for some very specific things, and one was being able to hold his liquids. So, he started in and it didn't take him but maybe 3 1/2 minutes to get all quarts down. He didn't just hold it for 40 seconds, he held it for the rest of the day, as a matter of fact. So we had gone from just laughing hysterically and rolling on the ground having a good time to just, disappointed. Totally lost faith in the challenge and lost interest in the challenge. I don't think we did any of it for the rest of the year and obviously we had to pay a little bit more than we had liked for that (not to mention the fact that we had to listen to him bragging about it for the rest of the season). Hands down my favorite story.

Hannah                      Are you sure he held at the rest of the day?

Anderson                    He maybe spit excessively. I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it.

*End of interview.*

## Charlie Caldwell

**Retired Hotshot Superintendent, Redding Hotshots (Shasta-Trinity National Forest;  
USDA)**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 14, 2014 in Redding, CA for The Smokey  
Generation.

Hannah For the camera can you tell me your name, how many years  
you've been in fire, and how many you were a hotshot?

Caldwell I spent 32 years in fire. I actually started in 1954 on a hotshot  
crew and it was a 40, 45 man hotshot crew called Shasta Hotshots  
and it was at Lakeshore up on Shasta Lake. They'd hire at least  
five extra people and they would tell us, "Five of you will not be  
here next week." And they weren't. So you had to go out and  
really hit it hard on your project work and stuff to make it look  
like you wanted to fight fire.

So I spent the season there as an All-American GS-02 firefighter  
and went back the next year, early in the year, 1955 on the engine  
crew (then I was going to go on the hotshot crew when they came  
about). A packer job opened up and I'd been around stock and  
horses as a kid, so I took the job as a Packer on the Trinity  
National Forest. They didn't combine those two Forests until  
1955—it became the Shasta Trinity. It was the Shasta and the  
Trinity, two separate Forests. So I spent the season as a Packer  
and we got out of the woods a couple of times that whole season.  
1956, the Fire Control Officer, it was the Redding District at that  
time, he offered me a job on the hotshot crew as a squad leader.  
So I took the job of course. After about a month I was the  
assistant foreman because something happened to him, I don't  
remember exactly what happened. A month after that, I was the  
foreman of that 40 man crew, because the foreman had a heart  
attack. So that's how I got into the hotshot business and was  
really looking forward to staying there for a while, but the  
smokejumpers came into Redding in 1957. It was a forced  
program and so they did away with the hotshot crew at  
Lakeshore. So I stayed there as an engine foreman until 1965. I  
was actually the first GS-6 engine/station foreman. I know they

got all the new titles for them now, but it was a foreman back then.

So I went smokejumping on a detailed program in 1965; the District let me go in the second year because they wanted me back as a squad leader. Which is unusual because smokejumping—usually you're three or four years at least into the smokejumping program before you get to be a squad leader. But I got my riggers license and squad leader (at the same time the FAA riggers license). So now I finished my second year of smokejumping and I went back to the District and my job was fire guarding on Interstate 5, going to the District.

The hotshot superintendent job opened up, apparently the Washington Office felt they need to bring people along into fire command positions, if you will. So I applied for and got the job for Region Five. And they said, "You've got 30 days to bring on 25 foresters." I said, "Whoa, how is this going to happen?" Anyway, I started sending out information, the smokejumpers helped me a lot because of their recruiting, and so I recruited mostly foresters the first year. Six of them from Region Three, and it's really worked out through the years; all 18 years that I was there as superintendent, that detail program covered most of the United States, BLM, even state. So we had detailers from those particular jobs.

I think probably the most—the reason I stayed—I had some pretty good job offers throughout the years—and the reason I stayed there was because I felt like it was the best job in the world. I had the best job in the world—training and watching people go up the ladder. We were talking earlier, two of the gals that were on the crew—the first two gals that went on there—one of them was Fire Control Officer in the Florida at the Everglades (when they got back there on fire). One of them is a forest FMO. Those are the first two girls on the Redding 'shots. Now, we have two girls that were on the Redding that are now forest supervisors (you may have read that). Okay, a lot of fire control officers, I don't know, I know the Redding Hotshots right now, their crew has to know how many people came through the program and ended up hotshot superintendents other places. But

I can't, off the top of my head, tell you how many of them right now, but a lot of them made it there.

There was a little disgruntlement, if you will, from some of the staff. This is a good program and everybody liked it, but they also came out, some of the forest FMO's—they have their FMO meeting each year—so, one of the FMO's from South Zone was, "How many Charlie Caldwell's are we going to release on this region?" So they weren't really happy about that, but—some of them—but for the most part, I know when Ken Clark worked in the Regional Office here, and he went back to the Washington Office, came back to Region Five and he said "Just leave Charlie Caldwell alone, yeah, he's done a job for us. Leave him alone." So that was a big plus right there because they were trying to get me out of here into an FMO job. I saw the FMO job turning into a personnel officer job. It took some of that steam out of that wanting to do that.

Hannah <00:10:57> So in your mind—you've seen a lot of change in fighting fire over the span of your career—what are some changes that really stand out in your mind? You mentioned one, management dealing with personnel.

Caldwell One of the big things that I saw change was air attack. Air attack made it safer for everybody and in the early days I remember—1955, I was on the San Bernardino—the first big airtanker I ever saw. All I ever saw before this were biplanes. They were throwing out water balloons and stuff like that, and the PPY came through. Through the later years, the wings started falling off of them and they had to get rid of them, but that PPY came in with almost a thousand gallons—850 gallons, it carried—and it put out my backfire. And boy I was hot—"Where did he come from?" You know? We were doing a backfire downslope and burning out as we went, you know, to make a safety zone as we went down this steep hill and here comes PPY and just nailed it.

But the thing about their attack now, like with the cobra situation, I'm understanding that they can actually—the cobra can be flying here and they can set some equipment over here on the ground and your hotshot superintendent can look at this and see exactly what they're seeing in the helicopter. They can say, "This is where

we want to go, it's not safe to go here" and he can look at it while he's talking to the helicopters. That kind of stuff is probably some of the biggest safety, and actually accomplishment, on the fire line, and getting to the right places at the right time and cutting things off. But I think the air attack is really been a big, big move.

Hannah <00:13:37> Do you have any fires that really stand out in your mind as particularly memorable? I know they kind of blur together after a while, but any big ones?

Caldwell You know, I love to relate to all the way back to the beginning where they —everybody was going, "How is this Redding program going to work? We're taking people with 5 to 10 years of experience and trying to make a hotshot crew out of them?" So it was a real challenge because everybody's pretty well set in their ways, you know? Working on their District, their Forest, up to 10 years doing their own thing. And now they have to stand in line for their food. They've got to sharpen their tools a certain way because I said so. It's a big change for a lot of people, but when we first started in 1967, we were here and I didn't have the draw. I'd study like crazy, myself. I was pretty much a backwoods boy; put myself into a program —English class—and started learning how to talk in front of people. Probably the most impressive class I was in—and all my people through the years were in—was the instructor training. I understand that's what they're doing now, but I still have people call me —after being gone for 28 years— "Thanks for the instructor training program, it was the best thing that ever happened to me." And I'm talking about people that are retired now, working for FEMA, working for other organizations.

It's a shame that all us old people are working for somebody because, the young people, there's no jobs for them. But we are a good risk, is the way I look at it, and I think that's the way people look at it. But 1967, see, everybody came with a certain amount of qualifications already. So, we needed to give them experience. So we're here at Redding, we've got almost all of the training done, there's no fires happening in 1967. Finally we end up on the Hanover Fire out of Grangeville, Idaho, and we're on that fire for 21 days. One of the Foresters —we were here for a month and a

half or so before the first fire, so he moved his wife and son up from Arizona to Anderson—and then, “boom,” the day they got here we took off for 21 days. So when he came back there was a note on the door that said, “Listen, I’ve gone home.”

It proved out on the first fire that it took the crew on, of that nature—they couldn't catch the fire, they were asking me for recommendations at that time. So, what I suggested to them at that time was to set up spike camps, because it was too far to hike back. I think we walked to nine miles in to the fire to begin with. But the main camp, by the time you got in there you'd have half your shift was gone. So we set up spike camps all around this fire and took everyone on the Redding Hotshots and put them into an overhead position (that made—that fit—that person). I had all my notes in my pocket, you know, so if they needed a camp officer, then he was a camp officer at this particular camp, and so on. So I said to the Fire Boss after that, “What you want me to do? I’ve got all my people out there” So he said, “You be my Fire Observer.” So I was a Fire Observer on one fire my whole career. I did that on horseback and it was kind of fun because I would take saddlebags full of candy bars and cigarettes and Copenhagen and pass them out as I rode around the fire. But that was the first—from that point on—I knew this program was going to work and I felt good about it. I think that's probably the main reason I stayed there because I saw what was taking place.

But a particular fire, you know, there's been so many of them. In the early days before we had any training, we had the job instructor training—JIT/JRT, job relations training, job instruction training—anyway, that was all the training we had. So I had a couple of close calls. Big Tujunga Canyon on the Angeles, where they wanted a line punched downhill and I had a crew of Mexicans. And all of the sudden—I'm scouting down the hill and by the time I can holler at them—the trail were going to tie into is gone, there's nothing there, a wall of brush. I found out later that it was built the year I was born, in 1936. So there wasn't much of a trail left there. And we got burned over—and had one guy with a broken leg and so on. I remember I lost my mustache and the hair around my hardhat. I ran over the hill and diving in, like you said, nobody knew anything at back in those days, we didn't

have the training at all, you was hanging out there, if you've got guts to go do it, you were in charge. You know? You do it.

Saw one guy get killed on a Southern California fire by a retardant drop. It just flushed him in like that, and I've had to grab hold legs and arms around a tree like this to get from getting knocked off the mountain, too. That's before they had regulations on how high you had to be before you could drop a load. So, it was pretty hairy back in the early days—there was no restrictions of things, see the fire, they go drop on it. They didn't care how many they knocked down.

I'm rattling about different fires in my head, but I'm trying to think of the big one on the LP that I was on, where the guys got burnt up on a cat. Could have lost a bunch of other people—crews—if they had done what the plan was. You know, because a lot of times people forget about what's out there on the ground. Like a re-burn type of situation. Like, for instance, I've had like 80 people sitting on a cat line waiting to go do cold trailing. And I'd go look at it myself and go, "No. No were not going to do this." And have people get all upset about it—and watch it go up in smoke in less than 30 minutes. Where you would have had all those people in there. But, we had a crew coming into a fire, we're coming into the fire and the crews—the day crews that were in there—and I'm seeing what's happening, I'm seeing the fire and so on, but I don't have any choice because I can't stop our people from going into the fire, because those people that are in there need that transportation to come back out. So I'm, "Okay, keep your mouth shut, think about it, do your plan after you get there, so those people can get out." So we get on top of the mountain and watch the fire chasing these trucks back downhill. Just coming right after them and packs off of inmate bus, blowing off—the top of the bus and blowing through the air. Electric wires, balls of fire, you know, 30, 40 feet around just shooting down the power lines. It's going to burn all the way around us—there's no way of getting around it—so we had to set up engines in a circle like this, circle of wagons like you will, turn on all the spray nozzles and everybody get under there.

Things like that that brought about the use of fire tents. You know, I remember once on the Stanislaus I had to take the whole crew in— we went into pick up, actually, help out an inmate crew—get them out of there. Well, we were doing that and we got caught ourselves. We had to build a bare area—we didn't have no fire tents in those days. You didn't think about it either, you just did what came natural to you. Just seeing things quick enough.

The different fires you go on, it kind of depends on who's there in a lot of cases. Like in 1970 in Region Six, I think we were on seven or eight fires in Region Six and we came back as the three interregional crews. Then later in the year, we're sent to Wyoming and they wanted to keep all three interregional crews—at that time, there was only three—and very few hotshot crews in those days. They wanted to keep us—they were going to release everybody else, "You guys are the ones doing any work." Well, we showed them how to do the work, setting up pumps, hooking pumps together and hooking the inline pump and getting water up where they've never seen water before. Just amazed with themselves—they wanted to keep us and I sent us into Greybull, Wyoming and I called home to Dispatch and the next thing you know I'm on a three-way conversation with Washington and San Francisco. And they're going, "We don't know where you're going but you're going to another fire." So they sent us to the Gold Ridge Fire where that movie Wildfire—I just talking about earlier—was filmed. I know I have a picture at home that shows—in the film, I probably had my shirtsleeves up, but when I knew they were taking pictures—and I got a picture at home there, I was going to bring out to these guys—but you can see all the way from here down, this shirtsleeves were real clean and all wrinkled. You can actually see it in this big photo, but those kind of things happen.

Oh, we had—sometimes we'd get carried away—came running up to the bus, "Redding Hotshots are here." We were kind of famous back in those days. This is in 1970, they run over to this bus, "We need Charlie right now, get on the helicopter and go." And so I tell my captains, you know, "Get the guys fed and so on and I'll get back to you." So they take me out there, "We need to

stop the whole south end of the fire. Do you think you can do it?" Fire's running downhill, you can see the stuff rolling down the hill. I said, "Yeah, we could pick it up tonight." So we got there, they said, "We don't want any more fire." "Really." This is like walking into bowling for hotshots, you know, on this steep hill. So we went to the other side and fired the whole thing out—and they thought we were heroes again. But we really didn't do anything.

Another one up in Region Six was, they liked us up there, we'd just come from the Angeles and I said, "We need to get some sleep." So we got something to eat, got in our sleeping bags, and they woke us up within 30 minutes and said "We've got an SRV crew in trouble up there, can you get going?" So we get up there and they're sitting on the danged thing saying, "Mas cerveza por favor?" I'm going, "These guys aren't in trouble." So they didn't want us to work at night. I go, "Are you kidding me, I've never heard that my life. Why not work at night?" So we did and we stopped this fire—they had predicted it going 20,000 acres or something into all these plantations—and we stopped it that night at about 40 acres or something like that. So we got a fireline award, I don't know if that's still around or not—Nine Mile Fire, I think it was—and they called it "Redding Hotshot Fireline Award," which I had never even heard of before. But anyway we got through with that and they were filming that wildfire program and that was kind of a hindrance.

We left that fire and went immediately from there to the Angeles and on the Angeles the Fork Fire is where we lost some people. And it was probably the hardest thing in the world. Things that people need to know about I guess. In a helicopter accident.

Hannah <00:28:09> Would you mind telling about it?

Caldwell Yeah I can tell you about it, it was basically—getting ready to go out for night shift and manifesting people on the helicopter and the first load out was the two chainsaws, two sawyers, and myself. The loudspeaker came over and said, "Charlie Caldwell report to Plans." And I went "No." So, I had to smokejumper detailer with me, and I turned and I told the guys, "Hey, throw

somebody on there with the same weight and just change the name" and it's cool for the manifest. So the helicopter crashed and killed two of my regular guys and the smokejumper and definitely I should have been there. So it hasn't been an easy thing to live with through the years, but you've got to keep going. That one still bugs me. I just found out today that they got their names on the firewall, or at least Ron Scott did. He was from the Mendocino. Yeah. It was a tough situation because the families didn't believe it because they had talked to them from Oregon the day before, there in Washington, or in Washington it was.

Hannah <00:29:41> With your experience dealing with fatalities on fires, then versus now, they bring in CISM Teams, and they work to make sure people are taken care of. Was there that kind of support then?

Caldwell No

Hannah How did the crew recover?

Caldwell There was really none of that kind of support back in those days, they — two of the guys quit, they were detailers from Montana and they quit because they were apparently having nightmares. Just discussed it between themselves and couldn't deal with it anymore. And the other guys, it was a tough thing for all of them. We didn't have a shrink come in or anything. I've always been a little bit hardcore, you know, in my career, later years as a deputy sheriff, they called me on every body recovery there was because I didn't have to have a shrink afterwards. You accept things as they are and deal with them.

Hannah <00:31:03> When were you the most proud of your actions on the fireline?

Caldwell Probably on any piece of hotline that we tied it in. It may sound crazy, but you've got your crew, everybody's busting ass, if you will, and we always had our post-fire critique after the fire. Actually had the crew come back, you could say anything you want, don't bother me out there on the line, write it in your notebook, when we come back in we can discuss anything you want to discuss — which we did. The whole crew was after me for

making them, even after the word came out, no building line downhill blah, blah, bullshit, we can tie this in. So you're building line downhill and then you have to run to get out and run back up the hill and then you go back and tie it in again. And people didn't like that at all. But they were satisfied with my answer. After all their comments, I said "Now you get respect for fire." You've got a have respect for fire.

Hannah <00:32:31> So I was interviewing Gina Papke last week and I asked her if there were any particular people who mattered the most in her career and she named a few folks that really helped her along really early in her career and then she listed off a bunch of superintendents who made a big impact on her career just by the way they fight fire and you were one of them. Do you have any people that really stand out in your mind as people who, either you looked up to or just had a big impact on your career?

Caldwell Well there are some of the old superintendents that were really hard-core, that I looked up to. But names, right now, I really can't spit out any names. One guy, who died of cancer quite a few years ago now on the Shasta Lake District, yeah, he was kind of my mentor, if you will. I really looked up to him, his name was Jerry Solus(?) and he was a mentor. We just lost Bob Kurst(?) the other day—a while back—he was 91 years old. He was a law foreman here at Redding and I spent—1955—I spent the winter working with the Bob Kurst in the old fire cache down on the Parkview Avenue in Redding (before this place was built). He pushed me at that time saying, "If you don't have time to do it right, when do you have time to do it over?" And that stuck with me all through the years.

All through the years, you know, we had people come up on top of the ridge or something, you know, the overhead and say "Do you think you can fire this out and hold this?" and I'm looking at him going, "Hmmm," you know, wind your face and everything and I said, "Yeah, I can get me, holding crews, this this this, and you know, water, blah, blah and give it a go." And then they're gone and then they come back and say, "You always fall in an outhouse and come out smelling like a rose." But you've got to make those decisions, you know. Sometimes people will, you

know, like big burnouts, like I pulled off about 10,000 acre burn out up in Region 6 one time in the timber. And we burned for about 20 hours straight. I had all this stuff set up on the cat lines—barrels of drip torch fuel and stuff, all the way through—and we kept going like that and people running around the fire line hollering, "You're crazy." "I know I am, what's your job?" Even Safety Officers telling me, "You've got a slow down." People don't realize that when you start something like this, you have a window, and you use your window to the best of your ability. Know your weather, know everything you got, and exactly how much time you've got to do this. I know we pulled one off, another one up in Washington one time, and they had a newsreel of it and it went off like clockwork—it was a beautiful, lots of cheat grass and stuff. You could really see how it worked and how it pulled in and everything and we were supposed to get that for training film. And I guess the Forest Service and the local radio stations had some problems with that—nobody ever saw it. But it was beautiful, it was picturesque if you will, the way it worked, but people were still screaming, "You're going too fast." I have to be there by a certain time, I knew what I had to do, but people always going to tell you the way.

- Hannah <00:36:38> Can you describe the fire behavior on the burnout in the timber, 10,000 acre burnout. Can you kind of paint a picture of what it was like?
- Caldwell Yeah, exactly, we had, I don't know if the Forest Service still has it but during Vietnam they had a special grenade, or grenade launcher on a rifle for burning out that thatch houses that you will in the jungle. So we had two of those and I ordered them up and we fired—we fired out here, you know, three or four hundred yards to get some fire going, to pull it. You light that stuff off and it starts pulling, and it's just, yeah, it's just—what more can I describe? It's just awesome. I sound like a Pyro don't I?
- Hannah You sound like a hotshot superintendent. How do you view fire, the role of fire in the environment? Can you describe from your perspective having seen a lot of fire in your career, what do you view as the role?

Caldwell

I've been on a lot of wildlife burns and that type of thing, too. Fire is really important for the wildlife. There's a lot of decadent fuel; I know they were telling us we were crazy for burning—remember when we were burning up in July upon the Lassen, Andy [Thorne, who was sitting in the interview room]? We did some burnouts up there when Ken Velasquez(??) was on my crew and it was—we got some really good burns, got rid of that. All new brush for the deer and so on

Yeah, I know, the general public, I tell you, doesn't realize the kind of damage, you know, the damage can be done. I think sometimes people think you can just go out there and punch lines in, out to the woods and stop the fire and it just doesn't work that way. I talked earlier about the fire on the—clear back in 1967—the fire was getting away from them every night, every night, with the moss on the trees and so on. They were to backing off far enough and so on, but that will keep happening, you know.

I'm trying to think. When you're a Redding Hotshot and you have a reputation, people will call you for doing almost impossible things sometimes. I remember they had a fire in the Eldorado [National Forest] one year and it went on for about two weeks and finally they called me upstairs and said "hey, here's what we got, think you can do anything with it?" We built China walls, as high as the walls in here, of rock and stop this thing from running down. We stayed there about five days, just building rock walls as high as these ceilings in places, just to stop this fire. I think a lot of it has to do with the overhead, like, "we can do this; we can do this." For example I was in Minnesota for six weeks. They had a 5000 acre fire, burning the peat and it burned down there, 30, 40 feet. I have pictures of snow back there from the DNR guys that say, "hey, your fire is still burning," in the wintertime coming up through the snow. I got out there, you know, they're trying to stop this thing and it had mowed down acres and acres and acres of trees—tamarack—and just laid them down on the ground. It was just a mess and I got to looking around on the maps and so on and found this lake. Got with Fish and Game and went in there and blasted out—I was a blaster then—so I was able to blast out these beaver dams and we got

this water coming down, these old kind of hills, and we built Visqueen dams in there and flooded the peat. I'll bet it flooded out about 100 yards and we never got to where they did all the damage with the cats. We put it out before it got there.

But they were—you come from California, like you be there too, if you haven't already been in situations like—this guy comes out there one day, and I'm in a Jeep with tires about so high because the grass is taller than that and he says, "we're looking for the expert from California" and I said, "what's his name," and he says "Charlie Caldwell." "Ok, that's a tough title to live up to, but what you got going" and he was a state fire marshal and he had a fire in in a silo. And I get over there and I said, "well, I've never seen a silo fire in my life." When I get over there I see what they're doing, they're building a bomb, putting water in on top of this huge silo and now they're crying because I'm telling them "get the, you know, get all that stuff out of there." It's the winter feed for a dairy farm but those people had no idea what they were doing; they were actually building a bomb. It would've flattened that whole ranch.

See, you just, common sense in a lot of cases. But then when the DNR thought we were some kind of heroes back there, because I was IC on two 5000 acre fires at the same time and they said "what can we do for you guys." I said, "well, why don't you send us home Amtrak." "Okay, we can do that." Now I've got the Washington Office, Regional Office, North Zone all on the phone on me saying, "What's going on? What are you trying to pull?" "Nothing, they asked me if they could do us a favor." So they said that, "well, you know that people can't ride Amtrak because the Rough Riders from Oregon tore up an Amtrak train one year." So that was, that was no good, we couldn't ride Amtrak anymore after that. Little things that happen.

Hannah

<00:43:59> One question I want to ask you is—I've been asking a lot of superintendents or former in superintendents, if they could describe the characteristics of an ideal hotshot, what would they be? Do you have any ideal hotshot—.

Caldwell

They gotta be able to play baseball and volleyball, yeah, the ideal hotshot—. Anybody can be a hotshot if their head is in the right

place. I really believe that. Some people are born lazy; you can't have lazy people on a crew. Back in the early days when we first—I think Mark Linane had, who was one of my old foremen, went to the LP and he had the first girl on his crew that went on to be a smokejumper. I had the next two girls on a crew, first girls on a hotshot crew and yeah, they were scared to death, and I was going, "Wow, I'm buying into two weak links." Shouldn't put that on film, but nevertheless, at the time that was the feeling because women did not go out there and fight fire.

I remember doing a term paper when I was in high school on forestry and lumbering and one of the things that they talked about clear back then, 1955, 54, was, women's place is not out in the woods. You know, that's just the way it was, it's like somebody, older people that you worked for—that didn't accept change, that didn't change with the times and—as far as people of different color and so on—they had their own ideas about how many you should have on your crew and that type of thing. It's like still a lot of those running around like Sterling. Do you know who Sterling is? He's the owner of the Clippers?

Hannah <00:46:26> Oh, change of context there. How did you, as a leader and supervisor, how did you handle the dynamics of the crew when women started being part of the crews? I'm sure it was a big challenge.

Caldwell It was a challenge at times because they had their own ways of doing things. Like women had their things that guys didn't talk about. We would go out and run three miles every morning and I tell them ahead of time, "You've got to tell me, you know, if it's your time of the month and this type of thing." And I'd see them out there and they'd be out there on the tarmac. We're running and I'm seeing somebody falling out and I'd run back to see and "Well I'm blowing hard or I can't do this" or something, and I'm going, "You need to let me know, you can stay in the barracks today, it's okay," but we had those kind of problems. I think, probably, every superintendent did with a first started but, "Hey it's part of life." I was married with a daughter and two sons and I understand how things work, so I've tried to deal with it.

Hannah <00:47:51> Gina was telling me that initially there was an actual policy that if you had one woman you had to have two, is that the case for you?

Caldwell Never heard that.

Hannah I hadn't either. I was just curious

Caldwell It might be, but I don't think it was ever anything in writing, it might be some local thing.

Hannah Are there any significant events that stand out in your mind that really change the course of your career in fire?

Caldwell I don't really think so, you get to where some of the decisions that are made really affect your thinking—like who are these people and how did they get to be in that place to make those decisions. A good example of that is, I had a guy on a crew who was a temporary employee on the Stanislaus, he already had his Masters in Criminology, but he wanted to fight fire and he'd heard about Redding and he wanted to come to Redding. The FMO on the Stanislaus accused me of stealing his people and I'm going "Hey, I had nothing to do with that. It's between you and him." So he got here as a crewman, spent that season—two seasons—with me. Went to Oregon in a temporary position. And so now I'm able to get full-time foreman. I called him back, Sappy upstairs, he's a real challenge just to be around. And so I got him back. He wasn't satisfied with the decisions that were being made in the Regional Office and some in the Washington Office and whatever. I said, "You need to be in a decision-making process." So I got him sponsored and sent him back to school, he got another Masters—in fire—ended up a District FMO and then Regional Office fire staff, and then Budget Finance Regional Office. Retired out, was in charge of the urban area in the Bay Area—fire problems they have in urban areas. Working through college down there. Now he's Fire Chief in East Bay firehouse down in San Francisco. But he's one of the guys that, the decisions that were being made drove him crazy. I said, "You've got to be there, man. You've got to get up the ladder, get up there where you're making the decisions." I saw a lot of decisions that

were made, really helps people out, from the ground up, you knew what the problems were. Yeah.

Hannah <00:51:20> How are we doing for time?

Caldwell I'm not punching the time clock.

Hannah Any other great fire stories that you can share? That come to mind.

Caldwell I need something to trigger it probably.

Hannah How about—some of my favorite memories from fighting fires were, fires in the wilderness or spike camps where the crew has an opportunity to just kind of be alone and gel. It do you have any wilderness fires or remote fires where things stick out?

Caldwell Well you know, probably, you jogged my memory on a wilderness fire. We were on a wilderness fire on the Shasta Trinity once and, I shouldn't be saying this but I'm going to anyways. You can cut it out. But I'm down on a creek—I always carried a little pocket fishing pole in my bag—so I'm down on the creek and I'm catching a few little trout and throwing them back. I hear this noise and I look up the hill and here comes my whole crew. Nothing but Whites and hardhats on. Hiking down the trail. Later on I got a call from somebody on it, "There wasn't very many people back there in the wilderness and some packer said they saw a crew or something in the nude or something up there." I said, "Are you kidding me? You have the audacity to think that I would allow something like this to happen?" And they were all, "Sorry Charlie." But it really did. So a few years later, we're on the Mustang Fire up in Nevada and unbeknownst to me, this is happening again. They got all their tools and chainsaws and everything else and somebody took movies of it and invited my wife and me over to their house in the wintertime. And I go, "What? When? Where? What?" But those things, you know, that's the esprit de corps type stuff.

Got busted once— we used to sing a lot of songs—I was terrible about making up songs from other songs. Making them up myself. We had come off a shift, you know after working 30

hours straight. The crew would say, "Come on, Charlie, sing Barnacle Bill." "Come on guys, take a break." But yeah, they were that fired up to do that type of thing. But we got busted for, I guess it was a Job Corps crew on a bus with us or something, and so a letter was written back down here and so on, and they said, "You need to send a letter of apology." You know, this and stuff. They said "Well, apparently their supervisor—and my supervisor pointed at the—my supervisor here. And I said "You don't know a god damn thing about esprit de corps." That's where I was at with that type of stuff. You do what you can get away with.

Hannah <00:55:00> I have my list of topics. [Battery change]

Hannah <00:56:35> So those are just some general ideas that I thought might trigger some thoughts.

Caldwell You probably want to know how I got my name?

Hannah Your name? How do you mean?

Caldwell My name is No Slack.

Hannah No Slack? Yeah, I want to know how you got your name.

Caldwell Well, besides all the other stuff that goes on, I was on the Mendocino on a fire and John Allendorf, who retired in law enforcement up in Region Six a while back, but he's on the fireline and he sent a note up to the crew and it said, and it got to me and it said, "I'm tired, I'm hungry, I'm cold, and I miss my mommy." So I get the note and I write, "There ain't no slack" and send it back. For the next 15, 20 years I was known as No Slack.

We was talking about women on the crew, I thought it might be kind of neat to kind of throw it in. The first two gals I had on the crew were doing a little complaining on the side, I found out, that they didn't get to use the chainsaws. When you're doing hotline you're going to use the best chainsaw people out front and so I said, "No problem, we can take care of that." So we was on a situation up in Region Six—for some reason they wanted all the trees cut down next to the line. It was just a mess, we made a mess. But they wanted them all cut down, so I took one of my good sawyers and I said, "Okay, let the girls fall today and give

them their 15 minute break and keep them going." They decided that they didn't want to cut hotline with chainsaws, but at least it gave them the chainsaw experience and I was probably neglecting doing that.

We had a lot of situations, you know, people say "Loop Fire," for example in Southern California, where we lost people. You see, well, some people will just go and do this, other people will turn down the assignment. And I've been in situations like that myself, where people have turned down assignments. I can see the fire; I am looking at it with my own eyes and seeing—I can see a safe way of doing that—and I go in there and do it and people tell you you're crazy and all kinds of weird stuff. Using your own insight and knowing that you can figure out a safe way of getting down into a hole and taking care of it and getting back out safely, is an art in itself—it really is. And I think probably all of these guys run into situations like that, say "They don't look good." You know, and I've had people tell me, you know, I had my crew waiting to go on the line, and say, "We want you to take a line down here and up the other side" and I go "No, I don't think so, it doesn't look quite right to me." And they come out and say, "Well, you probably know more about it than I do, and I go, "Yeah. Probably so."

Hannah

<1:00:06> I've been hearing a lot of stories from people who, after years of gaining these, everybody calls them different things, operational slides or downloading to their hard drive is one way I've heard of it—they get that kind of intuitive sense that something is not quite right. What's your feeling on that, when your hair stands up on the back of your neck, what are your thoughts?

Caldwell

Exactly, probably one of my favorite classes to teach at fire generalship in Ranna(??) and the different places where I was instructing, my favorite topic was Factors Affecting Extreme Fire Behavior. One of the things I used to tell people, you know, when you're hearing this noise and you can't see it, when the hair comes up on the back of your neck, you'll know what I'm talking about. Then people call me up about 10 years later saying, "I thought that sounded really crazy, but it finally happened to me."

And I think that everybody needs to experience that, to have respect, to have respect for the capabilities of a fire, what it's going to do or what it can do, you know.

Hannah <1:01:23> What would be your message to hotshots today? Do you have any thoughts on the hotshot industry moving forward with? What would you like to see?

Caldwell I think they have a good thing going. They probably have more clout than any other part of the Forest Service organization right now. There are more hotshots out there than there are any other branch. The hotshots got all the clout in the world and I remember when I first started, I worked on it about four or five years before we finally had our first hotshot workshop — where we got all the superintendents together and tried getting physical fitness standards, and that type of thing going for everybody. People came to Redding and they say, "Well that's fairyland up there in Redding. They do whatever they want, you know, they take two hours for conditioning every day." One of them was about 1:45 to 2:00 hours to get all of our physical fitness in, but it paid off and the other crews started pushing for it and we pushed for it at the workshops, and made it work for the rest of the crews.

I'm not saying they had quite as much time as we did to do the, to get the job done, physical fitness wise. But those kind of things, it really helped, but then we still had people saying, "Who do these hotshots think they are, that they're going to make policy." I'm serious about that, they were, "You guys are down here and we're up here and you're not making policy for us." So it was a tough thing to overcome in the early days but I think the hotshots now have got a good handle on everything. I'm hearing a lot of good things, yeah.

Hannah <1:03:31> What was your favorite thing about hotshotting.

Caldwell Well probably, it's the adrenaline rush, I think — more — probably, the adrenaline rush. I know we were talking earlier about me running up and down the canyon with red lights and sirens going, that was the adrenaline rush in the early days. And then you're going to Smokejumping, and that's a big rush, jumping

out of the airplane. You're flying from here to Southern California and see a column of smoke 40,000 feet in the air and go, "Yeah, that's where it's at." And you want to get down there and do your part.

I know the little things that you do, sometimes. I remember on the Los Padres, 1985, Craig Mikelighter(??) and I went up to this place and were trying to get people to evacuate and the fire is coming out of the south. And these two guys are up on—they have this ranch up on top of the hill—and they have a pond out in front and there's a glass of wine, a bottle of wine sitting on a stob in the middle of this pond, and that's where they're going to go. They told me, "That's where they're going to go." I stopped the truck, had Lanky get out and let these horses out that were inside of a fenced area. He let the horses out and told these guys, "Where you going? What are you going to do?" You know, I told them "There's not going to be an air left here when that fire comes through. I mean, it's just a wall of flame coming." So one of them jumped on the motorcycle and the other one jumped in the car and down the hill they went. Now were behind and the fire is chasing us and it was burning over the top of our truck. We couldn't see, it was just blind driving, and that was kind of trippy. Some of the things you do sometimes to help people out. Like we—Lanky jumped up on top of this house and I'm throwing him buckets of water out of a swimming pool and we put this house out—and it never did burn—so that was kind of cool. Yeah, there's a lot of satisfaction and putting a fire out, the different things you run into. Yeah.

Working with other crews all through the years, because I was—most all crews were tied to the Forest and I was tied to the Region. So the guys out there, they kind of looked up, like I knew what was going on, and they thought I had a way of knowing who was number one, two, three, and four. And so, Redding was number one every year and all the Supt's would be calling me. I didn't tell them until I was retired that there was really never a list. [Laughing] I remember Overaker used to call me up and say, "How are we doing? How am I looking this year? Am I looking okay?"

Hannah <1:07:06> Can you tell the story about the shirts, for the camera, the T-shirts, the colors?

Caldwell Oh, it gets kind of interesting that that came out. I guess it was myself and my foreman at the time said, "Hey, no use going to fire camp looking like a bunch of bums, you know." You get cleaned up, put on your hotshot t-shirt and your ballcap and go through the chow line. And it really made an impression on the Forest Service as a whole to have people do that. Actually get cleaned up to go eat food, you know. So I actually called up the other superintendents and said, "Hey, we're green, what colors do you guys want to be?" We're going to have tee-shirts and ball caps from now on and designate the crews that way in fire camps. Everybody bought into it and that worked good.

But even things like chainsaws. Another thing that happened here in Redding. At one time, you could only use a Homelite chainsaws—because it was GSA. And we didn't buy foreign-made saws, we didn't buy foreign-made stuff. We weren't even buying, in 1967, when I came to work here at the airport as a fire and training specialist, we'd do instructor training. We had old reel-to-reel tapes, so people could practice. So you could actually practice your presentation you were going to give. And I had to set up these reel-to-reel. We wrote the Washington Office, got permission to buy Sony tape recorders, it was the first time that the government was buying from Japan. So we started there and—I never did like the Homelite chainsaws—and found out through our Regional Training Officer up here—the decimal test, in 15 minutes running a Homelite chainsaw, at that time, you do permanent ear damage. I still can't hear out of—this ear—I call it my chainsaw ear.

So we did a matrix with the Jonsered and Husqvarna's and Stihl's, we do the matrix on all of them, and of course Homelite was right at the bottom of it—it didn't even come close to others. So we got permission from the Washington Office to buy other than Homelite. Sent the letter out to all the hotshots nationwide, so everybody started using Husqis and Stihls. Yeah, so that started here at Redding also.

I always had two superintendents, or two foremen is what I call them—captains, now. So I had two captains that were part of the crew when we first started. We didn't have the positions so they were part of the crew and I take the most qualified-type people, talk to them and asked them if they'd like to be in this position, blah, blah and I've used them in a foreman position for the whole summer. In later years I got permission to hire two. And hiring guys that really kept me going, I mean—smart. Smarter than this backwoods boy, you know. So they were a real challenge to me all the time and it kept things going. Like every foreman I ever brought in wanted to use those little tiny saws, instead of a brush hook out front. You guys ever use those little saws? They used to burn up, the little ones, the little one-hand saws. Chainsaws. Yeah, do you use those now?

Dan Mallia

[In the room, observing the interview]<1:11:32> Yeah, we call it the arborist saw. We have one in the Supt truck.

Hannah

Yeah, cool. Well I know the guys used to burn them up. They go out there for one shift and I'd say, "Okay, you tried it." You know, they would go out there act like a brush hook. But they've come a long ways with them, they're probably better saws now.

Mallia

They're really good, yeah.

Caldwell

Yeah, I just bought an electric saw awhile back—palm trees and other things. Went out the other day, one-handed, and did all the work— can't use this one yet.

So, Couth Vault. I'm probably the one that started this Couth Officer thing way back, too.

Hannah

Oh good.

Caldwell

The Couth Officer thing was, old hotshot traditions, things that you couldn't do—you still do that I suppose? Yeah and, like if you went into a restaurant and you didn't take your hat off, it was a fine. In the early days we call that a six pack fine—they were a dollar and a half a six pack—and we kept the six pack, a buck and a half, fine all through the years, all the years I was here.

Hannah <1:13:12> What other infractions would result in a fine?

Caldwell Oh, if you sawed your chainsaw chaps, that was definitely a fine. If you got married, it would cost you a case. If you got a divorce, it would cost you a case. Some of them are pretty bad—I don't think you've heard about. The interesting thing, if I'd written them down I'd have some better ones probably, but the interesting thing about—our safety program, the Shasta Trinity and other Forests were always contacting me, on wanting to bring my two foreman and go out to the Forest and put on a safety program because we had more hours worked without an accident than anybody ever had. And they wanted us to do that. And I'd just tell them, "I can't do that." You know, can't do it. They'd go, "why?" Well, we use a different method, you know—can't really talk about it." I'm trying to think of some of the—more nice ones—you've probably got some yourself that you use now.

Mallia We have the original list.

Caldwell Oh my God, no.

Mallia Well, not the original, original list but we have a list and we've tweaked stuff over the years, like, well, birthdays, for us is four bucks, promotion, four bucks.

Caldwell Okay, that's one of the ones we used.

Mallia Fire on your forest is four bucks. Any safety infraction: no gloves, not cleaning the retardant off of your hardhat, so those are two dollar, right? The safety stuff is two bucks.

Hannah We had a fine on Craig for being unpatriotic. Someone said John Wayne wasn't the greatest American hero and he was fined five bucks.

Caldwell <1:15:28> We had one, that you probably don't use, that was always comical to me because if we'd be—whichever's Forest we went to, if it was somebody's Forest, well, I'd make sure that they were the crew boss. They made all the contacts with their District and so on, played the part. But if we were going to stop for

dinner in somebody's hometown, where they live, for example we pulled into Happy Camp one night and we all went to dinner and one guy goes home. Well if you go home and see the wife, it's going to cost you a case of beer. So he came back to the bus with a case of beer on each shoulder. He was working double time, here. But yeah, that's a Couth Officer.

Mallia We still have the one Charlie where, you know, if you don't check the wind before you—that's still a fine. Confined space is still a fine.

Caldwell Yeah, that's cool

Mallia Hats at dinner, oh yeah.

Caldwell Cool, cool, glad to hear it. And I was really happy, I came out here a few years ago to see that you still had the same logo.

Mallia Yes sir; that will never change, ever. You should tell about the logo.

Hannah I'd love to hear it, what is the significance of the logo?

Caldwell Well, it's just when I started out with, like I said, I applied for the job, got the job and had 30 days to get everything going. I was cutting out aluminum discs like this to put a little hotshot sticker on, so we had something to put on our hat. We couldn't afford a lot of the things, you know, like the decal. And I drew that up one night, just in a hurry-up thing, and it stayed all these years. Kind of neat, that it's still here. The bottom across here has always been a controversial thing. People say, "What does that mean?" The, "Citrus Et Absolutus" at the bottom. "Fast and efficient." "Fast and sure." Yeah.

One of the things that I was noticing on here was working with other crews, and so on, and spiking out. Probably one of the best examples through the years, and I don't think they do enough of it nowadays, is the backwoods fires. Well, I'm thinking more about people now and getting them out. Getting them a shower and getting them good food and all this stuff. But on the Hog Fire on the Klamath, they put us out there for like, a week and a half, build line, stop, crash, dropped food into you, build a line, crash.

Excellent. The best probably firefighting methods, kind of methods that we used when I first started in the Forest Service, but they don't seem to do that much anymore. I think it's the most effective, one of the most effective.

The other thing is I was really upset—I was pushing hard for water drops from helicopters, assisting crews, and that died because they didn't listen to me when I told them they needed to fly out of two different—they tried it in Southern California—I told them, "You gotta fly out of two different spots, two different helibases. You can't fly out of the same one at night," and so on. At that time, I was thinking that way. But these helicopters come in at night and drop and you just build your line through there and here comes the helicopter back and it was the most effective thing going—and it died for over 30 years, close to 30 years—and it's just coming back now. And I think you're going to find that a really effective tool. One of the most effective in my book, because if they allow—I don't know the regulations now on fighting fire at night—but night firefighting is the most effective of any firefighting, in my book.

Caldwell <1:20:31> Working with other crews back in the early days, we had crews that tried to walk other crews down, that never happened with us, at Redding, never did that.

Hannah What do you mean walking other crews down?

Caldwell Well, you got a crew walking into their assignment and here comes Redding. You guys are moving a little slow for them, and you do that. We had other people do that. I remember one time we had a guy—one of the superintendents on one of the crews here in Region Five and had a big sign on the back of his truck, "It's hard to be humble when you're the best." Whoa—of course you know with that, "It's hard to be humble when you're—. Came out and don't you guys be saying that, you know. But there was that kind of stuff going on.

Love the high desert fires.

Hannah Why?

Caldwell You can burn out right behind the McLeod, yeah. That's good firefighting.

Hannah Any particular fires stand out in your mind?

Caldwell It's been 28 years, girl. There are some, you know, if I'd sit down and really think about it, there's some that were really — probably stand out. I remember my first smokejumper fire.

Hannah What was that like?

Caldwell There was a little spot down there, it looks like a postage stamp in the timber. And myself and the squad leader — the only two people out of 16 man load that hit that. One guy bounced off of a logger's truck; two guys were hung up in trees. I had to climb a tree to get one guy that was knocked out and hanging upside down in a tree. Another guy had a broken leg and I'm going, "What's the matter with these people? Can't even hit the spot."

But yeah, that makes people stop and think about it when you've got two or three accidents on your first jump. Oh my. Of course we always have the guys, too, that would stand up on barracks and say, "Hey look at me, I'm a smokejumper" and break their leg jumping off on the concrete.

Boy, yeah if I had your list here, I think, I could have thought of a lot more things that. Any questions that you have that will trigger something is —.

Hannah <1:23:40> These are great stories. How about, where is your favorite place to fight fire? You mentioned you like high desert fires but is there a particular areas that you enjoy?

Caldwell Yeah, I like fighting fire in Southern California.

Hannah Because it just goes?

Caldwell Yeah, it's just, it's just a real challenge. Back in the early days, by the time I got into 1965, when I got into smokejumping, I was already at 10 years in and I was already — in the old fire org. organization — I was already a line boss. And so when we jumped

in and did a crew action fire, like on the LP or something, the jump foreman would put me in charge. A lot of times on fires, as a hotshot superintendent, I was pulled off to do overhead positions. So it was always important to me to have a really good strong foremen because I got pulled off a lot. I was on a Class I team for a couple three years and that was good. I remember the last, one of the last fires I was on as a line boss, we had 2000 people in one fire camp, and that was the last time, to my knowledge, that we ever had that many in one camp. It was in Arizona.

Hannah <1:25:26> Well, thank you so much, do you have any other thoughts, any other stories?

Caldwell Well I probably will when I leave here, that's what's so sad. You've been so many different things, happened through the years since then.

Hannah Well maybe I can come back up and get some more.

Caldwell Yeah, maybe so. I'll be working over here at the Tanker Base all summer.

Hannah Well I'm just down in El Dorado Hills, outside of Sacramento.

Caldwell <1:26:21> You know, it was a really rewarding thing for me to be working, you know, out of Redding here and I look back and it wouldn't change a thing. I wouldn't change anything it's just very rewarding.

Hannah You built a great program.

Mallia He's the start of it. While you got your glasses on—. [Showing a box of couth lists from every year]

Caldwell Well how cool.

Mallia Well you can have that if you want, yeah, you can take it. We had to change some things, you know, because we don't want them using cell phones and stuff like that, in inappropriate areas and using their phones.

Caldwell            Yeah cool. You got the pregnancy thing in there. I didn't want to say that, I'm glad you got it. Yeah, I'll keep that, that's cool, thank you.

Mallia              Yup, I've still got all the old Couth books from 82 on. I have all the old Couth books, yeah.

Hannah            So what did you do with the fines at the end of the year, did they go to a party?

Caldwell            An end of season party, yeah. Back in the early days, like I said, we didn't have any money when we first started we'd have a barbecue at my house and throw soap on the patio and everybody dance and have a good time. Yeah.

[Looking at list of topics] Never made it to Alaska. I was supposed to go up there and jump one time but I had broken up a fight between a couple of guys over here at the training center and I got subpoenaed to court. I'm in the court and the DA is up there and says, "This man is a hostile witness!" I told the judge, "Let me talk to you a minute," I went up and told him why I was hostile. I missed a trip to Alaska."

1:28:52            *End of interview.*

## Juan Castaneda

Hotshot Squad Boss, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:6:29> Can you give me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot?

Castaneda My name is Juan Castaneda, 36 years old, this is my 11th fire season and ninth on a hotshot crew. I'm a squad boss with the crew, by the way.

Hannah So do you have any stories that you thought up that you would like to share?

Castaneda I do. I want to share a story but it's not fire so much, it's kind of my—like start, intro to the whole thing. I guess I was trying to start, do the whole fire—the whole fire thing and it didn't originally start out with the Forest Service. I wanted to get in with the municipal fire department. I'm from Southern California, born and raised there, and wanted to do LA City Fire. I went to community college out there and took all the fire courses and went and got my EMT license and started doing all the steps. Took the physical test, too. You know, get into the Academy and all. Then it just kind of hit me one day, when I applied for a job, you know, they had three job openings in the City of Long Beach and I think they said about 7000 people showed up to apply. That's kind of when I realized I probably wouldn't ever get into one of those municipal departments. It's a lot of competition out there and most definitely they had a lot smarter people than me out there. So I kind of took a different route and started looking into the wildland thing.

I did one season on a type two crew and I hated it. I hated it. Swore I'd never do it ever again and I did about six months on an ambulance and figured, "Hey, if I do six months, I can get into paramedic school and, you know, at least do the medical part." Realized I wasn't good with blood and body fluids and all, so I—yeah, it wasn't working for me. Not going to happen. So I had to

get back and I had to find a job, really. I put in my application to do some winter work and I got picked up by Bear Divide Hotshots to do some thinning with them. It was during the wintertime, so it wasn't hotshot firefighting stuff, so we did a lot of chipping and road brushing and stuff like that. Hanging out with those guys, I realized that it was a different world. The hotshot crew and the type two crew were just not the same.

They suggested that I put my application in to the Apprenticeship program, I did and I had no clue what was going on with the Forest Service at that time, but they had what they called the Hispanic Resolution going on at that time. So pretty much if you had a Spanish, Mexican sounding name, you were going to get hired. And sure enough, I got hired. They made me rank Forests one to 12, or whatever the Forest count in California is, and obviously picked all of the neighboring Forests. LA first and then just kind of worked my way north, you know, numbering them. And I think Modoc was number 12 for some reason, or 10, and that's who picked me up.

I got a call from Modoc saying, "Hey, we have an Apprenticeship position for you, if you'd like, if you want to, we'd like to offer it to you." I didn't know where the Modoc was and I said, "Let me look into it, I'll get back to you. How long do I have?" She said, "Well, you have three days but we'd like to know as soon as you can." So I did that, jumped on Google, looked up the Modoc and saw that it was 12 hours away from where I was living now. I thought long and hard about it and I don't know what the deciding factor was, maybe just like the dead-end thing on the ambulance—knew I didn't want to do that. I had never been out of Los Angeles—I think I might have took a trip to New York once, you know, in that time. I was about 25 or 26 years old and I guess I was looking for something new. You know, not really knowing I was looking for something new, but looking for something new. I called them back and said, "Yeah, I'll take it."

Drove up there and they put me on the hotshot crew and I didn't know, you know, at that point what hotshot crew was, other than it was a type two crew, which I was familiar with but with more experienced, I guess. I don't know, I really don't, I can't

remember what I thought about hotshot crews at that point but I remember telling them, "I'm not ready to be on a hotshot crew, this is—I'm not ready, anything else I can do?" "Nope, you're going to be on the hotshot crew, the superintendent is really good. His name is Greg Keller; he's been around for a long time and he'll teach you what you need to know." "Okay fine."

Yeah, I showed up, I don't know if you know where Canby, California is, but it's far northeast California—maybe about a half an hour north, or, half an hour south of the Oregon border and another half an hour west of the Nevada border. So it was the far northeast corner of California and I'm a city boy. Had no clue what I was getting into. Show up to this desert town with 20 people that were just not very nice at all. You know, I thought about quitting every single time I was there, every day I woke up. I was like, I thought I was going to quit, "This is my last day here, I'm not going to be here; I miss home."

And then getting on fires I was not ready. Hiking, being on my feet that long, the work, you know, it was no place for a first-year firefighter, at all. I don't know what kept me in it, why I stayed so long, but I always tell people, I've always been—I've never been one for quitting much, so I stuck it out and 11 years later, I'm a hotshot squad boss. So something kept me there and it's working just fine now. It's—looking to become a captain one day. Hopefully the next year or two. Yeah, just kind of a long road, a long hard road. I wouldn't recommend for anybody. If they're looking to get into fire, you know, start off on an engine or a type two crew. Definitely don't take the route I did, you know. They offered me a job on a hotshot crew and I took it because I needed a job, but not the smartest thing. So that's my story, that's the story that I wanted to get out there. And I don't really have many fires stories, they all kind of blend together after a certain amount of time, but that one sticks out. Like you said earlier, all the stories that stick are the ones from the first couple of years. That's the one I have.

Hannah

That's funny you hated it.

Castaneda

I hated it. It was paramilitary, you know, saluting the flag in the morning. But, I guess I understand why they did it. A lot of guys

don't have any experience—discipline issues, I guess. I guess I understand why they did it that way.

Hannah

<00:15:28> What's your favorite part of a hotshot it?

Castaneda

Yeah, it's definitely the camaraderie part of it. Fire's a close second. It's tough work at times and it tests your mental fortitude, too, quite a bit—and it doesn't have to be the fire so much; it's the long hours, the extended shifts, that not knowing part. I worked at the airport for seven years before I started fire. I picked up the freight for DHL, one of the freight companies, and I knew—. I started at six in the morning and if I wanted to work any overtime, I could. A couple hours. But for the most part, I could work an eight hour shift and go home. And I did that Monday through Friday. I did that for 12 months a year. I took my two week vacation, either I split it up or I took it all at once but I was in a routine and you kind of get into routines here in fire but it's not anything like you'd expect. It's kind of hard to figure out when I'm going to be home next, when I'm going to be home. You can... Wake-up times vary, you have a wake-up time, well we need to get up a little earlier in the day. We need to go to sleep a little later today. Those things kind of keep me on my toes quite a bit and I can't complain about it so much now, I need to set an example for everybody now, so now if I'm complaining about something, then everybody else's going to complain about it. So, I take it and I do it with a smile on my face, try to get other people to follow.

But, yeah, the camaraderie part is definitely the thing that keeps me going. It's not easy work by any means but the people you're around, especially when you're around people you like, makes it a whole lot easier. You know, it's just meeting different people from different places. Everybody has their experience or their stories, their quirks or whatever. I can't remember whatever word that is there, idiosyncrasies or whatever. Everybody's different and I like that about fire. It brings a lot of people together, it's kind of like sports: it doesn't matter what race, color, religion, sex—just kind of brings people together.

You know, I've built some long-lasting friendships. I tell you right now, Mica, he's on the crew, he was on the Modoc Hotshots

with me 10 years ago and, like the type two crew, I hated Mica. I hated Mica with all my guts. He did not make it easy those first couple of years, but yeah, we definitely changed; he's a good friend of mine. When I got the job on Wolf Creek, I made sure he was coming over with me. Yeah, I've built some long-lasting friendships. I don't see a lot of the folks I worked on the other crew with anymore much, but we get a chance to talk every now and then and it's awesome to catch up with those folks and see what they're up to now. What they've got going on. Yeah, I guess I don't have many friends back in LA anymore, you know, all my friends are fire folks. Yeah, the camaraderie is definitely the thing that keeps me going. It pulls you through, it pulls you through a lot of situations, too. You know, a lot of bad shifts, even personal lives, people you go to, you can't—I don't call people that I know in LA anymore and talk to them about it, I talked to the folks here on the crew. You know, ex-coworkers and stuff like that. Yeah, it's those folks, now they're the friends, you call family, extended family. Whether they like it or not they're around me more than I'm around my mom nowadays, and all my brothers. Yeah, they have to put up with me and I have to put up with them. It kind of goes hand-in-hand, we're kind of spilling our guts to each other too, you know, "This is what happened to me, you don't have to say anything to make me feel better, just listen to me nowadays." So yeah, they get a dose of it, I get a dose from them. Kind of help each other out that way.

Hannah

<00:20:47> Would you mind telling about your bet?

Castaneda

My bet? Oh yeah, I don't know how it started off, but I think—we had a mustache rule. The mustache rule is everybody cut their facial hair into, you know, a mustache of some sort. You know, I had the long handlebar thing going on. Cameron, he's one of the other squad bosses, he's detailed into the captain position this year, but Cameron knows I like to place a bet or two. He suggested that we do a year-long bet and we did. August 22, 2013 we started this ridiculous bet. We're about seven months into it now but it is: neither one of us can cut our hair, whether it's hair on your head, or your facial hair, for an entire year. What is it, so, okay, so, year-long bet, \$100 a month, can't touch your hair. Starting off at \$1200, dropping down to zero. At about five or six

months we realized that neither one of us were going to give in. You know, it would be easy to pay somebody \$100 to get the beard and the hair, so it dropped down to six months, \$600 and then, it's on the rise again so after seven months it's \$700, all the way up to \$1200 again. He was originally — the original bet was he could not cut his mustache and I couldn't cut my beard and neither one of us could cut our hair, but everybody gave him so much flak over his facial hair not growing, because you could cut the beard. He just kind of folded, he gave in, he hated people telling him he looked, he didn't look as bad as I did, I guess. I look horrible in people's eyes, I guess, but whatever. But he finally gave in, now he's growing the beard. So we have August 22, 2014 we're allowed to cut our hair. We can get rid of the stupid bet. Yeah, this is doing wonders for my social life by the way. So, good thing fire season is coming up.

Hannah <00:23:25> The bets on some hotshot crews are pretty classic.

Castaneda Well yeah, I'm sure you've come across—you bet on anything, anything and everything, to keep things interesting. Keep it kind of lively. You know, when we're going to get our first dispatch, when the crew is getting laid off. What's for dinner tonight? Anything goes. It's always a bet with something. Basketball, basketball is my big one, I love playing, I mean, I'm a Clipper fan and it hasn't been easy in the past to make bets on the Clippers because they've always been horrible. Don't get it wrong, just because we're in a good streak here, it's never been easy to collect winnings betting on the Clippers, so I try to find other ways to win. But yeah, betting on a hotshot crew, I mean, I guess in fire—fire in general—it kind of keeps things a little entertaining. It keeps things entertaining, but yeah, that's one of my stupid bets.

Hannah <00:24:34> So I have one last question for you. How do you view the role of fire in the environment? Hotshots see a lot of fire, how do you view it?

Castaneda Our role and what we should be doing, are completely different. Our role is to suppress fires. Can I get a break here?

Yeah, I don't know how to put it into words, but our role isn't jiving, we're not doing what we should be doing. We need to be

burning more on the prescription side. We need to let these fires consume more ground, in a controlled way, where we're suppressing a lot of fires, especially in populated areas. Southern California, for example. If there's a fire there, you know, it should be welcomed and nurtured in a way so that we can reduce some fuels. But we're not allowing fire to do its job. If you've ever fought fire in Southern California, you know that you're getting—if you get a fire out there, you're going to get state resources, federal resources, county, city, and volunteers—all coming out to one tiny fire. Fires don't often get too big out there, but when they do, it's because of the fuel. Our fires are so destructive in Southern California, not only because fires aren't allowed to burn, but the population has moved into these areas that make it critical to keep these fires small. So an area that should burn to reduce fuels, won't burn because their population has moved into that area. We need to suppress them now, to keep homes from burning. We need to, we need to transfer, we need to shift our focus, I think. Reduce a lot of these fuels, let the fires burn, if they can.

I realized that Southern California is a bad example when it comes to letting fires burn because of the public, but we're not doing what we should be doing. We need to change that up some. I don't know how to go about doing it.

When I started everybody said that we would switch our focus and we would invest more money into fuels crews and there wouldn't be hotshot crews any longer. There would be more fuels crews, but that hasn't happened. I don't think we've made a step towards shifting our focus: it's suppression. We are paid to suppress fires and, you know, every now and again will get some prescribed burning in. We just finished a prescribed burn here on the forest, but it was 15 acres, a tiny little thing. I guess every little bit helps, but we need to do a lot more prescribed burning. Watch fires that have started naturally kind of grow and consume on their own. But we can't, though, the public is a big role; residents, houses, homesteads and farms and all that. We're on the wrong track.

Hannah

Great. Any other thoughts? Or have I tortured you enough?

Castaneda

No. No. Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## Dirk Charley

### Tribal Relations Program Manager, Sierra and Sequoia National Forests

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 16, 2014 in Clovis, CA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah                    If could you tell me your name, your fire experience, and how long you are a hotshot?
- Charley                    Hi, my name is Dirk Charlie. I'm, I'm the acting public affairs officer for the Sierra National Forest and currently Sierra/Sequoia tribal relations program manager for the Sierra and the Sequoia. I was on the hotshot crews in 1984 through 1992. I was on the Sierra Hotshots, Horseshoe Meadow Hotshots, and Arrowhead Hotshots and also I've been a Tanabark air attack helishot and helitack crewmember in 1979-80 on a Bell 212 night flying air attack. And, I've been on engine crews on the Pinehurst Engine on the Sequoia National Forest for two years. A model 51 (at Westfall) engine, a model 51 engine for two years and a model 60 out of Trimmer Work Center (at that time it was the Kings River Ranger District) on the Sierra. So kind of had a wide variety of experience regarding firefighting and it's a pleasure to contribute to this.
- Hannah                    <00:05:34> Do you have any memorable hotshot stories that you want to share?
- Charley                    I have quite a few, being on three crews. It's always given me great pride to be able to share those types of experiences. Gosh, I would say the 1988 Great Yellowstone Fire, where my father was a strike team leader for the Horseshoe Meadow Hotshots and the Sierra Hotshots as the strike team went to the Yellowstone Fires. For 38 days, to be there with my dad was pretty awesome. That fire was something that is famous. I think it was the eighth most famous story for that year, 1988. To be on the fireline, doing what we could to try to control that fire was pretty awesome, with my dad, it was cool. Also 1987, the great fires that happened here, in the California area, the Stanislaus Complex, the lightning bust up there on the Klamath was very exciting. Some of the best—some

of the most exciting fire behavior in fire seasons that I ever had. Working as a hotshot foreman on Horseshoe Meadow Hotshots in 1992 was also a really good season for me, really good experience. As the foreman, I set the tone and I do my best to lead by example, but also to—the welfare and safety of the crew was number one, but along with promoting high morale. Some great times.

I could go through a couple more examples as we proceed along with this interview.

Hannah <00:7:21> Tell me, you were at—the Yellowstone Fires are so iconic in wildland fire history. Tell me, from your perspective, what the fire behavior was like, how it was burning, and just kind of the atmosphere of that fire. 38 days is a long time to be there, but if you could just give your best impressions.

Charley We'd work all day and we would end up trying to do some night shifts, but at that time there were things that were out there, on the fireline that could eat you. So we'd just stick with the long work days and we did a lot of our coyote firings, where they would drop us off and we would work and we would be supplied from that point on, just keep on keeping on.

[Took a break to turn down dispatch radio]

Hannah <00:11:41> Any descriptive statements about how fire burns or any tactics or anything like that?

Charley The Yellowstone Fire was interesting in that both of the hotshot crews, we decided to, well management decided to wrangle them up. Which meant, basically, a blue shirt for Sierra, an orange shirt for Horseshoe Meadow and we mashed and that's how we were able to act as two hotshot crews. We were able to utilize a crew of 40 and put in handlines, but also communicate. It worked out very well. My father was a line scout upfront and I was quality control in the back. So when it came to working with the helicopters to sling loads, the water drop operations, I had a lot of control of that. The fire was like, unlike anything I've ever seen. It was quite awesome. It was freight trains every day and they had land that we had to traverse. It was either through places that

had geysers, mud pots, the buffalo, the elk. It was quite an experience firefighting wise, but it was cool to do that as a hotshot crew together on a fire—that was just something that we were herding along. We couldn't use California handline tactics on it because it was light-hand-on-the-land tactical stuff. All during that whole time, it was something new every day. The coyote shifts that we did, again, very interesting. It was always an adventure and we could all pitch in and we all helped each other. We didn't have single tents like they've got now. We usually just strung up tarps and we all kind of slipped underneath the tarp and stayed warm and took care of each other. It was an adventure, most definitely. But that was just one of many fires that I've been on.

My background, I used to be a helishot/helitack from the Tanabark air attack. And when I got out of the Navy, in '79, I got a job on that—now Baldy Ranger District—on the Angeles National Forest. It was on a night flying air attack crew and it was a really good team. For me it was an easy transition. Coming out of the military, no problem. But I used a lot of my four years worth of machinist mate experience, which was structure firefighting, a lot of firefighting expertise, and I did a lot of crash rescue onboard the Navy ships that I was on. So it was very easy for me to mesh together with this team. I really liked the arduous duty, the physical terrain—that was excellent for me, I'm a sports fan anyway. It was an endurance athlete's type of job and when we got on that helicopter, it was adventure. We were Seven Bravo; that was the name of our designator and, boy, it was three initial attack fires a day and then 1800 hours, or if we weren't on a fire, it was knockoff. But our job was, "we stopped them, we mopped them," and it made for a pretty interesting competition with other firefighters.

Our logo was the number seven with a lightning bolt and a "B," Seven Bravo, so it was really cool. I worked for a really good guy, Lewis E Ozzie(??), an ex-Marine Corps, but he was like a legend in firefighting. He was a really good friend, current mentor, coach for me now, but that crew was always in demand and we traveled up and down the West Coast and also up north to Oregon, Idaho, Nevada—all the West Coast. They utilized it

mainly in the Angeles, San Bernardino, Los Padres, all the way up to this Forest, the Sierra/Sequoia. It was action galore and three days of the week I was a helishot, two days I was a helitack. My brother, Shelby, joined me in the next year, in 1980. He got out of the Marine Corps. He and I were on the same crew but brothers couldn't fly on the same ship, so it was him, helitack and myself as a helishot. But myself, I really enjoyed the line construction part of it; we were like commandos. It was really cool. The night flying air attack was thrilling. I was parking a tender, I was mix master, take off and landing director, and to me that was pretty cool as a GS-02. Not bad, you know, to have that type of responsibility, but I really enjoyed that. We worked together as a team. We trained all the time and it didn't matter, I think, ability, attitude, commitment mattered a lot. That's why I got those opportunities and proud of it. That carried over from 79, 80, working on the Angeles.

I went to work here on the Sequoia National Forest as an engine crew person. Working on the engine crew was fun; I always wanted to drive, I was just waiting for an opportunity to get into the seat, they call it. Those two experiences, those two years on Hume Lake Ranger District were fun. I worked for really good leaders. I was stationed out of the Pinehurst Work Center, where Horseshoe Meadow Hotshots were. So my dad was there and all the Indian employees; he had a lot of Native American crewmembers on the crew. So, it was cooler to be able to work with them but also sports: volleyball, basketball and then Arrowhead Hotshots would come and play against us or we'd play against Merrimonte and Maycrew. It was always teamwork stressed and assignments that I had with the Horseshoe Meadow Hotshot crew was when they were down a couple of crewmembers, so I got to fill in. I would work for the foreman, Bob Bennett was a good leader and took care of us, and I worked under him. Just to be there with Horseshoe, that was cool. After my two years working with the Pinehurst Engine crew, I went to work with the Arrowhead Hotshots under Jim Cook.

So again, working out with my brother Shelby, we were teamed up again; we were the Dunlap boys. Reported to Swale Work Center, up in the park and worked for Arrowhead Hotshots. I

worked with that crew for a full pay period and we went on three action-packed fires on the Angeles, San Bernardino, and it was when we were on the Cleveland that I got an offer for a 13/13 position with the Sierra National Forest. It was a hard choice, a hard decision but I had to ask the question that many of us had at that time. It was, "Hey, does this have health benefits" and they said it did and I said, "I'll take the job." So I left the Park Service to go work for the Sierra National Forest.

I got station in the Westfall Ranger Station, which was the Bass Lake Ranger District on a model 51 where I got more time as an assistant tank truck operator that was the position description at that time as a GS-4. And I got called upon to work with the crew and respond to initial attack fires in and around on the Sierra and out of region assignments. But the more and more leadership I got, the better and better I got at the job. Being the acting captain, the following year I was a detailed fire engine operator; that was fun. But any time they needed somebody to fill in for the Sierra Hotshots, I always volunteered because I knew that's where the action was. You cut me and I'd bleed Sierra Blue. I always imagined myself, and hoped, that I might get a chance. In '86 I got a transfer, a hardship transfer to Trimmer Engine. That was a model 60, engine 401; that was a great experience. That's where I drove a lot and I really enjoyed being the assistant fire engine operator out of Trimmer. It was an easier commute for me to be with my family, my daughter had medical. But again, working for the Forest Service, they were very family friendly and they still are.

But getting that experience was great because we got to work with Trimmer helitack crew. Over there we had a lot more, kind of, activities within the district. Each district was very unique, I really liked it. But it seemed like we had more cohesion on the district you know, with the other employees: Sporting events, picnics, activities, volleyball games; it was cool. Working on that particular unit, again, I volunteered to fill in with the hotshot crews. If they needed a guy — and I'd get frequent calls and I got to go with them. We went to Montana, we went to Idaho, went up to various fires on the Trinity Alps and everything. Being with the Sierra Hotshots, they always gave me an opportunity. They

gave me the radio, they designated me as a squad boss or as a driver and I felt conscientious about that, in that, I'm not really part of the crew. You know, shouldn't somebody else get an opportunity? But "no, no, we want you as a squad boss." I remember talking to the management of that crew, "we see something in you." I thought that was cool, that's what they tell me at Tanabark Helishots. They see something in me and that changed my attitude and may be want to perform even better. Especially in leadership roles.

The Sierra Hotshots though, eventually came a—my unit, in '87 one their assistant foreman left to take a job as one of the fire engine operators on the Big Creek engines, Steve Parr left. So when Steve left, I was like, I heard that he left and I was going to call Sierra Hotshots but instead they called the engine crew and said, "Hey Dirk, we have a spot for you, you want it?" "Absolutely." And I got one of my career goals and I became a Sierra Hotshot. At that time I became also the detailed foreman for the crew. So that was good. That detail kind of kicked off the '87 season and a really good way. We had a really good crew. We didn't have crew persons. We didn't have crewmen. We had assistant squad boss trainees. That is the way we treated each other. And we had a high esprit de corps; we were a great team. Very smart people.

We looked at some of the fire training that—the basic stuff that we had to go through, but for us we kind of modified it. You know, map and compass training right away. Let's teach them things that squad bosses need to know. They already, kind of, have the basics; let's take it up a level. Mike Freed was the detailed superintendent at that time and he did a great job leading us. All of us felt very tight; we were a good team and we got quite a few fires in '87. Ranging from just initial attack, which we got a lot of those, but the campaign fires out of region, it was an excellent experience.

Hannah

<00:23:21> Can you describe some of the fires from 87 for me? Does anyone stand out in particular?

Charley

Yes, we went on a series of fires that ranged from Oregon, up on the Fremont National Forest where the lightning strikes, pretty

big fire but different country up there. A lot of mosquitoes in some of the areas we were at, kind of volcanic area. But one thing that really, I'll never forget about that, was the lightning, the electrical storms. If there's one thing that did scare me it's lightning. It was so close, just booming. It was something that really made me pay attention to lightning strikes even more so. Especially in different areas.

From there we got shipped to Kingman Arizona and went on a fire in the Hualapai Indian reservation and we finally got there at night. We pulled a night shift and the next day, that fire was exhibiting some extreme fire behavior. Mega rate of spread. But it was during—right when we were getting ready to get off shift, like, right around noon time. Our relief was coming and we were asked if we'd ever seen the Grand Canyon. Well, seeing it from the air, yeah, but I mean "the Grand Canyon." They said "yeah just go about six chains from where you're at now. Go in teams, take your squad boss, and go out over there and go check it out," And okay, I did. And I got to go see the Grand Canyon at a place called Jungle Point on the Hualapai Indian reservation. I hear that it is near the area where they had the new skywalk. So, for us, to go as a hotshot, and for me and everybody there, it was a breathtaking experience. It was awesome. It will always stay in my mind, that's how I saw the Grand Canyon personally.

From there we got transferred to another fire, we got reassigned to the Gila National Forest where we ended up pulling up some long shifts in the Aldo Leopold Wilderness. All this time we were a strike team with Arrowhead Hotshots. So my old buddies that I had seen in '84, a lot of them were still there and that was cool, they were a good team. But going to Aldo Leopold Wilderness, it was a long helicopter flight and I remember it was like a 41,000 acre fire and two hotshot crews. Not bad. But we stayed out in the wilderness for a long time and when we finally did get the assignment to come off the fire we walked like 17 miles out. That was a long haul. And that was through electrical storms, you know, but all the wildlife that we saw on the way out was something pretty impressive. Antelope, elk, and all that stuff in New Mexico. I was so tired, my feet were hurting. We came out and it was, we were soaking wet because it had rained on us, but

I was so glad that we pulled that shift and ended up at El Negrito Helibase and it all turned out very well though. That was good and then eventually we got shipped back here and back to the San Joaquin Experimental Range, that's the home port of the Sierra Hotshots, but the next day we participated in, they called it the loggers jamboree chainsaw ridge run. We ran it as a crew and we set some records. We were in tip-top shape though and they caught us at the right time. That was fun. That was a good time.

'87 was a heck of a year, '88 was even more so though, because we did a lot more traveling out of region: Minnesota, Florida, we went to Wyoming and everything. That was quite a really good crew. By that time we had Kenny Jordan join us, who is the Sierra Hotshots superintendent. He recently retired, but Kenny and I were great friends, he was a great guy to work with. All I knew was that we both competed for the job, he got the job but you know what, I realized that he was a great addition to the crew, a great leader. He's been a good pal, a good friend. But I always felt, like, working with Kenny, we just got better, the whole crew did. It worked out very well for us we were a good team. It felt good to be looked at as a third foreman on a crew, not many crews can say that. That's—in '88 was one of those years we were going to a lot of fires, seeing different geographic areas, different fuel types. It gave me a wide variety of experience and was able to help me in my professional career—with the Forest Service, but also managing people. And again, we were very versatile. We were a tip-top crew, what else can you expect.

When they came forward with the most dangerous, most critical and most primitive areas, it was usually hotshots that were selected for that. And for us, you want us, that's our element, we should be there. I'm glad to participate. We received a lot of praise that way after reassignment—not cocky, just grateful for having got to go and contribute and help out. Some things that I wanted to contribute.

Hannah

<00:29:07> With your hotshot experience, how do you view the role of fire in that environment?

Charley

Fire management—fire in the environment—is a need. We are guardians of the forest; we should be taking care of the forest and

utilizing fire as a tool. With the experience, techniques, and practices that we have; it's something that we are going to need — to get more fire in the environment. And it's been something that you have to rely upon good people in your crew and those in various positions.

I always liked to be the lighter, that was my job. I volunteered to do that because you want to have people that are in shape, they have endurance, their agile, they know where to put that fire, they're paying attention to their environment, they have a lot of good people watching out for them. But as a lighter, that was the most exciting part, position, I could be at. But the knowledge of how we were going to do this and as a team, and why we are doing it, that was the goal and that was something that was very rewarding. After a very successful prescribed fire. But also being able to pay attention to whether or not, "Do we need to put fire in here or do we not need it here?" "How much fire?" That made a difference when you were working with good people. "Okay, Dirk just a couple of sprinkles there, give it a twirl over there, or the like me a couple of chevron's there." That's a great — to carry two of these drip torches together and to be able to do it in a good, safe way — that was something very important for me.

I know that what we're trying to do now, in the Forest Service, is to have more prescribed fire and also to work with the communities, to make sure that they understand that there is prep work needed before we even begin such a firing exercise. Also the need for proper placement of control lines. Having all the available resources there, trained up, whether it be personnel or mechanized equipment, anything that we need to support us. And when I mean mechanized equipment, I mean, like the fire engines water tenders, hose lays, sprinkler systems set up. I've done a lot of that being — again, working with, in my career — with engines. But also when I think about probably working with additional resources, helicopters and everything, there is another facet that a fire behavior that we created from prescribed fire. It's great to hear and it's great to be part of an agency trying to market and promote that, educate people on the usefulness of it and how we're going to need it. It's going to be interesting for the future to try to introduce more fire into the environment.

Hannah <00:32:15> With your family being involved in fire and then also your heritage is very important to you, and do you feel like you have a unique perspective about fighting fire and fire in the environment based on family affair and then the fact that you have been in this area you are, your ancestors have been in this area for a long time, right? Are you Northfork?

Charley I'm a member of the Dunlap Band of Mono Indians and my people are 50 miles east of here, up Highway 180 going towards Sequoia Kings Canyon, Hume Lake Ranger District, Sequoia National Forest. Yes I do bring that, I feel that, coming from a Native American heritage, background. Even watching my grandfather and when he would do clearing around the spring boxes and around areas on our property up there, we'd always build piles and burn piles and we'd burn these brush piles. We'd leave some for habitat, but just the smell of smoke and fire, it was something that I knew that it was being used as a tool. And not just my family, but other mountain families in the area, the pioneers, the Indian people, that were in the Dunlap area.

Being Native American horticulturists, which is how a lot of us look at each other as, part of gathering and preserving of cultural resources, it was a good thing as a hunter gatherer tradition of—we know and we have an eye out for these things. When my dad got out of the Marine Corps, he eventually became part of the Forest Service and he was a fire—he was in construction and maintenance, but also as a fire prevention technician—he was that FPT at the Camp 4 1/2 station right along the banks of the Kings River, which was an awesome station if you're a kid. Again that's how we got introduced into the Forest Service level of experience. Also as a fire prevention technician at the Mackenzie guard station. 5200 foot level, it was our summer home and dad was the leader, the person that influenced myself—very much so, and my other brothers and my nephews—to get involved with firefighting. When dad would come home from fires and he'd still smell like smoke, like ash. And Shelby and I would run up to him, you know, "daddy's home, daddy's home" and I'd give him a big hug and everything and the first thing where he'd look at though, he'd look in his lunchbox and he'd have fire camp

goodies and we'd just be in there all happy, "Yep we're going to be just like him." And we're going to be military, because we are warriors, you know. But the other part is for firefighting, that was the best fit for us. We were going to be just like him and we were.

So when I think about that influence—and it is something that our father and the tribal experience lent to a lot—again, we are, I guess working in enough Forests and working on the land, I'm always like, you know, this dead and down stuff can be piled over here or that stuff can be utilized for erosion control. Always taking care of the water. Water is so important in Indian country, it's the source of life. And to work with my elders—my grandma taught me a lot. She was quite the mountain woman and it was a big influence. Women's input, opinion on how things should be done, was always respected and valued by men and that something that makes me better. That's something that we feel very strongly about even now, all things considered. Working with the Forest Service and everything we hope with collaborative meetings, with the tribal forums that were hosted, with the communications, not just via the meetings and paperwork, but also the site visits matter a lot. How do you describe something that sacred? It's something that you have to go and experience. It's changed people's attitudes towards projects when you're out there on the landscape and you are smelling or hearing, you're feeling. It's something that, I'm glad the Forest Service has a tribal relations program that works with all facets, all levels of the organization.

But we work with a lot of tribes and they have their own cultures, their own languages, their own gathering areas—also known as their own neighborhoods—and it's good for me to have that background experience as a former firefighter, working with a lot of the tribal members who are former firefighters or have family members that are still in firefighting. Firefighting is something that lines up well with Indian people, as far as hard work, knowledge of the lands, good line scouts. I'm a line scout, I've always looked at myself—I'm the type of person that you want to send in ahead of time to go get a feel for the land. I would never put anybody in an unsafe position, somewhere I wouldn't go myself.

Having that type of ability is something that I learned from my father, my brothers, and other good leaders—a lot of Native American firefighters, a lot of role models—I appreciate that very much. I try to convey that now to that younger generation but also current managers and everything. We have a rapport, we know of things, local factors, things to consider. I've been on my share of fires where we got there at nighttime and once things got where we could at least kind of look around, you could always ask yourself, "Hey who lived here? Whose people were here?" and with being native employees we'd be looking for certain things and you probably could pick up, right away, our cultural resource or heritage site. "Hey what tribe's here? You know, did you know any of those people?" and it would be an interesting connection. Once you found out, then you'd have a rapport and when the tribal folks that we did make contact with—they would be kind of reserved with meeting with, like, the regular Forest Service folks in times—once an Indian person met another Indian, then the rapport would accelerate and more information would come out. You know, I've heard people say that, "We don't know them but will talk to you." And that was good, it's a good bridge, whatever we could do as ambassadors, as a line scout to help out in the incident and respect their ways or listen to what's important to them: "Please be considerate, sensitive to this particular geographic area." It's not like they're pointing it out exactly but they are very conscientious of what operations may occur there and if we can plan it in a good way and respectful, then that's a good thing. You know, it betters relationships.

Hannah <00:40:00> What other good firefighting stories do you have? Do you have any particular shifts that really stand out in your memory? Or fire camps? Or situations?

Charley Some close calls, those are the things aware totally unplanned for. We can be as safe as we can, we can take as many precautions and set up and staging of people and resources, but I remember a fire on the Yuba River, I was on the Sierra Hotshots where my assistant, Chuck Berner and I, we were at the bottom of a fire that burned in an oblong shape, from the river bottom up. But we were working a night shift and when the sun just started coming

up, we gave out—you know, the assignments were for Chuck to take the crew, “you work that area just make sure that we secure that buffer. I’ll work the crew in this area and will be okay. All right? Ready? We set?” “Okay, we’ve got our stuff together, great.” And as he turned around and as he walked away I heard a “boom, boom, boom, boom” and I look up and it was, I could hear people yelling “rock, rock, rock” and I saw a boulder come out. It was tall as Chuck, it was 6 foot tall. But I remember the boulder came and it was coming straight for Chuck and it was like, “Chuck! Watch out!” and he got out of the way just in time, in the nick of time. I remember how frightened and—I was just kind of in shock about it, how close it was to killing my friend. And it would have devastated him. And we heard it finally hit the bottom of the river, a tremendous crash. That was a close call, I mean who would’ve thought of that?

I remember a time that I was on the Klamath in ‘87, where I was doing some burning, burning out of our line, where I stuck a fusee underneath some—you know, touched some dried fuel to torch that off—and as I did that something hit the fusee there that just shattered it and it came and jumped right at my face. I thought it was a raccoon but it was like a basketball shape type of thing, but it was a rock. And it would have bash to me in the face, if I hadn't moved in time. That was one that stays in my mind.

There was another incident on the Palm Fire out of San Bernardino where it was full of arroyos. It was Talkeets(??) Canyon area, I believe. But it was something that, where it was so hot and it was... We could see the plume of fire coming up from the Devil Fire across the way on San Bernardino toward Big Bear. But I remember watching the fire behavior, the winds were switching back—this is about 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock in the afternoon and we were trying to figure out a way to get down into the area where we needed to anchor and then put in line. But, man, the winds were so—so much switchbacks and gusts, this really strong. As a line scout, trying to figure out how we were going to get down from where our current position was in a safe way. I had felt a need to scout out some areas, which I did. I looked into a canyon and I was careful, I looked down there and I realized, “Well no way down there—about 200 feet and full of hot embers.”

And as I backed away from there safely I felt a violent shove in my back and it pushed me to the edge where I had a hard time catching my balance. But I did and as I sat there to recover, my knees were shaking because I almost fell over the cliff. I realized that that wasn't a gust of wind that was a violent shove in my back. It was at that time that I just got on the radio and said, "you know what I'm terminating this scouting trip." I came back and I joined the rest of the strike team of crews that I was crew supervisor of. Eventually that shift ended, but it was so windy and so erratic, it was tough. Later on that shift we came back and that's when we got the news of the Storm King incident. And it was heartbreaking to hear that. And all I remember is how firefighting has its hazards and you have to be careful out there; very extreme, very dangerous line of work we're in.

Later on that year, I was working with an organization—well, tribal relations from region five—and we were hosting a major workshop. Actually it was the spring afterwards, but I traveled down to San Bernardino where I was helping finish up some of the agenda artwork for the meeting. And I happened to see the pictures on my friend's wall, in San Bernardino area and I saw this picture of this area and it had the name of the area and I saw it and I recognized it and said, "Hey I've been there before, I was on that fire last year." The gentleman who was from that Forest said, "Oh my gosh, you've been there? Man, that's the place where Indian people, they call that the place where demons and evil spirits are." And I heard that and it shocked me in that I remember my feeling, my experience that I had, in that area. So I thought that was interesting, close call.

The other one was where, we were on a fire up by Yosemite National Park, in the Wawona Area by the redwoods. Again, we were working another fire where there's a huge snag in the middle that was weaving like a drunk man. And it was huge, 200 feet plus. It was a night shift and all eyes were on that and, you know, we made sure we had adequate distance in case it did come over, we'd still have adequate distance to escape. My job was to patrol that area and I remember, in the middle of the night, I was looking at the top of that tree, keeping an eye on it and noticing that, "Now this is different, it's...it's...it's coming

right at me!" and I turned and I ran, literally, for my life and I remember that when it hit pieces of wood hit my heel. But we had planned right and nobody got hurt, I was able to use my agility and speed to get out of the way—in time—but that's another close call.

Gosh I had many, it, it kind of goes with the territory though when, you know—we talk about it all the time. We always had critiques—debriefings—after every fire and we encouraged people to talk about "What did we just experience? How did we all feel?" and "What can we do to prevent this next time?" And it was that type of routine, tailgate critique that made us all better and that still occurs, I hear from a lot of people. I'm happy to hear that.

[Second audio recording started after interruption <00:00:14>]

The hotshot crews I worked with, and the helishot crews and engine crews, seemed like we always had it together when it came to the administrative part of it. I'll just speak from the hotshot perspective, where we would have a plan about who was going to do what. Management was going to attend this briefing, squad bosses were going to deal with this, and other folks were going to deal with that. We always took care of pre-suppression, post suppression information, but when it came to maneuvering in fire camp, we had some particularly good expertise in that. We knew people who knew people, so when it came to the paperwork process, I guess when you say for times, my job was to train others, because in case I am not here, then you could take over for me. So I'd usually take a couple of GS-2's or 3's or 4's and I would invest in them what I knew. The need for accuracy, making sure the hazard pay was there, being sure that our times were matched up with what we knew. Everybody deserves to get paid to the penny of what we incurred here.

But it came to working with supplies, we had people who were very efficient but we walked away very tight and comprehensive. And that, I'm very proud of that, administration is a big role in this. And that's one of the things that we had a good knack for and we transferred this knowledge to others. We felt like, "Hey that's all right we're very versatile, if so-and-so is not here,

another person would take it up." We had all of our paperwork very organized, very lined up—medical stuff and everything—and that's part of the leadership part of it. But what I believed in, and what managers in our philosophy was, invest in the crew. Invest in the ones that—the young leaders, upcoming leaders. We always had really good people and I felt that's a good way to do that. When it came to making things appear where things weren't, we had a knack for that. People could find stuff, the latest greatest maps, supplies, equipment. And when it came to getting assignments we never got stuck with, like holding crew stuff or, you know, that stuff, mopping up. "No, no, no. We're initial attack" And that was always good. We always wrangled a good assignment together and I felt like that too—even when I ran blue card crews, organized crews—was that, my question was, to them was that, "So you want me to run this like a hotshot crew?" Many people knew me and it was like yeah do that Dirk, we want that." "Okay, that means we're going to get tough assignments." But we wouldn't have it any other way and they were very happy. It was my way to convey that information.

When it came to assignments on crews, depending upon their training and their abilities and everything. That was always good to, again, to coach—because of my hotshot, helitack experience—I was usually handling the bucket loads and bucket drops and the swing loads, which I enjoyed. But I always tried to think about it like, "What if I'm not here? I need to take you, I need to take you, you're with me this time, come with me." I would always mix it up and bring in a different two. So they get equal experience.

And then at the end of the season, usually we tried to help people with their applications, their resumes, how to address it with what criteria and based on information that you knew, that you know. I saw you do it, you know, we'd vouch for them we'd be a reference and everything. Those are good things. They would also walk away with it the other cool things we did. We had a lot of photographers, so we would always do a slideshow, end of year slideshow. The Sierra Hotshots were pretty cool on that, where we'd have big activities and events where we would do things like that. That all turned out very well. It was good esprit

de corps. At that time we had a system where we were able to save up money and at the end of the year to have deep-sea fishing trips. My dad was big time into that, as far as the event organizer, but as the crew we would always save up money to pay for a charter boat and go fishing out of Monterey or Morro Bay and we'd have a great time.

Again, it was an all-hands type of thing, working together like that. Those are great moments, good for morale. I think about all of this stuff working at a work center, in particular hotshots and everything. That was our little world and we ran it very well, very efficiently, always tried to be stocked well, inventoried. Try to rotate assignments and treat people in a good way, but always saving time to train. And making sure that every opinion counts. I mean, I've seen fires where it looked like the superintendents were stumped and a division supervisor was stumped, and the foremen were trying to figure it out too, and this one GS-3's little voice was, "Why don't you do this?" And we all looked at him, "You know what? That's a good idea." And we followed that idea and we think that person—I don't know—he made sense and I think that's what you have to do to be versatile and to be a good team. And we gave him good credit and everything.

I went up to the Rim fire a couple of months ago and I was looking from the Rim of the World down into that fire and I remember watching, looking at that land and thinking you know I've been here before and finally after I looked at some maps I was like, "Oh yeah, we had our control line from this area, from the top and we were doing downhill line construction with all of the necessary safety practices and everything that we had, plenty of lookouts. But I remember that very well, it was quite an adventure and we were strike team with Tahoe Hotshots and the Sierra Hotshots. But just to look at that land and see it all torched off again, it was only going to be a matter of time. Wild and accessible country, beautiful country. It'll come back, it always does. We hope.

A little concerned about water though, this year, more than I've ever seen, many firefighters talk about it. But just people, Indian people talking about, "Where's the water?" I think that it'll be a

very interesting fire season this year. But all the more reason to train up, staff up for success, and don't take any shortcuts. Those are the types of things that this interview's been really good for me, to kind of say some things that are on my mind right now. Working with other crews, that esprit de corps, respect, always take care of them, don't inhibit their ability to be a success. Make sure that if we've got extra, they get it. And if we're coming off the line, leave the stuff that we don't need. Make sure that they understand and know the hazards out there, even if you don't have the time for a face-to-face, write it down. Give them the notes, indicate on a map, make sure they have that. I did that for my brother, did that for my dad, I would do that for my brothers and sisters, my firefighters.

When it comes to any kind of extended attack, well just got I use the old term, "two more chains.", "Just two more chains, boys, then it's going to get flat up here," you know—and just keeping going. But you can just tell, people—sometimes people are tired—in the middle of the night they're exhausted and everything but, you know, they're looking at the leaders and here we are talking about fishing trip or something funny we read or we heard. The people would look at us and think that, "Man, don't you guys ever quit?" "No, not really, this is the line of work we're in, there's no other place on earth I'd rather be than be right here and you're with us, you are lucky, you know." Here we are collecting, you know, hazard pay, over time, holiday pay perhaps, and we're in another state and we're not going back anytime soon, that's a good thing. You've got to maintain that attitude, that esprit de corps. Never say to "I." Just keep on keeping on. But then you have to maintain that, when you get back to the project, back to the office, back to the work center and go on project work. Equally important job, building handicap accessible trails, doing bioengineering, as far as ecosystem restoration projects, meadow restoration, putting fishery check bands, building fence, construction or maintenance. It's needed and you keep them occupied based on the skills that they have. Management wise, got a do the paperwork but also train people. I didn't have computers and laptops and anything when I was, you know, from '79 to '92. You knew it was coming, but didn't have all this state-of-the-art stuff they have now. It's an

interesting, different way of firefighting—in a lot of ways it, a lot easier. But quite different.

Doesn't matter, you're still going to work with people and management and be the leaders. I've worked for a lot of good leaders, in fact, the ones, my ex-boss is—I look at all of them as good friends, but you always give them due respect and learn from them. You've got to be confident and it's something that I see a lot of people that we hired, we trained, and now they're in management jobs. I'm very happy about that. Firefighting's an endurance athlete related work, I recognized that back in '92 and that's how I've. When I left in '92, yet I gave up some firefighter retirement time but the work that I've been involved in from there, equal opportunity employment, human resources, labor relations, and now doing tribal relations. It's okay; best use of my skills. I haven't forgotten how to be an unlimited faller, or do the helispot manager, or be a hotshot, I could do it. There's a lot of stars out there, let them shine, they do well. I support them all the way, they're guardians of the forest. It's a cool thing—when I had a friend of mine mention it to me recently at the—that's exactly who I am, that's exactly who we are, we're guardians of the forest. Cool.

Hannah <00:11:32> One more question or one clarification from that. You mentioned two more at chains and I haven't had anyone mentioned that yet during an interview, but it's so pivotal in the hotshot culture. Can you describe what that means and kind of the feeling, the tactic behind it?

Charley "Two more chains" is a term that my dad used. I remember working with Horseshoe Meadow, where we would go on a fire in steep country and boy, I'd tell you, he could walk. I was, I heard him say "Hey," you know—we could hear people grumbling around, really tired and everybody really huffing and puffing—"two more chains, fellas. Two more chains." That means, 66 feet times two, "Okay, that's not too far." And then we'd get up there and it'd be like, "That's more than two chains." "Two more chains everybody, it gets flat up here." And they would be encouraging us, you know, okay stay at it. And, in the meantime, we're "Boy, when is he going to stop? We're pretty

tired here." But the two more chains is a way to just motivate us and you knew that wasn't two. But it's better than other terms I guess. And that something that my dad, he would say that. I remember like—I adopted it and everything and I guess it gives people "two more chains" and then they can take a break or, "it gets flat up here." And I'll tell you, that is a key term, you know, that's something that we all utilize.

Have you ever heard of fighting fire with a flapper? If you haven't, well that's a tool down south. We were in Everglades—we were in that Everglades National Forest in '88 where I had an opportunity and that was cool. There's a lot of terms that, you know, "side the hill," "bump up," "hold and hover," I still use those terms now. Once it's in you, you know, you work with enough people where we can all tell what that means and everything. People will utilize these terms to get you along well within the workforce but also, it's common language and that's something that nowadays with, whether you're working with a collaborative team or a work group. If you can have a common language, like the National Incident Management System, you outta have the certain vocabulary everybody knows. In firefighting, "two more chains" is legendary. I talked to my old man about that he'd tell you—. So what was the other term? You know, "When we get back to fire camp they'll have steak and eggs. Steak and eggs boys." Well okay, that just gives you more impetus and you'd get back and you'd get a sack lunch full of—well at that time we used to have C-rats, but also sack lunches with mystery meat and everything. "Where's the steak and eggs, Ben?" "We're working on it." [laughing] "Well okay." That's cool.

Hannah <00:14:44> How about two similar questions. What sort of advice would you give to a hotshot, someone who wanted to be a hotshot today? And then, if there was anything you would tell the public about fire what would it be?

Charley Well, if I was doing some outreach recruitment for some people who want to be on a hotshot crew, I'd give them—Let them comprehend what it is they're about to get involved in. Endurance athlete. That you're going to be staying in shape, you have to maintain that. Don't whine, cry around—it's hard on

morale. But the other part of it is that, be ready for some good training, pay attention, stay focused. Remember your training when you're out on the line, trust in your leaders. That's another thing that I learned also. Be prepared, be organized, follow orders, don't freak out on an emergency incident and everything. Look around, trust your peers. They're good people, they'll take care of you. My gosh, when it comes to lookouts, communications, and escape routes, safety zones—that's a drilled in you, practice it. Practice a heads-up, safety attitude. Get along well with others, please. Have a good sense of humor, but know when to tone it down. Don't complain, I guess that's probably the number one thing. If we can make it all right for you, well then, we'll try. But life's not perfect. At least come with that type of attitude, be physically fit—it's not my job to whip you into shape, it's your job to come in shape. It will take you up a little bit more. Be ready for some adventure; you will be gone—and tell people that ahead of time. Nobody's going to be home to pay your bills or make arrangements. It's probably different nowadays with cell phones, iPhones, and all that stuff. Before it was hard to get to a phone and when somebody did, it usually would go, "Hey do me a favor, can you call my — can you let my wife — can you tell your wife to let my wife know — or let my mom know that dad's over here or over there." That was kind of cool, communications wise though, we always kind of helped each other. But as far as advice to—best job in America, as a hotshot foreman, best job in America.

When I think about what the public needs to know about fire, well, support the firefighting resources that we have out there. We appreciate that. Also make sure that they have the available resources and the ability to do the job. Sometimes budget and everything comes into play, well it's an emergency like that. It's planned, it's focused, but make the resources happen, don't deny it. And, again, to make good firefighters you have to be able to work with fire and that's where prescribed fire comes in. I mean, there's no better training. You'll have all the tools, the techniques—you're going to practice all the tactics. The strategy and tactics to make it happen. Support your local firefighters and that's the number one thing I could say. And also, all those firefighters, they're public servants and they'll conduct

themselves in a polite, friendly, honest, integrity way. There's something that we feel very proud about and that's: we support each other. Take care of one another. Have good attitude. Be confident, competent. And if you want to know more about firefighting, ask your local U.S. Forest Service. Maybe get an interview or I can give you a burst of information, and give you as much information as possible in a proud line of work. Professionals, men and women that I'm always proud to serve with. Make that happen.

Hannah <00:19:11> Thank you so much, do you have any other, anything else you wish to share?

Charley Just, keep on having confidence in us and all the resources all working together. It's something that good people—trained, smart people, very conscientious, compassionate but, man, wonderful people. That makes up the majority of the Forest Service firefighters that I'd love. And we work very good with other agencies—cooperating agencies—where there'd be Bureau of Indian affairs or CALFIRE, or other state federal agencies, state Parks Service, BLM—everybody has connections and you'd be surprised how, once you know somebody, who knows somebody, who knows somebody in fire management. You have that and you strike up a rapport and it's very comfortable. From that point on, if I knew you and I met you, or I had a friend, or you had a friend that knew you and you referred him. That person would be taken care of in a good way. And again we're here to please. But it's very respectful. Whatever it takes to make you success. It's the way I've seen a lot of firefighters treat each other. Very unselfish, professional, but very friendly, very people-oriented. I like that it's good work environment. TADA!

Hannah Thank you so much.

*End of interview.*

## Johnny Clem

Hotshot Superintendent, Klamath Hotshots (Klamath National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 2, 2014 in Klamath River, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:01:35> Tell me your position and how many years you've been in fire and how many of those have been in hotshots?

Clem Let see, I'm a hotshot superintendent and I'm going into my twenty ninth or thirtieth fire season and I'd take off my shoes to tell you but one or the other. I've been on hotshot crews for—. [camera malfunction] I don't know what I've told you now, this will be my fourteenth season here and I've been on crews for eighteen, nineteen years, I'm guessing, something like that.

Hannah Do you have a favorite hotshot story?

Clem Do I have a favorite hotshot story? I don't know about that, there's all kinds of hotshot stories that are fun I suppose. Umm, we tend to have fun when we're out there—actually we have a lot of fun when we're out there, that's why I still do what I do. The novelty wears off pretty fast on the fires and it's just kind of another fire if that makes sense. Don't take that wrong, it's rewarding and I have a lot of fun doing it, but the reason I come back is for the crew. They keep me young, they keep me smiling, they keep me sane. So to nail that down to one, maybe by the time we're done I will, but I don't know, there's been a ton of them.

Hannah When we say we have a lot of fun, is it more the personalities that come through or is it more the type of work and being able to put people in different situations.

Clem It's all of it, it's all of it. It takes a special person to do this, I think, you have to be physically tough, you have to be mentally tough, you have to enjoy doing what we do. Working hard every day, being proud of the work you do and yeah, their personalities are... there extremely outgoing, they like to have fun, they like to laugh. I'll give you an example, this isn't my favorite hotshot story, but it's a hotshot story. I forget the year, I think it was 2001,

we went back to Kentucky and it got extremely cold back in Kentucky. We were doing pretty well, typically when you go back there they will put you up in hotel rooms, cause once the sun goes down, it gets dark, the fires kind of quit burning and there's not a lot you can actually do with them. So there really is no night shift, so they would put us up in a hotel. While the district we were on, Red Bird, it got to the point where it was overwhelming the district to take care of all the crews that were there. So they brought in a team, a type two team and those guys took great pleasure in saying your hotel stays are over and you're going to camp up in the holler. It would get somewhere 'round twenty or a little bit below that every night, so one of the boys on the crew—pretty funny kid—he would wait until everybody was asleep and he would go around with a canteen and pour water over their zipper, so it would freeze up. Then he would get up early in the morning and watch them all try to climb out of their tent and they couldn't. He'd do that to everybody but me because he was smart. But that's some of the fun that we have.

Hannah

<00:05:02> Tell me about a really good shift or good burn show, or could you describe the best shift ever?

Clem

I don't know if there's a best shift ever. I hate to lose, and I guess that's the best way to put it, so those shifts where you wind up pulling something off that maybe. I don't want to say you got lucky because I don't believe in luck, I believe in a plan. Some of those ones where you're right on the edge that this might work, or it might not, and you actually pull it off, it's a lot of fun, Zaca Fire. This's like our either second to last (or our last shift) and I forget the name and the canyon we were burning through, but in order to pull the heat off the edge—'cause the canyon was so steep we used a helitorch—and we would come in and I would light it up, I would literally light it up and it would just pull the edge off. There was one extremely narrow piece where we figured we would probably lose it and we generated enough heat that we never did. I mean nothing ever slopped over—the radiant heat was getting sucked up the hill—so nothing slopped over on the green side. I don't want to say luck, but sort of, it worked. I mean we had a plan and it worked.

Hannah <00:06:11> Tell me about the dynamics of using fire to pull fire in?

Clem Well, if you generate enough heat—without going into fire behavior—you know, heat rises. Heat goes up, something has to come in to take its place and that's the cooler air. When you generate a big column and a ton of heat that's rising up the hillside and up into the atmosphere it pulls everything from the outside. So all that cooler air that's over on the green side is just getting pulled over to what you're burning so you don't get the spots that come over on the other side.

Hannah <00:06:47> How often do you use tactics like that?

Clem To be honest, not a lot. Typically when we're burning we're not trying to nuke it or, you know, make it look like to moon. In that particular case we were, because we needed to stop it there, if not it's going, you know, another hundred thousand acres. Typically when we burn we like to make it look good and not do any damage when were done. Every now and then you just can't pull that off.

Hannah How do you determine if something looks good? Is it experience?

Clem Yeah, typically we will blow holes through the canopy once and awhile, but we can't help that. You know, it's summertime and things are hot and they burn hot, but you can limit the amount of heat you put on the ground. We've got all kinds of toys that we use, pistols and we throw what we call grenades, there not really grenades, but it's stuff that burns. You can bust up the way you burn things up and it's much cooler, it's much lower intensity and you can tell its good when you go back the next year and the forest is still green.

Hannah <00:07:49> Is it fair to presume that you've fought fire all over the west and some eastern?

Clem And other places as well.

Hannah Canada?

Clem Canada as well, we spent thirty days in Canada some year in the '90's

Hannah '98?

Clem Before that, maybe '98, no I think it was '98, '97 or 98.

Hannah Where is your favorite place to fight fire? Or, which fuel type do you prefer?

Clem Actually, I like it all and it just depends on what we're doing. Desert fires in the basin are a lot of fun because when there's activity going it's a lot of fun. It's a lot of quick thinking and a lot of movement. Once they go out there kind of out. Then you wind up gridding through junipers through days trying to find hot spots. So, on that aspect there a lot of fun. Southern California to me is an absolute hoot, again it's some of the most extreme fire behavior in the world and you have to be on your toes but again it's a lot of fun doing that. I don't mind the timber fires either. So, I don't know, all of them, they're fun, It don't matter where you're at.

Hannah <00:09:01> Is there one fire that stands out or could you describe a fire in high desert basin?

Clem Actually there's a few, trying to think of the name. It's when I came into Carson City, Waterfall I think is the name of it, I think. It's when the fire blew into Carson and I guess the best way to put it is, typically, most of us really don't like to brag about what we do for a living. When people ask I tell them I throw dirt. That's my job, I throw dirt for a living. But on that one you felt really good at the end of the day and nobody knew. Nobody knew what we did. When we got to the fire and we just left a fire out in the basin, got reassigned to that one and it started the day before and it was blowing downhill into town. When we got there, there were just two crews, ourselves and another. We went left, they went right. By the time that day was over we'd got it through town and actually turn back up hill. Actually I don't think we lost a single house. The only direction I got from the ops chief was "do whatever you need to do." Radios were out of

control, you couldn't talk to anybody. He just said bag, borrow and steal what you need and keep it out of town. And we did, at the end of the day we did and nobody knows that.

Hannah Talk to me about hotshot crews in base camp?

Clem I don't know if it's hotshot crews, I think it's probably fire fighters in general, for the most part. For us I think it's pretty easy. 'cause typically we work pretty long hours, so by the time we get back into camp, it's basically eat and sleep. Maybe somebody might go over to medical for a band aid on their foot or something like that. Typically don't take showers, and that's not because we don't like to get clean, we just don't like to stand in the line for two hours, we need to sleep. So, choose your food, sleep, get up and do it again the next day.

Hannah <00:11:17> As the superintendent you're dealing with a lot of the politics, or at least are exposed to more politics than the crewmembers. Things like the term political smoke or campaign fire. What are the pressures do you get as a superintendent in regards to the politics behind fighting fire? Can you give an example of a fire that was particularly political in nature?

Clem Some are and some aren't. I talked about southern California earlier. A lot of times those can be and on the ground it doesn't matter to me. I'm just there to put the fire out and sometimes politically, you know, because of the perception of the public and things like that. They love to see your tankers in the air. Even if the wind is blowing twenty miles an hour and I might know from the ground that you're not going to help me with that air tanker. But yet they want to drop the air tanker anyways. In some cases it slows us down and makes us get out of the way for the air tanker drop and all that other stuff. There's others that I understand what the issues but it makes it very, very difficult sometimes to implement, on the ground the tactics that we need to and still meet the intent of the agency administrator and actually catch the fire.

Hannah <00:12:41> If there was a message that you could give people about fire, what would it be?

Clem Well we talking agency people or just people, public?

Hannah Public.

Clem Fire's actually a good thing, it can be very destructive at times and those are the ones that we need to go after, go after hard, especially if there's houses around and we need to put those out. There's others, even though the smoke might be a nuisance to you, it really is doing nothing but good. It's ok, it's a little bit of smoke for a little while but you've protected your whole community for years to come.

Hannah <00:13:25> What do you see as the role of fire in the environment?

Clem It's been there for thousands of years before us and obviously it's done nothing but good since then. There's a lot of magazines, there's a lot of books you can actually check out and they have photo plots from the years gone by and you can see a photo of the 1900's and it's a beautiful open pine stand. It's obviously been burned through on a normal or, you know, consistent basis. Then when we started suppressing fires really actively, about every twenty years they've taken another photo and that last photo, you don't see pine anymore and you see nothing but a thick, choked out forest. We need to get back to that and that is going to be difficult to do because there is so much of it.

Hannah <00:14:14> What conditions do you feel need to be in place for a fire to be detrimental?

Clem It's a lot of everything, it's the fuel loading, it's the terrain, it's the weather patterns, are we in a drought, are we not in a drought. There's all kinds of things that go into that, but I think we can logically make those decisions. The Gila is a perfect example to me. They are like the poster child for using fire on the landscape. If you go there they have a beautiful forest and they—every year they allow—they manage—but they allow a lot of their fires to burn. We were there in whatever year we were in the blacks range and the only reason we were there to put that fire out is because they had so many fires going that they were managing, they didn't have the capacity to manage another one. It was a

shame, it was an absolute crime; it was doing nothing but beautiful, beautiful work.

Hannah <00:15:14> Do you remember a fire from the beginning of your hotshot career? Do you remember being a rookie? Can you give me a story from?

Clem Yeah, I guess there was there was a lot of those. The memorable one that would stand out the most would be Yellowstone. We spent about thirty days there, pretty much the entire month of July and what stood out about that.

Hannah What year?

Clem 1988, I'm that old. What stood out, all kinds of things.

Hannah Describe the fire itself, that's an iconic period in fire history.

Clem Well again, it was, you know, that part of the country was in a pretty severe drought. Back then the park service had a much different policy then they have now. The fire that they let go to manage, wasn't managing anything. It was a total, you know, stand replacement fire. But they still had a lot of their suppression policies in place, so they would limit the amount of line that we could put in, they would limit the width of it. So we would go out every day and we would cut line all day long and we would go back in and we would go back out the next day and we would move over a quarter of a mile because it didn't hold and we would cut a line again. Eventually, I have a picture somewhere of the first dozer that came into the park and it's a shame it had to get to that point.

Hannah I did trail work in the back country of Yellowstone in '95 and it was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. Just sticks basically. It's getting to the point where it's back to being over grown.

Clem Choked out.

Hannah Yeah, choked out. I think that was kind of a key moment in my life. Just seeing the aftermath of that fire and seeing. They were

seeing flower that had never bloomed in Yellowstone before, or even pretty catastrophic. It was interesting to see it.

Hannah <00:17:24> When you have the ability to determine suppression tactics and strategies, can you give me an example of a time when you would choose MIST tactics over full suppression? As an instant commander, not coming in and having (unknown) what needs to be done.

Clem It's pretty interesting the term MIST, anyway. I use it all the time. If you look at the true definition of MIST, you're just putting in the minimal amount of line that you can put in that is going to hold. That's all I ever do. There's no sense in blowing a canopy open thirty feet wide and cutting a four foot scrape if it only takes a foot scrape and an eight foot cut. That's what we do, we base the tactics and the line standards and specs to the fire behavior itself, or what we're doing with it. If it's an indirect line and we're going to burn from it, it's a different standard then if we're cutting direct line and it's just two-foot flame lengths.

Hannah <00:18:27> How do you perceive the value of your work?

Clem That is a tough one. I would hope it's very valuable. I think we've over the years, not just us, obviously, but any firefighter out there. We've saved communities, we've saved watersheds, we've saved rangeland. I would hope that would be valuable to everybody.

Hannah <00:18:51> How do you reconcile saving land with the idea that fire is good for the land?

Clem Well, fire is good for the land, but you also have to have the human element into it, and if fires coming down into, you know, downtown LA, that fire's not good. There's other fires in Southern California, out in a lot of their wilderness that maybe they are good. There's fires around here that need to be managed, and I think they do a wonderful job, but if you're going to burn up the entire watershed for a small community then that's not good. And again, it depends on the year, the fuel, the terrain, all that. Some years you may be able to manage those fires and it not harm that and in some years you can't.

Clem <00:20:04> I'll give you one that makes me laugh, I guess, a little bit. We were in, I won't tell you where we were at—that would not be fair. We were in a place that they had just completed a prescribed fire earlier that year in like May and where there in July. So the prescribed fire they completed was beautiful. Beautiful understory, there's still ashes on the ground. The fire itself that we were on wound up burning into that and it did exactly what it was supposed to do, it stopped. Unfortunately, there burn was not big enough so three quarters of a mile up here it went around that and kept going. So, after a morning briefing I am in the break out with the division supervisor and he tells me, he goes "we want you to go up here and cut line from here to here, about two hundred feet off the fires edge" and I said "what are you talking about" and he explains to me about, you know, here's this block that they had burned two months earlier and we want you to come off this fires edge two hundred feet and cut line.

Hannah In the block?

Clem Yeah, in the block, in the block that they burned. I started laughing 'cause I thought he was joking and it turns out he wasn't joking. It was "Don't shoot the messenger, I'm just telling you." And I said, "Why in the world would we want to cut through ashes two hundred feet off that fire?" He says, "Because there's a two hundred foot mop-up standard." I said "Ok, how long is this block." He says "It's about a mile," I said "I think you got five thousand two hundred and eighty foot of mop up" and finally he said "You're going to do this." And I chuckled and said, "I'll cut three hundred feet off the edge, that way if you change your mop-up standard, we don't have to come back." Whoever made that decision, I don't know. I don't know. Probably one of the dumbest things we've ever done.

Hannah If you're going to try to describe your ideal hotshot, what would it be?

Clem In a few words, physically fit, mentally tough, intelligent, you pay attention to your surroundings, you're not afraid to speak up, but you also know when it's not time to do that and it's time

to go to work. I could probably list a few more but those are quite a few of them.

Hannah

Great. Thank you!

*End of interview.*

## **Brent Corkish**

**Hotshot Crewmember, Flagstaff Hotshots (Coconino National Forest; USDA)**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 15, 2014 in Flagstaff, CA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah <00:03:01> Tell me your name?
- Corkish My name is Brent Corkish.
- Hannah How many years have you been in fire and how many years have you been a hotshot?
- Corkish This is my ninth season, seven seasons on hotshot, two on engines in Colorado.
- Hannah What position do you fill?
- Corkish I do a lot of swinging right now. This guy's doing some training and stuff so they're doing Leads and stuff, but all last year I was the Lead. Just kind of backfilling, some people were doing some different stuff. Right now I'm back on the saw, I've been on the saw for five and a half of my seven seasons on this crew.
- Hannah What's your favorite part about the hotshot's?
- Corkish My favorite part is probably the people that you get to interact with. I haven't met anybody that's been negative or anything like that and also being in the outdoors and just getting to travel around, seeing all sorts of different country and different people. The excitement is always good too. It just being outdoors, nothing's ever the same, you know, you don't get into a routine. Like if—like people who work in an office, it's just the same thing over and over, day in and day out. You never know what you're going to get from day to day in this job. It's always going to be different, something new, always learning.
- Hannah <00:04:38> Do you have any favorite hotshot stories?
- Corkish I've got a few. At one of my favorites is—that I like to tell—it's kind of funny. We were in California and I was on the saw. We were walking down some pretty steep terrain and I had the saw

over my shoulder and I slipped and fell back. One of the dogs went into my neck and so, of course, I was freaked out and reached back and there was a bunch of blood. I they taped it up and the nearest hospital was like two hours away. So my boss is like, "All right, I'm taking you to the hospital to get stitches." So were driving along and I'm holding pressure on it and all the sudden he pulls over to the side of the road, and he's like, "Man I'm too tired, I can't drive anymore. Do you mind driving?" I was like, "I guess," so now he's sleeping in the passenger seat and I'm driving the holding pressure on my wound. I get to the hospital and get the stitches and stuff but that was always something that I thought was pretty funny. I don't know why but it made that—it's something I like to laugh about now, looking back. It's like, "Are you serious, dude? All right, here we go." That's pretty funny.

There's always the eating challenges—are always a good time, especially, you know, you're spiked out and you get a couple crews together, a big pool of money together. I have watched people hammered down gallon things of—chocolate pudding and eating bugs and just stuff to keep you self-entertained. You've got to make sure you're having fun at work, but there is a lot of stories that are pretty funny, for sure.

Hannah <00:06:38> Why is it important for those antics to happen?

Corkish It keeps morale up. It seems like they happen more often on the harder fires, when people are feeling down and stuff. It's something to keep—boost the morale, get people laughing, having a good time. In the end of—that's, kind of, why were out there—well, to do a job, but if you are doing your job and you're not having fun then maybe you should not be in your type of a deal, so—. It's more of a morale boost, for sure, to do that kind of stuff.

Hannah <00:07:19> Tell me about a memorable fire, describe what the fire was doing, what you guys were doing?

Corkish I'm probably, just repeating Rigo on this one but we always talk about it. It was my first year. Didn't really know what I was getting into, type of thing. We had been on—I think it was June

or July—we had been on a few fires, pretty easy ones—some burn shows off the road and stuff like that. Hadn't of been working out a lot and stuff and then all of the sudden we get called to Nor Cal and the American River complex. Going in that—we weren't in the best of shape, pretty easy summer so far. I was on the saw and they're like, "All right, you guys are going to put this contingency line in, just in case it blows out of the American River Canyon." The first night we go down, we get down pretty far and we turn around to go back to the buggies and we're fried and it's a good hour and a half walk out. My saw a partner has the saw and we start hiking out and we get, I don't know, maybe a couple hundred yards up the hill and he's like, "Can you take the saw?" It's my first year so I don't want to be like, "no," so I'm like "Yeah, I got it." So I take it and he just goes off and, before I know it, I'm in the back of the pack just barely making it. Luckily my squad boss is like, "Give me that saw. Come on 'Colorado'" and all that stuff. He takes the saw and I barely make it back that night, to the buggy, and they're like "We're just going to sleep here." I think it's midnight or one, something like that. Wake up the next morning super dehydrated. I had a quick little breakfast and then we start hiking back down and start cutting again. My saw a partner has the saw. He's cutting and I was swamping for him. So I would go bend over to pick up the swamp, puke on the swamp and then take it back over and just kept doing it over and over. Finally my saw a partner is like, "Dude," —he calls over the squad boss, "this guy's puking." So they had to go, like, sit me down. I just remember being a really disappointed in myself, letting my saw a partner down, and I'm puking and dehydrated and all this stuff. So that stuck with me for sure. That was also the first time I've been in poison oak or anything. Turns out I'm super allergic to it, so my legs are ballooned up. You're waking up in the middle of the night not even knowing you've been scratching your legs and arms and they're bleeding and you can't sleep. That was a rough fire, I remember vividly, "I'm not coming back next year. I'll get through this season but I'm not coming back." But six years later I'm still here. It—you get that itch in January, "I've probably better go back." That was my first year, I did not know what I was getting into at all. That one will always stick out in my mind.

Hannah <00:11:02> There is a couple of things you mentioned that I would like to clarify. One of the things is that you said you were kind of out of shape. But for hotshots being out of shape is a different thing than being out of shape for the rest of the world. Can you describe the standard? Describe what you guys do for PT's and what it feels like to face hard shifts like that?

Corkish When I first started, when I first found out I was getting hired, I thought I was in pretty good shape. I can go out on runs and do all this kind of stuff. Pretty active, you know, so I was like, "Yeah, I'm good to go." I show up here, I think it was our second day at work, and they're like, "All right, we're going for a PT hike." I was like "Alright!" I'm all excited, I've got my saw and everything. Thought I was cool because I was first year on the saw, type deal. It I was picturing just a leisurely hike up this—it's called the Eldon(??) trail over here. So they're like, "Here we go" and these guys just take off, like shot out of a gun and I'm like, "What is going on?" Like 100 yards in and I'm like already falling out. The messages started getting passed. I have no idea what's going on and people are screaming at me, "Come on, come on" and I'm just like "What is going on?" It turns out I was not in any kind of shape at all for what the job actually is. I found that out really quick, day two. So now during the winter I put on a pack, you know, 45 pounds I hike three times a week, run two times a day, do weight lifting the one time—like on the weekends, or something like that. That way there's not that shock when you come back to work. You can't take any days off otherwise you're going to be in trouble when you get here, for sure. For us being out of shape, like I was saying on the American River complex, to the rest of the world were probably in great shape. But were not in "hotshot" shape, kind of a thing. It's a whole other level, for sure, that you need to be in. It's mental as much as physical, I mean, this job. A lot of people say it's 80% of mental, 20% physical—it's probably more like 60/40, but if your mind is not in it then you're pretty much done, right out of the gate.

Hannah <00:13:56> Tell me how you perceive to be the role of fire in the environment, given what you've seen?

Corkish [Edited] I think fire has always been a part of the environment — since the beginning. Really important, I know there's some species of trees that their seeds won't come out unless there's fire on them; it melts the sap out of the pinecones, or whatever, to spread the seeds. So, it's super important; it clears out all the dead stuff, the decaying stuff, and gives the forest more nourishment and all that kind of stuff. Thins it out, you know. You look around any forest right now, it's dog haired, it's everywhere and I'm sure back in the 1700s, it's just like, a couple Pondos here — like, pretty well spaced out, you know. And that's why, probably back then the fires weren't as huge as they are now (because there's so much fuel out there now). When it was natural, it would just do its own thing it and stay on the ground and burn the ground fuels, and kind of just do its own deal thinning out the forest — how it, nature's — supposed to deal — until we came in and started messing around with it. It's a huge part, super important to the entire ecosystem and the entire forest.

Hannah <00:15:45> Do you have a best shift ever story, a story where you just walked away going, "Hell yeah, that was a good thing?"

Corkish Yes, there are quite a few. I think it was, let's see, in 2012 there was a shift, I think it was a hundred acre fire, pretty small. We worked until about midnight and then we went to bed. When we went to bed, we were pretty far away from the fire and then about three in the morning, our boss's, "Flagstaff, wake up." And we wake up and the fire is like two chains away and coming at us. It — we were all scrambling to put our sleeping bags away and all that stuff. We wake up and just start going to work and punching line down this ridge. We get to the bottom of the ridge, start hooking it, come around and finally tie into the other crew. I think it was 10 o'clock the next night. That was pretty exciting, felt good to catch it. It was definitely like a rude awakening, it was just like "what is going on," we look over and the fires just coming at you and your like "oh man," just scrambling but yeah it was a lot of cutting. A lot of my favorite shifts are the following shifts. After the fire goes through and they're like "all right saws go take care of the hazard trees that might be out there so we can get in there and mop up." Those are definitely my favorite shifts

because you it just go out there and test your abilities as a sawyer and drop some crazy trees and stuff like that. It's is just always fun.

Hannah

[Interview cut short because of dispatch to fire assignment]

*End of interview.*

## Drew Derrick

### Senior Firefighter, Sierra Hotshots (Sierra National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014 in Oakhurst, CA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah Will you tell me your name, how many years you been in fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot?
- Derrick My name is Drew Derrick, been in fire 12 years, I've been a hotshot for seven, I worked for Yosemite National Park on their type two crew, and I got on Crane Valley Hotshots for it few years. Tried CALFIRE for a season, wasn't really my gig so came back to Crane Valley. I got the apprenticeship, worked on Engine 12 out of Mid Pines, Yosemite Helitack, and got back on Crane Valley for two more years and just wanted a change, just a change, so I came to Sierra; last year was my first year on Sierra Hotshots. Now I'm here; hopefully I will be here for a while.
- Hannah <00:04:34> [video/equipment check]
- Derrick Was that too long? Do you want more cut and dry?
- Hannah No, that was great. Yeah that was great. In fact the more details you can give me the better. I'm really looking for good descriptions, kind of paint pictures of how fires are burning. Okay, do you have any favorite hotshot stories that you would like to share? Best shift ever stories?
- Derrick It's hard to bring an exact one up because after—over the years, they start blending together. But I think it has to be the longer shifts where you end up working 36, 72 hours, like when the Gallery Fire started after—we were staging for the Indian Fire here in California and the Gallery Fire started over by Big Sur. So we got to initial attack that with the Los Padres Hotshots and it was pretty inaccessible—we were up at the top on a ridge and couldn't really get down to it. So the sun was starting to go down and we started burning out off this road, trying to make it turn around a ridge. Went into this drainage and the fire just blew up and ripped through that drainage—and we pretty much never saw it again. Well, we saw—we saw it go for a long time and we

worked all through the night just cutting direct line. Well, being on the coast over there, you get that coastal influence so it actually burns more active at night with the offshore winds. So we were just cutting all night. I remember the sun coming up and they let us kind of stage for a minute and kind of get ourselves together and before you know it we just had to keep going, right back at it. We're up on that same ridge and fire blowing from one angle out of a drainage and we have to shuffle over, and then it'd spotted in another drainage and blowup and we have to shuffle over into another area. My buddy said that he never seen me run so fast with a chainsaw. That was definitely a good one. We were probably pushing 70 hours on that one. We did two 14-day shifts back to back. We did 14-days, went home for two, came back, another 14. Actually it turned into the Basin Complex.

Hannah <00:07:09> What's your role on the crew?

Derrick I'm the lead crewmember

Hannah I see that you run saws.

Derrick Yes, I actually just got my C-faller last week.

Hannah Congratulations!

Derrick Yeah, I was a B-Faller for a few years and finally got my chance to go to the class; went well.

Hannah That's big, that's really big.

Derrick Yeah, I was a sawyer on my type two crew I was on at Yosemite National Park and then when I got to Crane Valley Hotshots, I ran saw for three years and then when I came to Sierra, I was a lead crewmember.

Hannah What's your favorite part of fighting fire?

Derrick Direct line. You're just right there, especially when you're on a saw and your lead saw—it's just, you have a squaddie out in front of you or a captain kind of scouting the line and then it's just you and the flames. You've got to cut fast enough to keep up with it, but you don't want to out run the scrapes behind you, the

shovels and the Pulaski's that are pounding dirt. You don't want to out cut them because that fire can actually entrap you and come in behind you and cut you off from your escape route. But it's definitely fun to be out in front; it's just you and the flames and you're cutting brush as fast as you can. Then, sometimes you have to back out and you all run out and let it kind of calm down or let the wind shift a little bit and then you just run right back in and go right back at it.

Hannah <00:08:33> Where is your favorite place to fight fire?

Derrick California, it has a wide variety and I like the places that fire takes you. Places that you'd never go on your own and you probably go to places people haven't been to in 50, 100 years. You know, you just end up in some really wild places. They're kind of undesirable places to go, but when you're there and you're there with your crewmembers and working hard, it's a really fun place to be.

Hannah Tell me about the camaraderie on the crew? You've been on two different hotshot crews to date and each crew, you know, creates its own culture. Tell me your experience?

Derrick People from all walks of life on the hotshots. People might stay for one or two years, or people might stay for a long time, but they're all from a different place and they all have different stories. You just get to meet so many interesting people and work side-by-side with them. Everybody loves to work hard, you just become so tight with people—they're literally brothers. I've made some of the best friends I've ever had on 'shot crews.

Hannah <00:10:08> Looking at this list, did you have any particular stories or topics?

Derrick I had a story, it's not really a great story but it's one that kind of stands out. We were in Utah, well I was on Crane Valley, and the Pinion-juniper type fuels that they have, the fires actually burns through scabby; it's wind driven, and it's really hard to find that direct edge and kind of work the edge. So you kind of, actually you line out, and there's about 10, 20 foot spacing between everyone and we had pretty much the whole crew out there. I

think there was only a few people missing and we were kind of just scouting the edge—we were gridding, gridding the edge, containing the edge as we go. We would stop and mop-up and a lot of the guys are finding antlers and really cool stuff that you, you know, like to find. And so I kind of had my eye out. I was in the middle, I was just kind of walking around and I look up and I thought I saw some antlers. So I shuffle over there and it was actually a rib cage and I noticed it was a rib cage and it was an actual skeleton—of a human. With a 357 laying in its hand.

And so, what we found out was, it was about a mile from the freeway and someone—well, this young woman parked her car down there (they found it a few months prior) and walked up there and went up in between—by this Pinion pine, or actually, excuse me, Juniper and shot herself. She had been there for months and then the fire came through and burned, but the skeleton was still there and the gun was still there.

So I was the first one to find it and I just—started yelling for a squaddie to come over. I didn't want the whole crew to come over but everyone found out eventually and everyone kind of saw it. Then they had an incident stress debriefing and everything, so it was pretty heavy. I felt really bad for the girl but that was one that just really stands out.

Hannah <00:13:50> I'm glad you had the wherewithal to not have anyone come over.

Derrick But it was kind of weird, they kept us there instead of bumping us out, we stayed there for a while. We should have just GPS'ed it and split, but they ended up bringing the search and rescue to extract the skeleton.

Hannah Let's find a positive aspect. Some of my favorite times on hotshot crews were downtimes in spike camps. Do you have any good spike camp stories or memories?

Derrick When I worked in the park, we spiked out a lot. You just have a lot of fun in spike camp, it's just you and your crew. You eat MRE's and you camp out real minimalist—you're lucky if you have a sleeping bag. Not an individual time jumps out at me but,

it's just the best time, I prefer to be out there in the dirt and then in the camp. It's just, you get to spend really quality time with your guys and it's a lot of fun.

Hannah

What good burnout, burn shows have you done?

Derrick

Well, back when I was on Crane Valley—because a lot of my stories are from Crane Valley because that's where I spent most of my time—I was still, I think it was my second year on the hotshots and we were on the Day Fire down on the Angeles. We got attached to a branch to just be a burn crew. So we would stage and a division would call and say they need us to burn, and we'd drive over there and we'd burn out a section and then we'd go back and stage for a little bit and wait for another division to call us for a burn.

There's old Highway 99, kind of, below. Midlake there. We were staging to burnout off old 99 and they were going to burnout off the top of the ridge with a helitorch. And they started doing that—the winds weren't right and the fire just ripped down off the ridge, jumped old 99 (which is four lanes) and then we had to drive through that fire. We burned out the best we could and then we jumped in the crew hauls, drove through the fire and got out onto I-5. They shut down I-5 and then we just burned out off of I-5. It's kind of eerie just walking on I-5 when it's all shutdown. It's just like a ghost town—just empty—and you just walking along the side with a drip torch. That one stands out a lot, burning off I-5 is pretty good.

Hannah

<00:17:10> Any other unique situations like that?

Derrick

When I was on crew seven at Yosemite National Park, we went up—we would help the Lassen with a lot of their fires—Lassen National Park. We spiked out for 14 days and we were working this little lightning fire and we were just trying to corral it, doing MIST tactics, just trying to do "light hand on the land." We actually utilized the Pacific Crest Trail and we just burned off of it. We burned all day and all through the night and tied into the lava fields. It's just beautiful, just a beautiful place to burn. Right off the Pacific Crest Trail.

Hannah <00:18:10> How do you perceive the value of your work?

Derrick I don't know, at the end of the day on a hard shift, just proud of the hard work that you've done. Like, money is not a factor. I wouldn't be in this job if it was about money. It's just the work you get to do. I'm extremely proud of what I do, I don't ever really express it to people, but deep down inside I'm very passionate about it and I wouldn't want to work anywhere else or do anything else. It's just so gratifying to be able to—especially after a hard shift and you accomplish your goals, whatever—maybe tying in line or doing a burnout—it's just a great feeling.

Hannah <00:19:03> Have I asked you how you view the role of fire in the environment?

Derrick No you haven't. I think we've just suppressed it so long it's making it hard to manage now, and the prescribed fires we do around certain values—whether it be with giant sequoias and all that stuff—is good, but it's almost like we can't catch up to what's overgrown. The fuel loading is so heavy now, there's a whole different beast. Instead of the fires back in the day, which were a little bit more mellow, it's more devastating, like catastrophic type fire. But it's definitely part of the ecosystem, I think maybe managing fires more than suppressing them—I like suppressing fires, it's fun—but I think managing them to meet objectives is better.

Hannah <00:20:03> As a California hotshot crew, you encounter a lot of urban interface. If there's one thing you could tell the public about fire, that you would want them to understand, what would it be?

Derrick I think, clearance around your home. I live in the foothills and I have to protect my home. I have a lot of weeds and brush and it has to be cut back. It's hard for a lot of people to get out there and do. But, I think, if you can create enough of a buffer, then you can really help the firefighters protect your home. That's what I think.

Hannah <00:20:53> Were you part of any all risk incidents?

Derrick I haven't been on any hurricane relief or—I haven't done any of that. I'd like to, but I haven't yet.

Hannah Any other memorable fires? Any really fun ones?

Derrick They're all pretty fun. The Topanga Fire in Southern California. It's just heavy urban interface and the ICS system on big fires like that, right off the bat, are kind of shaky. And so you kind of have to do your own thing and do point-protection. And we just kind of got in there, found a little place where there were some homes and tried to just cut some line. Tied it into a road, burned out off the road, started getting dark, huge D10 dozer from the landfill came out and started punching line, so we tied our fire into that. We tied it into another road and then actually went down underneath and just started going direct all night and cut all the way into the morning. You see it and then in the morning you see it newspapers and there's structure department engines that have been sitting and they're like getting pizzas and all this stuff and then we're out in the middle of the brush all night. It's not like we deserve pizza or anything like that-it's just funny to see. That one really stood out. You might have to edit some of that out.

Hannah <00:23:10> I think it's great. What was the fire behavior doing at the time?

Derrick It was cranking, it was just—it's unbelievable how much land a fire can cover, even at night. You would think it would die down quite a bit, sometimes—the majority of the time it does—but sometimes it'll just rip all through the night. Especially when it gets established in the bottom of a drainage at night. It will just eat it up.

Hannah What's the most impressive run that you've seen on a fire?

Derrick I can't think of the name of it. A lot of the Southern California fires, but on the Day Fire there were days—well, I think we staged for almost seven days because the fire was so intense and so extreme that you couldn't do anything. You feel helpless. You have to sit around and it kind of sucks because there's nothing you can do and the fire is just plume dominated. Ice capping out

on top. Just putting out so much heat and you just can't do anything. You have to wait, you have to come up with a game plan and kind of wait until that window opens so you can get in there and do something. It's definitely hard is sitting by the wayside, but it's kind of what you have to do to work smarter not harder. If you go out there and thrash your dudes for seven days doing stuff that's not going to work, when it comes time to do stuff, you won't be able to get it done as well.

We were out in Utah again, St. George; it was probably 108°. We cut direct line all day. One of the guys had heatstroke, he started going down, he was acting really crazy. He was cutting with a Pulaski next to me and started acting really weird, swinging his tool really a radically. We just called it and went and—we just started cutting trees down, making an LZ right in the black where the fire had gone through and just cut a huge open area. Helicopter landed and took him out and we got right back to work. The fire actually ice capped out. It rose so high it freezes and then it collapses on itself and pushes outward and it did that while we were right in there. We were in a safe spot, but then at night we just spiked out—or it was a coyote—we just had a little space blanket in our pack and found a nice little area to hunker down. It rained all night, lightning and thunder, it was pretty sketchy but we were just way out there, there was no way we're going to try to walk back, so you just kind of hunker down where you are. I think those—that kind of makes me—more than the fire itself—it's when thunderstorms get involved because you're out there and you're exposed and they come right through your area. They affect the fire behavior a lot but the lightning itself can get pretty intense. You just have to hunker down, or if you're close, just get to the trucks as fast as possible. We encountered that a lot in Utah—eastside—of this year.

Hannah

<00:26:40> Did you have any close calls with lightning

Derrick

Not necessarily, like being under a thunder cell and trying to run back to the trucks, it's literally like banging all around you. I did have a close call on the Chips Fire two years ago. We were doing a swing shift, so you come on at about three in the afternoon, and you help the day shift with the hottest part of the fire and then

you transition to night and you help the night shift. Well, the night shift comes out, so you're kind of that in between shift and then you go off shift at about two in the morning, three in the morning. And then you sleep during the day and come back the next morning. So it's a little bit different when you get out there. Usually when you go out there in the morning you'll probably have an inversion, every thing's really mellow. But when you go out there, the beginning of your shift is at three, at the hottest part of the day and every things kind of moving. Kind of got caught off guard a little bit.

We had a dozer line that went down, actually pushed the dozer line the day before with a dozer, so I knew where it was at. So they sent me down there to check it out and fire up a Mark III pump and get the hose going. There's already some spot fires, so we kind of registered that the fire was getting closer, but with me, I'm kind of a mechanic guy so they wanted me to shut the Mark III off and come out. But with pumps, you don't want to just turn a hot pump off, so I turned it down, let it cool down and then turned it off. As I came out, where before there were only two spot fires, there were 15, and I'm hiking out of this dozer line and I can literally hear and see the fire running through the crowns. I could see it, it was a short run, it was probably, I don't know, 100 yards to the truck so it wasn't really far but everyone was yelling for me—they were yelling at me on the radio to run out. I was running as fast as I could and I could see the fire, I could see the truck, I didn't know if I was going to make it or not. And I just had to keep running and running and finally I jumped in the back of the crew haul and we just split. But I let my guard down for a second, pretty sketchy situation. We definitely talked about it later at the end of shift. That was pretty heavy.

Hannah

<00:29:00> That's kind of one of those incidents that you just want to sit down, have a bit of alone time.

Derrick

Yeah, I never really before that—I'd never really been scared by fire before. So after that it definitely took me a few months to kind of ease back into it. I was out there still fighting fire but I definitely had my guard up. It kind of spooked me a little bit.

Hannah Hypervigilance, yeah I'd imagine. That's a good story. Do you have any examples of a time that you believed that fire was benefiting the environment?

Derrick Yeah, a lot of the time in the higher elevation like in Yosemite National Park or Lassen, or anywhere in the higher elevation where the fuels aren't as dense or as thick. They really manage a lot of their fires and just kind of let them—just like a let-burn—and it just does its job. It cleans up the forest floor, opens pockets here and there in the canopy, and just kind of eats its way around and does a lot of good. You know, if you come back to an area two or three years later it's just fully green, vegetation is coming back, it just cleans the forest.

Hannah <00:30:33> When have you felt the most proud of your actions on the fire line?

Derrick I can't think of a single episode but being able to speak up, I think in the Forest Service and on the hotshot crews—it seems like the Forest Service as a whole—they allow you to speak up. Twenty sets of eyes are better than one, where in some other agencies it's kind of frowned upon to talk back to overhead. But being able to speak up and say, "Hey I'm uncomfortable with this" or "Did you see this" and they'll either say, "yes" or "no." Being able to voice your opinion and mention things that people might not see is really good, I think, with the hotshots and the Forest Service. I think we have a pretty good communication base.

Hannah Any other good stories?

Derrick Nope, I think that's it. I wish I had more for you.

*End of interview.*

## Dan Farmer

Hotshot Crewmember, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah <00:01:40> For the camera can you tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire and how many you've been a hotshot?
- Farmer My name is Dan Farmer; I've been in fire for—this is my fifth fire season, this is my fourth season with the Forest Service and my second year as a hotshot.
- Hannah What role do you play on the crew?
- Farmer I'm a sawyer; a saw for Wolf Creek right now.
- Hannah Do you have any favorite hotshot stories?
- Farmer Yeah, my longest shift ever. That's usually the story that sticks out to me and it happen in 2012. I was asked be a fill-in on this crew. I was on a type II crew and I came in as a fill-in. We were flown into, I believe it was the Cottonwood Fire in Benson, Arizona and then we pulled a 34 hour shift. I think it was about 38 hours before we were actually hunkered down and going to bed. It was pretty good. We got flown in and we went direct on this fire all day; we relieved a couple of crews and I believe it was right around, it was 102° that day, so it was a long one. I was so nervous because I was a fill-in—one of the first time I ever rolled with the hotshot's, and everything. But we punched in line, we hooked to the fire; it was pushing down into a drainage and we ended up prepping all night. We went and prepped that drainage and burned as we went along. It was probably the longest—it was weird just to see the way the sun would come up and then it set and then see it come up again—was pretty interesting. It was all new for me, even though it was such a long hard shift, you know, we didn't have very many breaks. But everything was so new to me I just pushed through it. I was so energized because it was all new to me. That's one it sticks out.

Hannah <00:03:38> Tell me a little bit about the fire itself, what the fire was doing, what type of fuel it was in?

Farmer Yeah, basically it was in some light flashy brush in very steep terrain. The fire activity was picking up pretty well throughout the day, especially as it was getting hotter; I believe we even had a thunderstorm. But the fire was pretty active in itself, you know burning—it was cranking actually, a lot. The problem was—the reason that we cut down into the drainage was because there was a type of cactus, that's in a ball form, and when it burns it busts loose and rolls down the hill. So once we took the flanks we didn't go under it, that's why we prepped to the drainage and picked it up from there and burned out—and just kind of watching your own backs, all that roll out, which is pretty big in a watch out situations.

Hannah <00:04:34> What's your favorite part of hotshotting?

Farmer My favorite part personally, and this is why I think I've gotten into fire and I've liked it so much, because coming out of high school I really didn't know what I wanted to do with myself. I was an athlete through high school and I ended up meeting a gentleman who I wrestled with through high school and I met one of the head referees of Oregon and he actually lived close to me. He was an old hotshot, he hotshot for 15 seasons, around Oregon. I was a ranch hand for him and graduating out of high school he was always talking to me like, "What are you going to do?" And I wasn't sure, so he was like, "You should try to get into fire if you don't know what you want to do." I grew up camping and fishing, I'm from Oregon. My favorite thing about fire is probably the camping and, you know, going away from home, sleeping on the ground. I think that to me, it's like, it makes you appreciate the smaller things in life and that's what I've taken the most from it. You appreciate seeing your family more, sleeping in a bed, taking a shower, you know, just good food. You just respect everything, all the smaller things in life.

Hannah <00:06:10> Do you have another good story like that, another good memorable fire?

Farmer

Actually I think I do. It was another Arizona event. I believe it was the 177 Fire out of Globe, Arizona. We were backfilling for, I believe Globe Hotshots, and there was a brush fire right off the highway. I remember it was 104° that day, and once again, I was a fill-in again. So, just the nervousness of being a fill-in and then having it in Arizona, you know, that fuel type down there is just so explosive, basically. I was assigned to carry a bladder bag and I kept getting told, "Don't to go 100%, save your energy, go slow." 103°, bladder bag on top of my pack, you know, tool. We had a retardant plane attacking the head, and helicopters assisting us and we're using swatters. The swatter is a short handled tool with a long strand of cotton jacket, and you basically swat the fire out and you work with the bladder bag. You just kind of spray the edges, knock it down, and keep moving, keeping one foot in the black at all times. I was so excited and so nervous, I had so many emotions going through me just seeing how the fire activity was and everything. I had that bladder bag and it was so hot. I may have died a little that day, I was so hot and tired. At one point, it's not a matter of if I go down—.

[Camera malfunction]

<00:08:36> Where was I? So, like I said, with all the commotion and everything, and I was so nervous and so hot—I've never been in that type of fuel type before and that was my first time in Region Three, really. To get that experience of having a bladder bag in that kind of heat and that kind of terrain, it was steep, you know, we were just chasing that fire, we were flanking the fire. We had the helicopter working with us, so there was a lot of in and out with the bucket drops. I remember thinking to myself, it's not a matter of if I go down, it's when. I've never had that thought process before. Ever. You know? And I was just a like, "Okay, so I really need to calm down." I was just trying to catch my breath and stay calm about it because I was so tired and exhausted (because the way I exerted my energy). That was probably one of my biggest learning experiences ever. It was only about a 12 hour IA, and once we got it buttoned up, we got to go home. Once we were done with that shift, I was like, "If I can do

that—.” And I just learned a lot, and just that 12 hour time I learned a lot about myself and what I can do, the smarter not harder usually most of the time. I learned a lot that day, it was a good one.

Hannah <00:06:57> How do you view the role of fire in the environment?

Farmer I think fire is really important, you know? I think it's a natural cycle. I think all for us, I believe it's 80% of the nation's forest, are fire dependent and that just goes to show the way the earth was brought up. It's a natural thing with lightning, there'll always be lightning, though. Always be fire. Everything needs fire to live, just for regeneration of different fuel types, and everything. Plays a pretty crucial role, I believe, especially around here.

Hannah <00:10:30> Is there any particular fire or experience that led you to come into that understanding?

Farmer I do a lot of prescribed fire and just to see how good low to moderate intense understory burn can take effect on tree stands. I think that's really important, you know, keeping the brush down and weeding out some of the smaller species. My favorite to watch is a good understory burn and just to see the timber stand improve, you know. Get rid of all the brush and just really open up the floor.

We used to do a lot of field burning. I worked for a private engine when I first started and to me that was really cool to see how wind influenced a fire can be in lighter fuel types, you know grass. It was pretty cool to see the whirls and everything but to come back and see how green the grass is now, you know, it was pretty cool. I did a lot along I-5. So I'd be driving with my mom or my friends, "I burned that about four weeks to two months ago and now lookout green it is and nice." Just rolling hills, acres upon acres, thousands of acres turning all green, it's pretty cool. It's a good feeling to know you put that in.

Hannah <00:12:22> If there's one thing you could tell the public about fire, what would it be?

- Farmer I think the public has a pretty extreme view on fire and firefighters. You know, "Oh, it's so crazy out there and so scary all the time." But really, you know, if you're with an experienced group of people it's always really safe. It's usually—I think sometimes—it's blown out of proportion. I'll have people come over to me, "Well, thank you very much," which is very nice and I really like that a lot. For the most part it's not as dangerous and scary as the public thinks, really. With experienced people it's actually really safe and can be a really smooth rolling process going to fires. I think that's pretty important for the public to know.
- Hannah <00:13:13> Do you have a favorite place to fight fire?
- Farmer I'll touch back to Arizona, I like the fuel types in Arizona, there's usually never a lot of mop-up. So that's what I appreciate about it. When you go there for a roll to region three, to fires that don't last very long, so you're bounced around, so it keeps you on your toes and it keeps everything new. Rolling onto new fires and everything. Getting multiple fires in a row is usually a good thing. It keeps everybody fresh and energized and new things, you know.
- Hannah You mentioned that you are a sawyer. Can you describe your toughest shift as a sawyer so far?
- Farmer My toughest shift as a sawyer, I believe I was in—. We went to Alaska last year, I think we were just out of Fairbanks. I did the Skinny Road Fire, I believe, and we did about a 19-hour shift and my saw partner and I, we did a lot of cutting the whole time. We were kind of going a tank for tank and just kind of feeling each other out. The saw part about it, that cutting the limbing, it was a lot of dead fuel and it's the swamp that will get you. Swamping, I think, is the hardest thing in fire. To move that brush, it's just, it takes a lot of energy and if you got a good saw team it works out well. It just, you know, those long IA shifts, 19 hours just cutting, you really got a step back and pay attention to what you're doing and what your partner's doing. That was a 19 hour IA, went back for four hours and slept for maybe two and woke up and did it all again. It kind of builds in Alaska, it's a very strong fuel type.

With that, the dozer line—we were cutting out by a dozer line and the permafrost was melting, so the more we would swamp, and it was uphill. We were cutting black spruce, about 10 foot high black spruce. So I would get my load and I would have to stomp through the mud, through this, you know, 10 foot swamp basically. As the day progressed they wanted the line wider so that dozer track ended up tripling in size. So it's just bigger and it's so wearing on your body and you're so tired, swamping through mud. It was a fun one.

Hannah <00:15:46> How about the fire what was the fire doing? Fires are pretty unique up in Alaska.

Farmer Well, it was my first time to Alaska. So, I always heard about the black spruce and all the sunlight—so the sun exposure and how things will pick up and burn. It was making really big runs; it was running a lot, chunking off. I think it was 107 acres so we IA'd first two days and we were doing some burn out. Honestly the very last 200 yards—the day was wrapped up, 19 hour shift done—a black spruce right on the line ended up torching out and jumped the line. We were like, "Oh, maybe we can catch it. We might be able to catch this." I heard air attack say the spotting was a quarter-mile. Right there I was, "Oh man." For the most part it was a very active fire, lot of torching out, a lot of spotting. I've never seen spots go that far before, a quarter-mile, I mean, that's pretty far from my experience. It was very interesting to see how things burned up there. With all the sunlight and everything and the thick fuel. The black spruce is so dense, the stands per acre up there, it's a very extreme amount. Don't know if that really answered your question.

Hannah <00:17:47> How about any stories about the crew antics and the camaraderie building that happens on hotshot crews? Do you have any fun things that come to mind?

Farmer For the crew antics and everything, I'm usually a jokester. I don't take things very well if I'm stressed out or putting a lot of pressure on myself. So I realized, in my life, taking everything pretty lighthearted. On those mornings you wake up, you know, just try to make somebody laugh and smile. Even if you're not in the best mood you're just trying to push through and be happy

and kind of get everybody up. But with the camaraderie and everything. One of the things that I appreciate about fire, again, is, I met the crew for the first time, you know, when I came on as a fill, and I did three roles with them. I really liked everybody there and I've noticed through fire, if I meet somebody and in six months they're one of my best friends and I'm hanging out and I'm going kayaking with them or were going to shed hunting. Some of the best people I ever met were through fire and just the diversity of kind of people you get, you know, you get all walks of life coming through. It's really nice to, like, meet everybody. I'm usually a shy person for the most part and so that six months of just always seeing each other, it really, kind of helps me out a lot, to get to know everybody and everything.

Hannah

It's always kind of a culture shock at the end of the season to when everyone goes their separate ways.

Farmer

And everybody scatters and all my friends are gone and I'm like I have no friends around because everybody's in California or Idaho or went back to Montana. That's really cool.

Hannah

Thanks so much.

*End of interview.*

## Rigo Flores

Senior Firefighter, Flagstaff Hotshots (Coconino National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 15, 2014 in Flagstaff, CA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah <00:04:25> For the camera, tell me your name.
- Flores Rigo Flores
- Hannah How long have you been a hotshot?
- Flores This is might eighth year with Flagstaff Hotshots. Started off with them in my fire career and whatnot.
- Hannah What position?
- Flores Right now, I'm a detailed squad boss. Before the squad boss, I was the lead of firefighter, or senior, since 2010.
- Hannah Just to get started, do you have a favorite hotshot story?
- Flores I do. As far as the fire, I wouldn't say was my favorite but it was the most memorable. It was in Northern California, the American River Fire on the Tahoe National Forest. It was, probably, the hardest fire, to date, that I've ever been on. It was only my second year on the crew and I was a sawyer at the time, as well. The year before that we had gone to Montana and whatnot and seen that terrain, in the northern part of the states. It's definitely steeper, bigger, and whatnot. But when we went to Northern California for that year, on the Tahoe, everything is multiplied by 20. The mountains there are bigger, terrain is just crazy steep everywhere, poison oak, you name it it's there. We had on a ridge that we were on—there was the Tahoe Hotshots (it was their backyard), us, Payson, and I believe there was another crew there. It had to have been at least a couple miles worth of handline we had to put down this ridge. It was an indirect piece that we were putting in, talking about a 30-foot swath with a 2 foot dig—I mean, it's thick, really, really thick. So we were leapfrogging crews the whole time. It took, I think, 3 to 4 days to put the line in with that many crews and we were tying into the

American River at the bottom. All that I can remember during that whole time is, at first, the fuel model changes from the top going down. So, when we started at the top there was a lot of brush, a lot of that Manzanita and whatnot. Finally when we drop down, we got into the timber, with the brush still, and lots of poison oak. I just remember getting further and further from the top and by the time we got to a stopping point, we had to hike out to go back down. That was probably the worst hike ever in the world. You're talking about going up something that, it literally was, it was a crawling pace because it was that steep.

All that I remember was there was people puking on the way up. It was bad, it was just hot, Northern California, it's got a lot of big mountains there but it was still 105° there. So hiking out when the sun went down, it was still 100° out, still really hot. A lot of things happened in that first day for us. It was a rude awakening, for sure, you go on these other fires, either here or, in your region and you go to other states, it can be tough but there's nothing like the Northern California area, or California in general. Fire there is definitely, it's a different way of fighting fire there for sure. Just getting used to all the elements of California is the hardest part, definitely.

Hannah <00:08:42> A couple things came to mind. One, tell me what it means to be a sawyer in poison oak and what it means to be a sawyer when you're tackling those types of assignments, in that particular case? What was it like, what did you do?

Flores Well to be a sawyer first of all, it's a huge privilege. I mean, you come onto a hotshot crew, you usually start off on the dig. You have to earn your right to be moved to that position as a sawyer. That was only, like I said, my second year, my first year I got moved on to a saw after about, probably midway through the fire season, and I stayed on the saw then and the next year I was on it full-time. But it's a huge privilege because you get to be in front of everybody else and everybody depends on you to make things a little bit easier for the dig—just to get everything out of the way and for them to come through and finish the job. You've got a take pride in your work as a sawyer. You want your line, your cut to look good. You don't want to leave a bunch of stuff

anywhere; everything it needs to basically be perfect. Doing it in California in oak is definitely really hard for sawyers because you're the one cutting all that out. That stuff's going down your shirt hitting your face, the swappers are picking it up, it's everywhere. All those oils are rubbing all over you. So once you finally have the reaction to the oak, it's pretty miserable to deal with. I get it pretty bad; I get a really bad rash, I swell up and get all these little blisters. It's itchy and it hurts at the same time. I think I finally reacted to it about three days into the fire and the whole time were spiked out on this fire. We went into the camp, checked in, they're just like, "You guys are spiking out." It's like "perfect" and I didn't really know what I'm really going to be expecting. I've spiked out before, but never in California. Once you got the poison oak and you're eating MRE's every day, it sucks a lot. The days don't go by fast enough, all you can think about is cutting and the pain and itch you have all of your body. That's it, you can't do anything about it. Unless you're so swollen up that your eyes shut, and then they'll take you to the hospital. I never got that bad, it was just on my arms and my legs—they swell up like balloons. Basically the medic and was just like, "Well, I can't send you to the hospital, here's some cream to hopefully help the itch" and that's about it. You have to just tough it out, that's all it is.

It's definitely the physical part of that is there, but this job is all about how your mentality is. If you can control your thoughts and just be mentally tough—even through that kind of stuff—you're going to make it. It will seem very hard but you'll survive it, for sure. That's when I finally learned what it was like to be mentally tough. I always thought, I played sports, all through college and whatnot I played baseball and we had our hell weeks and I look back at that kind of stuff and gosh, it's petty stuff compared to the stuff you really get put in on this job. I mean everything's taken away from you. You don't have a bed, you don't have showers, and your food is put in a brown bag and can last for 30 years. Things like that, and on top of that you have all this other stuff, you got the oak, you got the hike out, you've got weight on your back, you've got a saw on your shoulder. I mean, you're drinking boiling hot water out of your pack. All those things that you had before at home that were—but simple things

like going to your refrigerator and getting ice and putting it in a cup and putting water in it and its ice cold. I mean, you start appreciating things like that, and that's great.

You get 18-year-old kids that come to this job, they come extremely excited about it, but they just have no idea. This job is one of those jobs that will turn an 18-year-old kid into an 18-year-old man after a season with a hotshot crew. After that year I definitely matured a lot, especially after that fire. My skill as a sawyer, after that fire, improved tremendously. Just because of what was there. You're cutting through brush you can't see through and it's never ending, it always continues.

Hannah <00:13:58> Tell me about the fire itself, you told me you cut three or four days' worth of indirect line. Can you describe to me what the fire was doing? I assume you burned it out?

Flores  
Actually we didn't, on that particular piece we never even used it. That's one of those things is a hotshot, you do a lot of that. You put in a lot of line or you prep a road, and probably 85% of the time you don't use that line that you put in or that road that you prepped. The teams always tell you like, we need you to go do this, go prep this road, go put this line in, put in an indirect peice, because we're going to burn, were planning on burning it. Usually about the time you finish, they change their plans and they're just like "it's time to go direct, were going to go direct instead." And that's exactly what happened with us, because we got the line tied end and the next shift, they're just like, "We're going to send you down this other side and you're just going direct." And it's just like, "Okay."

It's definitely a morale killer, when those kind of things happen. Just because you put so much work into that piece and all you're thinking about is, is like, "We've just got a get this piece in and we're going to burn it out and were going to be done with the side." Then they throw you the curveball and they're just like, "Actually we're going to put you somewhere else and put you direct and we're not even going to use that line." It's a contingency line now, is what it is.

The fire activity at the time, from what I remember, from that piece you couldn't see the fire I mean we were quite a ways away from it. But when we got to the direct piece the fire activity was extremely minimal. Definitely just creeping around, skulking around in that brush. We had a ton of air resources; we had somebody out in front of us putting bucket drops down for us while we were putting in the direct piece. We do a lot of that; it's very common for it to happen all the time.

This year it could be different, especially after last year but you never know. I think the direct part of fighting fire needs to be there because it's probably our best tool, in the safest place we can be. Because most of the time those areas are nuked out or just out and we can use it as our safety zone. The indirect portion of it, that can be a safe way to fight fire as well, but you just never know what's going to happen when you're away from the fire. That's why we post lookouts and whatnot. The direct portion of fire is definitely important, very important in my opinion. Instead of teams going and telling us, "Go put this indirect piece," In my opinion they need to take the time to really look at what the fire activity is doing and what's out in front of it. If it's going to hit an area where the fuel model changes and the fire might just died down, maybe it's just eight matter of waiting a day or two and then go get it direct and just pick it up.

Hannah <00:17:40> What is your favorite part about fighting fire?

Flores My favorite part is definitely just hanging out with the guys. Because you create these relationships with them. Most of these guys on this crew have been here since, since I started. We've got a lot of depth on this crew. The superintendent's been here, or has been in fire and on hotshot crews for 20+ years. Everybody else is around that eight to 15 year mark. And we have three brand-new guys, don't have any experience in fire. But everybody's got experience so, you're looking at an average of people having at least 5 to 6 years of fire experience. A lot of that time has been here with us. So you create these huge relationships and that's the best part of it, you create these relationships—you get another family out of this. You get put through a lot with them and, I mean, you're not the only one

who's miserable out there, on certain days. You've got 21 other guys on the crew that are in the same spot as you, they're miserable with you. So you get to share a lot of those experiences with them and you'll be able to share that with your kids, down the road. I had these guys behind me the whole time when I did this. This is what I learned from it, these are the friendships that I've created with them and now they're lifetime friendships. So, that's the best part, probably the greatest part of it—besides going out and fighting fire: that's the ultimate best thing.

Hannah

<00:19:30> So I know on 'shot crews, with that camaraderie you're building over time, a lot of fun antics happen. Do you have anything that stands out in your mind that you would want to share about? Playing baseball in spike camp with fiber tape or whatever.

Flores

We get a lot of crazy things, there's definitely times when we have time on our hands. Whether it's, you get a staging assignment or the fires just going crazy and they're not doing anything at—they're waiting. Like I said, you've got a lot of time on your hands and we come up with just the craziest things. Especially when we're spiked out with other crews and they bring you hot buckets.

We had a guy our crew, I forgot who the other crew was that was with us, but we ended up getting that night for dinner, we got hot buckets and it was, I don't know, chicken and gravy and potatoes and whatnot. And we had two buckets of gravy—you're talking about 10 gallons of gravy. We were just like, "Who wants to do a gravy challenge?" And he raised his hand and another guy raises his hand and people start throwing money in. We came up with the rules and it was four quarts of gravy and basically just chugging it as fast as you can. And you have to, after you get done chugging it, you've got to do, I believe it was like 10 burpies and after that you had to hold it for at least 10 minutes. Our guy won. He ended up getting a pot—it had to be like \$200 or \$300, is what got. So, that happens all the time, especially when you have a rival crew, like Mormon Lake. We go on a lot of fires with them, they're our sister crew, so we always

do some kind of an eating challenge with them. And it's fun, it's so much fun to watch what'll come at the end, it's pretty gross.

Hannah <00:21:49> Do you have any other stories that come to mind. I love the first story because it epitomizes what a hotshot is all about. Those “hotshot” shifts, they’re transformative because they challenge you in ways you never anticipate. Do you have any other stories?

Flores Yeah, I think one of the big things that stuck with me to is, when I finally got enough time under my belt I was able to start doing training as a firefighter one, ICT5 and all that stuff. Once you get into that role, I think, for me at least, fire became even more fun for me because now you're, you got a little bit more responsibility. Like now, since I'm doing the detail, I have a squad that I'm responsible for. It's nice to know that people can trust you to take on certain tasks and they know that they can leave you alone with nine other people and you can go get a job done. After my 2009 season, I got my permanent position as the lead on the crew and I got put into some roles where I was able to take my squad, take them out and put a direct line in or we'd go on just a mission as far as lightning mods, stuff like that. That really sticks with me; it's really important for me, especially, to be able to pass on the knowledge that I have received through the years to the people that want to do that too. And just giving them hope to be able to see that—well, if you put enough time and hard work into it—that you can eventually be in this position and you'll be able to finally get the knowledge and you'll be able to understand fire a little bit better.

It's important there, to get there you always have to be a student of fire. So, being able to pay attention in trainings and put on trainings as well, it's really important to get to this position and further. It definitely—where I am now, it's awesome. I remember the first year, I didn't really think I was going to make it this long, I thought it was going to be a two, three years kind of thing and I'd probably be done. But no, I'm eight years in and now I'm a squad boss on a crew and it's just like, “Wow, I can't believe I'm actually here and progressing still with my career.”

Hannah <00:24:50> Where's your favorite place to fight fire?

Flores

Favorite place is probably Montana. It's just so beautiful up there. There's never a time that you might not run into like a lake, there's so much water up there. It's awesome up there, I mean there's berries everywhere, you're just out in the middle of nowhere fighting fire. During the times you get breaks, there are berry bushes everywhere, you can just go and get berries. It's such a cool place. I've never seen—it's definitely not like any other state in the states, for sure. We don't have anything like that here, and the Forests up there are just amazing. I definitely love going up to Montana, it's awesome. It's a little bit cold during the time that we go, but whatever. They have some good fires.

If you go to the eastern part of Montana you get into the grasslands, you get some really good grass fires out there. We had one last year, I think it was, you know, the Dakotas—on the borderline of Montana and the Dakotas—and it was a rager. There was 70 foot flame lengths off the grass. Probably had a 60 to 70 mile an hour wind behind it, just pushing it all different directions. A lot of chaos for sure, there's homes involved. I mean, a huge wall of flames just slams it right into a bunch of homes—luckily they didn't burn down (we had a lot of resources there, that were prepared for it). We had it plumbed and they were definitely ready for it, but it's just—I mean, those kind of situations in those kind of fuels—it's just so quick that you have to react to doing something, to try to save homes or just try to stop the actual front of the fire.

Hannah

<00:26:50> What were you guys doing?

Flores

On that particular fire, when we went to it—when they called us, at least, they said that, "Yes, it's in the grasses"—in the grassland, but it was pushing towards a mountain range. But when we got there it was a totally different story. It wasn't going anywhere near the mountain range and it was actually pushing away from it to the north. And it's just hundreds of miles of grassland that way with homes in between. So when we got there, it was literally one of those things where the Supt. jumped out and he was just like, "Okay, let's all split up into two squads, you guys are taking the structures—the rest of you guys, you guys go up, take the road and start figuring out a burn operation we need to

get in place and get going with a burn." But as soon as he said that, it changed so rapidly. It was so cool because everybody just kind of collective and knew what they had to do.

That's the great thing about having that much experience with the crew and people being together that long. It's just one of those things, like a second nature. People know their job, they know what they have to do. There's half a squad, they took the structures without—we got briefed on it—but nobody had to tell them, "Hey hurry up and get over there." They were already there doing what they had to do. Another squad went and they had drip torches in hand ready to go, they were starting to light in some places, near the structures to protect them. With me, at the time I was a heavy equipment boss trainee and the IC was around saying, "Hey, we need to get a heavy equipment boss for these dozers over here." I just went over there without even second-guessing it. It's just like, I'm a trainee, there are no trainers, but somebody needed to go and do the job. So I just went over there and did it. It was just so cool to see that everybody spread out and was definitely doing something to try and help out—and we wrapped up that fire within a day and a half. It was pretty quick once that wind stopped, at least. It was very exciting for sure. I want to say, it was definitely a few hundred acres, probably like 500 to 700.

Hannah

How do you view the role of fire in that environment?

Flores

It's definitely a part of the environment and it needs to continue to be part of it. Just because, here in Flagstaff, one of the big things with, before the Schultz fire (that we had here in 2011, I think it was), a lot of people were against us doing the prescribed burns—going out and doing thinning projects and stuff like that. But when that fire happened, all of the sudden people had a different opinion because the backside of the peaks is a wilderness area and that fire got into it (and there are homes that backup to that area, too). After it was all said and done, I mean, there were no homes that were lost in that fire, which was great, because there was literally fire inches away from homes there. But after the fire was all done and whatnot, people finally realized, okay maybe we need to do the prescribed burns and

have people out there doing the thinning projects and whatnot. Because your forest isn't supposed to look super thick and dense, there is supposed to be space between the trees (for them to grow). There's not supposed to be a bunch of those little rep-rods. They thought at the time, before the fire, that's what it was supposed to be, it's supposed to be super thick, there's not supposed to be people going out there and cutting trees down. Which, in fact, that's nature. When we went around doing all the prescribed fires and thinning, lightning fire started, fires ran through the forest and that's how nature created fire, in a sense. It's good for the trees, too. It helps them with the growth. There's definitely areas of Flagstaff that have giant, giant pines out there and it's kind of weird to see them because you look around everywhere else and you're looking at like trees that are probably only about 70 feet tall and at the base, at the widest part, they're probably only about 30 inches wide. But there's some areas that there are some huge toads that are 100 and something feet and the bases are 60 inches or 70 inches wide. That's what it's supposed to be like. Definitely the prescribed burning, the thinning, it's definitely a good thing to do with the forest—and just anywhere. It definitely helps out with the growth and it also helps us out when it comes to fighting a fire. If we have that little bit of work that's been in there, or if they've done prescribed burns in the past, we can definitely get control of a fire a lot quicker than if it wasn't like that.

Hannah <00:32:36> If there is one thing you wanted people to know about fire, or know about hotshots, what would it be?

Flores I think the one thing about hotshots is that they are, they're just—the people I work with in hotshots, they're not doing the job for the attention, at all. Literally before last year nobody knew about us and we didn't really care. It's like whatever, we just have a job to do, just let us do it. You see a lot of the structure guys on TV getting a lot of praise for supposedly putting out massive wildfires out there. And that's all great and whatnot, we don't really care if they're getting all the credit for it. I think now that people know that we actually exist, though probably, definitely their saying, “well it wasn't really them, it was a bunch of hotshots up there putting in line and doing burnouts and

whatnot with other people.” The structure guys definitely do help out, don't get me wrong—we need them too, but a big majority of the work is definitely all hotshots. All the stuff that happens out there it really couldn't happen without those types of people in the hotshot crews, at all. If they went around these things, it would just get bigger and there just wouldn't be much of a forest left without us, in my opinion.

Hannah <00:34:25> Any other great stories that you want to share?

Flores I think one thing too, people should know, we never really get to—get like a free ride or an easy hike into fires. It's always something. It's always, “you have to go to the top of that and start working up there.” I remember on the Gila—it was the Miller Fire—we had to go in, it was about an 11 mile hike in before we started working, actually. Those are the times, too, that it's just like, people will think that we can just get to the fire really quick and all the sudden were working. But in some instances, it's not even that, we still have to hike in 11 miles to get to the point where we need to start and then once we get there, we still have work to do.

So, it takes, like I said before, a special person to be able to be mentally tough and in good physical shape to be able to do that kind of stuff. Because walking in with your pack and saw, for the sawyers, and whatever extra stuff that we take in—water—that time we had to take some pumps in with us, a bunch of hose. Everybody had some kind of extra weight on their shoulder and it's tough to carry that for that distance and put it down, set it up, and get to work. Like I said, it takes a special person to do this job. Not everybody can do this job, that's for sure.

Hannah <00:36:16> I've been asking a lot of the Supt's that I've been interviewing to describe their ideal hotshot, in terms of character?

Flores Yeah, I mean, you can definitely—the new guys that we get that have no experience—the great thing about them is that you can form them into whatever you want. Just because they have no clue of what's going on in this world. So when they get here, when you start training them, you mold them into your little puppet and the great thing about that is, after you have trained

them they are like that from then on. For me though, my hotshot would definitely be just, somebody that comes in and just wants to work hard, regardless of what's happening, so if we have to hike up there, or it's going to be something in the oak, or Southern California, anything, it's not going to phase their work ethic. I think a lot of people want that, is what it is.

Hannah

This is great. Thank you so much; I really appreciate it.

Flores

Sure. Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## Jeffrey Gallivan

Senior Firefighter, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah <00:04:25> For the camera can you tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many you've been a hotshot?
- Gallivan My name is Jeffrey Gallivan. This is my fifth year here in Wolf Creek, fifth season. I'm a senior, be detailed as a squad boss this year. Previously I did five years in region three, all on type III engines.
- Hannah Do you have any stories that you've thought of that you want to share?
- Gallivan Oh, I've thought about best shifts ever and it's a little different, I think—I think a little different where my best shift is always the hardest shift or the one that makes you most tired. It's always a good day when you go climb into a sleeping bag and fall right asleep, you feel like you've done something. There's been a couple of them, I think the best ones that are working around houses. 2012 we were in Wenatchee and it was basically so smoked-in you couldn't see the fire all day, creeping around towards the houses. Prepping around houses and then working late, we were pulling 18 hour shifts because as soon as the sun went down, when you saw the fire was down the road next to another house. We'd burn around another couple houses every night, sleeping in their front yard. Getting up super early to check on the houses, checking on the people. It's just nice because they were bringing us coffee, cooking us dinner. Then another one, I worked in Flagstaff on an engine and the fire was coming towards houses and tankers coming in and everybody was out. It was just nice when you come off the fire and people clap or come say "thank you." Because you'd don't see that usually, when were out in the woods or spiked out. Somebody doesn't know who the Forest Service is, they don't know what a hotshot is. They don't really know what you do until they actually get to see it.

Hannah <00:05:11> On those fires can you describe what the fire was doing?

Gallivan The one in Flagstaff, it was in ponderosa pine, needle litter, and it was windy. And so, it just kind of raced towards the homes, didn't really get into trees or anything, it stayed on the ground but it was just a moving really fast. You have to dig line, run hose out behind houses, air tankers coming in. The Wenatchee one, it wasn't a very high intensity fire. It was really low intensity, just backing down towards the houses, you just couldn't see it. We didn't get out of the smoke for 12 days. Short on people, I think it was us, one squad was off on another fire, so maybe 12 of us and then two engines for three or four days, trying to get this fire. Just creeping, backing, not too high intensity.

Hannah <00:07:10> What's your favorite part of hotshotting?

Gallivan My favorite part of hotshotting is that it uses everything that I've learned. You take the classes, for the first five years you take and pass class and you figure, "Maybe I'll use that," "Oh I'm sitting through another class, I need this certificate" but with Hotshotting, it seemed like my first year everything came into play. You use pumps, you burn out a lot, you spike out a lot, you're gone, you see running and torching, you see high-intensity fires, or you're just mopping up for 10 days on the same piece of line. It's so different fire to fire—and you just go from fire to fire. There's not a lot of down time, which is nice. I am worker and I love to work; the downtime kills me more than anything else.

Hannah <00:07:57> Speaking of downtime, I know on a lot of hotshot crews, that's when a lot of the crew antics and camaraderie comes into play. Do you have any good stories about—?

Gallivan We play a lot of 31, a lot of cards on the crew, different card games when we're staging. Cribbage; somebody made their own cribbage board last year out of a piece of wood, so we played a lot of cribbage—I got to learn cribbage last year. Books is a big one, somebody will bring a book, you read it, you pass it along. Somebody else will bring a book, pass it along. I filled in on another crew where everybody was made to do book reports.

Like on your down time, they had to read the book, you had to present it to your squad — that's pretty good.

We do teambuilding every year. I thought up one that I got out of a class that I did last winter, where everybody holds onto the rope, you untie the rope and you get through it and you might see people who have never even barely spoken to each other, trying to go through—who's listening to, or who's just going to take it over. It's more funny looking from the outside it and the main part of it.

But then, I don't know, on R&R, it's pretty fun, go out and go drinking, try to get everybody together and hopefully it they don't just split and take off. Because I've seen it a lot where you get home and within half an hour, everybody's gone. It's okay, "What are we going to do?" Well, "Who's going to be around?" And there's three of us, "Okay let's go get food. What are we going to be doing tonight?" "We're going to go get dinner here, were going to go do this."

Hannah <00:09:32> Camaraderie is important. Tell me how you view the role of fire in the environment? As a hotshot you travel all over the country, you see a lot of fire. How do you view the role of fire?

Gallivan Oh, the role of fire in the environment, it's a necessary thing. It seems like running BD or prescribed burning is a lot cheaper than running full-on wildfires. I've seen it where, untreated areas, it'll just rip through there, or you get a wildfire in something you burned two years ago and it doesn't do anything. I think it's more of a necessary thing and an underutilized tool. I think they changed wildfire use to manage it for resource benefit, which should be looked at a lot more. At lightning fires, let it back down towards roads, do more burning out, let it do what it's naturally going to do. Provided that it's safe for everybody, you know, let it do its thing, See what it's going to do. You don't always have to get in there and get at it. Which doing that is a lot of fun; it's a lot of fun digging hotline—but I think it's really underused. I've been on districts where they don't burn very much, maybe two units, a total of 50 acres. I've been on districts where you do 400 acres a day, six days a week until the fire season actually shows up. So

it's, the preplanning, it's all dictated on money and this and that. But I think, the more we use fire in the environment, it's going to help out a lot more. Because prescribed firing, you can control it to the way, more or less, what you think it's going to do.

Hannah <00:11:26> Was there any particular fire that stands out in your mind where you realized that fire was important? Or is it something that you kind of grew into overtime?

Gallivan Well there's the Woody Fire, 2006, was kind of—it was my second season and get to it, burned from a freeway straight into houses around homes. And we had to burn out before it got there, to save homes where it was untreated. And it spotted into an area behind the houses, behind this neighborhood where it was treated and it didn't do anything. Very easy to pick-up, instead of getting up into the trees, crown running straight to it. Quick decisions to burn. Where over the years I've seen areas that, the transitions to old burns, you can use the old burns as control lines. That you see it, it'll run—like in Alaska—it will run right into an old fire from two, three years ago and fall on its face. Just seeing that over the years and years and thinking about—. And learning what it's going to do because you go to some places and it will run through the grass still. It'll burn real quick through the grass, through the old burn, or through old sagebrush but you go to other places—. Oh we had a prescribed fire here, where there was a fire a couple years ago, right here, just let it burn into that, and it does, and it stops. It's easier to pick it up instead of trying to go a quarter mile over this way or a quarter mile over that way just to stop it. Instead of, okay, I could go here, just let it burn and do its thing.

Hannah <00:13:15> Any good burnout stories?

Gallivan Last year we had a good one. Firing boss trainee, Warm Springs fire, the Big Turnaround Fire. Ceanothus was burning like they had never seen before, we had a little bit of wind and it was basically rip and go. You light them and you just walk and it pulled it all and—great fire behavior, big plume coming off of it, no worries. Those are the fun ones where you can just take it and go. My first year, same thing, but we were in Arizona, you know, in tall grass. And people were just running with torches, just

running with it, and it sucked it all in, right up the hill—just grass—it was a lot of fun burning late into the night. We got a couple good burn stories—worked through the night, but by the time the sun comes up you're dead tired.

Hannah <00:14:14> Any other thoughts, any other stories?

Gallivan Burning in Alaska was pretty fun. It was the first time and they ever told us to light the trees, so you're not really lighting the duff on the ground or in the permafrost, you're actually walking around throwing fire into the trees trying to get the black spruce to burn. As soon as it does, it just takes off, just like a rocket, through those trees. We were burning one time and we couldn't get anything on the ground to burn—nothing—so we took, they call them Skidgines, little soft track dozer things and we were pushing over trees into hot areas and it would pick up and then run off. It was really a different way of thinking. Somebody else came up with that it was like, "Hey, well we can't light it this way, let's try this." Just pushing over trees and taking chainsaws, cutting holes for them to get into, pushing all the trees down—it got what we wanted. They wanted it new black, because without that it's just not safe.

Hannah <00:15:18> From my memories, the fun fires were the ones that were super remote, spiking out. Do you have any wilderness fires?

Gallivan We do a lot of spiking out in Alaska; it's fun because you cook your own food, you get your food boxes flown in, you send to people back to go cook dinner. You have these elaborate camps set up where you make benches, you've got a couple fire pits going, you make the triangles to hang the coffee up, so you've got coffee going all day. We learned that from one of the locals—the Alaska natives—they were showing us all these little tricks to do since they're out there all the time, what to do. You set up your Visqueen and your tarps overhead so you have someplace dry because it's always raining in Alaska. Those are always fun to set up, you can get a little creative with your seats, you know, where you're going to dig out for your tent, you get to sleep on the permafrost. It's somewhere where you know you're going to be for a little bit. Spiking out is a lot of fun, you always hear the

stories, you know, the campfire stories, "Oh I remember on the fire we did this" "Oh I remember this." You get to learn about people a little bit better, you get to know the actual person instead of the worker.

Hannah <00:16:43> Any other thoughts, anything else you want to share?

Gallivan I'll give you a close call fire related... Same fire in Warm Springs, Burned through the ceanothus. They were saying, "Nope never seen it done before." We were pushing ahead with this like, type II crew, and they wanted to burn out as fast as we can on this to track—we just couldn't go fast enough. It was thick trees, kind of in and out of timber stringers and the brush. I was up ahead scouting, kind of being a little lookout. It made a push, so I went back down towards the crew and, about that time, the wind had been blowing in—into the black all day—and it was just chunking away, coming at us. When we turned around and the wind switched, soon as it got into that timber stringers. It was me, another guy, saw team, and we just turned around and looked at each other and said, "Nope we're going to head down." Everybody was saying, "Go!" It's like, "Nope, we're going to head down, we already lost it up there." So we start heading down and our saw boss was coming up to get us and over the radio they were telling everybody, "Get out, get out," And he was going up to the upper safety zone and I just turned around and just locked eyes with him and I told him, "Nope, it's gone." He looked back and it had already blown over the line below us, we were almost cut off—just as soon as I said that, it stood up, we took one look down and yelled "run" and we ran as fast as we could, stuff flying off people's packs and then it shut the door again. And we took one step and he said, "All right, get your breath." Stood back up again and we ran, we could just hear the guys, we had been down there may have been a quarter-mile, a half-mile or something but we were running as fast as we could to get out of there. I think, if we would've waited, just a couple seconds slower we might not be here, but I mean everybody was saying, "Go down." I mean, thick brush, we're not going into that with fire coming at us. But we made it, a little bit of burns to the face, my ear hurt for a couple days. I think that might have been my second closest call. My first one—closest call was running

crown fire that we took too long to come out of it. I wasn't on the crew, it was somebody else and we had to hike out and they said, "Go." And we were hiking in and all the sudden the wind shifts and it started crowning towards us and you could just hear it coming. We're running on this trail, thinking we weren't going to make it. As soon as we came in, we came out on this meadow, we just all looked at each other and we were like, "wow." We turned around and we noticed how close it was. In the moment you never know, this is going to be it—you just run and then you turn around, and like, "Wow, yeah, that was close."

I think the best parts of being a hotshot are working together—20 people—seeing what you can get done. Wouldn't imagine, like before, like working fire, five years in fire, already was a squad boss, firefighter one, thinking, "Okay, I'm going to go beyond hotshot." But you never really know what you can do until you've seen 20 people come together, or marrying up—40 people getting this line punched in. Within a day when people were thinking, "Oh you can't hold this, it's going to take two, three days for you guys to get in there." And we'd take it personal, so "okay will get it done in a day." It's the can-do attitude, it's the "Okay, we've got the experience," which is nice because then you rely on everybody else and it's like, "Okay, we're to get this done, we're going to work hard."

Hannah <00:20:48> Anything else, this is great, this is good stuff.

Gallivan I just like to talk. I'll do a camaraderie or do an incident within an incident. 2005 we were on the Tonto, I was with the Globe Hotshots but a guy cut his leg with a chainsaw and I was filling in with Globe, and I think Santa Fe might've been there. So it's—all these saw teams have never worked before—cut a helispot in 15 minutes; just everybody knew what to do. They'd never met each other before, all they knew was that one hotshot was down. He was hurt, we needed to get him out of there right away and the noise and the buzz of the saws going as quick as they can, falling trees, cutting the brush, just. People scattered everywhere and getting that helispot cut out before they had even got the helicopter off the ground. It was pretty amazing to see, and people not even knowing each other just, "This is what we need

to do, and we need to do it now." Getting it done. It's pretty amazing to see sometimes, but camaraderie between each other and, you know, they call it the brotherhood—but I say structure guys are firemen, they don't see as much fire as we do, we're firefighters, but it's all the same. We all get out there to do the same job, to put the fire out.

Hannah <00:22:35> There's also the competition—how when you have two crews coming at each other digging line, nobody wants to shut off their saw first, the line gets really wide when the guys meet.

Gallivan We've had—we were in Hells Canyon a couple of years ago and we were digging line all the way—we thought we were going to go all the way to the bottom. Digging line all day and they flew a crew in. So we took it personal, it's like, "We don't need them, we can get this done." So we were trying as hard, digging as fast as we can, cutting, just go, go, go, just pushing everybody. It's like, "We've got to get this in before they're there. We've got a get it and—." It's like, "They can fly out, we've hiked from the top, we've got a hike out of this, we're going to get this done before they even get a chance to get in here."

They have a—we call them sister crews—it's always the crew that you seem to be with all year, you go to the same fires and by the end of it, it's usually August or towards October—it's not spiteful against the crew, it's like, "Okay, we worked with you guys all year, we're going to beat you. You might've got us last fire, but we're going to get you this fire, we're going to do this." And then again you have—I know a lot of people who work in region three and so if I see somebody I worked with before, I might push my guys a little harder and be like, "Oh yeah, we're going to show these guys." I mean, it's just fun competition.

And then you have your fun games. We always have the Copenhagen Challenge, where somebody puts a whole can of chew in, against somebody else. Or it's the MRE challenge, you know you get one guy off of one crew, one guy off the other, who can eat the most MRE's, keeping them down. Or the 4, 4, 40. You know? The different games that keep you sane out there fighting fire at night.

I've seen a guy do the whole banjo at once, he did it three times in one year. He made quite a bit of money off of them, But he—it was—nobody thought he could do it each time. As soon as he got a new group, somebody would be like, "Hey I know somebody that can do it." "No he can't." "Yes he can." "Do you have somebody to challenge him?" He would only do it if somebody challenged him to. He got the division to challenge them one day—that was ugly, division didn't make it very far.

Hannah <00:25:09> Any other thoughts?

Gallivan Anything else you want to know about.

Hannah No those are great, good stuff. I can release you from the torture.

Gallivan No it's not bad, all talk. I'm a talker sometimes.

Hannah You mentioned, you like fighting fire around homes, if there was one thing that you could tell the public about fire what would it be?

Gallivan I would tell them defensible space is a big deal. I've done talks at Lyons groups, in different places of people I know. Try to explain to them how far and how big defensible space is—the bigger the better. It's a lot easier when we only have time to run around and look at homes, to not write their home off. If they're going to let it over grow and it's going to take us a long time to try to save their house, it's going to be very low on the list. It's not to be mean, it's just to be truthful; that's what happens out there. The more effort they take going into it, and can do, the better it is on our job and the better it is for them. Insurance claims are going to be a big deal. Fires around homes, homes burn every year, it's a sad thing but you don't want it to be your home. Do what you can before we get there. Even have a plan, if you're at home and you see a crew show up—there's things you would like us to see us do or not do, you know, if you have that one tree that has been in the family for years because your grandma planted it when they moved in, or if there's a hidden—. A couple years ago there was a hidden playset that nobody knew were out, up in a drainage. We'll take the time to go cut around, will take the time to try to

save it for you, if that's what you want to do, if you just let us know. If you had put forth the effort to make defensible space, you know, you put forth the effort and there's just some things you didn't get to—you know or you had tried, there's a little bit more effort that we could take out, then we're going to try to do that as long as they had made the effort in the first place.

Hannah

Perfect. Thanks so much.

*End of interview.*

## **Ron Garcia**

### **District Fire Management Officer, Sierra National Forest**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 1, 2014 in Prather, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:02:34> For the record, can you tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many you were a Hotshot?

Garcia My name is Ron Garcia, this will be my 32nd fire season and my background is: I've 15 years of hotshot experience from a crewmen to a squad boss to a foreman to superintendent. Currently in the division chief role, the district fire management officer on the Sierra National Forest and look forward to many more fire seasons.

Hannah <00:03:32> Do you have any stories right off the top of your head that you want to share?

Garcia Yeah, looking back at my time spent on hotshot crews and I had the privilege of working on three different hotshot crews. I worked on the Los Prietos Hotshot crew, on the Los Padres National Forest. I worked on Horseshoe Meadow Hotshot crew on the Sequoia National Forest, and I had the privilege of starting Kings River Hotshots here on the Sierra—part of the MEL buildup. During the National Fire Plan and such. Overall, all my experiences at multiple positions and multiple crews, multiple geographic locations, I think my most recent time spent on Kings River Hotshots was probably the one that stands out the most. Due to the fact that I had the honor of starting a crew from scratch. Building my team, bringing in the people that I felt would be the next leaders in wildland fire and to continue the legacy and the traditions of hotshot crews in the nation.

Hannah <00:04:45> What are some of the challenges of building a crew?

Garcia A lot of challenges building a crew, initially. Here on the Sierra National Forest, before I even applied for the job, I did my homework. I wanted to get the intent, what is the intent of the National Fire Plan. Do we want more hotshot crews? Are we looking at type 2 crews? Type 2IA crews? And once it was

determined quickly that the intent was that we want more hotshot crews on the Sierra National Forest and throughout the region, that gave me direction. So, that being said, I knew the criteria; I knew the standards; I knew what it meant to put a hotshot crew together. So it was quite easy. I did my local recruiting. I knew people out there that shared my similar background and a similar objectives. So finding the right people—. The overhead was probably the first challenge, but pretty simple, truthfully. The end state, or the highlight of building a crew was when we achieved our type one interagency status. That was quite the achievement. We were the first crew in the region to achieve the certification and we did it in one year time. Even though we had the personnel and the qualifications to do it the first year, I chose not to do it 'till the second year. Give us a good—. Get our feet underneath us and get our name out there. I knew there was going to be some crews out there that were, were curious on what's going on with the buildup of hotshot crews. But that was probably my biggest achievement and my biggest accomplishment was when we achieved our hotshot status in 2002.

Hannah <00:06:58> Do you have any best shift ever type of stories?

Garcia A lot of that, over the course of my 15 years on hotshot crews and again as I mentioned, I had the privilege, I should say, as a crewmen as a squad boss, as a sawyer, as a foreman and as a supt. So different perspectives in different stories, I should say. But I would have to say one of the best assignments would have had to probably been in 2003. There was a fire at down in Southern California called the Cedar Fire. A rather large fire. It was probably to the closest thing that I've been in where it would relate to sheer chaos in Southern California. There was not a whole lot of command and control when we first arrived on scene and there was multiple fires going on in Southern California at the time. The Grand Prix, the Old Fire, and a few other ones. But we were assigned the Cedar Fire and it was the longest shift I ever worked. We were pushing 60 hours straight, 2:1, we were kind of really pushing the boundaries on 2:1. We bedded down when we could, you know, made sure the guys got adequate rest, but when they continually call in on the radio, "We

need additional resources." And it was, in my opinion, there was probably a lot of independent action going on and my job there was to take care of the crew and be able to provide a resource to Southern California, which we did.

It was literally nonstop for about 50 hours straight. It was quite challenging. The crew did a hell of a job—nobody got hurt, a couple of bumps and bruises, but that happens—and we were down there for 18, 19 days or something like that. Probably out of those days we were cutting hotline every day for about the first 10 days before things started really calming down. So, overall that whole 2003 fire season and that wind events that occurred, working with other crews and that was the thing that made it so challenging. Every crew down there was doing the same thing we were. You talk to them after the fact, during the fact, they were all, similar stories: 50 hours up, you know, burning out around houses, burning, you know, burning just to keep the fire out of houses and then just walking away and going to the next house. You save some and you lose some. And we went back in the aftermath to see some of our, some of the results of our backfire and some of them didn't work. I know for a fact that there was a lot of homes that we couldn't save—and that happens. Pretty emotional for the crew. They were beat up, they were beat up; I was beat up. I could remember, for my role as a superintendent, my role is the well-being of the crew and, you know, during that 18, 19 days, I didn't do a lot of hiking. I didn't do a lot of swinging a tool. I did my role as a superintendent—oversight of the crew. That was probably the most exhausted that I've ever been in my life. Just the sheer management of the crew—staying up, not a lot of physical work, but I do remember as exhausted as I was—probably the most I've ever been to date—even when I was a sawyer, even when I was, you know, a lead P and such—but I do remember setting up my tent in fire camp, not quite getting it all the way up and just falling asleep before I could get it up. That's when I woke up—when I was awoken by some guy and the tent's collapsed around me—making sure I'm all right. But it was just, I couldn't lay down, putting up my Six Second Tent and didn't quite get it all the way up before I fell asleep. So that kind of explained how exhausted I was. I know the crew was about the same condition.

Hannah <00:11:26>[Dispatch radio turned down]

Hannah <00:11:39> You mentioned hotline. Can you explain why hotline is so physically challenging? You know, that's the classic—in my opinion—other than burnouts, it's a classic hotshot shift. You just have to push. Can you explain a hotline shift?

Garcia Over the course of my years, you know, one of the tactics we quite frequently use is hotline. That's one of my favorite tactics because we're close to the black. Were one foot in the black, which we're close to our safety zone, so if there's an opportunity to go direct, go hotline—where you're physically at the edge of the fire perimeter; that's a great tactic. It's hot, obviously, the shifts could go a long and it's probably the most exhausting tactic that the crew will experience based on the proximity to the fire, based on the tool lineup. You're trying to turn the corner on the fire, you're going hot, you're going out to the edge, you're trying to turn the corner on it. Working with other crews, working with helicopters, they're supporting the crews, air tankers are supporting the crews. You have LCES in place, you know where you're going, you're close to the black, that's what we do. You live for hotline assignments; yeah, you mop up and you burnout—there are a lot of different things that you do, but those assignments you love. Fighting fire, you look forward to hotline assignments. And at the end of the shift you're—you know, the sense of accomplishment is great because you've tested yourselves physically, mentally, and fire went out because of your direct suppression tactics. But yeah, overall that's what kept me in—doing what I'm doing—is working the edge.

Hannah <00:13:51> A lot of people that I've been interviewing, they say that hotshotting is just plain fun and then you ask what they mean by fun and they say you're working hard—. So tell me your definition of fun on a hotshot crew?

Garcia My definition of fun on a hotshot crew is all of the above, the camaraderie, the guys, the girls on the crew, that we're all doing the same thing, we're doing the same thing. I like to travel. I like the adrenaline. I like being a student of fire. I like understanding fire behavior, the topography, the terrain, the weather, how it all

interacts. And we come up with solutions how to stop the progression of fire.

The traveling across the nation, you know, working on hotshot crews, I had the privilege—from Alaska to Florida, to the eastern part of the state, to the Western part of the state; it's fun. That's what I do, you know, I think I'm pretty good at it and I've always said, "If you're not having fun at work, then it's time to do something else." And I kind of live by that. I've always had fun. There hasn't been one day on a hotshot crew where I dreaded coming to work. Even when I know we're going to, you know, have a hard day of project work or some other local unit stuff that we have to get done. I always enjoy coming to work. My time spent as a hotshot crew, just being around the folks, because they share the same values that you do. We live by, duty, respect, integrity. And to share that with the other crewmembers, and your fellow crewmates, is important and they reflect the same core values that are important to wildland fire.

Hannah <00:15:50> Do you have any fires that really stand out in your mind?

Garcia Working on hotshot crews, I can't, I don't remember how many fires I've been on. I used to keep track but I don't. Probably, one fire particular fire, that stood out in my mind was in 1994 in Colorado, the South Canyon Fire. We were there working the fire. Obviously we all know what happened. And we were assigned a job to assist the recovery team in accounting for the equipment before the actual investigation team went and ended their team. That will one stick to me to this day, you know. I've read all the information, up and down that line, multiple times, on the event. Just looking back over the course of my years, that one probably—the time spent on the South Canyon fire—was probably the most disturbing to me based on the investigation reports and what happened. I put myself in that situation, if I was the foreman, the supt., what would I have done? What tactics, strategies would I have done? I wasn't there during the event but looking back, every year, as we move into the 2014 fire season, I pass on the information that I know from that fire because it's important that the young firefighters know what happened, what

went wrong, what could've been done different. A lot of different things happened but I think—every fire season—I think of that fire. This year is the 20th anniversary of the South Canyon Fire and I remember cutting a lot of line on that fire and being there. That's probably a fire that I'll never forget, just based on what we did there.

Hannah <00:18:03> How was the fire behavior when you were actually fighting the fire there?

Garcia South Canyon? During the South Canyon Fire, I was on Horseshoe Meadow Hotshots and we were on a fire down on the, I think by Lake Arrowhead—the San Bernardino National Forest, the Devil Fire is what it was called—and that thing was ripping. Good fire; it was up in—by Arrowhead, Lake Arrowhead—and that fire was going. And we get—our supt. gets a call on the radio, "Hey, at the end of shift you need to report to Demob." And we're all thinking, "The fire is not all out. What's going on?" But we weren't the only crew that were told to report to Demob. So all the supts.—I was a foreman—so I was in privilege to all the information, but none of the supts knew what was going on. So end of shift, came into camp, and they said, "You guys are all going to the South Canyon Fire." Horseshoe, Fulton, LP, Stanislaus. But we all loaded up on the Boise jet and they briefed us. "You guys are going into South Canyon Fire, they need—."

It was the day after the event. So then, when we got to the fire, we were briefed and they needed, they wanted some crews to go in there and assist with the recovery, so which we did. But at that point in time—and there was still a lot of work to be done on the fire. The event happened, there was a lot of line—we cut a hell of a lot of line for the next four to five days. It was interesting to see the local wind conditions, you could see what happened, from where we were at, up and down, helispot one and two, and such. See—you could really see what happened, the winds were doing about the same thing, thunder cells were still in the air, so that was continuous. But all I remember was cutting a lot of line through gamble oak and looking at this is gamble oak, it's everything that the report said: it's green, it's a very—. You don't think it would burn, as were cutting through it—and it's tall

gamble, thick oak—but really rocky, I had the pig tool that day, so just working all day with the pig tool. Came out of there—my hands were vibrating, at the end of the shift, you know? So be it, though.

Hannah <00:20:33>[Technical issues and side conversation]

Hannah <00:21:27> How do you see the role of fire in the environment?

Garcia How do I see the role of fire in the environment? From my perspective, fire has a huge role in the environment. I think that by our effective suppression tactics, we did impact the way it—fires are burning hotter and faster and more aggressive. I think that we could do a lot more burning, prescribed fire. I'm an advocate of prescribed fire and I'd like to see more fires in the wilderness. I'm very in supportive of fire burning across the landscape to meet multiple objectives. I understand ecological restoration; I think it's important and I think were missing an opportunity. When the conditions allow, we need to be allowing fire to burn naturally in the wilderness (when it's safe to do). When it's the right time, the right place, the right location, the right time of year, there is a place to allow fire to burn naturally. I'd like to see it done more, not just in the wilderness, but outside the wilderness. We have several, just here locally, we have several areas that we could allow fires to burn naturally. They're not in a classified wilderness, but there's room for it.

We do a lot of prescribed burning. Over my course of the years on hotshots, we've done a lot of prescribed burning—from implementation to the execution, even the administrative side as far as facilitating, assisting with writing burn plans, and such (and I'm very pro-doing that). You know, I know hotshot crews, a lot of people, we just want to go on fires. But no, I think hotshot crews, with the skill said they have—which a lot of people don't have—I think it's important that we use those experts out on prescribed fire and for fires to meet ecological restoration, to meet land resource management objectives.

I think fire is a valuable tool and I would like to see it done more across the region and the nation. I think—we had a fire locally here, on our Forest last year, the biggest one in the Sierra

National Forest history, the Aspen fire, which burned from the San Joaquin River up to the Kaiser Wilderness. Huge fire, I mean, not that devastating as far as to the environment, you know—we burned up a few trees but no homes were lost, nobody got seriously hurt. Most of it was brush. A few plantations got burned up but not too destructive. And what's nice now, is now we have a nice fuel break from the river to the wilderness—and that's huge. Especially down in a steep river canyon. Now we have something to grab onto for the next fire that we get. I feel better now—we get lightning up in the upper stretches of the San Joaquin Canyon that "Okay, tie it into the black." Now we can walk down to it. Before we couldn't get down there to it because you can't walk down on a fire, downhill towards a fire. So now we could skirt our way through the black. We have other opportunities that previously before, thought we didn't have. To me, that's a huge success. I think by allowing fire to burn naturally through the landscape it gives us the opportunity to prevent large devastating fires.

Hannah <00:25:00> I think it's good training to.

Garcia Yeah, good training—everything, everything about it is great. You know, we're going to put smoke and air but yeah—now or later.

Hannah <00:25:13> What would you like people to know and understand about wildland fire? If there was one thing you could tell the public, what would it be?

Garcia I think if there is one thing I could share with the public, is that we're professionals. Wildland fire is—you hear about it, you see it on the news, it seems like the media is all over it now—but keep in mind that we're professionals. We're not going to be rich being a wildland firefighters. We're not going to make a lot of money, but that's not what brought us all here. I think the take-home message is, to the public, we're professionals. We're serving the public, we're working for the US Forest Service, and that's our objective; during fire season, our role is to suppress wildland fires. And sometimes homes get in the way. And sometimes people get in the way. And politics get in the way. But

I think the general public needs to be aware of what a wildland fireman/person does.

You see them on the news, but you don't see them on the news a lot because they're usually way off the road, hiking into a fire or flown into a fire. But probably the key message is, we're all professionals, we do a lot of off-season training. We all try to be students of fire, understanding topography, whether, fuels, fuel moisture's. To me, it's a science and not everybody has that skill set to be able to provide. We're leaders; I like to build future leaders for the agency. I think it's important that the agency has a strong leaders to carry on the legacy of the Forest Service and the legacy of wildland fire and the traditions of the US Forest Service and how we got here today.

Hannah <00:27:15> That actually brings up another question I've been asking a lot of supts. and former supts. If you could describe your ideal hotshot, what would it be?

Garcia You mean like, person, or a hotshot crew, or just a hotshot person?

Hannah Characteristics of a person.

Garcia I think that the biggest characteristic of a person that meets the—if I was to mold a hotshot—would be somebody that has a lot of core values and commitment. You know, I've said over the years you just don't put the same color shirt on one person or on 20 people in column a hotshot crew. That's not what a hotshot crew/person is.

I think somebody that wants to challenge themselves is important. Somebody that is physically fit is huge. I think that the more physically fit you are, the better—to me that's your safety, that's your escape route. You can always count on, "Yeah, if I need to get from point A to point B, I have the physical endurance to do that," it's huge. Somebody that wants to develop themselves into a leader. You know, a lot of people say, are leaders born? Are they made? I think it's a combination of both. I've seen young GS 3's firefighters, hotshot crewmen that come up that start as a GS-3 and I go, "Man this guy or this girl, I don't

know." But then you put the effort into them and it shows. Their learning, their understanding—I like to see people that ask questions, people that not just sit in the back of the buggy and fall asleep every time we go from one fire to the next.

I've always encouraged people, "Hey, be asking questions, be looking out the window, put yourself as the incident commander. You know, if there was a fire there what would I do?" I mean, that's the way I was taught, that's the way I've always done it—just don't sit the back of the buggy, plug in your headphones, and go to sleep. No, you need to be learning, asking, listen to the radio. And some people do that and those are the people we seek out.

I think people that like working on teams, people that like to see a team succeed, is important. Hotshot crews are a team and it's not just during a fire season. You know, over my course of the years—of or over my 15 years of working on hotshot crews—I stay in contact with them year-round, you know. Even as I moved into the leadership roles, I stay in contact with our seasonal workers over the year. Just seeing how they're doing, if they're coming back next year, just reminding them of, "Hey, you know, how things going> We've got fire season starting here in two months, hopefully you're out PT-ing, getting ready for the summer to start, and such like that." You can tell the ones that want to be there, it's pretty clear.

Hannah <00:30:29> That's great, any other good fun stories or fire stories?

Garcia You know, fun stories—all fires are fun, you know? So, some aren't quite as fun as others but—. I would have to say that, I used to love hiking in or spiking out, coyoteing, you know. We're camping in the wilderness on a lot of fires. Who gets the opportunity to do that? You know, I've been on a lot of wilderness throughout the nation and it's God's country. They're paying me to come up there, work 16 hours a day, just pull up my sleeping bag and just crash out. Those are my fun fires. Yet, you got your big fires, the big, large, major campaign fires: the Cedar Fire, the McNally Fire, the Station Fire, those are all fun. But give me a fire out in the wilderness, where you've got my crew, too, a couple crews, maybe two or three hundred acres and

we're anchoring into a pond or a lake and, "Hey, will see you in a week," as we flank the fire. Those of the fun fires, you know? MRE's, every four or five days you may be get a hot can or something—and if not, just an MRE. Those are the fun fires that I enjoy. You get to sleep in a little bit more, you don't have to stand in line to go to fire camp, you don't have people telling you, "You can't park here. You can't do this. You can't do that." They're good, but if you can find a fire for me out and the wilderness, I'll take it any day in the week. To me, those of the fun ones.

Hannah <00:32:09> Any other thoughts?

Garcia No

Hannah This is good material, thank you.

Garcia I hope you got what you needed. It's simple, and that's the message I try to get out to people, you know? Come on guys, wildland fire—it's hard, it's a dangerous job, plain and simple—and it seems like it's getting more dangerous as time goes on. Because of politics, because of the way we've managed the forest. It's not as easy as it used to be, it seems like, you know, you just go fire, you go fire, there's a lot going on. I think it's a generational thing too. Look at—for an example, we were talking about it, I was at the team meetings—you go on a fire now and it seems like every shift, you get three or four guys off a crew going down for heat injuries. When I started, that never happened, I mean it happened, but not as frequent as it does now. It's not hotter really. We're giving you all the water you asked for, but still people are dropping. Maybe it's me. I don't know. But it seems like that happens more frequently, and that's just one example. I'm not sure what that is—if it, you know—I tell people, don't be drinking all those power drinks, those aren't good. We tell people, but people are still dropping. I don't know. I don't know.

Hannah I agree.

Garcia I don't know what's going on. I can't figure it out. Maybe, I don't know what it is? May be, I don't think—. People are strong still, but I think it's, we're just so used to sitting in an air conditioned

room anymore. Every time you go out into, "arrgh." You know, we never had air conditioning. I don't know what it is.

Hannah I think that's a big part of it, people don't, kind of grow up—.

Garcia I think so. I mean, we'd go on fires and very seldom people would go down. Yeah, you'd hear about it, and yeah okay, sit them under the shade, drink water, and he's up working the next day. I don't know, maybe it's a generational thing, I don't know. I don't know. Well, hopefully that was good. hopefully you got what you needed.

Hannah Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## Nick Glatt

### Lead Firefighter, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah We'll just start off with your name, how many years you've been in fire and how many you've been a hotshot?
- Glatt Okay, my name is Nick Glatt, I've been in fire for five seasons. I started my career on the Klamath National Forest and went through the apprenticeship program and I've been a hotshot for three seasons now.
- Hannah What role do you fill on a crew?
- Glatt I'm a lead on Wolf Creek Hotshots.
- Hannah What's your favorite part about hotshotting?
- Glatt You know, I think it's the physical aspect, along with the friendly competition and camaraderie that you find on these crews. And just experiencing these experiences together and being able to reflect and looked back at these experiences.
- Hannah <00:06:44> Do you have any stories you want to share?
- Glatt I was thinking of one—just a fire that stood out. I think that was for me—that was the Wallow Fire of 2011, which was and is Arizona's largest fire. I think that was over 500,000 acres. So, fairly large complex, kind of got to see a lot. That was a back-to-back, 14 day assignments with R&R in place in Flagstaff. We got to see a lot; there was about, almost 2 weeks of burning. Doing burnouts and holding and the fire activity was pretty intense. The second two weeks was a completely different location on the fire and was pretty much, instead of high elevation and ponderosa pine, it was all desert in extremely hot conditions, as far as temperature goes (and humidity being very low). Usually 6 to 7 quarts of water will supply you throughout the day but I think we were drinking at 12 or 13 quarts and having to make sure that we had those cubees available and water available.

We were spiked out for four nights on that second 14-er and two nights out of the four, people were getting stung by scorpions. One guy, I believe, got stung on the neck. It's rough, you're not sleeping to well anyways and then you have to worry about the scorpions coming into your sleeping bag at night — so that was kind of a tough one. But you know, that was kind of a fire that stood out for me because it was still early in my career and we got to see a lot and it was definitely intense to do those back-to-back fourteens and being in place. That's kind of what you're going to see, being on a hotshot crew.

Hannah <00:08:57> Tell me what the fires were doing in each fuel type?

Glatt Correct, in the first two weeks it was around, I believe it, 6000 to 8000 feet and, you know, in Arizona you're going to be seeing a lot more timber, mostly ponderosa pine. There was a lot of fire activity, a lot of fallout and multiple spot fires when we were holding. Obviously our burnout operations were happening in the evening, but it was a lot of fire whirls, a lot of tall flames and, like I said, several spot fires behind us that we had to deal with. It seemed, like at that point time, things were still under control but it definitely kind of brought the energy up a little bit.

Hannah <00:10:02> You mentioned before wanting to talk about what it takes?

Glatt Yeah, I kind of was thinking about the crew — the hotshot crew — that I started on and the one that I always reflect back on because those are my first couple years in fire. Getting into it, you're kind of bright eyed and bushy tailed ready to do whatever it takes — I still am — but very nervous and wanted to make sure that I was in shape for the position. It was kind of tough at first, I kind of came from a running background, and it was nice to get into a crew that was, kind of, really big into running. The overhead were really big runners and that was kind of their foundation for their PT's. I think that was a strong characteristic of the crew.

It's kind of tough, I grew up in Chicago and got the apprenticeship on the Klamath National Forest, a very rural area. To move up there and start fresh and get on a hotshot crew,

there's a lot of emotional and mental strain on your personal life—and life in general—when you're first starting out. That's one of the huge challenges, I think, of being on a crew. And then when that is taking its toll, having a positive attitude and being helpful and trying to persevere through that in a long fire season. That crew, which was Salmon River Hotshots, really gave me a strong foundation to keep a career going hotshotting. It's not for everybody, but I think if you can get past the first couple of years you kind of get used to it.

Hannah <00:12:38> If you were to describe the characteristics of an ideal hotshot what would it be?

Glatt The characteristics of an ideal hotshot would probably be much different now, than what I thought they would be when I first started out. It's not the person that's the fittest, it's not the individual that can get up the hill fastest, or put in the most line. I think it's the person that has the best attitude and keeps that attitude going throughout the season, or throughout those 14 days or throughout that 16 hour shift. That attitude spreads and it kind of keeps the crew going and staying in a positive mindset. I think, you know, you do as far as the physical aspect and having strong characteristics, I think, you need to well-rounded in kind of every aspect in the job. I've seen really strong runners and then I've seen them be really weak hikers—or vice a versa—and it's just, really I think the key is to just be well-rounded; it's going to get you far.

Hannah <00:14:02> How do you view the role of fire in the environment?

Glatt Can you elaborate on that question it really quick?

Hannah Just as a hotshot you see fire everywhere, everywhere as far as you get to go all over the country and see fire in different fuel types and wildland interface settings. Generally speaking firefighters view the role of fire as a tool and the public views the role of fire as something more damaging. So I'm just curious, you as a person, where do you stand?

Glatt I think it's based on, you know, the town itself and the demographic. You could go down south, to Southern California,

and definitely be in that urban setting and your treated like a hero or you can go up north into the more rural areas and you can be looked at and glared at in a negative way, and not be treated like a hero at all. Not that I feel like I should be, but there are people that—I think—that don't understand even if you're doing work around their community and creating a buffer from a possible wildfire that would take over that community, they still don't understand. I think it's because we're attached to the government and a lot of people are against certain things that the government does, so if we're attached to the government then obviously it we're not doing the right thing. They're just not educated on what's going on. If you go out East, it's interesting. Where I grew up in Chicago, a lot of people don't really know much about wildfire at all. I think their opinions are kind of just, I think they're more open about it, they just don't know anything about it, opposed to people out West who either have a jaded view or a positive view.

Hannah <00:16:33> Do you have any other memorable fires that stand out in your mind?

Glatt So fire that stood out for me was the Pagami Fire in 2011 and that was in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. With that, it was a 21-day spike out and the crew actually had to really kind of take care of themselves—from morning to night. Cooking breakfast, getting our lunches going, and also cooking dinner. So, we didn't have our MRE's, there was actually food that was being sent out to us, we had to cook it. So we had to work a long shift but also take care of the crew and all of its needs. The cool thing about that fire was—I should say the interesting aspect—was that there are these islands surrounded by water that were burning and we were using canoes to go and commute every day to get to these islands. We would also be on a bush plane that would take us to an island that was even further away. The fire activity was interesting and just the daily commute was interesting as well, so I thought that was a pretty unique fire.

Hannah <00:18:32> What was the fire doing? I'm assuming you are fighting fire in some of the blowdown?

Glatt

Yeah, it's interesting to me because in one day that fire ran, I think it was over six or seven mile push. From Ely, Minnesota, which was the town closest to the fire, there was a massive column that you could see just coming out of the lake. That's what it looks like when we got there. There was a large blowdown from a large wind event that occurred, I believe it six or seven years before. It made a massive push and RHs were high, and it kind of had that mossy, Alaska tundra stuff that doesn't look like it could burn but definitely did. After that it kind of turned more into a political kind of fire. Fire activity was low yet we had to really kind of work on that fire for 20 days.

Hannah

Great. Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## Steve Griffin

### R5 Northern California Fire Training Officer and Geographic Area Training Representative

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 4, 2014 in Redding, CA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah Let's start off with your name, how many years you've been in fire, your position now, and then your hotshot history?
- Griffin My name is Steve at Griffin. I'm 25 years in fire going on 26. I'm currently the Northern California Fire Training Officer and a Geographic Area Training Representative. Of my hotshot history, 10 years on hotshot crews, on three different crews, in two different agencies with hotshots. Back in 2002 I was able—. I was approached to apply to become a superintendent on one of the new MEL build-up crews. I applied and got the position and that was—. Can I backup?
- That opportunity it was, no regrets. It was a very good opportunity; I enjoyed it. It was extremely challenging. It was a lot of fun to start the crew up from inception all the way to its hotshot status.
- Hannah <00:05:14> How long to take for that crew. This is in Southern California?
- Griffin Correct; it was the Breckinridge Hotshot Crew on the Sequoia National Forest.
- Hannah And how long did it take you from inception to that status?
- Griffin It actually took us five years. We went through some hurdles. You had to bring the crew from scratch, so a lot of green people to be able to train into positions. A lot of people during that period of time, a lot of people were switching jobs frequently and so when you do get close to the qualifications you needed as a crew, you may lose some due to people transferring and taking other jobs. And so it took close to five years.
- Hannah <00:06:19> What was your favorite part about hotshotting?

Griffin You know, my favorite part about hotshotting actually is the camaraderie. The friends that you make. The places that you get to see, as far as—we get to go out into the woods in places where the common person never ever sees. It's kind of cool to be able to see those places. One of my other favorite things about hotshots is, it's one of the careers, I think, that you just remain with the fundamentals. There are technologies and stuff that we use in firefighting, even the hotshot crews use some today, but it's still the tool versus the ground, the weather, and the fire behavior and things like that, it has not changed since the beginning. It's just the simple things that I like.

Hannah <00:08:10> Do you have a favorite hotshot story?

Griffin You know, as far as hotshot story, a favorite story, there's lots of them really. I don't know if I can pin it down to anyone favorite as far as a story. I guess you'll have to clarify.

Hannah Anything from best shift ever, like a shift that really stands out as something—a hard one or just a really good shift, just a hard shift.

Griffin I think early on in my career, as a crew person on a hotshot crew, probably, my best shift that I really liked was an extended couple dayshift on the Steamboat Fire in Yosemite in 1991 or 1992—I can't remember the year. It was just a great hotshot shift; a lot of fire, very little resources. You're out there for several days unsupported, just moving along the fireline. We did everything from cutting line to firing out, to securing, mopping up, it was just a great all-around shift.

Hannah <00:09:32> what was the fire doing? What was the behavior and size and terrain?

Griffin You know, at that time the fire behavior was actually pretty—I don't want to say erratic—but it had pretty extreme fire behavior for those days at some times. It was one of the larger fires within that year and it really ranged from smoldering, creeping in the timber, to complete ground fire situation. I think you saw all versions of fire behavior there. It kept you on your toes.

Hannah When you were superintendent, tell me how you formed/shaped the dynamics of the crew? What was really important to you? What were the values that you looked for?

Griffin The values that I looked for to build the crew was not necessarily people's fire experience (or even skills) because you can teach fire skills, you gain the experience. I was looking for people that were willing to work together, in a sense. I didn't want a group of people that were all the same, because those are hard to manage as well. But looking for people with different experiences—different walks of life—to kind of bring them together to form the crew, is what we looked for. It worked pretty well, I think. We had a lot of new green people, so we were able to do that. The skills and experiences is necessary, as well, but since we were just building, it was more critical, I thought, to get people that were—people from different backgrounds to come together for one purpose.

Hannah <00:11:38> Is there a favorite kind of operational component that you really enjoy hotshotting? Whether it was burnouts, or managing resources and people, or cutting line?

Griffin I really think it's probably just the same as everybody, everyone likes to do the burnouts—it's gotta be the most favorite. The line construction also, as well. They have their different challenges. The firing operations, the challenges with doing it at the right speed, the right time, the right intensity, to accomplish what you need. But the line construction can be a whole set of challenges, as you know. Piecing pieces together to make sure they come together correctly. I would say, like most folks, those two are probably my favorite.

Hannah <00:12:41> Is there a burnout operation that stands out in your mind? Can you describe one for me?

Griffin You know, I do. There is one—and I'll be honest, I can't remember what fire it was exactly on—I was a squad leader on the Horseshoe Meadow Hotshots at the time and we were firing out a piece of line that went from ridgetop through brush field down to a river bottom. And it's probably the first time I got to

see real good fire techniques work real well. Where it was a firing situation at night, we would use the firing devices to get heat built up inside and then fire from the line. We did get that heat pulled in, but just to watch it—it would literally look like a firestorm, interior, and would just pull everything nicely from the line inside. And you know, I was still fairly green, I thought, it's probably about seven or eight years in, And to be able to watch fire whirls behave themselves and pull everything the way they needed it to pull in was pretty impressive to me. To actually watch that occur.

Hannah <00:14:06> What about the classic crew antics? Playing baseball in spike camp with fiber tape balls. Is there any of that camaraderie component that you want to share? Any good stories?

Griffin Yeah we have those. As far as good stories to share, they existed. To me it's an important part of being on a hotshot crew. You are away from home for long periods of time. You're with the same 20 people all the time and you need things to break up things, to basically spice things up while you're gone. You are in a lot of remote areas a lot of times. They do look for things, something different to keep themselves occupied. Off the top of my head, I can't think of any really just, cool stories, besides what Dan and those guys talked about.

Hannah <00:15:29> From everyone I've interviewed, Alaska scenes to be a common thread. Everybody has an Alaska story. Do you have any particular area or region that you enjoy or that stands out in your mind as really cool?

Griffin You know, I wish I could have an Alaskan story. I've not yet been there. I have been to Hawaii on fires but it was on a type II crew, pre-season to the hotshots coming on. That was a pretty neat spot because they do get—they said they were in a drought that year, they only received like 90 inches of rain. It was interesting because, same with a lot of areas, you'll receive a couple of inches of rain that morning and then it's off to the races by the afternoon. It was interesting to see that. I think one of my more favorite areas to fight fire in is actually the southeast, within the hardwood litters and things like that because you have a lot of the same thing there. You have a lot of moisture in the morning,

potentially rainstorms in the morning even, but then by the afternoon it's dried up and you're running air tankers on the fires. I don't know, I'd say that's probably one of the better places, but they're all fun areas to fight fires: the timber, the brush, and everything—well, not always the brush, but the timber and stuff, I would say.

Hannah <00:16:48> Describe for me a fire in the southeast that stands out. Everything from how the crew was arranged, to how the fire behaved?

Griffin Well, probably the one that probably stands out the most was, I was a crewperson on a hotshot crew, we went back to West Virginia on a fire; it's the first time back there. As far as the fire behavior went, it was just basically creeping through the leaves, it wasn't anything real big. But what was interesting about that fire, outside of being the first time there, was the tactics and stuff they used. They didn't fight fire at night, so you'd be pulled off the line at night, come back and have to redo lines and stuff all again. It was a 2000 acre fire with one type I crew—one hotshot crew and one type II crew, and that was about it. That was the other thing that made it kind of interesting. So we just leapfrogged through a lot of things and would take care of what we needed. But there was also—around a lot of different communities—so the different communities would take care of pieces that went by their community and then go back inside after it left—so we would just continue chasing it around the different communities, where we could. That would probably be the one that stands out the most, you know, because it was the first one. Just learning the different things about that area was interesting.

Hannah <00:18:42> That was the Sequoia? So there are other crews down on the Sequoia. Was there that sort of on Forest rivalry down there?

Griffin Yeah, just like anything else. At the time I had the crew on the Sequoia, there were actually five crews—not all of them were hotshot crews, including ourselves at one time, building our way to becoming a hotshot crew. But there were five at the time and there was rivalry. However it wasn't necessarily rivalry against

all five of them. There were crews that got along well together and there were other crews that had a little bit more competition amongst each other.

Hannah And clarify the competition.

Griffin It was just friendly competition. It is mainly, who can get the most fires, who can get the most overtime, the better assignments on Forest, who got the most initial attacks, and things like that. Who went off Forest the most.

Hannah Was any of it on the fire, you know, going head-to-head, digging line, out hiking each other?

Griffin You know, I think there was a little bit there but I wouldn't say it was extremely evident as being competitive. But it was there, it's always a little bit there.

Hannah As far as how you view fire in the environment, what do you view the role of fire?

Griffin Well, I always thought fire in the environment was just Mother Nature's way of cleaning house. That's the best way I put it to myself, because fire has an important role in the environment. It's been used since the early days of the Indians; they used fire to clean off grazing lands and stuff. And then we started suppressing fires. Which we did a good job at, and still do, but it's then created a fuel load that's changed the ecosystem, basically. With additional fuel load in there, and the cycles of weather that we get, it can change the ecosystem when fire goes into it. I think it's an important role. I think today we are starting to do a better job, even on larger fires, to look at opportunities to suppress but yet, suppress in a way that we're still getting good benefit for the land at the same time. You know, if we have to do a firing operation to close a piece off, maybe do it in such a way where it doesn't impact the land as much as it used to. You still have your objectives, where you have to make that line in good and secure, but there are opportunities to do some of that.

Hannah <23:24> Is there any particular fire that stands out in your mind where you saw a fire doing something for the good? Or the opposite?

Griffin You know, I can't say there's a particular fire by name. I think, a lot of fires have good pieces and bad pieces to them. I've seen some high elevation fires that just do really well. They just clean up the underbrush and the heavy logs and fuel loading that needs to do. But, you know, some of the devastating fires that are considered devastating fires, have a lot of pockets to them that have done a lot of good as well. Even some of the nuked off, slicked off areas that people look at—that are devastating, sterilizing the soil and causing problems potentially in the winter—some of the species out there need stand replacement. So even that can be considered good. We won't see the good results in our lifetime but, I think, even that can be considered good sometimes. Bits and pieces of.

Hannah <00:24:48> Can you describe a nuked out or slicked off zone?

Griffin Everything gone but black sticks.

Hannah There's been a number of people that have used that term but I haven't had anyone describe it yet; thank you. So, you mentioned that even when things are considered devastating there's pockets that have done good for the forest. As far as the public perception of fire, you hear the media saying, "50,000 acres were destroyed" or "it's catastrophic," whatever. What would be your message to people, as far as how to view fire—how they should view fire?

Griffin I would say my message would be: even though a fire can be large, it has its good and bad points. Not all fire is bad and not all of the same fire is bad. Fire burns in a real erratic, mosaic way. I don't think we even totally understand why it burns and leaves things that it should have taken out. I guess the message would be to look at fire with an open mind, yes it can change the aesthetics of the area, especially around recreation areas and homes and even—I even, don't like that myself either, but it is doing good in other parts. Does that make sense?

Hannah Yes, that's perfect. I know you're kind of outside of the hotshot world right now but how did you, or how do you place value on the work? Do you go out? Are you part of the team? What role do you typically go out in?

Griffin Yes, I'm on a team, I've gone out as different roles, as division and things like that. Currently, I'm an operations section chief trainee on a team. But as far as the value of the work, like with hotshots, I think anybody who is in this job values preserving land and doing what they can to manage it correctly. As far as a hotshot community, I always valued the friends I got out of it. I always valued taking someone 18-years-old, right out of high school, and watch them grow over a six-month period. From a just coming out of their parents' house to what they ended up in the fall, you know, watching them grow up tremendously in that six-month period. So those of were the things that I value—the crew cohesion, if the guys were happy at the end of the year—even though they were ready to leave—they were still happy. That to me was a successful year. So I guess I value things a little bit differently.

Hannah <00:28:01> Can you describe your ideal hotshot.

Griffin Ideal hotshot? Let's see: 6 foot tall, 185 pounds, bench about 500 pounds, can run two chainsaws—good thing you can edit that. Boy, I've never been asked that question. I would say the ideal hotshot would be somebody that is in good physical fitness, somebody that has the willingness to work hard, has some adventure to 'em (to be able to travel and see and do things). Somebody that can live together, work together in a tightknit community closely for six to eight, nine months out of the year. That's how I would describe them I guess. They don't have to be big and strong—some of the better hotshots I've seen were smaller people. Their pack weighed a third of what they weighed, so I wouldn't say size and strength is totally critical. It's endurance and willingness and things like that.

Hannah <00:29:57> What is your—especially as a training officer, I'm tailoring this to your position a little—what is your hope for the future of hotshotting? And I kind of say that because the

hotshotting world is at this point—because of last summer—that there really taking a critical look at themselves as a community, as leaders within that community. What's your vision or hope for the hotshots?

Griffin I'll pass on that for right now, I've got a think about that.

Hannah That was a really tough question.

Griffin Well, it was. It just depends because my vision and hope may be something in different that others want to see.

Hannah <00:31:04> Any stories pop out?

Griffin As far as fire stories, I looked at your sheet and when you talk about close calls. I think close calls—people kind of get a misconception on that sometimes—when they hear a close call, [they think] that the fire almost got you. That may be true with a lot of instances, but there are a lot of close calls that we have out there that people don't think about—after the fire has gone through.

You know, I had one close call on the Marre Fire in '93 where, you know, hoofing it up the slope in the grass to get to the safety area with the fire not far behind you. But I think my scariest close call was a tree event. It was after fire had gone through; we were in Yosemite, it was on a night shift, we were on a slope around a lot of big trees, mopping up. And my saw partner and I were mopping up a spot together. There was a tree up above us—several hundred yards—it was probably closer than that, burning at the base. The squad leader had actually gone over there prior to it falling, kind of looked at it; thought it was okay. Then we start hearing this crashing. It's dark and it sounded like just a big rock rolling down the hill. And so you're like, "Okay, which way do I go?" Because it's above you and your like, "It's up there." So you just resort back to your training—our escape route is back the way we came into the line and, even though trees can fall on the line and things like that, that's where you feel safe, at least in those days. So anyways, so we, I don't know, something told us to move it; we moved and just as we were approaching the line I felt something brush up against my shoulder and it was just the

tip of the tree, actually, that had fallen. So they pulled everybody off the line for that night and you could hear snags and trees falling all night long. Even though the line isn't something that keeps you safe, you still feel secure there.

It had gotten daylight—we went in there the next morning—the exact spot that we were mopping up was a 4 foot DBH sugar pine that had fallen. And it was a green tree that it had fallen too. So—. . . Actually I have pictures of it, too. That was a close call that, probably to this day still—doesn't bother me, but it's embedded in my brain, in my memory—on that close call. It wasn't a fire/flame situation, but it was still a fire situation.

In today's world I think we see that more and more often with trees and snags, especially with a lot more green trees that are stressed. A lot more snags out there. Especially when you're get a fire in an area that was a big burn 20 years ago and then you had another fire in there, you've got a lot of underbrush with snags—and now you have a huge hazard in there. Those are the close calls that I look at more so than—fire you can hopefully get out of the way, trees don't give you a warning.

Hannah <35:00>[Side conversation about Bethany's close calls]

Griffin It's funny that you mention of lightning because we had a close call with lightning, as well. It wasn't on the hotshots, but it struck right where the crews it were working. That time, maybe a 30 acre grass fire was started by lightning and struck again. It was pretty scary, when you see light and flash at the same time.

Hannah <00:35:51> Anything else, anything else that comes to mind?

Griffin I know you're focusing on fire stuff but, especially today—the last 5 to 10 years of the hotshot crews being utilized in other situations and all risk situations, you know. Fires come and go, they start blending together unless there's something specific that happens.

One of the most memorable things that I have it with the crews is, we were ordered up to go to Hurricane Katrina. And we did not go into the—a lot of crews were ordered up at the time, a lot went

into some of the affected areas to remove trees and hand out water and things like that. We actually ended up in San Antonio, Texas to work a shelter. And so, even though we were not in the affected area, we were seeing people coming off of buses that were just coming out of the Superdome, is it? That just spent hours and days in that and were coming off the buses into the shelter. So as a hotshot crew, a crew to go in there and do something like that, was the first time that we've ever done something like that. It was pretty incredible to have that experience, to see the impact you have on the folks and just see how the guys are going to react to doing something like that. They just want to go fight fire, now they end up in downtown San Antonio, Texas running a shelter.

It was at an old abandoned mall that they had set up the shelter in. And we actually had night shift, they ran stuff 24 hours around the clock. We did everything from building things around there, to responding to minor medicals with the EMTs, to handing out food. They had a warehouse of supplies and everything—supplies, even clothes; we assisted the Red Cross in different things there. We built some makeshift showers for 'em. We built a laundry unit for them and then we started doing the laundry unit for them. And this is kind of a funny story because—. We started noticing that a lot of laundry was starting to come in at night and we couldn't figure out why. And then we heard some of the older ladies around there talking and the people that did laundry for them during the day would wash the clothes, dry it, shove it back into the bag and hand it back to them. Our guys, believe it or not, were actually folding the clothes, putting in neatly in the bag and giving it back to them. And so the ladies started telling each other, "If you want your laundry done right, take it at night." So we ended up with a lot of laundry. But the guys had fun doing it, you know, they were actually kind of proud that they were wanting to bring it at night because of the way that they folded it and gave it back to them.

So running that shelter was a pretty good experience, as far as it opened up—I think it helped the guys grow a lot in their own lives too, because they saw a lot of—a lot of tragedies and things coming in there. A lot of people that went through a lot of things

and then a lot of things the shelter attracted from the local area, too. It was pretty interesting.

Hannah <00:39:32> Any other stories? One of my favorite times on the fire line with the crews would be at night spiking or coyoteing—when the pace was slow and people are kind of settling into whatever area they're in; when we start BS-ing about the day. You know? It kind of calms down and everyone can kind of—gets into—their personalities show through and that sort of thing. Do you have any good stories or good memories about those types of things?

Griffin Those are always the best times, I think. Urban interface is fun to go fight fire in, but to actually go out and spend a lot of time in it, out there away from everything where you're spiked out, you makeshift camps. The forest I worked on before I came here did a lot of resource benefit fires and so a lot of that was spiked out on ridges and supported with hot cans. Or actually just supported with food and you'd cook it yourself.

So there's always stuff, you know, when people talk about eating and drinking things. Probably the worst thing I've seen is it one of the guys decided to—for money—decided to, and we ground hamburger up, and he decided to drink the whole jar of hamburger grease. So that's kind of—I can watch people eat bugs. I can watch people do a lot of things, but I don't know, drinking the hamburger grease just wasn't very pleasant for me. You always get antics out there, at the time, sometimes, they think harmless—they generally do turn out harmless, you know. But when you're around a large group of folks, generally stuff like that doesn't get out of control. How is that? I'm trying to think of a good story because we have a lot of good stories, but some of them really, probably—.

Hannah <00:42:10> I know there's a lot of stories like that that are harmless but—I want to make sure we're not harming anyone.

Griffin I guess stories, as far as—nothing that really we created necessarily on purpose—but stories like—and does deal with animals and bears, those are always the most interesting ones. And they just come in to camp and grab people's packs while

they're sleeping at night and walk away with them. I remember we were actually out with some type two crews. We were sleeping in the back of the truck, the crew boss trainee I had at the time, he had his pack out there on the ground. I heard a noise come up and look, his pack was gone and we heard some commotion out in the woods and the bear had drug the pack away and then he was probably 100 feet away or so and helping himself to whatever. and all you can hear is (sound), ripping and shredding of the pack and poor guy can just stand there and watch his pack get ripped in shreds, to pieces. Stuff like that.

Hannah

Being out the woods.

Griffin

It's just being out the woods. I'm trying to think of some more, there's always good stories.

Hannah

Let me know when you're tired of this.

Griffin

It's all right.

Hannah

<00:43:50> When we talk about different management strategies or techniques, things like MIST or making decisions—especially as an ops section chief, you're making critical decisions on a daily basis about what you are going to allow a fire to do or how you're going to stop the fire from doing its worst—do you have any examples of a time when you made a decision about using a certain strategy or tactic in order to benefit the land?

Griffin

Actually, today we always take that consideration, it doesn't matter. They used to be, in the days where if you are in the National Park, or something, that was a big consideration—and it still is today. Today I even keep that consideration on National Forest lands and other lands because, you should always do the least impact that you can but never compromise safety. And that should be anywhere, whether it's in a National Park, or Forest Service, or BLM, or whatever. Because land is land, no matter whose jurisdiction it is. So I really just think that you should do your best; but safety does, obviously, come first. And so, if you can put a two-foot scratch in and it holds the fire just fine, then that's what you should do. If you need to put in four dozer blades to keep the fire from doing more damage, then that's what you

need to do. Well I was in Florida, at one time, and saw some tactics—it was in '98. It was probably one of their first big fires that they've had that had a lot of resources down there and the fire had already burned through and gone around the community and stuff, and they came in after the fact with tractor plows and lined it in people's yards and things like that. That's the kind of stuff that you consider, you know, the fires already gone through, do you need to have a heavy impact on the land to keep it there. Does that make sense?

Hannah <00:47:07>[Talking about story from previous day]

Griffin I've seen that too, where we've done a lot of work to do low impact, limit trees, prep ahead of a fire, fire out the piece, and it cleans it up nicely and it looks good, and then equipment comes through and widens after it's already burned in a big area to meet standards. I don't know if you want to put that out there. But it happens.

Hannah Probably not, it happens, what do you think drives that?

Griffin I think what drives that is public perception and policy with some agencies. And policy with some agencies doesn't stop at jurisdictional lines sometimes. They get a mindset that their policy is to do this where they work; they take it to everywhere they go, sometimes. I just think it's public perception, too: it needs to have something, a solid line in there. I think it's getting better, even the public perception is getting better, as far as what's required to keep a fire at bay. It's just a matter of more education, I think communities that are in fire environments that see fire frequently, have definitely a better understanding than a communities that don't see it very often.

[Technology break]

Hannah <00:52:15> When have you felt most proud of your actions on the fire line?

Griffin When I have I felt most proud of my actions on the fire line? I would say, well, when I brought everybody back safely, is what it comes down to. We've had a lot of successful operations. I can't

really say any particular one—and we've had some unsuccessful ones—but even during the unsuccessful ones, if everybody went back to the truck safely, is probably when you feel the most proud. You know, that you are able to bring people through something and you bring them back. The other times would be if you—there were times where we did a lot of hard work to protect the historical spots or even homes—pull off good operations that protect a community that wouldn't normally have been protected, that's about it.

Hannah <00:53:28> Any other thoughts, or any other stories?

Griffin No, but when you leave I would probably think of a bunch of them. I think that's all really, unless you have more.

Hannah There's so many different aspects of fire to cover.

Griffin You know, fire's—it's very dynamic, there's so many different components to fire—fire is ever-changing itself, but also the influences. Two years ago where it was just woods out there, there's houses out there. Even some of the climate change is affecting fires. I've only been doing it for 25 years, 1988, and I've seen a lot of changes, even in that 25 years. Anything, 30-, 40-, 90,000 acres was a large fire. They still had some fires that would hit 100,000 acres, but it was really rare. You know, a lot of the fires, especially in Southern California would be 1000 to 1500 acres at most. Now there that before you even get there.

So things are just ever-changing, so I guess the thing about fire itself is that you have to remember, you know, it's a dynamic atmosphere both within the ecosystem, both politically, both environmentally. And when you go back to hotshots, it's not part of that question, but when you go back to the hotshots, it's kind of interesting the statement Dan Mallia—you know, I started actually as a lookout and I was only a lookout for about a month and a half and I was hearing all these people going to all these fires with the engines, going, "I want to do that too." So I got on an engine and I spent about two years on an engine and I go to large fires with the engine and I'd see the hotshot crews. Even though there was one on the district, I still didn't know much about them. I see the hotshot crews kind of a load up with heavy

gear and chainsaws and bladder bags and tromp off to the woods, and I look at them and go, "Those guys are crazy. Why would they ever do that? You can work right from the truck instead of hauling all that heavy stuff around the steep slopes." So after my second year, my captain said, "If you're going to continue doing this, you're going to need to get on a hotshot crew." So I did and loved it, my hotshot time is probably still the best years of my whole career. It will always be, probably, the most memorable ones for sure. I couldn't leave it after that.

Hannah <00:56:36> It sounds like you were a sawyer at one point, did you work your way up through the ranks? Obviously you made it to superintendent, but how was your progression?

Griffin My progression? It was, you didn't really need to be a sawyer — you could do it at your first year. It just depended on your willingness to do it and the skills to do it and things like that. I did do some of the sawyer, you know, my first, second season. It wasn't the first saw or anything, but I was still able to do some of the stuff. As far as some of the ranking there, you know, it really depends on the crew. If you can do it your first or second season, you know. Once I spent about three years as a temporary on a hotshot crew, as a crew person, I became a squad leader as a permanent employee on another hotshot crew for a couple years. I didn't do the —. Then I left the crews and went to engines and kind of worked my way up from an FEO on up to in engine captain. And after about a year or so as engine captain, I was looking at getting back to a crew and I actually was applying for some captain's jobs on hotshot crews at that time. But then the opportunity came about to apply, to start the new crew up, and so I thought about it actually, long and hard. Applied for it and ended up getting it. So I didn't do the captain's position on a handcrew I went from squad leader, basically, did some engine time, and then did the superintendent role. So missed a step here and there but that's kind of how the progression went for me.

[Redacted per interviewee's request 00:59:06 to 1:02:57]

Griffin It was extremely rewarding. It was — it was extremely rewarding. I had a lot of returnees, which was nice. To me that meant we were doing our job. I left to the crew, went to an assistant fire

management officer position on the district. That was a big decision as well, I put a lot of thought into that. I wasn't quite ready to leave crews, however I did know that I wasn't going to be on a crew at age 57 either. That opportunity was the job I was looking for, for the future, but it came up when I wasn't quite ready to go. But I had to make the switch or the opportunity wouldn't be there. But it was a big decision to leave the crew. It was hard to get used to. It took a while.

Hannah <1:04:06> You've been at a crewmember level, switching to a different module type. When you leave the hotshot world, it's like a huge mentality shift and it doesn't matter which crew you're on or who you go to, it's—there's just a different way of seeing things and going about business in the hotshot world.

Griffin It is, and this is my personal opinion, but I think if you're going to spend any—if you're going to make it a career, you need to spend some time on hotshot crews, for sure. I will always, when I was a BC, I kind of wanted to see some of the good folks go and be on a hotshot crews to get the experience they needed. But I was really hesitant to because I wouldn't get them back. You wanted them to go there for a couple of years, get some experience and then come back and work on engines and stuff, but they would go to the crews and never come back. It's difficult.

Hannah Well, thank you for this!

*End of interview.*

## Adam Hernandez

### Hotshot Captain, Kings River Hotshots (Sierra National Forest, USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 1, 2014 in Prather, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:08:21> For the camera, if you could state your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot.

Hernandez Ok. My name is Adam Hernandez; I am with the Kings River Hotshots, and I have been in fire for going on fourteen years. I think about nine of those years I was with a 'Shot crew. Then, before that, I was intermixed in my career: I was a smokejumper in McCall, ID, and then Prevention and Fuels Management.

Hannah What role do you play on the hotshot crew?

Hernandez Currently, I am a captain on a Kings River Hotshot Crew.

Hannah What kind of roles have you played throughout your hotshot career?

Hernandez I started out like everybody else does, on a tool, a Pulaski, and then worked my way up and became a sawyer. I did that for a number of years, and then moved up to squad leader, then moved to my current position as a captain.

Hannah Tell me one of your favorite hotshot stories.

Hernandez Favorite hotshot story? Hmm, I think one that stands out was a burn operation that we had in Idaho. This is in 2007 and we got to the fire and, you know, conditions were really bad for going direct. The fire behavior was just something—you just couldn't get right close to it—so it was a lot of indirect stuff and lot of scratching heads, figuring out where we're going to go as far as burning goes, and stuff like that.

They had tried some burning a couple days before, but were unsuccessful due to spotting and, like I said, it was just way too much fire behavior in the daytime. We were out on a day shift

and we were trying to come up with a plan of attack for the day. We knew we were going to have to burn; so with some discussion with our superintendent and the division supervisor, we decided that it would probably be best to roll us over into night shift (since we had a good lay of the land from scouting it all day) – roll us over into night shift and then we would do the burn show at night, just burn all through the night.

Soon as we got the word—it was probably, I don't know, maybe three o'clock in the afternoon when we came up with the decision to do that—we decided to bed the crew down. Everybody was going to try to get some rest right there where we were, so there were guys just laying out on the road or whatever. You know, on the dirt road (there was no traffic going in and out so it was alright, we were in a safe spot). Everybody kind of just crashed out and tried to get some rest, which is hard to do at three o'clock in the afternoon when it's super hot.

So we did that, and then later on in the evening we started getting everything together, our equipment and stuff. It was probably about a two miles section, if I remember correctly, of road that we were going to burn off of. And so, soon as everything was right, we grabbed all our burn equipment and went out and started burning. We had folks just working our way across and it was going really good, everything was going really well.

This was kind of a pretty critical chunk of line that we were trying to get buttoned up and then it [would] set us a good anchor point to just keep moving for the rest of the fire. We started off and it was going really good; we're cruising along, going through a lot of fuel. We had guys taking jerry cans up the hill to top-off the burners. There was one guy in particular that I remember, that I saw him all night long just humping these jerry cans up and down the hill. And I remember towards the latter morning—probably around six o'clock when we were getting ready to finish up—we were looking for fuel and this guy was still carrying it, all the way from like, I don't know, from seven o'clock in the evening all the way, just back and forth. That was kind of, kind of crazy...you get guys like that on occasion.

We continued our burn, took it all the way around, and finally we ended our burn show probably around six o'clock [in the morning]. So, we started it maybe seven o'clock in the evening, maybe eight o'clock, and burned all the way until then. Everything went awesome; everybody was super stoked; didn't have any issues, you know, minimal spotting. And so we were pretty stoked.

Dead tired, you know, we get back in the buggy. They were kind of utilizing me as the firing boss, and I get back in the buggy and there are guys just laid out everywhere. Just exhausted; tired from the shift. When I opened the door to the buggy and looked in, they all kind of sat up and stirred, and looked at me. And I was like, "Alright were good, man. We're done. We're going to load up. Make sure we got everything, we're heading back to camp."

I remember as soon as I opened the door they all kind of snapped to attention. But later on, talking to the guys, one of the guys was like, "Hey man, I thought you're coming in asking for another burner, or something like that. I was praying that you weren't going to pick me." Because they, you know, they give all they've got and they'll keep doing it until you say, "we're done." We ended up loading everybody up and we're heading back and we're transitioning with the day shift.

And so, as soon as we get to camp we hear a call on the radio that they have a spot fire...and we lost the whole thing.

So, you know everything was going good, it was just that transition period when we were bringing in other folks and getting set up for the day shift. And, they got something that they couldn't handle with what they had and we lost it...had it go to square one again. So—Yep.

Hannah

You mentioned a couple of terms in there, or at least one: jerry cans. Could you tell us what jerry cans are and the significance of hauling jerry cans all night?

Hernandez Yes, I talked about jerry cans a little bit and what they are. They are rectangle cans and they hold five gallons worth of fuel. When you're burning, they have burn mix in it, which is three parts diesel, and one part gas. And that's just to help with the burning process, heat and all that stuff, out of the drip torches. So a jerry can is basically five gallons worth of fluid, which typically weights about forty pounds or so. The individual I was talking about was carrying two of them at a time, plus his line gear, up and down the hill. So that's the significant to holding two jerry cans and all night long, carrying them up the hill, so. Lot of weight. ot of stress.

Hannah Tell me tell me how you perceive the role of fire in the environment.

Hernandez <00:16:13> Well, I guess initially when I perceived the role of fire in the environment, it was a bad thing. When I first started my career, getting into it and hearing all the bad stuff that's associated with fires, you know, I thought it was a bad thing. Having a lot more experience in actually seeing a lot of the effects that occur from fire, and then additionally having some background in fuels and working in fuels management, I've learned quite a bit about fire in the ecosystem and what its role is.

The main thing that stands out to me when I am trying to communicate fire in the environment, is that it was here before we were. We work on the Sierra Nevada range here, and before we all settled in California, lightning would strike in the mountains just like it does now, but there was nobody here to put it out. And so, on a regular basis, at any given moment you'd have a lighting fire and it would burn. And at that time, before anybody put it out, it was just maintaining the landscapes. You didn't have these significant fires that you do now. Because of all these years that we've been suppressing it—and we've gotten really good at it, which is a good thing—but it's also been something that kind of hindered the environment from being able to use fire in its natural role and how the ecosystem's shaped from it.

There is certain things called fire return intervals where, in areas, they have figured out that before we were here, fire would pass through it every seven years (on average). It would keep those heavy fuel loadings down and would burn all those heavy logs out, so all you'd have is just the ground fuel; so if you do get a fire that goes through there, it's real low intensity. So my view has shifted quite a bit from fire is bad, to if there's opportunities to use it in certain areas, then it's really beneficial for the environment. Because, like I said, it was here before we were, before we were putting it out, and it was a lot more mellow, a lot more tame when it burned then it does now. So, I think some of our policies, and the way that we managed our land before we knew a lot about the ecosystems, are starting to change and we're starting to try to mimic some of the stuff that happened in the past, before we were here.

Hannah Great. Night shift in Yosemite? [Reading from a list Adam gave]

Hernandez Oh yeah. So when I was on, the hotshot crew that I started on, it was Groveland Hotshot crew off the Stanislaus National Forest, we were right outside the Yosemite border/boundary and we were just getting ready to end our shift for the day at the station. Did our typical station day and we got dispatched to a fire in El Portal in Yosemite (which is kind of on the front country of Yosemite, so there's a lot more brush component). It's just starting to get into some of the timber and that whole area is notorious for poison oak. And so, as a sawyer, you don't really have any choice sometimes with where the fireline is going to be. It'll burn in poison oak, it'll burn in trees, it'll burn in whatever it wants to burn in, and you don't have a choice if you're going direct: See that big patch of poison oak? That's where we're going to need the line.

So, on that particular fire we got there in the evening, probably about seven o'clock by the time we engaged and started cutting line up the hill. It started to get dark, everybody got their head lamps on and started working through. I was the lead saw at the time, so I was kind of out in front, kind of pioneering the line. And so, not really being able to see what you have and you're working with cause its dark, and just the, the—I wouldn't say

chaos, but the excitement that goes along with the initial attack—you just start working. And so we came up to this big wall of brush, or so I thought, but it turned out to be the biggest pile of poison oak that I've ever seen in my career. And it was just massive, and it was, but I didn't know it was poison oak at the time, I just thought it was a mixture of different brush or whatever. So, we actually get through that, it was probably a good hour or two hour cut just going through this big wall of poison oak. And towards the end of it, I remember my squad leader came down and said "hey, do you get poison oak," and I was like, "yeah." <00:20:52> He's like, "ok, just wanted to check. Because all this was poison oak." And I was like, "great."

I remember as I was cutting up this steep bank. I slipped a few times and I would have fell down this little ravine, or not ravine, but little drainage-type thing, and I slipped while we were cutting in this big pile of brush and luckily I got hung up by a big old vine of poison oak that came around like this [gestures to his neck] underneath my chin and it stopped me from sliding down (which is good). So I was able to grab it and pull myself up. But the next day I had a rash under here; a pretty significant rash and a rug burn where I got hung up by the vine of poison oak—and I was swollen to no end.

As far as that goes, can I see this can for a second here? [requests to use a water bottle as a visual] So this can right here, was like my forearm and my arm was all the same size all the way down. It was just swollen, poison oak, I didn't have forearms—it was just one swollen mass on my arms and all over my body. And it was miserable because we worked night shift, so you sleep in the day. So we went down to the fairgrounds in Mariposa and in mid-August it's the most miserable place you can be for a base camp. It was hot and miserable and sweating and I had poison oak like I had never had before and it was, it was a bummer.

Hannah                      Talk a little bit about, just running a saw in poison oak, the dynamics of getting sprayed with poison oak oil and things like that.

Hernandez                    Oh yeah. So, when you're a sawyer you get slapped in the face with brush, you get scratched by stabs, you get all kinds of beat

up—it happens to you because you're kind of in front and there's no openness. You create the openness for the hand-toolers to scrape through. So, in working in poison oak, one of the big things with it, when you're running the saw, the saw chips go flying everywhere, and the big thing is they'll get shot up into your shirt collar, they'll go down into your shirt and then work their way down and around.

When you're cutting, you get scratched by the brush and if you're in poison oak, well then, you have these open wounds that absorb the oils from poison oak—cause that's where you get the itchiness from, is the oils that are in the poison oak. It'll get into those and will turn into these weird blister looking things. You can't scratch because they'll bleed, but then you end up scratching them because you have to, because you can't stand not doing it. And then you get the poison oak chips that go into your shirt so it ends up spreading all the way over you, because you sweat and sweat drips down and it's not fun and all. Yeah, that's poison oak for you.

Hannah

OK, how do you perceive the value of your work as a hotshot?

Hernandez

The value of the work as a hotshot. I think there's value in a few different areas. For one, being able to take part in helping to manage the land, to preserve some of the natural resources that we have, it's pretty gratifying to be part of something like that. And to be able stop a fire. And on top of that, is working with a group of folks to accomplish these goals; it's pretty cool. It's pretty amazing thing to be a part of, to see, working from the bottom of the hill and working up two thousand feet in elevation in one shift, and then looking back down the line and seeing all that work that was put in by twenty people, it's a pretty amazing thing to be a part of.

So, the value as far as the land management side goes, I think it's pretty cool to be a part of something like that. So the fire suppression side, the other side of it, is in the wintertime or on the shoulder seasons when we're part of prescribed burns, when we get to try to maintain the landscape and bring it back to some of those pre-settlement conditions, that's pretty cool to be a part of too. To learn fire behavior. So, on the land management side, I

think it's a cool thing, but one of the other things that I really enjoy about it is just the core values that the hotshot community holds: duty, respect, integrity. And that's not just for the agency, but it's personal, as well. You learn a lot of lessons being on a hotshot crew: of hard work, doing the right thing, respecting others, and putting the mission above yourself and your comforts, to get the job done—because that's what needs to be done.

<00:27:14> A lot of that stuff can carry into your personal life. A lot of the lessons that I've learned on a hotshot crew, and some of the things that I've been a part of, you know, I carry over into my personal life and I feel like it's made me a better person in general. Just being around the mentors and the supervisors that I've had coming up, I feel real fortunate that I've been a part of the crews that I've been a part of (and had the experiences that I've had). Because it's shaped me to be a happy individual. So, I think there's a lot of value both personally and as far as land management goes, too. I think it's a great thing being a hotshot.

Hannah

You mentioned you had some examples of good or bad leadership.

Hernandez

Yeah. So examples of good and bad leadership. You meet lots of people in this agency, and some people, you work with them throughout your whole career, some people you just cross paths with, just on a fire, and it's amazing what you can pick up from just little, brief moments of interactions between people—especially in stressful environments and dynamic situations. You can see, kind of, what makes people tick, how they operate, what their stressors are, and as far as leadership goes, there's a lot of things that I kind of key into. I think it's a sociology thing, how people work and the things that they are driven by.

As far as bad leadership goes, a lot of times those folks their vision (or what makes them tick) isn't really in alignment with the duty, respect, integrity that goes with being a hotshot. So, it took me awhile to kind of pick up on that. But the more that I'm around it, I can see that folks that aren't really jiving with, as far as their leadership style and what I think is good and bad,

doesn't align with the vision of what hotshot crews are and what they've historically been, and what they're intended to be.

So, as far as bad leadership goes, I think it is folks that don't set the example. They don't suffer with the crews. And when I say suffer, you're uncomfortable, you're miserable for many days at a time, and the supervisors or the folks that aren't willing to be a part of that and share in that misery with the others, they're not really the type of leadership that you want around. You want everybody who's going to be a part of the same program to experience the same things.

So that ties into good leadership; good leaders that I've seen are the guys that I try to aspire to be: the ones that set the example and then they continuously show that. They're not just speaking and telling you that this is the right way, but actually show you consistently that that's what's right. Good leadership is somebody who is consistent with the values that they set forth and demonstrate; they do that—day in and day out. And the other part of it is, those type of individuals—good leaders—you can tell that they're not going to ask you to do something that they wouldn't be willing to do themselves. And that's really big with getting buy-in from a group setting and, especially being on a hotshot crew. So those are kind of my examples of good leadership and bad leadership.

Hannah

Great. Can you describe your—the characteristics of an ideal hotshot?

Hernandez

<00:31:08> Characteristics of an ideal hotshot? Somebody who's physically fit. Somebody who's self-motivated. Somebody who enjoys hard work, doesn't mind getting dirty. Somebody who can be mentally tough to withstand discomforts of all types, whether it's physical discomfort, emotional discomfort—because a lot of that comes from being away from home. You don't get to be at home, so it will really play into your emotional state and that translates into your ability to work and do your job how you need to do it. And then, just overall, somebody who has enthusiasm for the job and a positive attitude.

All the other things before, you can work and train somebody. But the attitude is something that the person just has to come in with; the right attitude to do the job and willingness to do the job. So, those are my characteristics of a good hotshot.

Hannah <00:32:18> Is there a memorable fire that stands out where you're really proud of your accomplishments? You told us one where you accomplished a lot and it got totally destroyed, but is there another fire you could think of where you kind of walked away and went, "yeah!"

Hernandez Well, there's one last year. I don't know. Well, there was one last year that we had and it was kind of similar, kind of along the same lines. It was a fire that was in Western Nevada and it was one of those things where in the day time you had a hard time getting any progress done, due to fire behavior, and it was just out-running the crews and stuff. So we got put on a night shift and we put in a lot of line throughout the whole time we were there. And just the daytime tactics weren't really working, but we were able to figure out some ways to make it work in the evenings just because fire behavior died down and put us at an advantage there. And so, for a lot of that fire, we put in good chunks of line to kind of box it in and some critical points. By the time we got around the last section of line, we're getting close to our last days—day twelve or thirteen, I think—and we were able to button up this last chunk of line on the fire, and the fire was done.

It was pretty cool to be a part of that, just to be the last crew to seal the deal after knowing that we put in a lot of good line and put in a lot of good efforts throughout the whole duration of it (along with other crews). But it was pretty gratifying to put that last piece of the line in and to be able to call division and, "hey, it's tied in." And as long as it holds, we're good. So that was, that was one probably that stands out to me.

Hannah <00:35:49> When you see another crew that might be a rival crew, do you get the drive to out hike them? When you're joining lines, do the lines get extra wide when two hotshot crews meet?

Hernandez

Yeah, so as far as that goes, there's a fair bit of competitiveness with the hotshot crews. It's all healthy stuff, for the most part, it's all real healthy competitiveness. You'll get stuff like, if your hiking up a piece of line and there's already crew there and you're going to start up above them — what they call a leap frogging — we go up past a crew and start in to where they ended or to jump out in front of them a little bit. (Laughter) Every crew I've been on, in every situation, it always seems like as soon as you start passing a crew, you're hiking at a certain pace. Whenever there's a crew there, whoever's in the front always speeds up and so your like going a lot faster than you normally would to go by the other crews. So there's stuff like that; there's competitiveness. I don't think anybody does it intentionally — well, they do it intentionally — but I think it's just kind of like programmed into our head to do that type of stuff.

And then when I was a sawyer on a crew, you're out in front and there's another crew coming in and your tying in with them, it's like, you don't want to shut your saw off first. So, you're cutting and, kind of, one of the examples you said is the lines get super wide right at the end, and cause neither one of the sawyers want to stop first. They want to be the last trigger pulled. So, there's stuff like that and in the end it's all good healthy competitiveness and all the crews work well together. There's, not to say there's not a few hiccups here and there, but all-in-all, reverting back to the duty, respect, integrity, we all abide by the same core values and it's a healthy competitiveness.

Hannah

Did you want to talk about your family?

Hernandez

<00:38:06> Yeah. So, like family life and being on a hotshot crew. I mentioned that I started out on a hotshot crew and I did that for a number of years and then there was a break where I got into a Prevention and then worked in Fuels — and the reason why I did that was, eh, it was a family choice. I'd just gotten married and we were going to have some kids and I wanted to be around for that, and kind of get my bearings on having kids and what that's about and how that looks, and the family dynamics. So, it's really hard to be on a hotshot crew and have a family because you miss

out on a lot of stuff in the summertime. You're away for a lot of firsts that happen, especially when you have kids.

So, having a support system at home is super important because, to be out onsite, I can't do this job without having support at home. And when I got back into being a hotshot, after I took that little break, I think it was probably one of the better things that I could've done, to be able to get my family life grounded. Being a hotshot was what I loved to do and that's what I eventually wanted to get back to, but I wanted to make sure that it was in the cards with the family and it was going to make, it was going to work alright for our setup. And so I took some years, some time off and then got back on a crew. And, at the time, my wife was working and I was working, and when I transitioned to going back to a crew, my wife ended up staying at home. And she supports me one hundred percent; and I couldn't do it without her support. And with the kids at home, it's tough. You miss stuff, but it's for the good of the family to do this. And keeping them in mind really helps to keep you driven and motivated. And so to anybody who's looking to get on a shot crew for a long period of time, it's a tough thing for the family life. And you've got to commend those at home that are able to put up with it and support so we can focus on what we do. With that, any side distractions and stuff will come up and you have to figure it out and deal with it. So, but yeah, it's really important to have a good support system at home, which I am fortunate to have.

Hannah                      That's great. Any other thoughts?

Hernandez                    Nope. No.

Hannah                      Thank you so much; this is all excellent.

Hernandez                    Yeah, no worries. No worries.

*End of interview.*

## Brian Janes

### Hotshot Squad Boss, Klamath Hotshots (Klamath National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 2, 2014 in Klamath River, CA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah <00:03:05>OK, tell me your name.
- Janes My name is Brian Janes.
- Hannah Tell me your position and how many years you fought fire and how many of those have been on hotshots.
- Janes I'm a squad boss on a hotshot crew and I've fought fire for 14 years total, and nine of those have been on a hotshot crew.
- Hannah [Testing equipment] Tell me that one more time.
- Janes I've fought fire for 14 years and nine of those been on a hotshot crew.
- Hannah So do you have a favorite hotshot story? Maybe a story you'd tell your family.
- Janes We've done a lot of fun stuff. I think going to Alaska for fire is definitely a highlight the first time you do it and then after that a lot of people are just over the rain and the walking (because most of the time walking on—kind of—sweat moss and peat moss which is cool because it soft and everything for a while). After a day or two it's kind of like walking in the sand at the beach, you're just kind of over it and it's tiring as can be.
- Hannah What part of Alaska?
- Janes That we were in Tanana, Alaska, which is off of a river that is up there. It it's a secluded area so we had to fly into Fairbanks, spend the night there, and then the next day get on a little jump plane, fly out there. We landed on a dirt runway which was a surprise to everybody because everybody's thinking, you know, "Where's the airport, where's the airport?" And then were getting lower and lower and it's like, "I just see dirt and we're landing." And then yeah, they took our gear, threw it in the back of some pickup

trucks and we drove for a while, came to a stop and the local said, "Just walk that way for like a mile and a half and you'll hit the fire." That was pretty much our entire briefing in terms of how to get there and everything.

That was pretty cool, definitely a different fire regime than down in the lower 48, which is kind of cool. Had a lot of black spruce and when the fires burn, it burns pretty well when the wind is blowing. And then, as soon as the wind stops, the fire just drops out of trees and then you just get it skulking around the sweat moss and that's kind of when you can put it out. I think that's why a lot of the fires, they just kind of let them do their thing up there.

Hannah <00:05:59> When you say skulking around, can you describe what that is?

Janes So basically, as opposed to having like flames and everything burning, that's what you go, "Oh my gosh, a fire," it's—it's just basically smoldering. Somewhat like if a cigarette was sitting on the ground, because it's wet and it's got a lot of small organisms in there, it just kind of slowly burns through. You don't see a lot of flames, it just makes a lot of smoke. Once things dry out, the fire can go back up into the canopy. But when the wind stops blowing it just smolders and smolders.

Hannah <00:06:38> Are Alaska fires your favorite type of fire? Or does it just stand out because it's Alaska?

Janes Yeah, a lot of it's about because it's Alaska, you know. You don't necessarily get that chance to go all the time, as you do down here. I mean, everything, you know, the summertime you have light for hours and hours on end. I remember that we were in Fairbanks and everybody's talking to their friends and everything else and we're outside the barracks because everybody's in like a gym or some type of building, you know, just sleeping. We're out there talking, just hanging out and it pretty much just got as dark as it does, you know, in California in April about 7:00 PM. That's about as dark as a got. And so we're outside talking and doing whatever, our superintendent comes out and, you know, "We're sorry, we're being too loud?" "No, you weren't being too loud but

you need to go to bed, it's like 1130." We're like "No it's not" and yet you just—the daylight just kind of messes with you a little bit. But I also think it's kind of cool too.

Hannah

[Side conversation: 7:42-9:29]

<00:09:29> Tell me about hotshot crew dynamics? As far as, that sort of thing, the wake-up calls, the lighting up, and that kind of stuff.

Janes

It really depends on what crew you're on and who is running it at the time. In all of my experience, we've gone with the philosophy that even though it's a crew and everything else, you're still an adult and as an adult you are responsible to get yourself up and get dressed and everything else. So, rather than waking each other up and doing everything else, in the squaddie position, it's our responsibility to tell the crew, when are we are walking to breakfast. Or when are we getting in the trucks and driving. So if, let's say, I tell them were walking at 0530, if you need more sleep and you can get dressed really quick. You might not get up until 0520. Some people that take a while, they're kind of groggy in the morning, they may get up at 0510 or 5 o'clock because they need that much time to get ready. Our philosophy is, whatever you need to do, do it. If you sleep heavy, have a buddy make sure that you wake up if you're worried about that. But it's your responsibility to tell your buddy, "Hey, can you make sure you wake me up tomorrow because I feel like I might need that." or something. I just count heads at the time and then we leave and if you're not there then you might miss chow or you might have to walk a little further.

Hannah

<00:10:57> Do you have a fire that stands out in your mind that was a close call situation? Where you had a moment that you were like, "Ok, the fire is big, it could kick my ass at that moment in time?"

Janes

I think the only time that really stands out was, kind of my first couple of years in fire, when it was still kind of new. You might have studied it in school, like I did, but until you're actually in the field—. The first time I heard the freight train sound of the fire when everything is burning really loud, there's a lot of flame,

there's a lot of heat, a lot of smoke—that was really awe inspiring. I was kind of like, "Wow it does sound like that, like people describe it." But honestly in my career I've been, I don't want to say fairly lucky, but I haven't really had a, "I need to motor out of here" moment. There's been times where it's like, "Okay we're going to back up and let the fire do its thing," but I can't say that I've ever had a moment where you have that pucker factor where, "Oh, things are about this close and getting really bad." There's always been a good spot—or we've seen it coming, seen precursors. Not been too worried about it.

I think, 2002 I was on a different crew, I was on a type II crew and we were in Fish Lake, on the Fish Lake National Forest in Utah and they had, what they called, Tom's Tornado. There's a video out there of it, and basically it was a big canyon—kind of like a Valley Canyon, not like a slot canyon or anything like that. This cold front came in and it was aspens and firs separated with spots of like rock. It's a really nice area but they kind of got, what we call a fire whirl, you know, when you get rising hot air and it kind of turns like a tornado (or waterspout or dust devil). But this thing got so big, it basically looked like a tornado and it ran around chasing a bunch of crews all over the place and that was kind of—. Because you didn't really know where it was going and you could see trees getting pulled out of the ground and it was kind of pretty impressive.

Hannah <00:13:28> When you say it was Tom's Tornado—is that what you said? Is that a name for that particular event or is that the name for that type of event?

Janes I'm trying to remember. That was the name for that particular event, they called it. I don't know if that was the name of the guy that first saw one or anything else, but I remember vividly that they called it Tom's Tornado and that's what you can look up and see videos of it. I think Midnight Sun or somebody has a lot of good footage of it out the back of the buggy as they're getting chased down the road by it. They're like, "Go, go, go, go!" And they're just filming the whole thing.

Hannah <00:14:09> Cool. Do you have a favorite fuel type or place to fight fire?

- Janes I don't think I have a particular favorite fuel type in terms of fighting fire. I really like burning or, you know, back burning in open ponderosa pine stands because they're nice and neat and straight lines with all of the needle cast.
- Hannah Described to me what that's like for a specific fire where you were able to do that?
- Janes Yeah, if you get into a—I don't want to say park-like, but you just have open ponderosa pine, not a lot of brush and stuff on the ground, not a lot of trees and just a layer of needle cast on the ground—when you light it, you can light a solid strip of fire. You put down and it kind of it just moves uniformly. In terms of controlling it, it's pretty easy because you can see exactly what it's doing, you can change it up really simple, especially if you're not on a lot of slope. It makes for a really easy burn but also allows people to really see what happens when you burn and how you can actually control a fire, which is pretty cool. But for fighting fire, different areas have cool things about them and not so cool things. Really, really steep stuff isn't that much fun. Really, really flat stuff isn't that much fun either, sometimes too tough.
- Hannah <00:15:33> What positions on the line or in the tool order have you filled?
- Janes I run a chainsaw, I've been a—what they call lead Pulaski, I was the first one putting in the fuel break on the hand tools. I've also run what we call the monkey paw, which is like the little hand rake in the back and you're basically there to clean up the last little bits of debris and stuff and also maintain the specs and quality control of the line. And then as a squad boss, I've kind of just floated in between the front and the back, wherever I'm needed to be to help out, whether it was to motivate people or—. There's a lot of new people and so I want to work in between some of the new people to kind of help show people to my left and right what they need to do. You just kind of work where you can and help out.
- Hannah <00:16:24> Do you have any good stories about wilderness fires or remote fires?

Janes                    Yeah, one year I worked on a rappel crew and on a rappel crew you're on a helicopter and you go to smaller fires and you kind of hover over them and they let you down on ropes to put them out. Usually only a couple of people have to do that and typically they're in the wilderness. That's why you don't use chainsaws, they won't let you; you have to use crosscut saws. You use what they call MIST tactics, which is a minimal impact suppression tactics. So your handline isn't super wide, it's just enough. Instead of using saws, you just use a Pulaski ax head and just cut it—it's supposed to look more natural and has less disturbance. I went to a bunch of those that year, as well as the big one that was in the Sisters Wilderness in Oregon called the B and B fire in 2013 and that burned up a bunch of wildernesses (as well as the PCT) out there, as well.

Hannah                <00:17:34> Any of these bring anything to mind? [handed Brian a list of topics]

Janes                    In terms of?

Hannah                Good stories.

Janes                    There are stories about just fun stuff that we do.

Hannah                Give me an example of?

Janes                    So we're in Alaska, you know, we're back in camp and we made our camp and everything else and you're just killing time while you're having a chow. There are always fun games that sometimes people play. A lot of people in fire chew tobacco and so we decided to have a contest with two people who didn't chewed tobacco. The contest was to see who could hold what they call a pinch of tobacco for the longest time. And so we had these two people, it was a guy and a girl and they put it in their mouth. I've been told, I haven't done it, I've been told it hits you—you kind of get dizzy and it hits you pretty hard if you've never chewed tobacco before. So they're doing pretty well for like 10 minutes or so and so we need to up the ante a little bit. So I think we made them do jumping jacks or something and they were still fine and were like, "Wow this is impressive." So finally,

we said, let's make them spin in circles. So they spun in circles, I don't know probably about 10 times and they're kind of dizzy and stumbling but they're still holding their own, they still have the chew in and nothing's wrong, they haven't thrown up or anything and I'm like, "Wow this is really impressive." So finally somebody comes over with a can of, a wintergreen type smelling one and just tells them to both take a whiff of it and that was it. Chew came and they threw up, stomach churning and everything else. So we crowned the winner and unfortunately the winner then went back to their tent and that was it—done for the night—kind of curled up and just felt horrible for the rest of the night. But they were fine in the morning which was kind of nice (so they can still go to work and everything else, you know). You're not going to be sick, for days or days, you just have to get it out of your system.

Hannah

<00:20:06> What about antics like that on the fireline? For example, rocking someone's pack, telling someone to go somewhere?

Janes

Yeah, there's all kinds of stuff that you do. Typically you don't do it in the heat of the moment, like when the fire is up and everything, you need to be, you know, paying attention and doing your thing. But when the fire is pretty much done and you're in a generally safe area, maybe mopping up—even though you still have to be heads-up, yeah, you have a little bit slower time. We do do a lot of stuff like that.

Rocking packs is great, especially when people are tired, because people don't really notice that weight. I usually don't even do the big rock, I usually—but it's when we sit down just keep putting little bits of dirt and stuff in someone's pack and by the end of the day, you know, you go to get up and they're like, "Oh, I'm just exhausted, my pack is so heavy." And you just get up and start dumping out, you know, like four pounds of dirt. Yeah, we do all kinds of stuff, we do games, see who can chop through a log in so many swings, you know, if you have to cut it. If somebody can underbid that many and say, "I can cut through that log in six swings or I can do it in five." When finally somebody does it, if they can't do it they have to put black on their face. You go back

to camp and people with such, kind of like football lines all over their face. Just stuff like that to help get through the day and try to have fun.

Hannah <00:21:47> What do you see as the role of fire in the environment?

Janes It's definitely something that's always been there. So I think, we're simply, at this point in time, trying to keep those kind of natural fires—fires that have been lit by lightning, stuff like that—from destroying people's homes and stuff. But as people are pushing further and further into the wilderness and woods, you get more and more of that interface. Man's been using fire for centuries, used it very well to clear fields and those kinds of things. You can kind of see the impact of our suppression over the last hundred years, where we have more fuel buildup in certain areas. Instead of having the nice open stands that—you look at the pictures from the 1920s and the natural area that nobody's managed and it's nice and opened and fires come through there—and you see it now and it's just a dog hairs thickets. You can't even see a house anymore, it's choked with trees. Fire used to clean that up and now were kind of seeing the results of that. Sometimes bigger fires, harder to manage fires and fires that are being managed out of fear of them getting too big—maybe we can let them do their thing in the wilderness, cleanup some dead and down debris and just keep the forest healthy.

Hannah <00:23:15> What would you like people to know and understand about wildland fire?

Janes I'm not sure exactly what people do or don't understand. It's both a good and bad thing, I guess. Most of the really bad fires are that way because there's a lot of fuel. But there are really good fires and we try to minimize our impacts so we can have those fires do good. We'll still put them out so we can preserve in some landscape and some natural resources, we also don't want to burn off everything in the woods, that's not our intent by any means whatsoever.

Hannah <00:24:00> Are there any specific experiences that are pivotal in your minds that kind of led you to that belief?

Janes Part of that's from my education, I got a degree in forestry with an emphasis on wildland fire management. I spent a lot of time learning about the cultural use of fire. Fire use on all the different continents, how we've used it in the past, how we've changed, how we use it—and just wanted to experience working, you see what does work and what doesn't work and you try and implement those ideas as you work. They might say, "Hey we want you to do this, make a fire break here." Well, we don't necessarily need it to be this big, or "Hey instead of over here, this might work a little better, a little less destructive or maybe we just let it do its thing and not worry about it at this point." The idea there is, sometimes putting less people at risk being out in the woods fighting fire is a good thing compared to what the fire is doing, how many people would actually take to put it out.

Hannah <00:25:17> Can you think of a shift on a fire where was awesome? One of those days where you thought, "This was a good day." Can you describe the opportunities and what the fire is doing?

Janes I think just in general, the feeling is probably a fire that is up and running and you're getting line in and just chasing it and chasing it and you know you're making headway which is a really good feeling. It's not like, "We're back here and the fire is going over here and I don't know what we're doing." Especially when you're initially attacking a fire, if you can work on it and actually catch it, that's a really good feeling because you know that everything that you were supposed to have done—for safety, anchor and flank, one foot in the black, whatever it is—is working together with the folks ahead of you scouting it, with maybe air operations that you're calling and bucket drops. You're not giving up on it, you are just going after it, going after it, going after it, and when you finally catch it, it's an awesome feeling. Especially if you are coming from the other side and, you know, when you meet the head of the fire, the top of the fire and catch it, it's a really awesome feeling. It's such a victory. You won. It is kind of a letdown because you're like, "Yeah we got it now everybody go back and just hold." And it's just like, "(sigh) Okay, let's go." It's a pretty good feeling.

Hannah <00:26:55> Is there a particular point in your education that's, I'm assuming that you came into fire with an understanding of strategies and tactics, was there a particular fire where you realized "Okay I get it. The strategies and tactics, they work, there's a reason for this." Is there a moment like that in your — .?

Janes I don't think there's a particular moment. I would probably say, honestly my first year on a hotshot crew, just because typically hotshot crews see more fire than other crews or engines do—and not necessarily that I was on a wildland fire—but especially due to prescribed burns. Like a big underburn where you are laying the fire down in a certain manner because you want it to burn in a certain way. Even though there is a lot of fire per se, you're still in control of it, if you will, and that's kind of when everything clicked. "Wow." And I've seen other people since I started get that same thing, where we say, "You want the torch here, I'll tell you where to burn, go ahead and put it down," You burn and you stop and you step back and you go, "Wow. You're right, that did exactly what you thought it was going to do. Wow, I can't believe I made it do this and not this and save that tree." Understanding how all that comes together, that you actually can manipulate the fire, you know? Nothing really happens all the sudden, everything happens as a chain of events. If you understand what the links are between those chains of events, you know A leads to B, C, D. D doesn't happen all the sudden, there are things that happen before that. When you understand that, it's easier to understand what fire is doing—both with prescribed fire and wildland fire, because it helps us make decisions on how we fight fires.

Hannah <00:28:57> How do you perceive the value of your work?

Janes Like how important is it?

Hannah Yeah, the public has perceptions, particularly now with hotshots being heroes and that is the value, but hotshots are more than just heroes, they're doing a lot of work that isn't heroic.

Janes Right, and I'd say most of our work isn't heroic. You want water around the houses, you don't necessarily need 'shot crews

around houses. You know, I definitely can appreciate when somebody comes up and says, "thank you." That's a great feeling. But you're obviously not trying to be on TV. TV is down in town and we're out in the woods.

So I definitely think there is value and I think a lot of people see the value in what we do. More than one occasion I've seen signs, "Thank you firefighters," This, that, and the other, and then we've seen signs that say "Thank you hotshots and firefighters." Where they specifically said hotshots and that's, you never see those people, you never talk to them, well they know we're here, you know? They know if the fire is way up on the hill and there's no roads, obviously you don't have an engine up there. There's people up there doing the job. For me that's enough, knowing that people are glad over there, that's cool.

Hannah <00:30:27> Is there a fire where you felt particularly proud of your actions on the fire line?

Janes Thinking, thinking, thinking, a lot of the fires. I guess the smaller ones that you kind of catch, you're pretty stoked that you caught them. There's only a couple of them where you go, "Yeah we caught this." You know, nobody ever going to know what that you were there—there's no big smoke column or anything else. That's kind of like the meat and potatoes of being a firefighter, I think. Because when you go to a big fire, you do the work but the management team is telling you what to do and everything else. But when you go to the smaller fires, it's like an acre, there's four of you, you make the call, you four catch it, you four put it out and call it out and they even mark it and nobody ever knows there's a fire there. That's a pretty good feeling, you know, "We kept this part of the woods at looking nice." Definitely.

Hannah <00:31:31> Describe an example of your favorite aspect of wildland fire?

Janes You know, I actually really enjoy the structured triage. What that is is, you know, if you have a fire threatening homes and you are there ahead of it, you can kind of say what home needs a lot of work or what home has a defensible space, not hard to save. Doing that on the fly I find it really fun. We were on the Waterfall

Fire, I can't remember what year it was—might have been '05 or something—it was over in Carson City, Nevada and the fire is basically running sideways through town and we were running from house to house in groups of three, moving patio furniture, turning on sprinklers, shutting windows—boom—next house, next house, next house. The fire was above the houses coming down, there was a lot of grasses and stuff and so we were just doing everything we could, just going from house to house, to house, to house. It was really fun. You're thinking on the fly, you're running with your group, you just have to know what you're doing and then keep doing it and just meet up at a designated meeting area when you're done.

Hannah <00:32:48> Tell me what it looked like from, say somebody's back patio, looking up at the fire and being on that kind of pace? What did the fire look like, describe it?

Janes It was kind of brush and grass—I'd say anywhere from 4 to 8 foot flames. The fire was backing, kind of, but a little one pushing sideways. Occasionally the wind would shift and you'd get a bunch of smoke blow right through the neighborhood. Which definitely made it hard to figure out where you were going. Yeah, so you're just trying to stay ahead of it, you've got the sprinklers on and everything else. That's the one time in my career where I actually felt bad for what we were doing. We're triaging a house and this family, they had fire creeping through their yard already and so were moving swamp and they had a wooden playset in the backyard. It had oil or something on it and it was just really combustible. Basically you want to get all the aerial fuels out of it, on the ground lower so you have less flames. As we were going, we're like, "If this thing catches, it's going to throw a bunch of stuff right to the side of the house." And we actually took the chainsaw and cut this kid's playset down. I felt so bad, but we're like, "We kind of have to do it." So we did it with as minimal of damage about just knocked to the whole thing over. So not the best, but you know, it was something that had to get done.

Hannah <00:34:51> Any other good stories you can share about fire in the environment? Or crew camaraderie?

Janes Oh God. Crew camaraderie goes from people eating weird foods for money. We had a guy one year that took, in fire camp, a cup—a paper cup—and just filled the entire thing with Tabasco sauce and as he's doing this other 'shot crews are there, "What's that guy doing?" "He's about to drink that." "No way." "Yeah." So people are giving money to see this happen, you know, 20 bucks—or for 10 bucks—or whatever it is. I think he made like \$800 for drinking that entire cup of Tabasco. It was like a full-sized cup and of course in like a half an hour later we were like concerned about ulcers or how your stomachs doing, or what happens in like a couple hours when you digest—how's it going to feel, is it going to burn? He ended up being fine, for the most part. Stuff like that happens—people eat bugs and grubs. If you can find it in the woods, somebody's eating it for money at some point; it's just something to do

Hannah <00:36:18> Do you have any good spiking out stories?

Janes We one year, we actually did a full 14-day spike out, and that was the first time I've ever done that in my career. That was up above Willow Creek, California. They had a fire—I can't remember the name of the fire—we basically flew into the ridge there, started cutting line and clearing stuff on the ridgeline and basically, you know, if we flew into gear, we would work to here and then walk back and camp. Then the next day somebody would stay there, you'd go to where we ended, continue working, this person would take all of our stuff and drag it over here and so at the end of the day you'd work to your camp. You kept leapfrogging your camp. I kept GPS things where our camp was for the helicopter stuff and we got back from the fire and I was like, "How far did we go in two weeks?" And actually Google Earth went and put in the points and we actually literally walked 20 miles from ridges. So we started on the Six Rivers, on that ridgeline, and we actually finished on our own Forest when we walked off. Just because we were way up walking in the ridge down. It was pretty impressive.

Hannah <00:37:41> What was the fire doing?

Janes                    It was kind in this large bowl, canyon thing and so we were on the west ridge of it and it's kind of doing this thing over here and we're just kind of going along, cleaning up the ridge in case they're going to end up burning out and then not really doing a whole lot after that time. It just kind of burned through. It was in a lot of the old stuff, from the old Angorum(??) Fire. So there's a lot of dead heavy down material when we first started.

Hannah                Any other stories you want to share?

Janes                    You know, there's just a lot of the little things that you do almost every day or every couple of days just for fun. Somebody's birthday, you know, we've dunked people in tanks of water, covered them with Gold Bond powder, out of nowhere. It's just all these little things to keep you going. Because 14-days is a long time to be gone, to sleep on the ground. It's not camping like a lot of people think. Unlike camping, it's not as fun as you think—it's fun, but it's not as relaxing and chill as a camping trip. You look forward to that bed when you get home.

Hannah                Great. Thank you, it is really good stuff.

*End of interview.*

**Ken Jordan**  
**Retired Hotshot Superintendent**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014 in Oakhurst, CA for The Smokey  
Generation.

- Hannah <00:02:53> For the camera, can you tell me your name, how many years you were on fire, and how many years as a hotshot?
- Jordan So my name is Ken Jordan and I just finished 40 years in fire, approximately 30 one of those on the hotshots, one on a helishot crew, the rest were on engines including CalFire.
- Hannah All in California?
- Jordan All in California.
- Hannah Tell me what your favorite thing about fire was?
- Jordan The people I worked with.
- Hannah I've asked all of the hotshot supt's if they could describe their ideal hotshot, what would it be?
- Jordan Well, it's changed a lot since I first started, but my ideal hotshot would be, really in good shape, good attitude, never whines and sober — and if they have got a family, good family man.
- Hannah What about the people? What's the people element that really draws you in?
- Jordan Well, when I first started in '76 with the El Cariso Hotshots, I went from CalFire to an opposite situation and working conditions and working with a lot of different people. The change was that the people I worked with on the hotshot crew were really hard workers — they really — they were men of integrity and they were just really colorful, fun, outgoing people. I knew if I stuck with the hotshots, I'd end up working with the same type of people and I did.
- Hannah <00:05:25> So do you have any classic hotshot stories you want to share?

Jordan I think, besides my fire shelter deployment—that was a story in itself—going to Australia was an adventure. We picked up, I believe it nine hotshot superintendents and nine or ten smokejumpers to go to Australia in 2002. They were tired over there so we went over there and fought a 2,000,000 acre fire. Did a lot of burning out, worked real hard, but it was really an adventure. I had a lot of fun.

Hannah How's the fire behavior different?

Jordan It was, you know there's a lot of gum trees—or eucalyptus trees, is what we call them—and you know, the ground fire. It was pretty much the same, it burned intense. It was in a drought they had the bush—structures to protect and everything. It wasn't really different, the fuels were a little different. The people that we worked with were different, they were more, I'd say, a little more self-reliant. You know, they didn't believe in fire shelters—they didn't believe in safety officers—they figured it was a person's own responsibility to stay safe and that they should never be in a situation where they would have to use a fire shelter. That was about the big difference. Other than that it was just pretty good. Oh, they drank a lot. We chose not to drink, just being ambassadors—they thought we were snobs—but, hey the volunteers drank nonstop it seemed like. But they fought fire hard the next day.

Hannah <00:07:10> I didn't know that that happened. I went to the wildland fire conference in 2003, so I got to meet some of the folks who were, you know—it was a conference. So I didn't see them in action— but it was very interesting attitude, a little bit more laid-back. Tell me about the types of changes that you've seen over the span of your career, in terms of how we fight fire and what kind of fire we're seeing out there?

Jordan It's, you know, the fires, course you burn them, seem to burn a little more—or you get bigger timber stand replacement fires, larger than when I started—and that's because of the fuel and the shifting droughts in different areas. As far as the way we fight fire, to me, we still have to get up there and—I like to stick to the basics, you know, anchor, flank, direct if you can, if you can't

back off and go in direct, it's safer. Always, you know, I heard the term the other day, "brilliance of the basics" or something similar like that but that's what I like to go with. It just doesn't seem like a lot of that has carried forward. You know, the Yarnell incident last year, it was a heartbreaker for me. I did not expect something like that to happen; it did. If I was still around—there would be a lot that I would try to contribute to prevent the fatalities like that again.

When I started, it was just after the old El Cariso Hotshots were burned, you know, the 12 on the Loop Fire. We always focused on safety first all through the—you know, my career. As far as the last ten years or so on this crew, just a lot of drilling, a lot of line construction. When we get on the fire, do a little bit different, but a lot of things are the same.

Hannah <00:09:28> Do you have any memorable—you have a long career—but are there any memorable shifts or fires that really stand out as, I don't know, either significant or classic hotshot shifts? That you really had to dig deep and accomplish.

Jordan I am thinking. I can't really think right now, but I know when I was on El Cariso, I was on the coldest fire of my life, Endong(??) Fire; had to dig deep. A lot of the other ones we just—might be, Marble Cone Fire, we kind of had to dig, we didn't have a lot of support there. So we went days without food, you know, it happened a lot back in those days. As far as fires nowadays, it's changed a lot, we do get a lot of logistical support and it's a lot better than it was. It really is a lot better in that respect and a lot of the teams, they respect the hotshots and what they do to a job. Which we really appreciate too; they treat us a lot better in that respect.

The only other change, and that was kind of the last question, too, was after the MEL buildup (it was the Most Efficient Level buildup), is that the crews were definitely diluted. And we're still in the process, even now, catching up with experience levels. So that kind of hurt us. It hurts. Sometimes we have to work with crews that aren't really ready to be out there on the line and meant to dig deep, but that's all right, it's just part of being a hotshot. I can't think any others, there's Florida and Minnesota,

you know. Arizona gets a little warm. Southern California, where I am originally from, most of it's just fires that go out eventually, they go out eventually—it rains on them if you don't put them out—so I just keep working every day, wake up, eat good food, go out on shift, face a challenge.

Hannah <00:12:03> How do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Jordan As far as natural fire in the environment, it's had to change a lot because of the urban interface (of course). Natural fire was part of the environment back in the day and now, since they do the, "hit them hard, keep them small," from the 1900s, it's changed a little bit. But I think, Mother Nature takes care of itself anyway. If we let these big timber stand replacement fires, like the Rim Fire, etc., burn and change the fuel types. Nothing we can do about it. Just like, when they came up with the term global warming, we can't do anything about it, and we probably didn't cause it, but it's going to take care of itself. Just like the fires. And that's the same thing with prescribed burning, you know, of course it helps. You know, logging went away. Loggers, which I think are part of the environment—man is part of the environment, they progressively get to a different level in the environment—we do what we can and clean up our mess as much as we can and if something happens it happens. You know, as far as the only issue we have is the urban interface and that should be a personal problem.

Hannah <00:13:35> Can you expand on that a little bit? If you were to tell the public something about—one thing about fire what would it be?

Jordan One thing about fire. Clean around your house so we can protect it. We don't mind protecting it as long as it's protectable.

Hannah Great, you mentioned, off-camera that last year was a really good crew, a really good season. Can you tell me a little bit about the season and what kind of fire you saw and how it went?

Jordan Well, the season for me starts out with recruiting the best of the best. And we probably have 98, 99%, 98% return rate. It's been

that way for years and that really helps with safety and productivity. And that's what made the season for me—we had the best bunch of guys that I've, probably, the same steel of the guys that I started with. Hard workers, great shape—we've been working on that anti-drinking campaign for probably the last ten years, so they're all good, sober, mostly family men and that really shows as far as the safety.

That's kind of a shift, I don't even know if you want to put this in, from the way it used to be, when I started. You had to go drink with crew, you stayed away from your family—that was just part of the other thing and it caused a lot of problems. If I said I had any fatalities on the crew—it's on the wall back there, it's still there—so those were caused by drinking. When I first came to this crew, one person was killed—drunk driving accident. So they progressively, it took a lot of years to get away from that, but we finally did and this year it showed. We had a great bunch of hard-core, no injuries, as usual, it really helped. That pretty much made my season, that and, you know, just a lot of good fires and watching the guys work on the fires. This group is kind of weird, I demanded that they got along with each other and they did. And so they even hung out with each other after work, which is kind of weird. But I liked it and it worked out well and I was really grateful of the crew. As far as the fires, just another fire but watching the crew work on the fire made my year.

Hannah <00:16:30> Can you describe a typical burn show on a hotshot crew? Or pick one that stands out, kind to describe the set up and the work that goes into prep and what you're looking at and what you're hoping not to have happen—just kind of paint a picture for me?

Jordan Well, it takes a lot of scouting and we check the weather. I'll talk to people from shifts before, I'll talk to the fire behavior guy (if he's there) about what the weather's going to be like, how the fire has been behaving. So, we get as much information as we can, the topography that the crew is going to be working with, crews that will be holding for us, how many spot fires they got the day before—if there had been any spot fires at all—and once everything, all the intel is collected, then we will prepare for a

backfire. And usually I'll put the most experienced captain in charge of the backfire or burnout and we wait for a window. And that would usually be when the wind shifted, the humidities are still low enough so the fire is going to carry, the fuel bed is continual enough to carry the fire, the topography is good enough to carry the burn show.

I think the last really challenging burn we had was on the American Canyon Fire on the Tahoe. Because all the other crews—a lot of the other crews—were committed, but we had to burn this road off the main divide, a ridge road, before the fire could jump and the fire is coming in a whole several different places. So I had to split the crew up and send them both ways and it was almost impossible to observe the fire—which is really important—and so we had to watch the smoke columns. As the fire would come out of the drainages and, you know, we would have to get ahead of it with a firing show and the lighters really had to hustle, we had a lot of spots but we couldn't stop to pick up the spots as quickly as we could with the holders, we continued with the burnout. That's about the typical, just everything you can get a hold of, trip torches, firing devices, quoin guns, anything.

Hannah <00:19:05> Tell me about watching smoke columns, I haven't had anyone tell me, described to me, what smoke does on a fire and what kind of indicator it is for firefighters?

Jordan Well, a smoke column is a really big indicator of what the fire behavior is doing, for one. So, you know, it depends on what's going on—every fire is different, so if I can get to a point—and I'm a firm believer that the Supt should not be down with crew; the superintendent should be up observing the fire behavior, the smoke columns, discussing with other Supt's, you know, what options we have. I've seen that change a lot, it's kind of disappointing but, you know, some people feel that they have to be with the crew to prove themselves to the crew—or the MEL buildup, more inexperienced superintendents. But you know, I'll back off and look at those columns—and if there is any, some thunder cell buildup in the area—and be the lookout. The darker columns will tell you what kind of fuel it's burning and how

active it's burning. If you get extreme fire behavior, it might—if you are looking at pyro cumulus buildup, you might be looking at the column actually collapsing (like it did on the Dude Fire). So you have to kind of prepare, make sure your safety zones are in order and that you're not too far committed with the line. A smoke column, if it's white, it might be burning a lighter flashier fuel. If you have a dark column, heavier more—deals with more fuel moisture in them and—you know, you have to just kind of watch the columns and see how it's developing, if it's turning and if you're getting a crown fire with it or not. There's a lot to a smoke column.

Hannah <00:21:14> How do you train the new incoming firefighters to read indicators?

Jordan Same way I do—I tell them what I see. I draw pictures, I explain it. I pulled them aside at fires and point at it. Whatever it takes because they need to know to, they're in charge of their own safety to.

Hannah <00:21:37> Do you want to share about your shelter deployment? Yeah?

Jordan It was on the Big Creek Fire in 1994. I was a captain on the Sierra Hotshots and we were—it was a pretty active season, we had a lot of fires up near the Oregon border and we were just coming down from our, I believe it was our third 21-day shift. This was before the work/rest, which I thought was a good idea. I mean, you put the work/rest in place and the next year, 14-days on, two off, etcetera, in 16 hour shifts. Back in those days you just worked until the fire was out, basically. Which was tough, but it was good. You just have to adjust to it.

So anyway, we're heading down from the Oregon border and we just—for our R&R, after 21, and we got into Fresno and we saw a big column coming up at the Shaver Lake area. They call us and they want us to respond to that. So were the initial attack crew on it. We worked a 24-hour shift, I believe—a double shift—the first night burning out along Big Creek. Went back to the fire camp, got about I'd say a half hour of sleep and then we went out for another double shift. We came back, got another half hour of

sleep and then we were supposed to go up and protect the town of Huntington Lake. They assigned us to a camp up there, Camp Keola. So we worked prepping around that because the fire was kind of coming up the Big Creek area. Me and the and the other captain, Mark Smith, we went down and looked up to the north—no the south of the camp. We found a ridge we could cut down, tying it to a rock and at the bottom of the rock—which was about a 600 foot drop—that would tie it to the next division. LP was coming up from the other side and it would keep the fire from basically sweeping around the camp and the Town of Huntington.

So anyway, we spent the night there at the rock pile and the next morning I went down, scouted down to the rock—the top of the rock about 200 foot section. Brought the crew in, El Dorado followed us up, and we were going to cut line down to the top of the rock and do a burnout along the other side of the line—the fire side of the line. So everything was in place, I was supposed to look out. I set up four short range safety zones, long range would be back at the lake. And communications was in place, escape route was back up the line to the lake, which was short range if we needed him. The fire was kind of burning up to the ridge slowly.

So anyway, I turn around and I saw a big black column down below the rock, and I couldn't see the base of it. So I slid down face to this ledge, crawled out on the ledge, looked down and saw that the black column was on our side of the drainage—which I didn't expect. I thought it would be on the other side. So anyway, a couple hundred foot flame lengths, south facing aspect, a lot of really heavy continuous fuels, chutes, the fire—the column itself was coming straight up at me, kind of turned—and they were thinking about 1000 foot per minute.

So one of the squaddies leans over and asks if they should get out, and I said, “Yeah, get them out now.” I paused and stay and watch the fire for about another minute and then realized that I didn't have time to get out. So I actually was going to go along the edge and out this chute and back up, but the fire, the gases and everything, burned of the chute—so I was trapped.

So, all the drilling and training came into play and I set my pack to the side, grabbed my fire shelter, threw my fuses over the side, I set my tool on the inside and then deployed my shelter and laid down on the rock. As soon as I laid down the thing—the column itself hit me, which was—I've got pictures for you. I was getting 70, 80 mile an hour winds, real hot embers, the fire—the gases were igniting all around me, so it was pretty hot—it was about 500°, is what they—when they sent my shelter up to Missoula, you know, they said it started to melt back at 500°, so that's what I was experiencing under the shelter. So I was fighting to keep it down; the old shelters were not good at all for that. They were built like they put an anchor chain around it, your body isn't like that. So it took everything I could to keep the edges down. Embers were coming in and burning me, all the way up my legs, my arm, shoulder. I had my protective equipment on and shrouds, which I usually wore, and my eye protection, so I was able to fight it out pretty good.

Then it got worse, you know, the pain and embers. I was overtaken by the pain of the heat, of the fire around me. And just thinking about where the fire was and where I was and how hot it was, I didn't think I was going to make it. There's no reason I should make it. So, anyway from then it started getting really dark and loud. You know, I turned over on my back at one point to try to hold edges, to try to keep it trapped down. And I crawled all over the edge, you know the edge—or out to the edge of the ledge and back, trying to find a cooler spot, and there wasn't any. I almost wore the straps of my shelter—the straps of my shelter were almost worn through from crawling around during the deployment. And then I felt a really bad pain in my chest; I don't know what it was to this day, but real sharp. And then I turned back over; kept fighting it out; getting hotter and hotter. The shelter is about the consistency of a parachute, you know, it was a little pup tent thing going on there.

Then I either started passing out—or dying, you know, I just started seeing stars and spots and stuff. I thought of my daughters. I was a single dad at that time raising my daughters. And they—right before that, what I was going to do, was—if I

started melting, I was going to go to the edge and roll off. It was a 600 foot drop, easy death. But I thought of them and it kept me going. And so, I said I'm going to at least die well. So they would know, you know, that I died well.

So anyway, started passing out and the fire at that point had burned all around me. And I looked—everything was lighter. Prayed, opened the shelter, you know, trying to get some cooler smoke. Shut it down. Opened it up again. And then, finally I was at the point where I could crawl back up to the top of the rock and kind of borough my way down, you know, trying to get a good spot—I thought I was going to get burned over again. Re-burn; but I was just paranoid.

And then I walked out and, uh, that was about it. I went back—they didn't do much for you; they didn't have critical incident stress debriefing. I always recommend that two people because it's pretty hard to deal with after that. Gary Collins came down and investigated. He was probably about the best of the best fire behavior guy. Checked off my list, all the fire orders and 18 situations were in place. It was a very unusual situation. I was off the crew for about 484 days while they investigated it—which was the hardest part the deployment. Then they put me back on the next year.

Hannah <00:30:49> I'm assuming that changed your perspective on fire, and crew and safety. Going through something like that must've been life-changing. What are the big takeaways for you?

Jordan It was, uh, you know, it just became, you know, the one statement—I said to my buddy—. Carlton Joseph said at the chief's meeting, or the ICs meeting, he said, "You need to be brilliant in the basics." So these guys—we did a lot of training. You know, blew off a projects sometimes so we could do training. Make sure that they were in just tip-top shape so they could run out of a situation like that. We did all of our running, hiking, push-ups, pull-ups, everything in our gear (we changed that so they'd be acclimated). So they'd be so tough that you can fight it out if they did have to deploy in a situation.

You know, I encouraged them to sober up, quit drinking, they need to come to work sober so they can have that edge in case they get a deployment or a burn-over situation and have to get out of it. And they won't be distracted with their studies, they won't be distracted with their drills. A lot of changes. "Break the cool barrier," I tell them. I think his name is Dan Gutfeild, he just came out with a book, but it was always my theory that most of the stupid things that people do, even on the fires, are because they're trying to impress their peers. And they need to "Break the cool barrier." Think it out and then do what they're supposed to do—and it still that way today. I mean I heard somebody stand up the other day in front of the Supt's and say, "Hey, I'm a hard charger and I expect everybody else to be." To me that's nonsense. What's a hard charger? It used to be, are you a good fireman, or you're not? A hard charger—I don't know, are you trying to impress somebody? Charge around and say, "Look at me." I don't know. We still get the job done but do it safely.

To me, nobody asked me, of course, but on the Yarnell incident, although they broke a simple firefighter rules (LCES, they had a person two years as a lookout, and they're in the black, you know, 'unburned fuel between you and the fire, cannot see the main fire and not in communications with anyone who can,' 'feeling the winds increasing/changing directions). It was an atypical region three fire event with urban interface to protect. And if I was to say any underlying cause—gut feeling—that caused those young men to die, it would've been that they were trying to impress, trying to do something, trying to be hard chargers, trying to prove their self—it was a whole peer thing. That was the underlying cause—gut feeling, no proof—but, can't have it. And that's what I tell the guys, I said "Look, you've got—." And that's what I tell my daughters, just starting this year in fire, you know, "You've got a break the cool barrier, alright?" And don't worry about being cool, worry about doing the right thing—first. Then, if there's time to be cool, go for it. Whatever. Hard chargers, yeah?

Hannah

<00:35:19> I've never heard that before, cool barrier.

Jordan

Having the guys break it off. People still like them.

Hannah Any other good stories, even—crew camaraderie is such an important component of hotshot and each crew kind of develops their own dynamic, their own definition of fun. Do you have a good stories about developing crew camaraderie or just seeing it in action.

Jordan Yeah, I don't know. The guys kind of develop it themselves, you know. I make sure we do everything together. We have family days at the beginning of each year, which really helps out because it gets the families on board. They know what you're doing, there's a lot less people with their heads out of the game. One drawback with having a lot of family guys is that they worry about their families—their good guys that worry about their family. So when something happens at home, when we're away and gone, their heads are not in the game and it's unsafe. So get the families on board, show them exactly what we do: cut line, burning up, what tent we sleep in. When we actually do, they feel so much better about the whole thing. That's kind of a common bond that they have, that they have a family. I used to make sure that the guys write—I would hand out postcards and postcard stamps just so they'd write home. Keep that connection, you know. Some of the families had never gotten a letter from a person—a handwritten letter. So when they get this letter it's like, you know, they keep it for the rest of their lives. Stuff like that.

I don't know, we used to do a lot of like cadence singing, that was fun. Carrying logs—they outlawed that a few years back, but we used to have the guys carry logs together, singing cadence. You know, we'd do all the push-ups in unison with packs on and full gear. Just make it really tough, tough time for them, tougher we make it the more the connection with each other. So we will walk up Big Hill cutting line every day, use a scenario on a fire, so that it's like the live sandtable every day for them, with their lives. They're good fireman—and women if we ever get one on the crew.

Hannah <00:38:11> What about the kind of goofball activities—like eating whatever?

Jordan

We don't do much of that here. It used to be a big jock fest, everybody would fight after work. They'd drink gallons of water and walk uphill—I did it myself. Drinking solids, there's no place for that anymore—fire's too big, too dangerous, the workforce is too diluted. You got to be professionals and, you know, some crews are going to, I mean, I haven't heard of it—but it happened—and I'm not judging, but because I've watched the drinking. But Tahoe lost somebody last year and I'm pretty sure it was for drinking. One fatality is way too much, especially for top notch crew like that. It's got a change, you've got a have a whole cultural shift. When it comes to hotshots, we have to be professionals, we've got to quit drinking, we've got to quit doing stupid stuff—even if it's fun.

Is it not fun to travel to Florida and do R&R in Daytona Beach, you know? That's fun. But you can't do it if you got thrown off the crew for drinking or you're dead from drinking, partying. It's not partying. I'm telling you guys, a party is when you go to your kids birthday party and wear a stupid hat. You know? Abusing alcohol and drugs during fire season is no good. That's not a party, because somebody dies. Because somebody comes to work hung over and is distracted while they're supposed to fell a tree and it landing on somebody's head.

The guys will hate to see that and hear that because when I started, it was like I said, a big drunk—drunken brawl. Nowadays the fires, the way they are and the workforce diluted the way it is, we have to do everything we can, including get the families on board, quit drinking. I've been accused—when I was teaching at the academy—somebody said that, "Well, is this an AA meeting?" "Well maybe it is. But stop it. You come to my class drunk again and you'll get thrown out." But it's still common place, socially acceptable, it'll probably be a long time before that stops but I'd say that is one of the major issues right now.

Hannah

<00:40:51> Is there a fire where, you already kind of mentioned it, where you felt extraordinarily proud of your accomplishments.

Jordan I never really—I never really thought that much about it. I know the hotshot culture, it's more, let's go out and get the job done. We're under the table, we don't need thanks, it's our job. We never really had that sense of—My pride came from how hard the crew worked, that's about it. I said, "Look at my crew, what a bunch of hard-working individuals." It's like they went 100 years back in time. So, I can't really think of a time that I just, "Hey look what I did." There was a time, it was funny, save structures, running around burning up, backfires—it was exciting. You feel a sense of accomplishment probably, more than pride, and that's what we're all kind of looking for.

Hannah <00:42:15> Any other thoughts, any other stories you want to share or messages that you would give to a firefighter or current Supts or anything like that?

Jordan No, just the one about Yarnell and the one about the drinking. Now that I'm retired, I don't have to be popular amongst my peers. You know, I always try to break the cool barrier, and it showed. But my crew's safe, they work hard and they're great, great firemen. The last 10 years have been amazing and last year was the best of the best. So it was a good year to retire, it really was. And then, you know, I really did enjoy working with a lot of these Supts, you know, even the ones now. Jack Sevelson is retiring this year, I'm going to miss him. But they have to watch—Al, he's a good one to take care of business and Bubba over on the LP. And hopefully Jay will come back with my old crew, on El Cariso. I could go on and on; there's still an amazing bunch of superintendents out there that I'm going to miss, you know. But everybody gets to that point. I just hope everybody—nobody whines—this is the best job ever, don't you dare friggin' whine in front of me. Why would you whine doing something like this? And going in doing something behind a desk or something. This is a hard-core job; no whining allowed.

I've just been looking at all these pictures over here and there's a lot of fires photos of the crew—and I never lost anybody on the fireline. Just other things, I don't know. Maybe I'll write down all of my stories and send them to you sometime, there's a lot of them. Florida was pretty fun—alligators and that stuff.

Hannah Alligators? I was in Florida in 2004, I think is when we went to Florida—lots of snakes, but no alligators.

Jordan We were in the Everglades when the drought hit. And so we were burning out this—Well, I'll tell one story. We were burning out around this one area to get around this observation tower. We all had our fire swatters. And so me and Mike Friddex(??), my captain—or he was a squad leader—we were kinda backing through the grass watching them burn out from the road. There was this lagoon there and we thought, you know, “If this thing picks up, we'll just go into the water right there.” And so they're burning out and we're like, “Ok, about ready to get into the water, this thing's picking up.” I look in and there is this bunch of logs. But they were alligators. Like hundreds of them. It was the only water in the area and I was going to jump in to get out of the burnout show. Said, “No!” And I had to run—hard—to get back to the road. And then me and Mike—and we were doing this other burnout show, and we see this big, huge—biggest alligator I've ever seen in my life. Like 14 feet long. And we had all of these hoggie sandwiches and we're sitting there feeding him. You know he'd go “keeck.” Every time he would eat: “Keeck.” And these locals come up and say, “What are you guys doing!?” “Feeding that old alligator.” They said, “You know those things can run as fast as horses and as soon as you run out of those hoggies, he's gonna take off after you.” We went, “Uh oh.” [laughing] Then we threw about five in his mouth and we ran as fast as we could. I don't know if they were they were lying or not.

Oh and on El Cariso Hotshots, '76, Marble Cone. We went three days without food. Back in those days you had to keep working. So we were pretty hungry. Waa. Oh, we weren't hungry, we were just feeling the effects of malnutrition. I mean, dizzy and stuff. So, anyway, this big old lizard runs between the sawyers—I was a sawyer then—and so we got it with a shovel, cooked it up, and ate it. We did it just for the heck of it. Anyway, fun times.

Hurricane Rita was awesome. We went down to the south; really hospitable people. We handed out water and food for a couple of

weeks, maybe more. That was fun. There were some beautiful places, back where you'd never go to. Travel was really fun.

Hannah Really quick. Hurricane Rita. Doing that sort of all risk incident response, as opposed to straight up wildland firefighting, how is it different to manage the crew and how did the crew transition into that type of work?

Jordan Really effectively and really easily. It was like a fireline assignment, because, you know, we always have squad bosses, nine radios, hard workers, everyone wants to help. So we just split up and go hand out food and water. The locals were just burned out, tired, hot, so it was an easy transition for us to just go in and help out. Move food and water. And we ended up doing extra things, like cutting trees off of power lines and people's houses and stuff like that. Actually, the graveyards were really, really important to the southeastern Texans. And we cut a lot of trees out of graveyards. And there were actually lots of people coming in and saying, "There's my grandma and grandpa, mom and dad. And there's where I'm going to be laid to rest. If you can cut that tree off of there." They were really appreciative.

[loud background noise] I think that's my cue.

Hannah I think so. Well thank you so much.

*End of interview.*

## Matt Kennedy

### Hotshot Superintendent, Entiat Hotshots (Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 8, 2014 in Entiat, WA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah <00:02:29> For the camera, can you tell me your name, how many years you've been fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot?
- Kennedy My name is Matt Kennedy, I've been in fire since and '91 so, this will be my 24th season. I've been with a hotshot crew since 1996 so that will be my 18th season here with the Entiat Hotshots.
- Hannah And your role?
- Kennedy Currently the superintendent.
- Hannah What other roles have you played?
- Kennedy Everything from crewmember, to digger, sawyer, senior crewmember, squad leader, assistant to super., — pretty much every role on the crew.
- Hannah What's your favorite part about hotshotting?
- Kennedy Well there's obviously a lot to love about it, but for me the big thing it would be camaraderie; the people you work with really make a difference. And it's gotta be the right mix of people — we all love getting things done. It's a very eclectic group, people from all different backgrounds. We're all here for different reasons but when we come together and work together as a crew, the things we can accomplish — it sounds cliché — but it's really amazing. When everything is firing on all cylinders you can get a lot more done than you thought possible with 20 people. It's a big part of it — obviously the job itself, seeing things, going to places and just seeing fire behavior up close that most people have that instinctual fear of. Being able to get close to it and understand it is pretty awesome.
- Hannah <00:04:07> Do you have any particular stories you've thought about?

Kennedy

There is a lot, you know. Obviously there's a ton of stories; many are not appropriate for polite conversation. None really stick out, there's a lot of great ones, funny stories, tragic stories, stupid stories, everything in between. On the job, off the job—because you kind of work and play with these people. Many of my good friends I've met in fire and still are, even though they may not be, and they still are my great friends. One that sticks out, I guess, would be a Squaw Mountain Fire in Wyoming in, I believe, in 2012—if I remember right. It all kind of blends together after a certain time. Our superintendent was on another fire, so I was detailing, just filling the role and we're on a fire—essentially, for simplicity sake, it's just this mountain, you know, picture a three dimensional conical mountain. There's timber, brush on the mountain and down the flats it's grass and whatnot. We should just be down on the flats fighting this thing—what we are doing is chasing it up this mountain. "Yeah that's a great idea, that's what we should do." But then there's political pressures—that grass is rangeland, it's winter range for farmers and ranchers—so there's some political push to make sure that doesn't wholly consume. Then you have the locals running their equipment and putting this spider web network of lines in to protect all that. So you kind of fall into, "Well maybe we should try and see if we can get up there and do something."

So we end up doing that and trying to piece it together, scouting and all these things. We come up with a plan that seems reasonable and get some other crews on board with it, so we're meeting the objective. In the middle of all this I looked down and I see the road system down in the flats and I'm like, "Man, what are we doing up here? We all said we want to be down there. What are we doing up here?" So anyway, I was like, "Well we're kind of committed, we're going to go down this path." Everything takes a little longer than expected, the prep takes longer, everybody getting in place takes longer. So we want to have this burnout pulled off—or at least get all the snagging and prep work done prior to dark—we're just barely, kind of, making that and we're about ready to put the torch on the ground.

The last two to three days, it's really been kicking our ass. Wake up, a wind event comes, whatever we did yesterday is all gone—but we've noticed in the last three days at about the same time the wind shifts to—a diurnal shift—and goes down slope, when things cool off. It seems to be coinciding with the time were about to light. So we're just about ready to light and the wind shift comes. We're like, "Let's just hold on and see what happens." The wind intensifies and pretty much negates the last six hours of work for three crews and chases a bunch of resources off the hill. And where did we end up? Right where we said we wanted to be, down in the bottom.

But just getting caught up and wrapped up in all the other factors, that kind of took us away from what common sense dictated and what experience and knowledge dictated. Trying to be helpful and trying to do what some people wanted to get done. It was a pretty close call, there were some people who were running and, unbeknownst to me the Supt truck was parked in—because I wasn't with the Supt truck—somebody had drove it and parked it where it was right in the path. The crew went off one side of the ridge, I decided to go down the other to make sure that there were no other resources, grab engine folk and whatnot. I wanted to make sure that they were moving out of the way.

Thankfully, as I'm making my way hastily down this hill fire not necessarily chasing me—but making me uncomfortable—coming my way. I see the Supt truck, I think, "That's going to be a lot faster than me walking." And we're not going to burn the supt truck up but I also happen to see a deer shed." "Oh I better grab that, too." You know, just like last second. Fire's about ready to burn the superintendent truck up and perhaps me, I guess. I didn't feel quite that threatened, but I have the presence of mind to grab a shed? I don't know why; silly things that occur.

I've been on really bad fires where people didn't make it—never something you want to be a part of. I was on 30-mile with the crew back in 2001. And yeah, there are visceral sort of memories of that. How horrible that was and, of course, the report that comes out, at least in this instance, was not 100% accurate (from my perspective, from what I saw). What I really appreciated was

our superintendent and the assistant at the time really shielding us from a lot of the outside influences. Media requests for interviews were running rampant. I can only imagine what McDonough is going through with the Yarnell. Everybody wants a piece of him, everybody wants to hear his side of the story. I'm sure it's difficult; those are his brothers.

So, one thing that would be nice to pass on is to take care of your crew and shield them from that as best you can. You can't do it 100% of the time. It definitely was appreciated by me and a lot of the crew.

There's lots of great stories. You got to meet some of the older generation, there are a lot of them around in the area is still. A lot of them finish their careers in fire management, so there's a real connectivity to those guys. Their blood, sweat, and tears built a reputation here; we don't want to sully that in any way shape or form. It's something we try to pass on, the tradition. A lot of old signs downstairs, the pictures from past years, it's all building on tradition and trying to instill that into—so that they have a true understanding of what it took to build a reputation for the crew and how quickly that can be eroded.

Hannah <00:10:41> I've been asking a lot of superintendents if they can describe the ideal characteristics of a hotshot?

Kennedy The ideal characteristics of a hotshot? Well, they've gotta be a glutton for punishment. They have to be physically fit—and physicality is a very huge part of the job, but hand-in-hand with that is mental ability. I've seen some of the biggest strongest people not be able to do some of the hikes that the smallest most demure people were, because they were more mentally tough. They're not willing to give up, they're going to push through that pain. You want someone who is going to do what is asked of them but is going to do it in a thoughtful manner—isn't just Pulaski motor, they're not just head down digging or cutting or whatever is all—. You need people that are able to think independently and take care of themselves and those around them.

Obviously former athletes work well because they're accustomed to working in a team environment and also the sacrifice that goes with most team sports. We've had a lot of people that have never played sports. It sounds silly but, we had a softball tournament and there was a guy who had never played softball—ever in his life—he was a 25-year-old man. That's not a 100% prerequisite. Someone who could handle the hardships in stride and not bring everybody else down around them, keep their morale high. We're all suffering together and I think that is—in my experience—one of the things that brings the crew together, is that shared suffering. We're eating crappy food, working, getting crappy amounts of sleep. There is ridiculous stuff being bandied about and we're a part of that, but we do it together, and we suffer together, and we've lived through that together. It builds familial bonds that are stronger, in a lot of cases, than actual familial bonds. You gotta be a bad ass. You've got to want to be here—that's a huge thing—you have to want to do this; you can't half-ass it (it's apparent and you'll bring everybody down around you).

Hannah <00:13:09> Who were the people who mattered most to you in your career?

Kennedy In my professional career? Well, obviously my first crew boss on a type II crew in Idaho, Tony DeMasters. He was—the right amount of goofy and fun, and the right amount of discipline. You know, there's a time and place for all things; he taught me a lot. In my hotshot career, it's mainly been Kyle Cannon, who was—through much of my time here—a squad leader, assistant, and superintendent. And Marshall Brown—and Kyle and Marshall worked together for seven or eight years, I don't remember now exactly. Having them—those two working so long together—had benefits. Less communication needs to occur; you know what they're going to think, you know how they go about things. So those two, professionally, were probably the most beneficial for my career.

Hannah <00:14:14> It you've had a fairly long career in fire already. What are the significant changes that you've seen throughout your career?

Kennedy

Significant changes—. There's a lot of them. Most of them are negative from an agency, top-down sort of thing. ASC's in and of itself—. It sounded good on paper to somebody, to save money and all that. What I don't think they really—. They failed to capture the amount of time it takes, on our end and their end. So, I sit here on the phone for an hour, there is an hour of my wages wasted, an hour of somebody else's wages wasted. Versus when we could hire here at the local level—I go across the street, I talked to somebody face-to-face, we figured it out, we move on. Now it has to get elevated to a different level, seemingly. Hiring is becoming more and more difficult, it really is. And it's one of the most important things we do. If we don't hire the right people then how are we going to be successful?

FireHire, which we don't have to deal with in region six yet. When it's described to me, what people go through for that process, it seems like the death of organized hotshot crews. If you cannot choose the people you want to be on that crew, if they show up in the middle of a fire, in the middle of fire season, how can you build the crew cohesion and therefore trust those people with their lives?

That's not hyperbole, you have to trust these people with your life. You do. Your new assistant, your new squad leader who shows up—I've seen it happen on a fire, on a region five hotshot crew, in the middle of fire season, "Here you go." How does anybody look at that and say that's the way we should be doing things? I don't understand. But even here, it just gets more difficult every year. Something changes with the process, so you got to learn that over. Subtle changes or large changes, whatever it may be. And we're pushing more and more down on the individual firefighters, as far as administrative standpoint. They've got to come with all this training paperwork. There's a lot of things that I can do for them, where in the past I wouldn't have been able to.

From a fire perspective, I think, what's changed is a lot of the old guard is leaving for retirement—so there AD's now and that's fine and dandy, it's good—but it seems like a lot of the agency

folks aren't moving into those roles in the numbers necessary to sustain the organization as a whole.

What I would hope from a public perspective is that were starting to accept that fire is a natural part of our ecosystems. I don't sense that necessarily, in some areas, like Colorado where they took out 1000 homes in a couple years, maybe there they're starting to gather it: if you build out in the wildland urban interface, eventually that's going to burn, period. It's just a matter of fact. Understanding that and maybe becoming more proactive—. What I would like to see is codes written, for building codes—you'll have to have defensible space around your house. Everybody wants to live in a pretty place, but do you really want to put people's lives in jeopardy to do that. If you asked most people they'd probably say no, but they don't think of those consequences when they build up on top of a mountain with hazardous fuels, 360°. Maybe we're making progress there and maybe there's no way to know if we're ever going to make the right amount of progress, I don't know—but hopefully. I wish that would occur.

Hannah <00:18:10> How about any other significant fires that stand out? Really good burn shows?

Kennedy I got one of those, also 2012 we'll say, the Fontenelle Fire in Wyoming. So there's a whole bunch of fires going on, it's like National Preparedness Level 4 or 5. We get there and we're the only hotshot crew there; there were some jumpers some miscellaneous type two crews, some other resources—and for the next week to ten days, we're the only hotshot crew there. Management team is really relying on us heavy to pull off these burnouts and scout and figure out the plan for them—which is very common with management teams, they heavily rely on hotshot's because this is what we do every single day.

It's also a beetle kill, lodgepole fuel type—a 90+ percent mortality rate in a lot of the area. So you can imagine what it looks like. Hundred foot tall carpet of just dead fuel. So we attempted to pull off this mid-slope burnout. So, the fire is down below, we're on a road—so the fires down here in heavy timber and we're trying to get this burnout mid-slope—and 99% of the time, trying

to hold that type of fire in that type of fuel type, in that type of terrain, just ain't going to happen. But we got the winds, we adjusted our lighting patterns to help suck the wind downhill—you know we take it slow and it starts acting the way we wanted to. So we pull that off and it's just like, "Wow." I've never seen anything like that in that type of fuel model. So were feeling pretty good about it.

So we wrap up that division in a day or two, we wrap up another division, and we're going to the other side of the fire and there are some summer cabins there—13 of them. Jumpers and engines have been doing all of the infrastructure work, bringing hose lays, pumps, sprinklers, whatnot. We get there in the morning and they're like, "Here's what we've done, we don't expect the fire to be here today." I kind of look up on the mountain, "Hmmm, it seems pretty close—it could be here today, don't sell yourself short." Sure enough the winds, predominant winds start pushing it towards the cabins. So we get into, "All right, here, we're going to come up with a plan, make this happen today."

We scouted it we got everything in place and basically pulled off—. The fire is laying over the cabins and we're pulling the burnout off underneath that—so there's this huge column just laying over you and you're burning out and it's sucking up into the column. It—we're not worried about it spotting on the road behind us, we're just trying to save these cabins; we'll deal with that later. It all works really well, but the reason it worked wasn't because the other crews were working well with us, it's because our crew was so dialed in to the conditions and what we'd seen the last few days and that part of the season. We were—basically we had crewmembers telling the engine people what to do. They were spraying on chicken coops versus that cabin right over there. It's like, "Hey, get over here." So essentially our crew really just banded together with a group of people that were there and pulled it off. We didn't lose any structures; it's one of those moments that you're always going to remember. I remember Bob—one of the guys on the crew—and I were going up to light a strip deep to help pull it up from the house and I'm like "Bob, you are going to remember this day for a really long time because you're basically in between a major crown fire, and you're trying

to generate another one that will burn into it and people below you are going to be coming along." You had to be there to really grasp it, the train or jet engine sound of that, the column generated by it, and what was going on. There's some really great pictures of it and we got a commendation from the team, so it felt really good to be able to pull that off.

Hannah <00:22:25> Is that one of your proudest moments?

Kennedy Oh yeah, it's hard to—. We're always taught not to think about what the value of—whatever is at risk is, as far as homes. One person single wide trailer is another person's mansion, so. That was a very proud moment just because of the way the crew worked together. It's been a lot though, it doesn't matter if you've saved homes or not, "saving babies," so to speak; hero mentality. A lot of satisfaction just comes from being out in the middle of nowhere as well and just knowing you did a good job. Seeing the accomplishments over and over and over.

Hannah <00:23:47> Do you have any memorable spike camp moments?

Kennedy There's quite a few. Anytime you're in the wilderness and spiking out, that's preferable. You know, normal camp with 8000+ people and noise and sickness running around. That's not where we want to be. So if we get a spike, it's gravy on top of everything else. There's been tons of them. In Minnesota on Pagami [Creek Fire], I believe in 2011, you know, you're just canoeing out into this wilderness and they bring food to you and you make it. Some beautiful memories there. Calm, stars on the water, wolves howling in the background, northern lights. Once in a lifetime sort of event. Or, being stuck in the middle of Alaska and spiked out. You're hundreds of miles from anything worth calling a town. Or wildernesses here in our state, or Oregon, where the light's just right, you see a major mountain range. At Mt. Hood or Adams or any one of the big ones. You wake up and that's your view; that's pretty awesome. Those are always what we look forward to, spiking, anytime we can do that is good.

Hannah <00:25:04> A lot of crews develop around antics, either seasonally or just as a crew whether it's playing fibertape ball or hacky sack or whatever?

Kennedy

You know, hacky sack used to be the big thing for everybody everywhere, on every fire. That kind of died off, fibertape ball or throwing the Pulaski's into the trees—which we don't do, officially. It's really more along the lines of storytelling or really getting to know people, sharing funny stories with one another. “This one time so-and-so did such and such,” or the stupid human tricks always pop up. We've had, over the years, people that would lick the dust off of a bumper or bite a dead snake in half or wear somebody's underwear after spiking for 10 days on their head for 10 minutes for \$50. There're those kind of people who do anything. On the one hand yeah, it may be unsanitary and certainly unsightly, but that helps gel the crew, as well. It's like, “Wow this guy's crazy, what can we think of next?” Then it becomes a game. “Maybe he'll eat mouse poop or moose poop” or whatever it might be. And those are fun, but within reason—you don't want somebody getting sick over something stupid like that. It used to be the 4-4-40; if you could drink 4 quarts of water in four minutes and hold it down for 40 seconds. It sounds it real easy to do and I've heard—I've never seen—but I've heard people can do it. But most people end up vomiting profusely; it's always fun, on a slow day of mop up. But you know, one of the things—about the only thing I can think of—that we do now would be, maybe play a game of friendly ultimate Frisbee. It's something nice to do; it's active. You're not hiking or you're not running in a line anymore, but that's if they—if they've been good.

Hannah

<00:27:12> Any other good fire stories that you can think of?

Kennedy

No, I could tell you all kinds. Most of them involve people, not necessarily the fire itself. Because after a certain point—at least for me—after 23 years, there's not a whole lot, fire-wise, that you haven't seen. It's either you're going direct, you're going indirect, it's a big box, it's a little box, it's a little fire or it's a short-term fire, you know, in simple terms. Obviously there's a lot of differences, things can occur, but you get a pretty quick sense of what's going to happen. So for me, at this point in my life, it's more about the people that are different. What's their quirk or what's their thing? And getting to know everybody is fun and challenging and good. Nothing else is really sticking out fire-wise for me. Like I said, at

this point I can't even remember what years what fires were. I have to look back through all the records to try to put it all together.

Hannah <00:28:23> If there's one thing that you would want the public to understand or something you would want the public to know about fire, what would it be?

Kennedy Patience, I guess. Do we ask people to go stop hurricanes? Do we ask people to go stop floods? Do we asked people to go stop avalanches? Fire is a natural phenomenon. We do have some advantages of fire: if you take away the fuel the fire goes away, the fire triangle falls down. It's not as simple as throwing more people or more airplanes or more helicopters to get every fire — we're not going to be able to catch all of them, nor should we. Be careful what you ask for, you're putting somebody's kids at risk. If it was yours, you'd understand better.

Our job isn't rocket science by any means. In fact, a cave person could do it. But there's a lot of art to it and, you know, just be aware that were doing our best at all times. "We're not trying to lose your summer cabin, but were also not going to risk our lives to do so. Sorry. Maybe you should have built somewhere else or done a better job preparing. Not to be cruel, but that's just the reality of it. It were not all heroes, that's not why we do this. We do this because we love doing it, it pays us, it puts us through college, it puts food on the table for our kids, just like anybody else. Yeah that's about it.

*End of interview.*

## Erin Kimsey

Senior Firefighter, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:03:18> For the camera, can you state your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many you been a hotshot?

Kimsey My name is Erin Kimsey and I've been in fire for — this will be nine seasons, in 2014, and eight seasons hotshot.

Hannah And what role do you play on the crew?

Kimsey I am a lead crew — or a senior firefighter.

Hannah Do you have any favorite hotshot stories you'd like to share?

Kimsey Um. Lots, like what kind of stuff are you looking for specifically?

Hannah So the best stories, for this particular project, will describe the fire. A lot about the fire in the environment. Although I love the stories about camaraderie and the fun stuff. I'm going to be looking at the figures of speech that we use to describe fire. So memorable fires, best shift ever kinds of stories, that kind of thing.

Kimsey Okay, so, we were on the Guadalupe and — this one time —. This might've been three years ago now, probably more like four. I was with the Gila Hotshots at the time; fantastic hotshot crew. The Guadalupe's are down, sort of close to Texas — it's where Carlsbad Caverns are. We were doing this, just extreme burnout and I got to burnout for like the entirety of the 16-hour shift. There, it's lots of desert plants and everything is spiky and pokey and stuff. I was the most interior burner and I was just walking and walking and walking and just getting torn up by all these crazy plants. My legs were just completely shredded up and at one point my sleeve — the sleeve of my Nomex actually got totally torn off. But it was just super fun and we just kept going and going and going and I forget the exact amount of miles that we burned, but it was something totally crazy. Just really perfect sort

of a fire behavior, the perfect situation to burn. The winds were in our favor. For the most part we had just enough terrain to make it interesting and not sketchy. I don't think we had any spot fires or anything like that, but it was just this beautiful burn show and then we finally tied it in and pretty late—like, we were burning for the whole shift, so it was late. They drove up and it was dark and they brought us Denny's. It was chicken fried steaks, it was like, "I love chicken fried steak"; it was the best. Some kind of dessert with strawberries.

And then we just bedded down like right where we just finished the burnout. So, we're all sleeping and then I was having this weird dream that the guy sleeping next to me was snoring really loudly and I woke up and looked up and there was a bull. Like, you know, the kind that they ride—and he was standing over me with his nose like five inches from my face, just like snorting into my face. That was really scary. But it was just a beautiful—. I love the Guadalupe's and it was just lots of fun, sort of hotshot stuff. That was a pretty fun shift for sure.

[Adjusting the camera]

Hannah <00:07:38> Can you describe, as you were laying down fire on that burnout, burn show, what the fire was doing? Describe how was burning?

Kimsey A lot of that stuff is really light, sort of, flashy fuels. Then combined with the cacti and it was taking off. It was burning beautifully. It was definitely burning really well. It wasn't like that sort of apocalyptic like explosive burning that you get from the brush down in So Cal (or in southern Arizona) where it's like just giving off so much heat and it's terrifying and then once it's finished burning, like it's moonscape. But it was just a level below that. So it was pretty intense fire behavior but it wasn't so intense that you are really feeling like you were constantly, perpetually at risk. Just a really good desert fire basically.

Hannah <00:09:15> Any other good stories?

Kimsey Pretty much anytime that we got to go into the Gila Wilderness was pretty sweet. That national forest has, like, it might be the

largest—in the Continental United States—wilderness and I think it might be the first. I'm not going to like swear to both of those, either of those things, but I think that's the case. At that point, the Forest Service in that area had really gone away from full suppression. Especially in those areas because the Gila, there's nothing out there and in the wilderness especially—it's a fucking wilderness, there's nothing out there.

So, we did get the traditional sort of month of dry lightning before the monsoons started and you'd get these tiny lightning fires in the wilderness and sometimes they'd fly a squad of us in to go check it out, monitor it. Just being able to go into that area—because it's so massive—and all your timeframes are completely changed and exaggerated simply because you're only limited to your two feet because it's a wilderness. So, you know, going from point A to point B, it's going to take you a day and a half. It was just so beautiful. It had never been logged, just powerful and terrifying. Like, you are out there and you realize that you could pretty easily just stay, you know what I mean? You are really sort of—you weren't the one in control of that environment and that was really a unique feeling. But yeah, for like the Whitewater Baldy, they flew us out, they actually did fly us to this one section that needed to be finished up and it was all MIST tactics because it was in the wilderness. And there was just lots of weird cool stuff out there. There was this strange cabin that we wrapped and then unwrapped and we did a bunch of burning. It's just a really beautiful, awesome place, just very, very incredible. I'm trying to think of some other cool scenario; I might come up with something in a minute.

Hannah <00:11:50> How do you view the role of fire in the environment?

Kimsey I think that fire is completely necessary to the environment and I personally view homes as another fuel type. I think that, especially in places like region five where I just came from, down in Southern California, for instance, that area is tremendously fire adapted. It's just part of what all of the plants in that environment are designed to do. I think that's a situation where, not only does it belong in the environment, but we're never going to be able to subtract it from that environment because it's so volatile. But in

other places like the Gila [National Forest], for instance, and the Whitewater-Baldy [Fire Complex], there were these areas where fire had been suppressed there for so long, before they kind of got more lenient about suppression (which has happened recently). I was talking to some old dude who owned a cabin kind of near our firebase, and he said that when he was young—coming out there—that you could see through the trees to the mountains behind, and that it looks really different. Now it was so crowded you couldn't see—just really unhealthy. Just too much, what's that called? Too much growth; it was too closed and this is because of the fire suppression. Then like two months after that happened, we had the Whitewater Baldy come through and just nuked out all of that. And so I think that fire's a role in the environment is really crucial and I also think that years of fire suppression is causing a lot of really extreme fire behavior and it's making fire way more destructive than it would be, had a natural burn cycle been allowed to occur.

Hannah

<00:14:07> Any other stories come to mind when looking at that list? Was there any particular fire that was really transformative for you?

Kimsey

I think that a fire I found really interesting was the Station fire, I think that was on the Angeles in 2009. It was just very strange, like I hadn't been on fires, that might have been my first fire in So Cal actually, but I've been to Northern California a couple of times but then just going down there, it was just a circus. Just resources on resources and we were kind of fighting for work and I just, I don't know, it was weird. They do things differently down there, I think is what I'm getting at and I don't know if it's really effective or the right way to do it but they do have a lot to deal with. With much more than we have to deal with in other regions, just in regards with the urban interface that was such a fucking stupid fire. Like they sent us up to this antenna tower, to guard the antenna tower but there was no what really active fire by that point so it was like five a hotshot crews up there just waiting up there all night. It sitting on these night shifts, which are sweet because you're getting paid a whole bunch of money but we weren't doing anything. Then finally my old Supt did sort of the like "were going to make work to do because we're

hotshots" and that kind of thing so we ended up doing something stupid but... That's a bad example but that was such a weird fire. Spiking out...

<00:16:50> A couple years ago we were on a really cool fire on the border of Nevada and Oregon, and for the life of me I can't remember what it was called, but it went to like a couple million acres. It was really huge it just because it was in that grassland and it moved super quickly. That was one of the strangest fires I've ever been on. Very light a flashy fuels and then, I don't know if it was an extra dry season or something like that, but the first day that we rolled up, there was like thunder everywhere, and they called us in (and I forget what size it was), but we literally got there while it was still like—it was a Type 5, or something. We were just trying to suppress it and then like, "boom," there would be fire over here and fire over there. We're having to, like, move our buggies—and then we finally got an anchor point. So we're cold trailing, because that's what you can do with that kind of grass. It's going to just go out if it stops moving—it's going out.

So we're cold trailing, and then we leap-frog with another crew, and they're below us and we're coming up this hill and nobody was really checking our backdoor (but we had pretty good eyes back to where we had started). Then, we started to see—and it's like these big sort of steep but still rolling hills—and we start to see this smoke come up from below where we had started. And then we just see this wall of flame, like, shoot up, paralleling the line that we had been cold trailing and just—.

Of course in that situation it's scary, but you just go further into the black and you're totally fine. But it just, you know, just a wall of flame. Like, "where the fuck did that come from?" And, you know, it was just because they had just missed something really—that crew below us had missed something really minor and it had completely blown out. Like I said, extremely volatile. I'm not sure what the story was that year but—.

It was ranchland, so these ranchers—so that first shift we were just running all over the place and just trying things that just didn't work. But it's in that really cool fuel type that, you know, you get the spectacular burnouts and it looks like the world is

coming to an end, and then it's all totally over—like within seconds. You know, a couple chains back you can just hop right into it because it's already cold and it's like a safety zone already. But there were a whole bunch of ranchers who had a lot invested in that area. And they were like, No, you're not going to make this fire any bigger by burning out; you're going to go direct with the dozers or whatever. And so we just kept trying to go direct and kept trying to cold trail and we kept trying to, like, back off because shit, excuse me, “stuff” would just get too crazy. Then we went to go do—we went to a section to go burn off of a road—and this whole time we've been there, for maybe a week by this point, we'd just been chasing spots and running around, and then discovering that a spot that we had spent, you know, well into the night lining was actually totally interior—and it was just big and confusing. It was so big that none of us really—people in charge didn't really know what was going on.

So we were doing a burnout with another hotshot crew and it was like, maybe 1300 and so we're burning along the slope—I'm sorry, at the top of the slope—that goes down and there's a drainage and then, on the other side is the fire backing down the drainage. So, I was kind of the lookout and I was taking weather. And as a lookout, I was kind of like a mobile lookout, so I went down into the area we were burning so I could get eyes on what that fire across the drainage was doing. It was kind of a weird lookout situation. So I'm looking at it and I'm like, "All right, I like that, it looks good, cool." And I'm taking weather (and stuff) and we're doing this burnout. This little thunder cell comes up and parks over us, like a T-cell, or whatever. Which was weird because you know, in the southwest that's like a standard thing like at noon or whatever—you get a cumulus buildup that turns into storms after July. It's like the pattern you have every day. But this was like Nevada, so—first time fighting fire in Nevada, too—so I was not really sure what the standard weather patterns were. So this little nugget of a storm comes up and like, he's like right over our burn and then like, within seconds we get this burst of precip. And then, “boom,” that fire that was on the other side of the drainage is racing up underneath us. It is like fully hooked under, and it's like, you know, bombing towards the line and towards our vehicles and everything.

So, we ended up having to run out and hop in the vehicles and drive out as fast as we could. But obviously it's like a two-track and our Supt ride, it had been getting flat tires the whole time, too. We'd been getting flat tires all over this place for some reason—the Supt ride, it's like a big toolbox dually. It was on four tires by this point, and so it was just terrifying. If you got another flat and then, like the Supt ride holds up everybody else, and we all get burned over. So we ended up getting out of there in time but somebody on the other hotshot crew that had been on the line ahead of us, actually ended up sort of in a bad situation—but they ended up totally fine.

That was just a really interesting day and that whole fire was just so fucking weird. But at the very end of it, the ranchers, I think, or somebody was finally like, "You know, let's just burn it out a little bit, like, we've actually made a dent." The fire is way away from the ranchland now. It's kind of, it's almost kind of died out—you know what I mean? We ended up doing this awesome burnout for—I forget how many miles, but it was sort of like my first one—where we just burned and burned and burned and the burnouts, they just looked perfect. We had perfect winds the whole time and it was just like the quickest solution, as opposed to all the crazy, stupid stuff we had been trying for the week and a half before that point. But anyway, yeah, it was a good fire.

Hannah <00:23:51> Any other thoughts, any other stories?

Kimsey Couth Vault. That's just in R5 thing, isn't it?

Hannah People call it different things; we always called it the buck list.

Kimsey Fucking R5.

Hannah What's your favorite thing about hotshotting?

Kimsey I really like just hanging out with people. I really love fire, but with hotshotting it's like, "You're always with your friends." Even if they're not really your friends, they kind of are your friends. I like the social aspect of it a lot. I really—I really do love fire. I like to travel, I like the travel aspect of it too. You just get to go to some crazy places and it's just so exciting because you never

really know where or what you're going to end up doing—or what weird stuff you're going to end up seeing. So that's pretty much, pretty much why.

Hannah <00:25:10> If you were to describe the characteristics of an ideal hotshot what would it be?

Kimsey I think that more than anything you have to have a really—the right attitude. I don't want to say a good attitude because that makes it sound like it's some kind of ideal person, which is definitely not the case. You have to have the right attitude for the job and, to a certain extent, that means you gotta really just not care about some things that normal people care about. And just let some things go when normal people aren't going to be like, "Yeah, that's cool," you know what I mean?

Fitness is important, but there are—it's the endless cliché of the individual that's super fit and is just a nightmare sometimes. It's always the people that are just, fun and funny and upbeat and hard-working—and being hard-working doesn't mean that you're super buff, at all. Those two things are absolutely mutually exclusive sometimes. So yeah, I just think that being a team player and sort of being comfortable with whatever happens. So I think that's a lot of it.

Hannah <00:26:42> Any other thoughts any other stories? You've given me good stuff to work with.

Kimsey I don't know. I just know there's probably lots of cool stuff that I'm actually not thinking of. Base camp, blue rockets.

Hannah I heard a great story from someone the other day of someone who, you know, stepped into a port-a-potty—or it was stepping out—right as a gust of winds came up and blew it over.

Kimsey Oh man! It's always like when you're like not trying to think of the interesting stories that you do.

I think that's all I got. I don't want to get anyone in trouble and that's where this will go.

Hannah Well. Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## **Brian Laird**

### **Hotshot Captain, Sierra Hotshots (Sierra National Forest; USDA)**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014 in Oakhurst, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah For the camera, can you tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many of those have been hotshot?

Laird My name is Brian Keith Laird and I started in 1990; this coming season will be my 24th season. And how many years I've been hotshot? I believe this will be my 15th year as a hotshot.

Hannah What position do you fill?

Laird I fill a captain's position.

Hannah What is your favorite part about hotshotting?

Laird Many different things. One thing about being a hotshot is that, you know, I enjoy, obviously the firefighting part of it, but people that are on hotshot crews want to be here, you know, it's like you kind of get the best of the best. There isn't a whole lot you have to do to motivate them. Of course there's moments of that, but everybody wants to be here and everybody wants to push each other always to another level. You know what I mean? So there's such a strong commodity, you know, so much collaboration and teamwork that it takes to kind of run the crew successfully and efficiently and safely. And so, being a part of that is just, I think, what sums it up the most. It's just the whole collaboration of everybody that really, really wants to be here.

I've been on different modules. I've been on a helicopter, I've been on an engine and I've seen how, you know, there's lots of little complaining and little issues that come up—different little issues that come up—and, believe me some of those modules have been good, but never like anything I've seen on a hotshot crew. Even on like a type II crew or going to the LP for quite a few years. There's something about being on a handcrew, especially a hotshot crew, where you know, a lot of that kind of stuff is weeded out—those issues are weeded out and I think that

it kind of sets the environment for just being able to have a good time, work hard, really develop and nurture—like, a really strong like efficient workforce, you might say. You know what I mean? A lot of those other issues are just kind of wiped clean. Of course things come up periodically, you know, no doubt, yeah, I think that kind of sums it up for the most part.

Hannah <00:07:34> Do you have a favorite hotshot story that you'd like to share? Any particular fires stand out?

Laird Gosh, I'll have to think about that pretty hard—there's many different stories. I don't know, I think some of the spike outs are some of the funest. Especially when you get to go to somewhere kind of more exotic—you might say—type places. Some of them— even here on our forest—you know, some of the mountains in our forest alone are some of the most beautiful places that you get to see. One time, it was a 2007 I believe, we used to go back to the Black Hills for project work for quite a few years. While we were out there, we were available nationally for fires. So we went to Minnesota, the Boundary Waters, for fire. That was quite an interesting experience because we were kind of given a crash course in water safety because we were going to have to use canoes and then portage canoes around to different areas of the fire—because, you know, the Boundary Waters is like little bits of island land and then, you know, the only way you can get around is by canoe.

And so they gave us kind of a little crash course on water safety and how to handle canoes and then we were canoeing around to different parts of the fire. We'd have to portage them over little bits of land and you'd go cut line here for a little while, and mop-up this little area, and so that was way different. We just spiked out and they just supported us for 14-days, we were out. Fire was very close—part of it was in Canada—we were in the very top of Minnesota there, so that was pretty interesting.

There were some funny things that happened. One of the coves that we paddled into, there was—. It was filled with all these fish. When we paddled into this cove, we were like, "Whoa, there's all these fish everywhere." We found out they were trying to, I think they were trying to get to another spot to spawn. Our

superintendent at the time, he loves fish, he likes to eat so he thought he'd take one. I don't know how much some people would probably like this, but we ended up finding out later that they're sucker fish—they're not like a fish you should really be eating. The thing is pretty gross, it's pretty nasty. The people in Minnesota, they only fish for like, pike and walleye are likely to coveted fish that you fish for—to mainly consume—and we had a guy come out, what was he? I can't remember exactly what his position was on the line—he came out and he was all, somehow the story got back, he's like, "Are you the guys out here eating sucker fish?" We had to fess up to it. But, you know, we only took one, we found out that they're not very good to consume, it's just that whole experience. It was pretty fun. It was really different and just really, really fun.

There's millions of different stories probably, but just that one came to the top of my head. Somewhere you wouldn't ever expect to go to, you know, and that's how it is on a hotshot crew—it's almost like every year, I think, you do something new. Even if it's just a minor detail every year, or go to some new kind of place, or you might go to the same place but do something differently and it's just all kinds of crazy experiences. So that's one that comes to mind for you guys. All in all it's a funny experience, good fire behavior too, really fun spike out. In between, off the clock time, we did do some amazing fishing, too. So it was pretty fun.

Hannah <00:12:26> Tell me about the fire behavior up there. Can you describe what the fire was doing, what your objectives were? Paint a picture.

Laird Well they had no, obviously we kind of didn't know much about the kind of conditions and the fuel types. So much we do kind of learn very quickly—in our briefing before we went out to do a spike out. It turns out that they had had, in years past—I forget exactly how many years past—they had some really strong wind events out there. So they had really strong blow downs, so there was a lot of jack pine that—I think what they have up there is jack pine, I think it is what it's called in that part of the country—and obviously a lot of that kind of part of the country was pretty

wet most of the time. But they'd been going through drought conditions and so you had a lot of accumulated fuel on the ground and in the kind of condition it was, the dryness—that jack pine burns a really, really well. And, you know, the standing stands of it are growing really thick, you know, dog hair thickets of it.

We had some really strong pockets of intensity and then you had a lot of like, I don't remember all the species on the ground, but a lot of that really tundra grass too. It can make a line construction very tough at times, but for the most part it was some definite strong intensity. We were trying to go direct to where we could—there was some really good intensity, especially some of the stuff we could see off in the distance over in Canada. We saw some really good runs of fire. Most of the stuff that we worked on, the intensity was very low for the most part, you know, we were just going direct line and like I said, it's little pockets of land, little islands so you just kind of—a lot of times you would just start cutting fireline right off the water and then cut over into somewhere where—it either cut into maybe another body of water. God what were the bodies of water they had there? They have a really high acidity, you know, the pH level was really, really acidic and we had to walk across some of them some times and they're really—tore up some of the guys feet because the acidity is like, it's some really, really high level where it can actually kind of a rot your skin really bad so yeah, it was—.

Pretty much just going direct, we did do a little bit of burning here and there and I'm sure that area doesn't burn like that normally, but we were amazed at like, because I knew like, I think one of the first things we did when we got out there was doing a little bit of line construction and prep for a burn. And we were kind of like thinking, you know, the intensity going to pretty low, like it wouldn't be that—. We were amazed when we started lighting it off at how, "Whoa," you know, we were like, "I didn't think it was going to burn like that." And that kind of set the tone for like the rest of the fire. We kind of had an idea of like—.

You go to different places, you kind of don't know quite what to expect. You get briefings and pocket cards and all that kind of stuff to kind of give you an idea of what it might be doing at that time of year, or that time of the season, but after we saw that and saw how it burned, it's kind of like, "Okay." Sometimes you go back to like, I've been to Kentucky and to Tennessee and you think, you know, the fires that we get out here are in region three or region five—and even some of the northern states we see some pretty radical fire, extreme fire behavior—and when you kind of go back to places like that you almost tend to think that you're going somewhere, "Okay, it's going to be a piece of cake."

Well, we kind of realized that it's not, you know, they're in a serious condition right now, fire behavior is like back home. It's that kind of, they're different species of trees but, you've got hardwoods, your softwoods, and then you have all these, kind of, timber brush mix. So everything was there—as far as the fuel type— everything was there for pretty explosive fire behavior—and we saw some for sure. I would say a lot of the time we were doing line construction, not so much, but would burn a bit and then some of the runs we saw out in different parts of the fire, extreme, extreme fire behavior.

Hannah <00:17:32> How do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Laird Essential, you know, it's kind of funny that you asked that because I was thinking about that the other day and there's probably many different ways to describe it. I don't know that some people would like to hear it like this but I see it as—fire is like, I mean, it's a force of Mother Nature. Obviously. I see it a lot like people dying, you know what I mean? It's like sometimes death is brought to us by natural causes. Sometimes death is forced upon us, like murder or some kind of illness that's brought upon us earlier than we should expire. Sometimes it by some kind of bad accident. Fire is a lot the same way. It sometimes lit by a person. Sometimes it started by lightning. Sometimes by some kind of strange thing, like a squirrel on a power line or something. You know what I mean?

Sometimes we may be killed by animals, but it has to happen for new growth and healthy growth and, also, too, if everybody lived all the time, then where would space be on this planet for people? As much as it hurts a lot of us, and some of it happens too early, and some of the catastrophic fires that we get, you know, say stuff like something in Yellowstone or even just the Rim fire last year—such beautiful land, watch it burn up and scar for so many years. But say somebody dies before we think what is their time, it's sad to see it happen but, I don't know, it all happens for a reason, you know? Definitely. Definitely when it started by natural causes and it burns at a low intensity and does its thing, it—just like a prescribed fire. We see it as like "Oh, that was—." We don't have to see such visual, kind of rude, reminders of the destruction that's caused. But you know, some of those really catastrophic fires that really scorch the land and take out large stands of timber or whatever, it takes a long time, but eventually we get healthy regrowth.

And a lot of times, you look back before we fought fire. Some of the Native Americans that—they would set some of that stuff intentionally for hunting. There's a lot of benefits that come out of it. It helps return certain species, probably—sometimes healthy species—back to certain areas of the land that need to, probably because it's been altered from so many years of too much—you know—not enough fire in those areas. It definitely helps for some species of animals to be able to hunt and probably for many different reasons. I just see it as, it's essential even some of the catastrophic fires. We have to see the visual reminders of it, too. Not always pleasant to see but it's definitely essential.

Hannah <00:22:04> Do you have any stories about really awesome burn shows that you've done on fires? Or, kind of that classic hotshot shift, the really long pull? Can you describe one of the good fires that really stands out in your mind?

Laird Yeah, I remember—obvious the many different ones—but one that comes to mind is—. What was the name of the fire, I could have the name wrong, but it was in Arizona. I want to say it was called Paradise Park Fire. It was on the Apache Sitgreaves. We were flown out to go spike out and prep in area for burn, but

with Payson. And just us, two crews out there and this is probably 2002, I think, 2002. And we were prepping kind of a trail system; they kind of wanted us to use MIST tactics, you know, least impact possible—which we always tried to do, you know it's funny MIST. We're always trying to do as minimal as we have to to suppress the fire—anyways, but we were working off this trail system, we were going to prep it and then, there was kind of—inside our division there was kind of in this big, kind of a mesa top, a mountain, you know, probably 800 feet tall or so. Back inside the burn quite a ways. I'd say if you had to walk to the mesa from one of the trail system ways, it was probably a mile at the most, maybe inside.

Their plan was, we were going to prep this trail system, we were going to take a chunk, you know our division and Payson was going to take a chunk of line, and we were going to ping-pong—the classic ping-pong—and they were going to ping-pong this mesa top and bring down off the—. And kind of let it bleed off the top of it and then we were going to hand light the line once the fire was kind of brought down off the top of that mountain.

So we spent, gosh, I want to say we spent two days prepping it, you know, snagging, it was timber—classic, like, 70, 80 foot ponderosa pine, needle cast, minimal brush in there, but a lot of pine and needle cast everywhere. Anyways a lot of snagging, a lot of bug kill-type stuff out there. So we were kind of doing two days of cleaning up the trail, snagging line; burn show is ready to happen. We get our burn pattern set up. We were going to, like I said, we were going to ping-pong it and then bring it off the top, and then when it came and worked its way off the top of that mountain, we were going to start hand lighting. We were kind of going to go in direct anyways, not quite to where the fire meets the base of the mountain and we were going to kind of—us and Payson—we're kind of going to burn our way out, and then out, and then work two different ways up the trail up there to our division break.

And that was the first time, in that I've ever—. At the time, I thought, “ping-pong, this will be cool.” From what I hear the superintendent and all and the captains at the time, Mike and

Alan—and the other captain talking at the time, kind of like, “Heads up about when they do ping-pong operations.” You know, I’ve heard of it, but I don’t think I’ve ever saw a ping-pong operation—I was a sawyer back then at that time—I don’t think I’d ever saw one. That was when I was really reminded about how much—if you can on the ground—and how much they really hold the reins on the kind of stuff and have very common and conformed firing boss in the air to control that operation. Because the problem with ping-pong’s is that, you probably know, a lot of the times they don’t always catch a good ignition source, or they hit really good ignition sources, or they just take a while to light. And so what they do is they, you know—there’s different settings on the machine, how many can they let out at a time and how frequent—so they make it sound like this is going to be a very systematic thing. And all the sudden, you can see the plane flying around—you obviously can’t see the ping-pong’s coming out, but you can hear them on the radio talking, what they’re doing, the passes they’re going to make.

Just to make it a long story short, they got way too many fires going, way too fast, and before we knew it we had a giant wall of fire coming towards us on our line. And we never got to go back up and do—initiate our pattern how we wanted to, lighting the fire kind of close to where they had brought it down off the mountain. We basically were forced into running up and down our line to try to defend what we had, and hold what we had, and basically splitting off each other and running with torches both ways and trying to just hold this trail. It was, for lack of a better word, it was insane. It was controlled insanity, it was—. But we did so good; it was amazing. We had a pretty intense wall of flame coming at us, it stood up in the crowns; we had a running crown fire coming at us. I’m sure for being a captain at the time there was a pretty heavy decision for the superintendent, at the time—it was a pretty heavy decision point on whether to kind of back off somewhere, but we didn’t. We obviously had a safety zone, but trying to make that decision, like, “Hey, let’s try to run and get it burned out and send fire back towards it and backfire this thing and try to hold onto what we got and try to make it still completed when obviously everything is going wrong.”

Obviously, after they got too much fire going, we retreated back to our trail, split off of each other, ran torches to get at least just the line burned out. We had so many spot fires it was—. We had spot fires just starting from radiant heat—just from trees being so hot, to just starting stuff on the other side of the line from just such insane radiant heat. I mean, I'm talking like we had anywhere from 50 to 60, probably, you know—from spot fires the size of a large pizza to 10-x-50s.

Well, we ended up holding onto it, picked it up. We were picking up spots until, I don't know, 10 or 11 at night and then we got a 70-acre slop and us and Payson picked that up in the middle of the night. Then I remember, when we were just about done picking up the slop (the 70-acre slop), we decided to bed down some of us. So we went down to our spike spot, bedded down, and I remember that night I was so sweaty—I was a sawyer back then—I stripped down completely. My clothes were just completely wet, so I stripped down completely and I was like, "I'm going to sleep naked in my bag and dry my clothes out." Well, I woke up to—I was probably asleep for like an hour—and I woke up to the division straight over my face yelling at me to wake up. And he was just hysterical, he was just freaking out, he was like, "You've got to get out of bed."

He didn't even go to the captain, he just started finding crewmembers and his like, "You've got a wake-up, we've got a spot fire." And the spot fire is literally like, from where we were sleeping like, probably like 70 feet away. It was like maybe 100 x 100, you know, burning around the needle cast and stuff. So we just all jumped up—I probably got into my clothes in like a minute— so we all just kind of started getting, you know, filtering in and started cutting line around this thing. We caught it. We ended up working until probably about—pretty much until it got daylight, so probably an hour of sleep with 50 to 100 spot fires during the day, hooking a 70 acre slop-over, to going to sleep, to picking up another hundred by hundred, probably, spot (probably got missed).

Then we were supposed to come out the next day and I guess, I have some pretty classic pictures and some of my old pictures of

us sitting around in all of our gear when it's ready to be slung out—or we're getting ready to be flown out the next day. The classic look on people's faces—an awesome two days of the hell. We knew, it was pretty exciting, it was a really fun shift. Everything was done really safe, though, you know what I mean? It was cool, it was a really fun shift. One of the things that kind of made it pretty cool to hear, you know, I guess from camp—that when everything, when the wall of fire was coming at us and the ping-pong operation got out of control, well the column was just super gnarly looking. I guess they took some pictures from camp and then the crews that were coming in, they thought we were—because we kind of lost communications with some people—and they thought that there might have been some possible burnover. They didn't know what was going on really, because they kind of lost some communication there for a little while.

Gila and some other crews came in, some region three crews—hotshot crews—came in to replace us in the morning and they saw what we held onto and they were like, "Man, they didn't know what happened to you guys in camp." Later, when we came back to camp, they showed us some pictures of what the column looked like from camp, where we were, and they were just like "Man, amazing job holding onto this." They thought it was just gone. They thought it was like one of those pretty epic shifts. The kind of stuff you do it for.

Hannah <00:33:34> Do you have another one in you? Do you have any other? How do you see the value of your work?

Laird The value of my work? Shoot, it's public service for one thing and you're getting to do something—. I love the mountains; it's public service, you get to help out defending the forest, you know what I mean? You get to also help out implementing fire into the environment and help out, in that sense, by doing some prescribed fire. To do stuff like that too. You get to get to go to all kinds of different places that you would never even think about traveling to. You get to find all kinds of places, like, "I'd like to come back to this place sometimes." A lot of them I don't ever go back to them and visit. I spend so much time, you know—because in my off time I'm a surfer, I travel around the world,

kind of exclusively to do that kind of stuff. So for me, I get to spend half my life in the mountains and half of it in the ocean. And like I said earlier, you know, I'm getting to work around a bunch of really quality people that like to do this kind of work and are motivated to do it—and then it being a public service on top of it. You know, it's the people you meet and all the kinds of different places that you go to, too. There's a ton of value and, for so many different reasons.

Hannah

<00:35:22> Any other good stories you want to share?

Laird

I'm just trying to pick out one. This is hard. Another good—I think another good time to is—I know a lot of good people don't appreciate—. See, I grew up in the Southern California, so I love going down—that's just where I, that's where I came from. So I love the brush lands in Southern California, you know? Especially the LP, since I came from there. The year we had the Zaca Fire, you know, many different crews did many different tours on that fire; I was loving it. I got to go back to some areas in the Santa Barbara backcountry that I'd always wanted to see, never got to see. And that year, in all forests—. It was one of those years. We did some backfire burnout operations, but it was just a line construction year. That was probably my second year as squaddie on the crew. I was loving it, I was in my element. I'm sure there was some other people that weren't appreciating it as much, but I love line construction. I do; I really like it a lot. It's the feeling you get of walking out after a really long day of line construction, I don't know, there's something about it—obviously it can be grueling times while you're doing it.

I just love it. I love doing line construction and there's so much of it—really tough, hard line construction that we did in some places that I always wanted to see and get back into the backcountry, kind of backed by the Sisqua—which is kind of a main river that runs in the Santa Barbara backcountry. I'd always wanted to get back into some of those areas. I think there's many different parts on the two tours that we did on the Zaca—two I should say. That year was just so full of many just really fulfilling days of line construction and I think we had so many days where the sawyers ran through every single bit of gas that we could

possibly run through. And then the crews giving up gas to us, you know what I mean? And you feel pretty dang proud, you know, when your guys are like—there are guys giving up gas to you. It makes your crew feel pretty tough and strong. That's what you do for, you know? I think guys push themselves to some levels that they probably didn't know they had it in them, you know. That would be my best story.

Hannah

That's great. Great.

*End of interview.*

## Jeff Locke

Hotshot Superintendent, Valyermo Hotshots (Angeles National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 08, 2014 in Santa Clarita, CA for The Smokey Generation

Hannah <00:05:16> If you would, for the camera say your name, how many years have you been a hotshot, how many years have you been in fire?

Locke Jeff Locke, let's see, I've been a hotshot for—I believe it's 19 years and I've been in fire since 1988, about 26 years, 25 years total.

Hannah Do you have a favorite hotshot story?

Locke Gosh. I was thinking about that when you are talking to the previous guy and the ones that come to mind are the earlier years when things were pretty bright and shiny back then. The first assignment that I can remember going off forest was going to Florida. And I just remember we got ordered—I believe we were on a fire that day—we got ordered up. Back in those days they didn't have 2:1 rest cycles and all that stuff. Pretty much, the end of the day came, we got ordered to Florida and they gave us a couple of hours to get our stuff together and head to the airport.

We got to the airport, there was plenty of time to take a rest—course it was new and exciting to me. I wanted to be engaged the whole time, even when we messed around at the airport. I think we went into Bakersfield, if I'm not mistaken—this was 1989, so it's been a while. I think we laid around for about 14 hours, 12 hours. Of course I didn't go to sleep. There was just too much fun going on, too much excitement about what was coming. So anyway, we got on the plane and ended up in the Everglades in Florida. Of course, the first thing we did when we got there, at the fire camp—which was just a Park Service grassy area to rest on—wasn't but a couple minutes we realized every little pool of water was filled with alligators. Of course there was going to be no rest with those guys around.

They hand us all lunches. Eventually, one of the guys threw a sandwich into the pool of alligators and they all started fighting

over it. That was just a lot of fun going on, new adventure. I guess what I learned out of that? 54 hours later I was pretty darn tired. I remember a helicopter flying in—we'd been out in the Everglades fighting a fire all night and it was a different type of fire two—I know when we headed out it wasn't until 430 in the afternoon when apparently the RH's would come up and let the fire lay down a little bit. That was the time when you could get out and take your flapper—which none of us knew what a flapper was, not even the superintendent—because the first thing he did when we got up to line up in our tool order, we grabbed our chainsaws. We're all lined up—I don't know if it was the IC or whoever was in charge of the fire—kind of came out laughing, said "Oh you boys, you're not going to get too far with that equipment." We just looked at him like "Whatever. We know how to use this stuff." Eventually they convinced the Old Man, Ron Smith, these are the tools it you're going to have to take out and they kind of gave us a rundown on how the fireline would go and how you would beat down the fire with a mud flap.

We went out and did a shift overnight and, there was one point—I might backtrack on the 54 hours, I think we got a 20 minute break where we actually laid down and fell asleep. It was after we had been fighting fires for hours and it was probably about sunup because I know when we sat down and we had broken off in a short squad. I was going with Ron Smith, the Old Man, and another portion of the crew to go back about two miles behind us where we had a little flare-up. And what we were doing is, on the fire line where the sawgrass was burning—that's what they call it—we were beating it down. And if you weren't careful, if you didn't beat it down really well, the embers didn't go out from the humidity, you could get a little flare-up.

Well, sure enough, that's what happened. We got one, but it was a couple miles out. We could see it off in the distance behind us, so we trudged back and we got about halfway there and the Old Man, you know, everybody's ankles were hurting from walking on these clumps and stuff, so he said, "Okay, sit down and take a break."

The sun was just starting to come up, we sat down—and they warned us about areas in the Everglades, any pocket of water there was going to be an alligator and there was some kind of critter you didn't want to be around. Sure enough, we sat down for about 15 minutes, 20 minutes, and we instantly dozed off and about 15-20 minutes later the Old Man said, "It's time to get up." I looked over and there was a huge hole we were sitting next to and I got up and looked into it and there was an alligator in there. The head was sticking out, it must have been that big, it must have been, like 12 or 15 feet long; it was a huge alligator. Course we sat right next to it and took a little snooze. We hoofed it out of their pretty quick.

That's one of the parts of the adventure that really etched in my brain. That evening we slept out on a platform, on a lookout platform for the visitors. All night long we could hear the gators. You'd look over the side and they'd be right there at the wall. They had about a three-foot wall between you and them. We'd horsed around, told jokes all night, and that was my very first season as a hotshot, that was my second season with the Forest Service. So that was some good adventure, and there's a lot more to the story. Guys going fishing—it was just fun—all the different bugs. Anyway, that's one of the favorites from the old days.

Hannah

<00:13:24> What's your favorite type of shift?

Locke

My favorite type of shift? Oh man, I really like the ones that where we get out and spike, and we're away from everything and it's probably most of the guys—the folks I should say—most of their mind sets, when they think of the good shifts, it's the ones where we've been out, up on a mountain. We've either hiked our way up there or we've been flown up there and dropped off. And up being out there for nearly a 14-day gig, or maybe a little bit less. You're anywhere from just having a good time in the evening, you know the camaraderie, or being too wiped out to have a good time, or getting your butts kicked during the daytime, or evening doing the job. I think some of those times are the ones that really stick out in your mind and it's usually the toughest most miserable or—. The fires that almost got you, type thing, so to speak. The ones that had a little excitement involved

in either fire behavior—. One that I can think of that really stands out is nearly getting taken out by a flash flood, which was pretty unexpected by all of us.

Hannah

How did it play out?

Locke

Oh, how did it play out? This is relatively recent—anything I say, "recent," it probably happened within the last 10 years. That all seems really recent to me. We were on a fire in the Sequoia and we had already been spiked—. Now everything kind of blends together, the older you get, the more fire you go to, the years start blending. We had been on a fire earlier and we had spiked out—I could be wrong, it could have been—this was our first one and then we went and spiked out on another one. But in any rate, we'd been on fire for a while and we went up and—I think it was about a 300 acre fire and it was of course in steep nasty terrain, like we mostly go to. We'd been on the fire for a couple of days, we'd been on the top of it cutting. And I'd hiked from the top down doing some scouting and the crew ended up going around to the bottom of the fire where they were looking at some pieces to tie into other crews coming down and a piece of line that I believe we had brought down from the top. We were going to try to finish anchoring it into the bottom.

Well, the fire itself wasn't really doing much that I can remember, not at that point in the game. So we were kind of laid back. We had worked all day just cutting line, you know, pretty non-eventful stuff, mostly going direct. Later that day and they were calling for thunderstorms—they had been calling for thunderstorms for several days prior to that to—nothing really became of it, for us. Well on this particular day, we were in the bottom and we had been talking to a home owner who actually lived in a little trailer on a piece of property there. He was telling us, through the years, how there had been flash floods in that area that had taken out the road. That had happened, I think he said, twice since he had lived in that area. We really didn't really think much of it, you know, just hearing stories of the locals and not thinking much of it.

Later on that day, it may have even been the next day, because I believe we were in there for a couple of days. We were driving

down to camp and back up in the morning. Anyway, we were doing our thing, cutting line. We started hearing people talking about, you know, they were getting the rain up on top. We thought it was away from the fire a little bit. Pretty soon we heard people talking about flash flooding across the road and things kind of going on. We had pulled the crew off the fireline and where we were, is down by the creek. It had a little meandering creek.

It was us and another crew down there. So two crews, superintendents were with us, and I was a captain then. We're down—the guys are down sharpening saws and sharpening tools, taking care of business. We had a strike team leader that was from a different agency. This has a little bit of a bearing on how it kind of transpired. He came running down, he was up there with the land owner—I guess his trailer was, like, an ice cream truck he had up there. He comes running down, just waving his arms and screaming. It were all looking at him and—he was kind of a spaz in the first place—so we thought, “Oh what's this guy up to now?” He comes running down, he's like “Ahhh. It's coming. Ahhhh.” And all these gestures. We're all just looking at him—“what in the world,” He wouldn't come down by us. He's standing up on top of the hill, yelling down at us. We're like, “Oh no. He must be at it again.” But anyway, we all looked at each other and laughed and then just a couple seconds later comes the home owner and he's like, “You guys gotta move. It's gonna get you. It's a flash flood.” We knew right then, it clicked. And all of the sudden we could hear something coming down the canyon. I looked up the canyon—I could probably see a quarter mile up the canyon—and I saw a big, I don't know what it was, probably a cottonwood tree, maybe an oak tree, just come down like that. Then I could hear an ominous thud like sound. All I could equate it to is the boulders clacking together. I told my guys, “Everybody get in the truck. We're out of here!” They're sharpening, and they're like—. “Just get your shit in the truck; we're out of here!” At that time everybody else was becoming alarmed. I told my driver, “Just start the truck and start moving.” We were the first ones up and there were four crew buggies and two Supt. trucks down there. When I pulled out, I looked and the wall was only 100 feet—I am talking a wall of mud and debris

and branches and crap as high as this building or higher. It was coming right where we were sitting.

Well, when the last truck pulled out—it was this Supt. from the other crew—he was the last one out. He said, when he pulled out there was stuff hitting the back of his truck. So that's how close it was. After we got out of that, the guys came—we actually got footage of it and all that. It wasn't 20 minutes, a half an hour later it had subsided and where we were sitting there was a trench, probably about 30 feet wide and 20 feet deep where there used to be a little meandering creek. Of course, the road that went into that area was totally wipe out.

What scared me the most and alarmed the some of the folks was, 10 minutes or maybe 15 minutes before that flood came through, a type two crew had left and they were heading down to camp. And we were just terrified that they got wiped out. Well, apparently they made it out the mouth right when it started to hit down below, so they were okay. When I think of the closest call I've ever had, that's the one. To this day, when we meet up with the other crew, we always look at each other, we go, "Okay, if there's any thunderstorms around, we're going to find high ground."

We used that as like a 'lessons learned' for the crew. You're thinking fire but, boy, when fire goes through, if you get any rain on the area, that's when flash floods happen so much quicker. Anyway, it was exciting to say the least.

Hannah <00:23:22> If we were to bring it back to, the best kinds of shifts, you said spiking out?

Locke Okay, we had a spike out that night, after that because of the road—it took them another day to put the road back in—. Spiking out. I can even think of one from last summer that was good. We had spent several tough shifts, I don't know if I can mention—Mountain Fire, up towards Palm Springs, above Palm Springs. Idyllwild. I guess it actually started down towards Idyllwild, I forget the actual name of the town. We ended up working the bottom, the bottom portion of it, and hiking all the way up over the top of the mountain, which is a pretty

treacherous looking mountain. Not so much from the side we went up, but the other side it was the mountain that we always dreaded ending up on because it's San Jacinto, it's a pretty big mountain. Anyway, for myself, it was kind of fun because I got to go up initially to find a place to spike out. We had to take a helicopter ride when we were up there. And they had a big airshow going on and we'd have to tuck ourselves away, get out of the way of the air tankers while they were dropping. In the meantime, try to find a decent place to land where we could hike the crews in and set up a spike camp.

Eventually we found a good spot and we found a decent spot to hike from—which wasn't too far from the black. Probably the biggest hazards were getting clobbered by a tree. Anyway, we got the crews in there, picked up the line at a division break. I guess we were up there for about a week, but I ended up getting to go back up there with the—. Why did we leave? We did a section of line, went back down, and then we sent up for—. We may have done another couple shifts down below. Then we went back up on top. I ended up taking three professional saw teams. I went as a felling boss up on top and kind of learned a lesson about watching out with those guys. I had a couple of them—they just wanted to fall the hugest trees there were, even if they weren't the best candidates to come down. Anyway, I worked with the fallers and we did a lot of good work. It was fun being with those guys, it was just a different perspective of why you're up there and the personalities were different—the private sector guys and they were fun to be with.

Eventually got to meet back up with the crew at spike camp. I spiked out a day—I guess it was only a day with the fallers and then we met up with the crew the next day, the fallers pretty much did the job that we were after for them—and tied back in with the crew. They had set up a really cool spike camp. It had everything you could ever want out of a spike camp. The only problem was, it was right there where the helicopter was coming in. Broke a bunch of our tents every time it came in, but we dealt with it.

In the end, there were some good tough shifts with it as far as falling big trees and holding the line. It got a little windy once and a while and the terrain was really steep and rugged in some areas. There were crews, coming up from the Palm Spring side—there's a tram and crews were getting up to a part of the fire from the trams. We were working towards the crews that were coming from the tram and we were coming from, the backside I guess you would call it, and working up towards the crews that were coming from the tram. Once we tied in—I believe we were up there five days spiking, I could be a little bit off on that but it was somewhere around five days—once we tied in, the fire was looking pretty good, we ended up hiking out; we took the tram down. The thing about that that stood out from this—of course, you always come back to reality when you've been out in the woods and sometimes you look at money and it doesn't look real, kind of foreign looking. We walked out of the woods into a fancy mall, you know, there were tourists there, people enjoying the environment up there and we just walked right into the middle of all that. They were looking at us like some kind of space aliens. I guess we were kind of looking at them that way, a little bit to. We took our crew picture up there, at the top, which is a pretty cool view. It was just one of those—. I had that feeling several times before, but that was the most recent for me of something that really makes the job different or exciting, adventurous. You never know how it's going to evolve until it you're in the buggies driving back home. At any rate, that's a fairly current story that I can't think of.

Hannah

<00:31:26> You see so much fire every summer, but is there a fire that stands out that has unique fire behavior> Or just really extreme fire behavior that stands out in your mind?

Locke

I'm trying to hone in on one. There's a few—especially last summer. Some of the fire behavior we saw earlier on and then later in the fire season kind of startled you into the fact that you really wanted to be in a good spot all the time. You didn't ever want to stray from what you've learned. It was just one of those heightened awareness summers and I think early on, there was the Powerhouse Fire. I live in Lake Elizabeth and that was one of

the communities affected by the Powerhouse Fire. The one reason that stands out for me is because for years this scenario that happened had been going—. I know my captain from years ago always had this scenario, if fire gets here in Lake Hughes—in the Canyon, Lake Elizabeth Canyon—gets established in here, it's not going to be good. If the conditions are right, it's going to do this and this and this, under these conditions.

So the scenario had been set forth in my head, gosh, back in the mid-90s, when I worked on an engine crew. So when that fire started, it started in an area—just close to my place—I was worried for my own personal—for my own selfish personal thinking and also my neighbors. That could really affect our community. We were on it initially and it got to the point where it was heading into the Canyon that I was a little fearful for. It ended up getting pushed down slope towards Santa Clarita. It had jumped a couple other canyons towards Elizabeth Lake Canyon. It was not a good deal because that lined it up in a couple different canyons that had that worst-case scenario already planted in my brain from years ago.

I know I went into fire camp the next day and talked to one of the team members and he showed me exactly where it had gone. They're talking about the wind turning around today and this afternoon and he's like, "Yeah." To me it was almost clear as day, what could happen in that worst-case scenario—was lined up to happen. I know at that point every chance I had, and every neighbor I had a phone number for, I called them and said, "Hey, have your stuff ready, this is for real, nothing is going on right now." One of the neighbors was having a ball game down the golf course, I look right down to it from my house, and I said, "About the time you're having that ballgame, just keep your eyes on the sky and if you see the smoke coming back up canyon it might be time to think about getting your stuff together and getting everybody out of there. But I said, "This is just a warning and from what I can see."

I was able to contact maybe half a dozen neighbors and warned them. I don't know how they acted, some of them took it like, "Yeah whatever" and some of them actually put a few things in

their car that they really needed to not lose. I even asked my neighbor, "Would you grab my dog and would you get my passport?" That's all I cared for, I figured everything else—there were a lot of things that I wouldn't have wanted to lose but I own two homes up there. One's a rental and one's my residence. My wife wasn't home, she was dealing with her father at the time, who was dying of cancer. Anyway, I told my wife this could be—. "Do you have time to get home?" She said, "I can't get up there." By the time she did that, they had already shut the roads down.

Sure enough about 5 o'clock that afternoon, boy, we were actually—. It turned and started coming back up canyon it towards the community next to me, more so. It blasted into there and took out a bunch of houses and were hearing rumors that—. The hotshot crews—there were a bunch of crew's scouts stuck up on top of the hill for several hours, we couldn't get out. By the time we did get out, we drove down, had to drive down canyon. So the crew needed to bed down, we were just like way over our—. The guys they were beat, they had worked hard that day trying to hang on to stuff and ultimately lost everything—as far as line goes. For that whole evening, I know—. That evening my wife called crying thinking her business was burned down, "We're hearing the stories that the school burned down, that the painted turtle had burnt down and the a rock inn burned it down," and they're like, "How does a rock inn burned down," "you know?" They're made out of rocks. Anyway, I realized that could be a possibility but that would be like the ultimate worst-case scenario.

Some of the neighbors were calling crying, they didn't know if their place was there or not. I can't tell you, I was trying to get rest because I knew I had to get up the next day and go back out there and fight fire. I even went and woke my boss up and said, "It's going through the neighborhood now, is there anything we can do?" And he said, "The guys are just too wiped out," And I said, "Yeah I understand." And he said, "Well, if you need to go, I understand." And I just opted to stay with the crew and deal with it in the morning. I was thinking, "What am I going to do running up there?" And I was pretty wiped out too, I'd been going for a couple of days. So, anyway, in the end, back at camp

that morning, started asking around, "Hey, is it true that the school burned?" And one of the team members, he goes, "Heard something like six places got burned down." And I went, "Six places, no way. Everything burned down didn't it?"

So all that rumor stuff that you hear — that normally you're not so attached to the fire mentally, you know, personally, I guess you'd say. But that one for me was kind of tough. And it was a relief because right after briefing, I jumped in the Supt. truck and went for a ride through the neighborhood. I was able to call — everybody had gotten evacuated, so the reports that were coming out of there were so sporadic and convoluted. The neighbors didn't know what was going on, so I started calling all the neighbors that were at the Red Cross or whatever. Started telling them everything was fine for them and that the school didn't burn down and the rock inn didn't burn down and that the painted turtle is still there.

So that was one of those things where you are fighting because you knew that you had your assignment to do, on the other hand you're like, "Dog gone it. Wish I could go take care of some business." It's just part of the job and the way it goes. I don't know, that one was probably, a personal one for me. In the end it worked out, I think 30 places did burn down — 26, 30 places — which is a real unfortunate. Some of the people I knew, because it's a small community. In any rate, that was an early on fire this year. I know I think I deviated from what the original question was, I don't know what —. That was tough, wife's crying, I'm like, "Come on I'll deal with it in the morning, that's all I can do." She thought her friends' houses were burning. I didn't know what to tell her, all I could do was look out in the distance and saw a huge glow and knew it wasn't good over there. Just the way it goes.

Hannah <00:41:05> What do you see as the role of fire in the environment?

Locke I think it's part of Mother Nature's scheme of things. As human beings and living amongst the areas that burn, it's a tough juggling act. People are afraid of fire. You can't put fire on the ground when it's time to put fire on the ground. You can't let it burn when Mother Nature wants to let it burn, because now after

years of putting it out, it's so decadent and uncontrollable in a lot of cases, once it gets established. Then it is a terrifying thing of for communities, because it's going to rip into town and burn down people's homes.

I don't know how it can ever—I don't know how things can ever be rectified, as complicated as the system is (with AQMD and all of the other—). In not so recent years—and recent years—we've been dealing with the pile burning mostly. It's just that the windows of opportunity and ways prescriptions are written, which are written to be safe—but the legal aspect of something happening—you lose it, or—. It's a done deal. Nobody wants to be there; nobody wants to be that person. So, not very much gets done in this day and age, unfortunately. At least in this neck of the woods. That's simply because there are so many people that are scared of fire, and rightfully so. A lot of their homes are tucked in amongst the brush and trees. That's the way they wanted to be, because that's what's so pretty about living amongst it.

Somehow—and I don't have an answer for how to fix it, and I know that there's a lot of brilliant people out there that work on it all the time and I know different parts of the country do a little better at it. It may be because, you know, it's not so sensitive with the air quality, or the homes aren't amongst the fuel as much, or the fuel is more controllable under certain circumstances. But I just know here the Power House Fire, the one I was talking about earlier, the one canyon it didn't get into, South Portal Canyon, that had been an area that had been worked on—almost my earlier career to the mid-parts of my career. And very little had ever been accomplished with it because... One time we went at it aggressively and it, I guess, started scaring some people. So it got shut down and it never got started again. Of course, it hasn't burned since. That was back in the early 90s, close to the mid-90s. I want to say it was probably early 90s and until this day that canyon still hasn't burned and everything has gotten bigger and nastier. When fire does go through there, which—that Power House Fire went through some other canyons that were very similar to the South Portal Canyon—we saw what happened. It was some of the most extreme fire behavior I've seen in my

career. That worst-case scenario that was set in our head early in my career through a captain I highly respect and he was a superintendent, as well. But I think that might have set the course for last summer, going, "Holy cow. This is extreme stuff were up against." Anywhere were at, we're going to expect something like that to happen. Of course, when that kind of thing does happen, it's one foot in the black, preferably, or you're within a close distance getting to a place that's safe. Because that particular incident happened so quick—I'm not quite sure how to put it, it was predictable, but then the predictable—usually when I look at a circumstance we're in, or a situation, and you're looking out for the crew (you might be a lookout). The thing that you always think about, is worst-case scenarios. What if this happens? How much time does the crew need to get back to the safety zone? Whatever it might be. I saw this worst-case scenario, and it might be even something that could be a little unrealistic, but, what if that did happen? If this situation was the one, what if—probably isn't going to happen—but what if it did happen? What are you going to do?

[Equipment break]

<00:49:57> The Buckwheat Fire was a heads up for the start of the summer. I'm trying to think of some other fire behavior, extreme fire behavior. I might mix up the names of the fire, the Day Fire—it was on Angeles National Forest, and went on to the LP—we were burning Old 99, along—right above Oak flat Station. Of course it got pretty hot, the fire was coming down, we didn't have much choice so we ripped off a section. It got so hot, there was a fire whirl. I looked back we had the engines holding it, the crew holding it. Of course the crew just started—it was moving up pretty quick and we had already given out the word, if there is a spot fire it's going to be in an island between the freeway and the 99—absolutely don't go after it, it wouldn't have been a safe thing to do.

At any rate, the fire came down off the hill as we were lighting it and it was just some intense fire whirls. I looked back, and engine behind us doing holding operations. They were squirting water, of course. I looked back and the road was on fire and I was

thinking holy cow the road was on fire. That doesn't seem right, but what it was, as I learned later, the guys left our drip torch cans in the back with the plastic can, of course the fire melted the cans and base spread out across the road and lit on fire. That didn't cause any spotting or anything.

While I was looking back this huge fire whirl came down, it's a four-lane highway—the 99 at that point, it is about four lanes wide. The fire whirl came down and there were these engine guys, with all their turnouts on and they had masks on and everything, I think they were from, I don't know if San Diego, they were a city department. So anyway, I look back and I'm thinking, “Oh man, I think those guys are okay. And the fire whirl dipped down and went underneath their engine and shot out the other side's—my perception of it anyway. It just blew all kinds of embers into the island and started all kinds of spot fires. I'm like, “Oh shoot, okay,” so we just kept on them with the burning operation, moving up the road. I looked back and thought, “Oh no, somebody's going to get burned out, I was real fearful for that.” So anyway, when all was said and done, nobody got hurt, nobody got scorched too bad. We ended up holding that piece on another road going out towards the freeway and then we just a little section of island.

In that course of time, there was all kinds of crazy fire behavior stories came out of that. A piece of plywood came out of the bottom of the island, which was a canyon in between 99 and the I-5 freeway. It came out of the island—it's spinning—and it came across half of the freeway, the first four lanes and landed in another small island and started a spot fire. I know the other crews were staged out on the freeway, they were the back-up in case we weren't able to hold it where we were at. They brought it down the freeway. I re-grouped at that point and they said, “Are you okay bringing fire back down to the freeway?” Down—it's a little dirt road that connects 99 and the freeway—I had to think about it a little bit and I'm, like—I'm a little rattled from what had just happened and said okay. So started burning down. Of course one of those things about the job, one of the most gratifying things is when you pull something off, because it almost feels like it's by the skin of your teeth. At some point you just think, “It's

done, it's all over, this is never going to work out, who knows where it's going from here" type thing. Forty minutes later you're sitting there going, "Wow, that turned out good."

With that whole incident though, there was a couple other fun things within it. One of them being, the engine that was back there—that I was fearful for—was being ordered by a strike team leader. I don't know how this story should be told, I should tell it to the way my eyes perceived it. The engine captain came to me and I thought he was going to give me hell, "Why did you do that to us, you know, we took so much heat." What he said was, "Are you in charge?" I said, "I did the firing, I was in charge of the firing show." He goes, "Are you a captain?" I said, "Yeah, I'm a hotshot captain." And he goes, "Well I want to file a complaint." And I'm thinking, "Oh great, he's going to file a complaint about me to me." So anyways, he goes, "The strike team leader is unsafe, he is telling me he's going to—." I'm not a city guy, but he's going to get him for not obeying orders. The order the strike team leader had given the engine captain was "You go pick that spot up." We had already talked about not picking spots up, because it wouldn't have been safe. Besides that there is nothing you can do. It would have been suicide to do that. Anyways, the engine captain said that, "I disobeyed the order, I didn't feel it was safe for me and my crew." Then I started going, "There's no way in the world of you were going to pick up any spots in there." That was never meant to be the case unless it was something right there on the edge of the road that you could pour water on, but never to go out there. He said he's going to file a complaint, he's going to the IC to tell him I disobeyed orders and he wants to send me home. I said, "I'll stand up for you, I'll go to wherever you want, just let me know, I'm on your side, there would be no way in the world that that would have been a safe thing." I said, "If I would've saw you do that, I would've thought you were nuts, not knowing what you are doing."

At any rate, that whole incident, later on in the fire—I think it was the next day—that strike team leader got kicked off to go back home. Not only for that incident, it was for something else where he went in to the station trying to order a captain around

to come out and put out—. And that wasn't their job anyway. That was kind of an internal thing, I guess you'd say, in the big picture of things, there's people out there who can be in charge of you that really don't have the perception of what is actually going on the ground, fire behavior wise. Multiple times, you know, we've turned down assignments because it's not safe. Whether it be the place it's at, or the time of day, or whatever—it might just be a factor that can be alleviated by saying, "Okay, it we're not going to do it right now, but maybe this afternoon it'll be a safe thing to do, after the burning slows down." Something simple like that.

Hannah

<00:58:51> How do you perceive the value of your work?

Locke

I suppose, kind of insulated from part of it because you do often, I guess, save people's homes and the value in that is that keep people from having to go through a whole lot of trauma in their life or whatever. Like, that earlier incident with my own homes, I realized how much that can really affect you. I think I perceived that, I knew that earlier too. I guess the other part of the job, the reason I do it personally, is because I do believe we do a good service. I'm trying to find the words for—. Preserve people's lifestyles or keep them from going through the trauma of losing their stuff or worse. I know a lot of times when we do what we do, it's really not even thought of that big of a deal. It a lot of times we catch it out where it doesn't really affect much. Now if it were to go on to its own devices and let mother nature take its course, it very well could be a whole different outcome. That's one of those things that is the juggling act between—. The problem with dealing with fire and the way of putting the fires out when their small—versus letting them grow and burning that fuel out so that things are more controllable with the lighter fuel loadings—I guess as years go on, have gone on, I've thought of that balance. Here we are putting it out small, on the other hand if you were to let it go—. They do have let it burn policies that don't take place around here too much because of the nature of the area.

What a question. It's part of the gratification of the job, knowing that you are doing a service for not just yourself—taking home a

paycheck—but it's for the good of the country in a big part because you're not just working in your own area, your own county, your own city, you're working across the country. A lot of times, it's funny—one thing I think of Southern California is, I don't know if I even want to go here, but, you go to different parts of the country and you're received differently and your respected for what you do. I know that we would go back east we get treated like, "Wow, you're here to help us out." In Southern California—don't get me wrong, there are a lot of people who are really grateful—but there's a lot more folks that just take you for granted. You're there, you're doing them a service, and if it's not being done the way they think it should be done, you know, you're the bad guy in a sense. You see more of that here and it may be because so much more fire goes on here and they get to see things on the news and different perceptions of what it's all about, versus going back east or to Texas.

I know in Texas a lot of the firefighters back there are volunteers, because it's a service to their community and it's a great service. I feel that same way for the job that we do, but we kind of get lost in it because we do so much of it that we don't think of it. It's a job to us, it's the camaraderie with the guys, you know? It is the job being—the tough job of getting done out there and saving the resources, and the structures, and the people, and whatever might be out there in the way. We've been so inundated with it, it's just part of our job, that's what we do. I think we do it rather well—could be biased about it. At any rate, it kind of humbles me a little bit going back east or back to Texas—a little bit more down to earth because so many of the communities dealt with just volunteers and they were there because they wanted it. Like I said, wanted to be there wanted to serve their communities and their surrounding communities. And mostly, I think, in some of the small communities, they all know each other and they all actually bust out their equipment and start fighting fire when they have to, like the old days. When we got to go into those areas we were treated like, I don't know, treated a really well. It kind of humbles you because you start looking at who you're working next to. Sometimes you're thinking, "Whoa man, these guys are out there, they're not doing things safe." But then you gotta say to yourself, "They're not trained like we are." I think by

us going into that part of the country, exposing them to how we do business, it helped them up a little bit. There's a lot of stuff that we do that's counterproductive to that—can get the job of getting the job done—bogged down somewhat too. I'll leave that one alone, that's a different subject, but anyway, going on to—. Bring me back down to reality here.

Hannah

<1:06:14> Would you describe your ideal hotshot?

Locke

The ideal hotshot? Holy cow, as a hotshot you're not necessarily—. This was a tough thing for me to grasp when I first came, I came into the organization, I was already 27 years old and I used to like to run a lot in high school. I was in track and cross country and we worked together as a team and, of course, you did your own event but the one thing with the hotshot—it's part of a hotshot crew—I don't know if you can single one hotshot out. They do give hotshot awards, for being—. That's usually in contribution to something that's outstanding, you know, training or being some kind of hero thing going on or something. You've got to have those guys because those are the shining stars that other people can—. It gives that insight for other people to look at and to kind of strive for. But as far as an ideal hotshot, I don't know that that necessarily is just it. It's really the culmination of a bunch of minds coming together and personalities—and being able to hang together and understand that they're there for a purpose and that when they get out and they are doing the job—what makes the job, what it is, is the hard work on the ground and the efficiency that you can do it—and in a lot of sense, it's not only the camaraderie from within, but what you develop—.

You might be on one incident and the crews that you're working with, somehow all work together for that same goal. I think that, I don't know, for a lack of a better word—synergy, or whatever you want to call it—makes up an entire crew. And the ability, the supervisors, the lowest crewmen, the strongest and the lead crew men—everybody within that small organization, to be able to work together with other crews and either draw them into their world—and this is what we got planned or for them to

understand, what's going on with the big picture, and to incorporate where they can best do the job.

So when it comes down to one single hotshot, you know, it's tough to put your finger on it because you really have to have a bunch of different personalities and minds, with different ways of thinking. But them coming together as one and understanding that the crew is bigger than yourself. Of course you're going to have your own personality, you're not going to lose that, but you've got to learn to control it when things don't feel good for you or sometimes if they're not feeling right. Of course, you don't clam up, you've got to still be able to express your concerns, your feelings—all that stuff needs to come out. When the crew can accept all that and everything keeps on running, I don't want to say perfectly smooth, it because nothing's perfect. I don't know, I guess I'll have to leave it there, you know? There probably is the perfect hotshot out there, but I don't know him or her.

Hannah

<1:10:41> You hear and experience, as a hotshot, a lot of fun out on the fireline. Do you have a story about having fun?

Locke

Yeah I got some, but most of them are pretty childish. I think the Florida one, that was fun. That was because early on, you know, that's what it was all about. Still, I'm 53 years old and I'm feeling like if I can't go to work and have some fun, and hopefully have the guys have a little fun with me, that something's wrong and maybe it's time to start thinking about something else. Don't get me wrong, there are days where I don't have a whole lot of fun—I know the days are coming, so it's still well worthwhile.

One fun incident, flash flood—that was fun. Getting chased by fire looking back and everybody ended up being okay, that was pretty fun. The times where you finally—you had your butt kicked all day, everybody comes around at the campfire and sits around and eats MRE's. I know for me now, I have a little AM/FM radio, I like to turn that on, have a little music going or a little talk radio. That's fun for me and sometimes it's fun for the guys at the appropriate time. I don't know, those are fun times, sitting around, setting up your camp, you know? Everybody knows it's going to rain so they're doing all these drainage things around their tents and everybody's got their own system going

on. Of course, supplies being slung in, going through them going, "Oh, what did they give us?" That's fun. Heading to a new fire or to a new place that you've never been to—mostly if you're going to a state or a town you've never been to before—especially out of California, the guys are having fun and it's mostly fun' yeah, it's a road trip.

Alaska was a lot of fun. Almost gone there multiple times in my career, and it's always been fun getting ready, but we always got shut down; but one time we went. We got there, boy it was cool looking down at the ribbons of the glaciers. I thought, "Man those are big highways, what in the world?" It dawned on me that those weren't highways, they were glaciers. And that was fun—I think that was in 2005.

We spiked out on that trip and had a bear shooter with us. One of the guys was running a pump—we were on just a little 10 acre fire near the Kenai Peninsula. I grew up in Michigan so I thought, I was dreading the thought of just getting torn up by mosquitoes. Well, I don't even know if we saw a mosquito while we were there; it was great. The pump operator, he had been working for days, over by himself running the pump. I don't know if we want to tell the story. Of course they had the bear training, you don't run, you try to look big, whatever, you'd played dead, whatever might come to mind, what you can handle. There were grizzly bear up there—when we flew in they chased a mom and a cub away. So we were kind of cognizant the whole time, but they had a guy out there with a gun, a bear shooter. In our crew picture that year—it's the best crew picture (I might be biased because I was there) but just the background the color of our shirts and helmets and the time of day—. The shooter, he must have been a professional photographer or something but that thing just turned out perfect. Then the little surprise is one of our guys holding a shotgun. A lot of people I'll go, "That's my favorite, well, do you see anything strange in there?" Then they'll look at it for a few minutes and pretty soon, "He's holding a gun!"

Anyway, back to the pump operator. He'd been out there for a couple of days and he was getting nervous. He was kind of a city boy, he was nervous about the bears. One day he called on the

radio and he goes, he was talking to my supervisor—I won't use his name—he goes "I hear something in the bushes, I think it might be a bear, what should I do?" And they get on the radio and go, "RUN!" And he was about a quarter-mile away, couple minutes later he comes flying by us and we're like laughing. And later on that evening, it ended up being a huge porcupine that was walking around in the bushes, but we're thinking, what a terrible thing to do, you know? One of the last things you're supposed to do is run from a bear, and here we are, "RUN!" That's probably one of those terrible stories to tell. So anyway, with that, that was fun. I could go on and on about fun stuff

Hannah

<1:16:52> Are there any more stories you want to tell?

Locke

It's all been a big adventure to me and I came from Michigan. I just rode out here on my motorcycle one day and ended up—. For me, I had a job—I was a motorcycle mechanic—realized, "Oh boy, it's going to be a tough living unless I owned my own shop." I'd always dreamed of that when I was a kid. I noticed a lot of my customers came in and had a lot of time on their hands, so I started asking "What in the world the you do?" "Oh, I'm a firefighter." My boss' son would come in, towing a big old ski boat and had a four-wheel-drive, and I'm like, "What does he do?" "Well, he works for Glendale Fire Department." I was like, "Holy cow. Well, do these guys ever work?"

So at any rate, it came to a point that I started thinking about what I might want to do for a career and I thought, "Wow, a firefighter." And when I was younger, that would've been the least of what I was thinking I would of been. Anyway, I started looking around and doing some testing and one thing led to another and I took a fire science class at LA Valley College—which was recommended, that's one of the ways you got into the fire department. For me, I grew up in Michigan. I heard of Smokey Bear, but I didn't know what big forest fires were or anything, always saw them on TV. So anyway my teacher was a FMO, a division on the Saugus. And I used to run marathons and once a week I would run to school. I lived in North Ridge and went to LA Valley College—it was about a 13 mile one way run. I would show up in class, I had my shorts on and pretty soon the

teacher started getting interested, "I noticed, do you run a lot," And I said, "Well I live in North Ridge and I'd do this just once a week, it's like a training run." And he goes, "How do you get back?" And I go, "I just run back home." That would be my one long run, once a week for the semester or whatever.

So anyway, he started recruiting out of the class. I remember, he recruited and I was like, "Okay how much do they make?" And he goes, "Well you make about six dollars an hour to start." I'm like "Oh, my gosh." I have to pay rent and still be able to eat food. So then I didn't really give it much thought and it was for the Forest Service and I'm like. "What's the Forest Service?" He started to explain, we're talking about brushfires and stuff. It's kind of interesting stuff, so anyway one thing led to the next. I went and talked to my boss and told him what I was kind of thinking about and he said, "Well, if you want to do that for the summer you can have your job when you come back in the fall, and you can work any time in between." I went back and said "Hey Pat, I might give this a try but I don't know if I can live on six dollars an hour." And he goes, "You're going to make some overtime." And he says "How much do you make now?" And I think I made \$12 an hour or something like that and he's like, "You'll do at least that through the summer and you'll be okay." I'm like, "Okay I'll give it a try." And he said, "Here's the application, just fill that out and send it in." I filled it out and sent it in and five days later I got this package in the mail and it said if you accept the job at Red Mountain Station sign here on the dotted line and bring it into the district office. Then I realized where my station was at, it was up Lake Hughes Road and I love that road. I didn't live up in Lake Elizabeth yet, I'd ridden my motorcycle up there thinking wow this is a cool place. I had lived in Castaic, at one point, and I used to run from Castaic after work and run up to the visitors center and back, which was like 6 miles and it was up Lake Hughes road. And I just thought, "That's just cool, I'm going to be working on the road that I love and that I think is so cool and love and do so much on."

So anyway I accepted the job and that's when I started in 1988 on an engine. I know my first season my captain said, "Oh, you're going to go to a hotshot crew next year." And I was like, "I don't

want to go to a hotshot crew, I want to stay here; don't you like me?" He was like, "No, you need to go to a hotshot crew and you'll get along with the Old Man." So, I hadn't seen the crew yet and he—. One day we went to Texas Canyon and we were in the garage and I remember opening the door and looking outside and all these guys are piled on the lawn, a big dog pile going on and wrestling around. The office door goes flying open, here comes this old guy walking out with long hair and shirt's all pulled out and old, dirty—a half beard going on. I'm like, "Lucky, who's that wino?" He goes, "That's no wino, that's the Old Man; you're going to get along with him just fine."

So anyway, one of those tapes that I brought you has him on it, talking about the old days. So anyway that was—. The next year I did go to the hotshot crew and it was quite an experience from then on. Even my first season was a good season. I've gotta say everything that I'd done—every season that I've been here has been just one adventure after another.

Hannah                      Any other stories come to mind?

Locke                         Nope

Hannah                      Well, that's great. Thanks so much.

*End of interview.*

## Dan Mallia

### Hotshot Superintendent, Redding Hotshots (Shasta-Trinity National Forest)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 4, 2014 in Redding, CA for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah                      Okay. Say your name, what position you hold, how many years you've been a hotshot, and how many years you fought fire in total.
- Mallia                        My name is Dan Mallia. I'm the superintendent of the Redding Hotshots; I've been on hotshot crews for 11 seasons and I've been in fire for 15 seasons.
- Hannah                      What's your favorite thing about hotshotting?
- Mallia                        Favorite thing about hotshotting? You know I'd say that one of the things I really like, the family aspect of the crew. The folks—getting 20 people working together for a common goal and actually seeing what 20 people can accomplish, it's really rewarding. I know for me, running one of the developmental hotshot crews in the nation, it's seeing that group of people come together to become a hotshot crew, which is really rewarding for us and for them—they take a lot of pride in that.
- Hannah                      So describe what a developmental hotshot crew is and how it compares to a normal hotshot crew?
- Mallia                        We end up—every season we get 16 new crewmembers. They come from all walks of life, you know, in the Forest Service, the BLM, you know, DOI, we get local agency folks also. Not just fire people either, we get folks—we get biologists, and botanists, and fire ecologists. So we get all these people and they come to the crew for the season and they're all working on—. Leadership development is our emphasis our focus. So they come to the crew and, you know, a lot of them come with the position task books to work on different things. They'll work on crew boss, firing boss, firefighter one, dozer boss, whatever they have. The main thing it were getting them—they all get a chance to run a squad and then run the crew if there qualified enough for that. Yeah, it's pretty interesting, interesting dynamic here on the crew.

Hannah <00:05:06> Do you have a favorite story, a good hotshot story?

Mallia Favorite story? I have a lot, I think, I'll have to see which ones I can get to, let me see here. You know one for me—which we were talking about—it kind of jogged my memory when you were talking about, we were talking about some stuff earlier.

I was a crewmember here in 2003, before I had the opportunity to come here and be a part of the overhead in 2005. And I'll never forget in 2006, I was doing my first Firing Boss assignment, on my own kind of thing. Rob Holt, who was a superintendent at the time—it was October 2006, we'd been super busy, and we had this assignment to burn this road. Burn this road out and then handed off to another crew, and then they were going to hand it off to another crew, and then they were going to hand it off to another crew, and we were going to put this fire away—put it to bed, kind of thing. So we get going and we start firing, and there's that—things just kind of start happening. I'd lined out folks that were on my firing team, and they are out doing their thing, and I'm up there walking with them, and we're burning and everything is going great.

I had told the top burner "Hey, you stay 50 feet off the main fire," and then the next person was staying about 50 feet, and the next couple folks were staying about 25, 30 feet. I said "I want you to contour with the fire." And I don't know if my—I thought my instructions were pretty clear. But anyway, at that time Rob is driving around on the road, he was our fuel tender (he had the fuel in the Supt truck) and, "boom," he gets a flat tire. Like right there. I see everything is going great, so I walked down the hill to go help him and a couple crewmembers and grab some more jerry cans to walk back up the hill with some more fuel. We get the tire fixed, everything is good to go. And, you know, I start seeing a lot more fire activity than I was expecting, from what we'd been doing. So, I called the other captain on the crew, John Wood, I gave him a call and I'm like, "Hey man, what's up?" He goes, "Yeah, you're putting up quite the header in that drainage." I'm like, "what?"

Then all the sudden I'm getting another call from another superintendent who was on a rock, and he was—he called down—he's kind of watching the same thing and he was wondering what was going on, because we were sending quite a bit of fire up the hill towards all these folks up on the top. I guess it was kind of a big, controlled-chaos situation because there were a lot of local government engines and they were kind of freaking out a little bit at this big header of fire coming up.

When I finally got up to where the crew was burning—I just dropped the jerry cans and went up and saw it—instead of the guy contouring with the fire's edge, he had decided to come way down around the drainage. So he caused this just super headfire going up the drainage. It wasn't a very big drainage, but it was big enough, and it was really thick—it was dog hair thick—and it caused quite the amount of fire up there, so—. It's not anything you can take back. That's something I tell the crew often, like when were about to start a firing assignment. We have to do—not have to—we do a lot of instructing while we're out on the line, and I told one of the crewmembers, I said, "Remember the one thing about firing is once you put that stuff on the ground, you can't get it back." And that's exactly what was going on that day.

So, the fire calms down, we get no spots out of it, everything is going great, everything is going fine, we continue firing our piece of line. You know, Rob and I had a really good discussion down at the bottom of the hill; I learned a bunch that day. We get to hand the fire off to the next crew, and their superintendent said, "No way; we're not burning anymore." And we were like, "What? What you mean you're not burning more?" He is like, "Man, the fire effects you guys had up there was, it's just, it's just not conducive to what we're trying to accomplish here." And we were like, "Well what we do?"

So Rob and I are kind of sitting there—and Rob had spent a lot of time in the hotshots and, you know, he'd been on crews for a long time—so, you know, we were both like, "What do we do?" He had been a Supt for two or three years now and it was one of those things like, "What do we do?" You know? And so, the next

crew that was going to take fire from this other crew, starts calling Rob and says, "Just keep bringing fire past those guys." And Rob and I are like, "We can't; can we do that? Can we not do that?" And so Division got involved, Operations got involved, and we stopped—we stopped the firing show.

The problem was, a couple days later, the wind was going to shift; there was a front coming in and we were going to have this shift and the wind was not going to be in our favor. The wind was *definitely* in our favor that day. We weren't going to have good conditions the next couple of days, and, sure enough of the fire blew out of that section that we didn't burn and it caused a lot of heartache amongst the folks on the fire.

We had to spend two or three more days working on that fire. And the one thing I remember—that fire camp—that's the coldest fire camp I've ever been in. It was about 17 degrees every day; every morning at briefing. So we had to spend multiple *more* days at a fire camp at 17 degrees. That was a long season. But, yeah, I learned a lot a valuable lessons that day.

Hannah <00:11:13> That's great, that's perfect, perfect to detail.

Mallia I left the crew names out of it obviously.

Hannah Nicely done.

Mallia I had to.

Hannah What other stories?

Mallia It let's see. Well, this year was our first time I'd ever been to Alaska and it was really interesting for us because—. One of my overhead had been to Alaska once, but he was a crewmember, so he had no—he really had no—he was just there doing his job. So we had one of our old captains on the crew here, he had spent a lot of time in Alaska working on a wildland fire use module, taking his module from here up there. So we had him come and brief the crew before we went to Alaska on everything they were going to be encountering. Then he gave us—he gave it—the overhead a really good at briefing on the logistical side and everything like that.

We fly up there, we get there—it was really interesting, you know. They throw us out to this fire and it's 12:30, 1 o'clock at night. Well we'd been there for most of the day and then, you know, it's 12:30, 1 o'clock in the morning and the crew is still plugging along working and you finally realize, "Hey, it's still light." And that was one of the weirdest things, is that we just, no one said anything about, "Hey we're going to stop. Hey it's too—." Because the other crews were still working too; we just kept working. I think dealing with the mosquitoes and the logistics and the camping and cooking your own food. It that was some really interesting stuff for us. We had a lot of fun, it was definitely an experience I hope we get to do again.

Hannah <00:13:14> Tell me about how fire is different up there, as far as how it burns and—you've got different fuel type and acreage alone.

Mallia Yeah that was the interesting thing for us. When we were going up there, we had checked the weather before and it had rained for like two or three days and when we got there, we had talked to a couple of the other crews that were on the fire and there like, "Oh yeah, it rained but that doesn't mean anything, like here in a couple days were going to be rocking and rolling." I'm like "Okay, perfect." And sure enough, it had rained and a couple days later it was super active and burning, really hot, and then dealing with those, you know, the spruce, really explosive stuff. I'd probably compared to almost, compare it to like a Southern Cal. rough fuel type, even like almost—you know, some of the little stands of black spruce we had gotten into, it almost seemed like it would be a Southern California fuel component. And when it would get wind on it, it would crank, it would move it really well. We did a lot of—they told us when we got there we weren't ever going to use dozers and we used dozers all the time when we were there. That was one of the—we did a lot of burnouts, a lot of firing, trying to get out ahead of that stuff. But I was really impressed with the fire behavior up there. I'd read a lot about it, I'd seen videos, I'd talk to people that had been up there, and folks told us, "Hey, just don't get complacent with what—." It doesn't look like it's going to burn that well, and it burns really

well. The tundra, too, was a trip. Having to—I know the crew—I didn't get to do much of it obviously, but the crew did it. Mopping up in that stuff and, you know, cutting the chunks of the tundra out and pulling it off was a pretty interesting experience for them as well.

Hannah

<00:15:19> Do you have any favorite shift stories or pivotal moments early on in your hotshot career or your career at all? That really settled things in your mind about how fire works or how crews work.

Mallia

You know, some of the most memorable shifts for me have probably been in the wildland urban interface. That's been some stuff that has been a really—. It's one of those things that has always interested me for some reason. I know that, once, the big initial attacks incidents that I've been on with the crew in the urban interface, you know, the Old Fire, the Grand Prix down in Southern California in 2003, and then we were on the Angora in 2003 and then we were on the Angora in 2008, and then we were on Waldo Canyon in 2012. Those of were easily some of the most memorable days I've ever had, you know, fighting fire regardless of what module I was on, but definitely with the crew.

I know in 2003 I was a crewmember on the crew and I remember Rob, just kind of giving us—. He broke the crew up into little squads and, you know, "This was our neighborhood." So that was the neighborhood we were fighting fire in and doing our thing there. The next time I was in a really big incident like that was Angora and that's when I was a Captain, so I had a whole different mindset of taking care of the folks. That was the thing I was most worried about, I was really worried about all the stuff that could get the kids out there in the—. We're always worried about snags, rocks, and fire and things like that, but now you compound all that with propane tanks going off, power lines, structures on fire. I know my level of—I don't want to say worry, but it is a worry, I'm really worried about the crew.

I know in 2012, when we were at Waldo Canyon, that was even worse because I was a Supt. now and I'm trying to talk to my captains who had never been in a situation like that before. I'm just telling them, "Here's what works, here's what we do, we go

slow to go fast in here.” Those would be the most memorable days, those days being in neighborhoods watching houses, you know, burn. Watching the crew do everything they could— everything they could—and still losing structures. Those are the days—those are some of the days that really bugged me, if there was something else we could have done—. But I know that everybody that was involved in any of those times, they'd done everything they could. Those are the ones that really, really stick out, some of the urban interface stuff.

I know in 2008 we had a really—we were on a really awesome fire in the wilderness in the Shasta Trinity, in the Trinity Alps. It was a really cool fire. We were at home and we got a call, you know—they blow horns here at Redding, for the—they blow horns for the air attack and the air tankers and the smokejumpers and then for the crew. So the horns, it went off for the jumpers and they took off, and then boom, the horns went off for the crew and I'm like, "Oh cool." So I called down there and I was like, "Hey, where are we going?" We're going on an IA in the Alps, Trinity Alps, right on the edge, it's right on the edge of the wilderness. I'm like "Okay cool."

So we got up there and that was probably—I can come back—that was probably one of the funnest fires I had ever been on. We had an awesome crew in that year, 2008, they were just an outstanding bunch of people. It was us on one side and 20 jumpers on the other side and the jumpers, it was a mixed load of jumpers, it was jumpers from all over. There were some Redding guys in there and there were a bunch of other jumpers from other bases. We're at the bottom—we kind of talk to jumpers that had already started going, putting line up one side. And I went down and told the crew, "You're not going to let a bunch of jumpers beat you putting line up the side of this fire are you?" And boy that really got them pretty motivated. It was fun; we have a really good rapport with the smokejumpers here at Redding and so, you know, the crew, they're here working with those guys and so are we—we're all here working with those guys all the time, so it was a really fun fire.

It ended up, we cut line pretty much all day and into the evening. Things had kind of settled down and we'd had it somewhat in check and then we spiked up there—we spiked up there for eight days and it was really awesome. They brought in other crews and other crews got to work, we worked with a bunch of other crews in there. But that first day and then being spiked up there—. They sent the other crews out and left us and the jumpers and then all the jumpers left and then it was just us on that fire. It was really cool, a really cool. We had a great camp, a great view of the Alps, you know. They were flying in hot cans every once in a while and then the jumpers left us all their little goodies. It's one of those good deal fires that you wish you could get all the time.

Hannah <00:21:18> Can you describe the fire itself, just acreage and fuel type and how was burning?

Mallia Yeah, it was about 80 acres. It was a lightning strike that had actually struck down on a pretty—not far down—but quite a ways down on a slope. It was a brush/timber model; there probably hadn't been fire there in a long, long time. So the fire made a really—once it got established down there—it made a big push to the top of the ridge and then just, petered, you know. It threw some spots over to the other side; we had helicopters and air tankers working that top and they'd pretty much knocked that out. The biggest thing was just taking care of the flanks. It was steep; it was nasty; lots of poison oak in the bottom of the drainage; and then, you know, old, tall Manzanita and pine over-story. And the crew just – yeah, it was good living in there; the fire moved well in that. It was surprising. But once it made that big push to the top, it got in there and just kind of laid down, just kind of skunked around a little bit, once nightfall came in—and we got to go in there and do some good work on that.

Hannah <00:22:40> Do you have any moments—and you don't have to share a few don't want to—just the 'oh shit' moments. Do you have any moments where like, "Oh, I am a very small person and this is a very big event going on?"

Mallia You know, I'd say that, going back to that fire when I was the firing boss. When I thought I had spotted, we had thrown a

bunch of spots, there's a whole other part of that fire to—like, a bunch of other stuff went on in that. That air attack had flown over and said, "You're getting multiple spots." And we couldn't figure it out. And the other superintendent was calling down saying, "Hey everything is good, everything's fine." Rob was getting very, "Where are the spots? You caused some spot fires with your firing." And I'm like—this is like my nightmare—I'm like, "This is the first time I'm actually getting to do this on my own and here I've completely screwed it up." It turns out there was another crew from another agency—will probably just leave it at that—they were firing on the wrong side of the line on another portion of the fire. Which was kind of right in line with what we were doing. So that's where the spots were the air attack was flying in seeing what was going on. So they halted their firing. But there was about a 15 to 20 minute window when I'd thought I had lost this whole fire. I felt about that big. You know, I was like, "Well I guess, you know," I made a joke to Rob I said something like, "I guess I've got to lose one in my career." Or something like that. That was just the wrong thing to say to him at that time. We really laughed about it after everything it kind of mellowed out, but yeah, that was one of those times.

I'd say that I've been pretty fortunate, there's been some—. There was one time where I—and I want to say it was 2008—we had put in a bunch of line and I was coming back up behind the crew and we were building this huge indirect peace on the Klamath. And it was just—it was in this old fire from '87 and we were on this ridge with a bunch of other crews and we were cutting. We were stripping this ridge and the crew had started off ahead of me and they were up working and I had kind of walked up behind them. And there was a couple of old fallers and they were knocking trees down. And the guy's like, "Hey was your crew in here?" He kind of screams at me. And I'm just like, "What? What are you talking about?" I went over and there was probably a 50 foot broke off snag and we had been working in that area—there had been a couple of crews working in that area—and I walked over and I was, "Yeah, what's up? What's going on?" And they're like, "Did you guys do this?" And I'm like, "What's that?"

I looked and there was a tree—that tree that we were standing next to, and somebody had got their bar stuck in the tree. What they did is, they took the face cut out of the—that they had cut out and stuck it back in the tree and lodged—and got the bar out but left in the chain in the tree. The other interesting thing was that they had taken another saw and cut the wedges off the back and didn't flag it or anything. So there's these wedges that are cut off, the face cut of the tree is put back in and then they didn't flag it or anything and didn't tell anybody.

I went up the hill, like seeing red, and, you know, went to the first squad leader that I found and read her the riot act. And she's like, "What are you talking about? That was blah, blah, blah crew, we were over here, this is—we didn't do any of that." So I stopped what we were doing, talked to all the sawyers, kinda, talk to them, "Nope, we wouldn't have done anything like that." What was rough was I knew they didn't do that, it was one of those leadership—I don't know, if you want to call it a leadership moment for me—it was one of those things that I reacted in the exactly wrong way, like, accusing the folks that I trained to do something completely crazy like that. I just really felt bad and I pulled them all together and basically apologized to them for overreacting and not getting the story straight before I did that. I think I learned a pretty valuable lesson. But yeah, that was one of the crazier things I've ever seen on a fire. That was pretty bad.

Hannah

[Conversing off record from 28:00 to 29:25, per request]

<00:29:25> What's your perspective, or how do you view the role of fire in the environment? Hotshots see so much fire—from the overgrown landscapes, to places that burn every couple of years—what's your view on the role of fire?

Mallia

It needs to be in the environment, and we all know that we do a really good job of putting fires out. We're really good at that job. With that has brought on all the fuel loading, and the unhealthy forests, and things of that nature. I know for me, there's times where we go in to a fire and the team, and the Forest, and the locals, and everybody, they want the fire out. They don't want to deal with the smoke. They don't want to deal with whatever—all

the stuff that comes with a fire—they don't want to deal with it. But when you get out on the ground and see what the fire is doing, and it's doing nothing but good, it's really hard for me to put the crew—especially in some of the places that, some of the places where—. This past summer, we spent a bunch of time on the northwest Forests, over there, on fires on the northwest Forests that were doing nothing but good for the forest. And it was, "Put it out, put it out, put it out," you know, "We need to put it out." With that you're putting—now obviously there's always inherent risk with our job, we're always putting people at risk. But it's one of those things like, "Wow, we could put a little fire on the ground here, we could straighten this up, we can even this out, we can keep ahead of the wildfire, and we could do some really awesome prescribed burning right now on this fire." I know that's probably not the—probably not the most popular—I don't want to say it's not popular, I'm sure there's a lot of folks that feel the same way. But yeah, I would love to see a lot more fire. Especially the ones that are doing good; just let them burn. We'll deal with the smoke.

An old Fuels guy I used to work for, when I worked on the Mendocino, told me, "Everything gets treated eventually." It's just, is it under your terms, or is it under Mother Nature's terms. I see that now, all the fire that we were on last year, up there, like on the Klamath and the Six Rivers—all that stuff we spent on last year—I would probably say, you know, this is just, I'd say 75 to 80 percent of that was all low intensity. I mean, we spent three tours on one fire up there. I mean, you see it, it's doing nothing but good. It's doing nothing but good. I would love to see more fire in the environment, but I know that there is a lot of political stuff that goes on, that goes on with that.

Hannah <00:32:47> Where do you place value on the work that you do, how do you view the value of what you are doing? You have a unique crew so there's a lot of value in kind of building the crew and the leadership and institutional knowledge but there's also other sides to.

Mallia Yeah, you know, it's fun work. One of the funnest things we have here—one of the things that I've kind of run by my whole

career—the word “hotshots” is a pretty prestigious, it carries a lot of clout. But I always told the crew, the most glorious thing about that—our job—is the name. We have a little spiel that we give the crew in our SOP book, it's kind of the start of our SOP book, and it talks about how you're going to be tired and hungry, on steep slopes dealing with poison oak, snakes bears, rolling rocks, you know, this, and then you're going to sleep on the ground and you're going to eat MRE's, or you're going to be in fire camp with 1000 other people, and you're going to do this, and you're going to do that, and it's not as glorious or awesome as the name sounds. I tell the crew, you know, I've been on—I don't know how many fires, and I've been on, I don't know how many shifts I've done on fires—if I really sat down and kept note of like, that was awesome, or that was just mind-numbing, the crew is just cutting line or mopping up for—. You know, that's one of the biggest things I tell the guys, "You want 1000 hours of overtime, you're going to do 750 of those in mop up." "No way." "Yes." That's the harsh reality of it sometimes. They want the job done right so they put us out there in some of those places to mop that stuff up.

For me with this crew, I get a lot of value in watching them to learn how hotshot crews operate. That's one of the big things for me because I know a lot of these folks are going to go off—and not all of them—we do have quite a few that go into—. They do a season here and then at the end of the season they come into my office and there like, "Okay, so I'm never going back to my engine. I have to be on a hotshot crew. This is it I'm doing, this is what I want to do for the rest of my career." And then there's some folks that come here, they do a great job for us and then they realize that, hey, this isn't for them. But the cool thing is that they get to go—they go back to their engine or they go back to their helitack module, or they go back to their fuels job, or they go back to their, you know—. The best example are the folks that aren't in fire, the folks that go—.

We had a guy on the crew in 2012 who is a forester and he was really into prescribed fire. But he had a really negative—I don't want to say negative but he had a, yeah I can say, it wasn't like super negative—but it was this negative outlook on how teams at

and how fires went, and how things went. Well, when you spend a season here, he— like all of his questions were answered by the time and he really understood why we didn't cut— why we didn't take the fire here and why we didn't do this and what we did do that, and why we did do this.

That's the biggest thing for me is when the folks go back to their modules and they have a good understanding of what hotshot crews do and what hotshot crews can do for them, so when they end up becoming division chiefs, or divisions on fires, or operations, and I'm working for them, they understand what they can expect out of the crew. So that's one of the big things for me, is that, I get a lot of value out of that. You know, just getting—the other big thing for me is getting the job done. It's meeting the objectives of the incident management team or whoever we're working for. When the crew gets that, when the crew does that and they do well, I get a lot of satisfaction out of that.

Hannah <00:37:21> How are you doing? Any other stories that you want to share?

Mallia I have some really good 4-4-40 stories, but that probably wouldn'y be very good.

Hannah You can toss one out.

Mallia One of the craziest things that I've—for money—that I've ever seen was—. There was two crews; we had us and another crew, and I'll leave it the other crew out of it, but we had been getting raisins. I think the caterer had excess raisins, so everybody got a lot of raisins in the lunch that day. And we had been mopping up on this fire and it had been—. We'd already been there a couple of days longer than we probably should have. The crew decides, hey, we're going to challenge this other crew to eat—. Another guy to eat a hardhat full of raisins. Each crew would fill hardhats full of raisins. So apparently they got to pick the guy's hardhat. So, this crew picked the grossest guy on the crew's hardhat and then another hardhat came out and they started filling these things with raisins. That obviously didn't end well. Our guy lost,

he had a little bit of a tummy ache after that—so that was a good one.

Last year we were spiked up on the Butler Fire and there were three crews up in the spike camp, up by a lookout tower, and they were flying in hot cans every day. It was really good living—it was a great, great assignment. And they were flying in those five—well, I don't know, they weren't five—they were like a gallon pudding. We were getting these gallons of pudding, they were coming with every, with every shipment of food. And then we'd get the gallon of peaches in syrup, and then the gallon of like fruit cocktail. One of the guys in the crew was like, "Hey what are your thoughts—." And I was acting as the division now, so I was not in charge of the crew, but one of the guys was like, "Hey what are your thoughts on us having a, you know, three crews having like a pudding eating contest?" I was like, "Sure whatever, things are really slowing down here, were about—." So that was a couple of good mornings, they did—one morning they did pudding and that was pretty gross to see that, the video of that, the hurting units of eating that putting. But the worst, by far, were the peaches. That was absolutely—because they wouldn't let the guys, there were rules like they couldn't cut them up, they had to keep them whole, "Oh it's just sliding down my throat, man, it's pretty sweet." And that was pretty gross to see that. I mean, I've seen obviously seen the people eat the huge grubs for whatever money is available and stuff like that. Those are some good ones, but the peaches, that was a really good; that was really gross.

Hannah

<00:40:31> Talk to me a little bit, just for the camera, why those antics are so important to crews?

Mallia

Well, especially when there's like crew against—you know, there's that versus another crew thing it going on. It comes down to that, it's that pride, like, I'm not going to let my crew down. I'm not going to let these guys beat us in the peach eating contest and I'm not going to—. And I think it builds a lot of cohesion within the hotshot community, you know, with crews. That's something that next year, that's the stuff that those guys remember. They don't remember the mop up on the Butler Fire for day 24. They

remember, "Do you remember when that guy ate all those peaches?" That's the cool stuff that they remember. It's historical, it's stuff that's been going on for eons. I'm sure before there were peaches, there were—there was something else that somebody went after or some contest of eating something and things like that. Yeah, I think it's one of those, you know—it's hotshot stupid stuff but I think it builds that esprit de corps. You're not going to let your crew down—you're not going to let—and by no means are you going to let this other crew show you up, or something. There's always that.

Hannah

<00:42:28> Any other thoughts, any other stories?

Mallia

One thing that's pretty interesting to me—and I'm still a young Supt., I think this will be my fifth, this will be my fifth season as a Supt. Yeah this will be my fifth season as a Supt—it's really cool seeing—and I like it because it is just the way that it's been going on, but there's like the hierarchy of like, when you're all, when all the Supt's are together and you're making the plan for the day and I'm still one of the young guys so I just kind of—. It's one of the things that Rob had told me, he's like, "Hey, so they're not going to ask you for any input." I'm like, "What? What do you mean they're not going to ask me for any input? I'm there—." He's like, "No, that's just the way it is." He goes, "I was a hotshot for like 20 years and then I got Supt. job and they still didn't want my input, they did but—." And I'm like, "Really, you know, that's kind of weird."

Well it's cool seeing that, I think there's definitely this respect, like I have a lot of respect for the older Supt's and it's really cool to just sit there and listen to those guys. Listen to those guys talk about what they're doing. The one thing that an older Supt. one time told me—and this is a Greg Overaker "Rax." You know, I never worked for Greg. We worked on some fires with him when I was really early in my career as a captain, and he said—. And he comes to our Supt's AAR and talks. And one night we were all hanging out talking about stuff, and we were talking about this hierarchy and there were some people that were kind of butt hurt about it, and he's like. "It's okay to sit there and listen, but one day those old guys are going to look at you and go, "What do

you think?" — and you better be ready. You better be ready to explain what you think."

That happened this year on a fire in Southern California. We were down on a fire and there were a bunch of us there — and there was a bunch of guys that I had been captains with, you know, we'd all kind of gone through the ranks together as captains and now we're all Supt's and we're all kind of sitting there. So we're like, you know, we're all kind of around that like 5 to 7 years of being a Supt. So we're kind of like, there was this unspoken, "Well I guess we've all got to make this plan together." But there was definitely one guy who had been a Supt. longer and everybody just kind of —. "Here's what I'm thinking." And then we were like, "Oh yeah, we can do this and we can do that." So I really like that aspect of the job, it's really cool — as far as from my level, the overhead level.

There's some really awesome people. I met some — there's just a lot of amazing, amazing people in our organization, the hotshot organization. There's some really cool people. That's a good one, I always love that stuff. There's that funny — you get on a fire and the old Supt. is there and everybody's just kind of, "Okay, what do you think, what are we doing?" But then I'll never forget that Rax told us that, he's like, "One day that old guys gonna go, "What do you think? And you'd better be ready to answer that question." So it always keeps us on our toes which is good.

We have a really unique job. I used to think being a captain on a hotshot crew was the best job in the Forest Service. I don't know, I think Supt. is. My captains, they'll definitely disagree, because they actually, you know, one of the things that I get to —. I come up with the plan and they go out and implement it, so they're actually doing the implementation of that. And I tell those guys sometimes, "Sometimes I feel like worthless, like completely worthless." I go off and I be the lookout and I'm, "Hey, how's it going down there? You need me to come down?" "No, we're good." You know, they don't want me down there. They're making it happen and I'm just up there going, "Damn. I miss doing that." That's all I got on that.

Hannah

<00:26:54> Any other thoughts?

Mallia Do you want any stuff on like the Redding? Did I talk enough about the developmental crew's aspect of things, is that something that you want too?

Hannah Any information, I'm just going to soak up. This is potentially going to be posted on a website, so if you feel like there's a misunderstanding about the training crews or you feel like there's an opportunity to promote what they're about, take full advantage.

Mallia Well this crew has been around since 1967 and throughout the years that it's been in its existence, there's only been three seasons at where there wasn't a training—development, leadership, or training development. That portion of the crew has changed over the years. It used to be, the main emphasis of this crew when it first got going in '67 was getting folks that were going to be line officers, like foresters and things like that, folks that are going to be district rangers—getting them fire experience. Which is something that I feel is extremely lacking in this day and age in the Forest Service. So, you have those people that are going to be in charge of these fire organizations, indirectly or directly, and they were on this crew and their getting fire experience. And over the years, that has changed to where it came to, you know, that small unit leadership. Here in 2003, the emphasis of the crew changed to fire folks, fire management and then that small unit leadership.

Because if you look at some of the past and even recent fatalities and near misses, those decisions on the ground were made at that small unit level, that squad level. There were key decisions made and so that's where we come along with our development. For us sometimes, as far as our line construction capability, it's probably not as efficient as other crews, you know, because we were continuously building the crew. A lot of crews will have people on team together for three or four years, and we have folks that are together for like three or four shifts. We've done a good job of—once we identify a good solid team—we usually have them together, just because it makes the world go round a little easier for us once we do that. But yeah, the cool thing about our crew—everybody does every job, everybody gets to run a saw,

everybody gets to run a tool and again it comes back to that— they kind of get a understanding of what's expected of everybody.

I think we do a really good job of going out and putting out a good product. That's the thing for us. It's a struggle sometimes. We have another good saying within the overhead, "We're always putting our patience hats on." That's the biggest thing for us—is sometimes, we know what we want, we expect how we want something to look and then we have to really go down and really talk about it. But we're finding more and more of the folks we're getting have a lot of crew time, so they've actually spent time on crews, which in the past it wasn't like that, it was a lot different scene. But no, it's a fun group to run; it's fun.

Hannah <00:50:48> Anything else? It was really good.

Mallia No, I don't think so.

*End of interview.*

**Joaquin Marquez**  
**Hotshot Superintendent, Kings River Hotshots**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 1, 2014 in Prather, CA for The Smokey  
Generation.

Hannah                    If you could state your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many years you been a hotshot?

Marquez                    My name is Joaquin Marquez and I'm the superintendent, Kings River Hotshots. I've been a superintendent now for just over a year. This will be my second season as a superintendent. I have 25 seasons in and for roughly—I think it's around 18 seasons as a hotshot—is what I have under my belt. Started as an apprentice there and actually stuck there and I think I've only had four years on an engine and three years on a type two crew before that so. Maybe between, excuse me, maybe between nine years on Stanislaus and then, nine years here with Kings River—is what my history is.

Hannah                    Do you have any favorite hotshot stories that you can share?

Marquez                    Favorite hotshot stories. Can we come back to that one? Okay, let me kind of think about that one. I mean, I have good shifts, good fire shifts that I had and I think that my best shift that I think I ever did was roughly about a 40 hour shift that we did down on the Cedar Fire back in 2003. We weren't in the initial attack, we were kind of the extended attack part of it. We got there the first night when it happened. We were down on a fire already, Camp Pendleton, and went over to the Cedar Fire and commenced to work in a 40 hour shift, which was burning, doing a little bit of running and gunning, and doing all kinds of things trying to catch this thing.

It was fun but it was scary at times, when the urban interface and things like that that, were going on. I'd never experienced that, especially in Southern California. You know, I've been on Santa Ana wind events before that time, but this was probably the craziest that I've ever been involved in. But yeah, to where we were actually up and going for pretty much the whole 40 hours

that we were going. Pretty much the walking dead when we were done with that shift and went back into camp. They gave us about 18 hours off and then we went right back out after that 18 hours ended, a 35 hour shift in Julian and that was even crazier than the initial start that we did because we were around more structures and trying to make a stance in Julian. It was pretty crazy. We did a lot of things that helped me build a lot of slides in my career, especially the initial attack portion which hotshots don't do a whole lot of. That was a pretty cool deal, the whole thing there.

Hannah <00:06:29> Can you describe the fire behavior and kind of what you are doing?

Marquez Yeah, the fire behavior was pretty erratic. We had Santa Ana wind events where we had probably—it's been wild now, but probably 80 mile an hour winds that, you know, blowing, and East wind blowing. It wasn't so much the fire behavior, I mean—you could see the fire behavior, it was still a ways away—it was dealing with the public that was probably the most, one of the craziest things going on. When people were trying to evacuate out of their homes—that was our priority job, was moving around trying to make sure people were—. And setting up the plan on how we were going to hold it. It was maybe highways at the time, it was Highway 8 or Interstate 8 that we were trying to hold and people being in there trying to evacuate was the craziest part. People not knowing what was going on, knowing that law enforcement running around asking everybody to leave. Firefighters are coming in trying to figure out what they can do to help out and that was the craziest part about it. Fire behavior was still quite a bit away; you could see it on the hillsides burning downhill, which you don't see a whole lot of especially at night—burning pretty fast downhill. It was, you know, something I hadn't been involved in and it was whole subdivisions, going by them, seeing that they were on fire. It was something that was amazing to me and at that time I was already, I don't know, 14 years into my career and hadn't seen that. That was a first for me, that big of a Santa Ana event.

Hannah <00:08:24> As a hotshot superintendent—I've been asking a lot of Supt.'s and former Supt's this question: Could you describe your characteristics of an ideal hotshot?

Marquez Characteristics of an ideal hotshot. To me, one is, you know, you've got to have—probably the strongest thing is the mental part of the job. You need to be ready; you got to be willing to do this job. You've got to know what you're getting yourself into. It's hard to take a first-year person—or even a second year person—to come into a hotshot crew and be able to fit in with what's going on. Some people, it takes them by surprise, they're not right for it. But I think that's the most—you've got to be willing to do it, you've got to know what you're getting yourself into. And then there's the physical aspect. I mean, every time we take our guys out, I tell them, "I'm going to push you these next few weeks—it could be 2 to 4 weeks, but I'm going to push you, trying to do everything. I need to push your body and see where your limits are so we can build off of that." So I know how far I can take our folks and get them all on the same level. I know how far to push a hotshot crew or an individual. What we're asking them to do—you've gotta be in good shape. You usually have to—if they're a first-year person, they know, I tell them, "Next year I expect more out of you." And every year I tell them that. So it's a mental thing; half of its mental, half of its physical. You've got to have the support of your home, you know. A lot of these guys are single, but some of them aren't nowadays. They all have a significant other and if you don't have their support at home, it's hard to do the job too. So we try to make sure that their family life is taken care of to, besides, you know—just the getting that taken care of, because if you don't have that support, it makes the job harder too, on an individual.

Hannah <00:10:35> Do you have any other good initial attack or good kind of memorable fires?

Marquez Memorable fires—the memorable assignment, I should say I had. We spent—when I was with Stanislaus—we spent 28 days in Canada. That was a great experience. That was fighting a whole different type of fire, you know. They didn't really have a whole lot of elevation. You get lost really easy in that country because,

you know, it's all flat and you know, you're following the fire's edge. You'd end up in the same place you started sometimes. It was different, especially, we didn't have very many GPS's back and then, so it was all compass work and things like that. It was easy to get lost but that was probably the best fire assignment I've had compared to—I've been to Alaska—Canada that was really fun.

The people there were really good with us. They weren't used to us digging line over there where they were at. They do a lot of things with hose, they do things different over in Alaska than we do, I mean over in Canada, then we did. It was just a good time, it was five hotshot crews that were there, that we all went together and most of us stayed together the whole time there. So we got to hang out with other crews, where we don't get a lot of that opportunity to hang out with other crews. Everybody goes different ways but because we were from in different places they kept a lot of us together a lot longer and it was fun. It was like a camping trip even though we were fighting fire out there. It was—we had a good time doing it. People were coming out watching us cutline because they don't actually dig dirt over there. They use pumps and hydro-mopping and everything that they do, and we were actually putting line in it for them. So it was fun. We got to see two providences when we were there, we got to go to Saskatchewan and Thunder Bay, and hit four or five different fires and that was probably the best trip I had. It was 28 days being out there, it was a whole lot of fun.

Hannah <00:12:49> Was that '98 by any chance?

Marquez I want to say it was '95, yeah.

Hannah I went in '98 and had my first fire in Canada. I was a green rookie, I'd never seen a fire before. We done some prescribed burning but I had paid attention in training and learning all the terminology, but when we got to Canada, they don't have divisions—they have sectors and sector bosses.

Marquez Yeah, it's definitely different. It was definitely different over there; it was a good time. Don't like the mosquitoes, don't like the no-see-em's there; they got a lot of stuff that bites you. It was

funny, one day we came in after one of our first shift on one of the fires, that we came in, and we set up one tent and that was our cooking tent and we commenced cooking steaks—so they fed us really well—cooked steaks for everybody there and potatoes and when we were done, we came out and one of the logs that we used to build our tent up, that's where the smoke was hitting it and the whole log was filled with mosquitoes on the outside of it going after the log. Usually when dark came to you, you went in your tent because it was—mosquitoes came out and it was bad. I'd never been around that part before.

Hannah <00:14:05> That's great, how about—do you have a burn show or a hotline shift that stands out in your mind as something that took a lot to pull it off?

Marquez Yeah, I definitely have one, it was called the Cottonwood Fire. It was up north on—I believe it was on the Tahoe is where we were—and it's actually, this was not just one shift but it was seven shifts of total burning that we had and we lost it every day for six days. We lost our burn area, it blew by our line—or it spotted over—and there was way too many [spot fires] for us to catch. This is when I was up on Stanislaus and there were way too many for us to catch and this happened to us six days in a row, we tried burning. It—we kept trying and kept trying and burning pieces of line and finally on day seven we commenced to start burning again, down in the town of Cottonwood—I think it was Cottonwood Valley is what it's called. We started firing first thing in the morning and this time we had just about every air tanker in—I don't know if it was in the nation or if it was in California—working with us. Just drop after drop after drop right along our burn show and that helped us hold it. The Supt. truck was pretty much pink after we were done with that, after that shift. Again, you hear on the radio, "We think Stanislaus lost it again," but this time we were holding it in place. They actually pulled two crews out of the morning chow line to give us a hand, which, they got there and they had nothing to do because we were able to hold it. Took it all the way into town and it was like I said, it was seven hard days of firing and finally on day seven we caught it. It was a big accomplishment, you know, catching that burn when it was there.

Hannah <00:16:07> How about, what's your favorite part about hotshotting?

Marquez You know, it's just being around the guys. It's just being around the other firefighters that are, you know, trying to do the same goal. Pushing yourself to your limits day in and day out. It's a satisfying feeling when you're done, you know? You know you've done your best. You know, hotshots, in my book, are some of the best firefighters that you can have working a fire. They're going to give you their all—110% every time they go out. They're not going to slack off on you, they're there to do a mission, they take pride in what they do. They're really professional, they try to be a professional module—to me it's the special forces of firefighting.

We give you many different types of tools—when you get a hotshot crew you can do a variety of things. You can break up into four groups, five groups, small groups and be able to help with, you know, lightning fires. Or you can—one big crew that can give it their all. You've got guys that can burn, that have skills that can burn, you've got guys that just, they're there for a common cause. They're there and they're going to give you 110%, you know, it's like being on a football team, is what I refer back to when I played the high school ball and stuff like that. It's just a great team of guys to be around, guys and gals, you know, to be around.

Hannah <00:17:52> How about wilderness fires, do you have any wilderness or very remote fires? Do you have any stories or any of those that stand out?

Marquez I guess one would be one that we had here on our forest back when we first came in. It was the Silver Fire. You know, you give a hotshot crew a task and they're going to do it to the best and—. They're going to ask what you want and if you say, "Make it look like—." You know, "We need the fire to stop here, do what you need to do." And we did. We fell trees, we opened up a trail and it was a little bit more than they wanted. We did that for three days and fell trees, put line in and, you know, held the fire there on that piece of line they wanted it. So we did a good job. The

only bad thing was, that we did a little bit too much. We had to go back in later on and make it look natural and it took us longer to make it look natural than it did, you know, I think we did more damage. To me, I think we did more damage making it look natural than we did trying to stop the fire. So, it's just, to me, sometimes you need to go after stuff in the wilderness aggressive, just because you got it keep that fire where it is, to me. That's how I felt, but some fires are good, some fires aren't, depending. That's the direction needed to be a little bit better, I don't know.

Hannah <00:19:33> Have I asked you how you perceive the value of your work?

Marquez You know, that was kind of what I talked about earlier was the value of our work. I know people appreciate us, we hear it all the time. I think management teams, you know, appreciate the value and the things that a hotshot crews bring. The biggest thing we could do as superintendents is pass it on to our folks—which I think we all do on a whole—that their work ethic that they do, it's important, it accomplishes. We buy them a lot of things as we, we give them a lot of specialty tools, a lot of different avenues, and we give them great ideas to go after stuff. And teams are willing to listen, and that's where the value is, too, on a hotshot crew is when Supt's. talk, most all of the divisions or other operations are listening. They don't ignore us, which I think is part of that—being a hotshot, they understand where we come from.

Hannah <00:20:39> Do you have an example of a fire where you used unusual tactics and strategies or rare—?

Marquez Rare, unusual? No, not that I can think of now. I know we've just used—. The biggest tool we have as hotshots is the firing portion that we use. You know, that's probably, to get people to buy off, we really got to know what we're looking at when we're burning and get everybody's buy-in. Because when you're missing one person in that group of, "Where you taking that fire to?" You know, you need everybody's buy-in. I don't think there's anything unusual that we've done because it's usually go direct on everything. You try to go one foot in the black as you progress—it is probably one of the safest things we have, tool

that we have. Burning is one of, probably, one of the—. It's not safe because sometimes you're out in front of the thing or you're trying to hold fire there. That would be the only thing I have, is burning is probably one of the unusual tools, it's a usual tool that we use; it's a good tool that we use but you need to get everybody's buy-in.

Hannah <00:22:15> Any other topics there that bring any stories to mind?

Marquez Stories I want to use? I don't know but—. No, you know, I think, it's just, there's been so many fires in so many—it's hard to pick one, you know, good story. We used to spike out a lot when we were Stanislaus. Spiking, you know, where we would sleep usually right there on the line or right there at a—somewhere near the fire line. You know, the longest spike out I think I've been on was—we spent, it was about 14 days on one spike camp that we pretty much made home. Because we kept coming back and coming back, we wouldn't go into camp, we just stayed at drop point 14. It sticks in my mind, I'll never forget it, on the Kirk Fire. We stayed at drop point 14 for like 14 days and it was a home away from home. We made it as comfortable as possible there.

Long spikes are usually the funnest because—. I know we did one when we were in Alaska, we actually made our hooch's and we made our benches and we made—actually, we made little cots and everything for everybody. That was probably a good, fun spike assignment was in Alaska. Best thing about that was when that they sent my squad out to go set up the next camp and we flew into—back to one of the high schools to get the supplies—and they shut us down because the governor came in and we had been spiked out for quite a while already and they go, "Well, you guys get to go eat in town now." So when we got in the town right there, where the school was, there was fresh halibut sitting right there, waiting for us. It was good, that was probably one of the best meals I've had on a fire, was fresh halibut, you know, as the stringers are right outside the restaurant right there. That was also a good, fun assignment in spiking and then, you know, just going out and setting up the next camp. That's always fun.

Hannah <00:24:31> What about the fire up in Alaska? Alaska is kind of unique, its fuel type. Can you describe to me what the fire was doing in that particular case?

Marquez We didn't see much fire when we got there—a lot of that stuff in those countries—when the fires get big, they don't have you directly on the fire line. It's more of a mop up. Putting out hotspots along the fires edge. But you use different tactics, you know. We put our chain on backwards and you cut the tundra and pull it off and that's how you cut line, some of them. Or you're just mopping the edges as you go. Because it's funny, it's the moss on the outside of the trees that are there or—that's the primary carrier, that's like our one hour fuels here. Usually when the moisture—when the RH's go up—that stuff doesn't burn. That's when you're going along the edge and trying to put it out. And when it does pick up, they usually back you way off so you're not right there on the fires edge. The fire activity is a little bit different over there and how they go after things. It's mainly in the mop-up kind of stage, when I was there. They do different things.

I guess one of the craziest things, though, that we did was in Canada. Where they wouldn't—when we were there in Canada they wouldn't—. We would fly into places and they wouldn't—it was funny because—. They got the crew together and we were getting ready to fly out to this one fire and they tell, "Okay, you twelve load on." And we're used to manifesting here in the states and they wouldn't manifest, they just, "Hey load on." It was funny because everybody, they filled every seat, you had your gear on your lap and the pilot goes "Mmmmm." Comes back down and, "All right, two get off." And that's how they would do it. And we thought, "Oh, do we want to be on this thing?" And that was new to me, that was strange, that was probably the craziest thing in Canada that we did. And it's just, our things that we do here and what they do there are completely different.

Another time they put us in a little type III helicopter and flew three of us into this little piece of line that needed to be covered and we flew in and landed right on the road and when we got off you could see that there was a tree right in back just swaying

back and forth because of the rotor and it's like, "Oh man, we just landed on this road, I can't believe it." Things are different in different places and, you know, I'm not saying that's just the way they do business over there. It's just strange when you go to, especially a different country and fight fire. But it was an exciting time there, it was great.

[Side conversation]

Hannah <00:28:16> Any other thoughts? This is really good.

Marquez No, I think one of the most interesting assignments I had it was when I—I went down—I was still part of the hotshot crew, but this was during the space shuttle recovery. I had a chance to go assist with that. I went as a strike team leader and I had a couple of crews from back east working for me. And that was some—you don't train to go out and do that kind of assignment. It was new to me, again, being a hotshot I'd say I'd go do anything they asked of me to do. And I said, "You know what I need to go do, I need to go do it. I need to go assist and help out where I can as a strike team leader." It was a good assignment, I got to meet a lot of good people, people I normally wouldn't normally meet being a firefighter. Like the NASA folks, the EPA folks, you know—again being in Texas some of those folks from there. I had never been to Texas at that time and never been there, and again everybody coming in for a common cause, trying to get a job done. I went at green up, which is the best time to go there because that's when the snakes are coming out, so we were running into a lot of snakes at that time. You know, getting to go out with some type two crews that—we don't get that opportunity being hotshots, you know, going out with them. Knowing that somewhere, where they're at, and helping them get along with each other. They have the same problems we do at time. Because it's all personnel problems. Attitudes, people being able to get along. You know, everybody has those problems and to see that, being able to get around it and help out with that, it was a good thing. The NASA folks, I got to know a lot of those. Good people, you know, wanting to do a job just like you and same thing with the EPA. It was just a different, it was a different

job and I spent 21 days down there. It was a good experience, you know, of a bad situation of course.

Hannah <00:30:32> Anything else?

Marquez No, no, unless you, like I said, I've done this quite a bit, I have other stories and other things, but I think those are some of the most memorable, you know. Being around the superintendent of Stanislaus for so many years, Greg Overaker—was, I thought—I learned a lot from him. He was a good fireman. Some do's and don'ts, but a great firemen. A great person to be around, a great person to work for. He—you know—it was a great opportunity I had there.

Hannah Thank you. *End of interview.*

## Eric Miller

### Hotshot Superintendent, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:02:40> For the camera can you tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire, how many you've been a hotshot, and your role?

Miller Okay. My name is Eric Miller; I've been fire since 1994, so this is season 21, and currently I'm the superintendent for the Wolf Creek Hotshots.

Hannah What's your favorite part of hotshotting?

Miller I think my favorite part of hotshotting as a superintendent, or from any position, is the building of the team and helping cultivate a good team and seeing the success at the end of the season. See people grow; getting through what seems to be, for people at times, like the hardest part of an assignment, you know? That last hour of the shift or late in the season when everybody's tired and everybody just has to push themselves a little bit more. And the sense of accomplishment you get when it's all done. You can look back and know that there was a lot of sweat and maybe some tears, but it all worked out and everybody takes a big sense of accomplishment in the whole thing. I think that's probably my favorite.

Hannah Where's your favorite place to fight fire?

Miller You know, I'd probably have to say back in the Southwest, region three. Generally very aggressive fighting fire, fast-moving, anchor and flank, you have a foot in the black, and you tend to just chase stuff. You go and you go and you go until either a team, kind of, comes in and takes over or you've caught it. Just a little faster pace and not a lot of mop up. Beautiful country high elevation of a lot of it. Yeah probably the Southwest

Hannah <00:04:35> I've asked a lot of superintendents this question. If you could describe the characteristics of an ideal hotshot, what would it be?

Miller An ideal hotshot? I'd say, strong work ethic, humble, takes a lot of pride in their work. It gets along with others, wants to be a part of a team. Mentors and develops everybody around them and it learns from the people or the situation. Speaks their mind when needed, gets along and everything. I would say a positive attitude and being humble is probably one of the most important traits. I always tell the crew at the beginning of the season, you know, right now everything is good. You'll probably say that this is the best group of people you've ever been in, been with, worked with. I always say, I want to ask that question in 1 October and if everybody is still saying, #hey, this is a great group of people and I want to be back," and they've made it through dirty August and Snap-tember and they have a smile on their face, that's the kind of people we really want. Attitude is probably the quality I look for most when I'm hiring folks.

Hannah <00:06:15> Do you have any favorite classic hotshot stories you can share?

Miller I can think of lots of classic stories. I can think of great assignments and a lot of fun stuff that's happened on the line and on the road. Can we come back to that one? Let me think about it.

Hannah How about, how do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Miller I would say, overall we need fire in the environment. Obviously our forests and rangelands are pretty overstocked with growth because of fire suppression for the last hundred years. It's something that's needed, we've done such a good job of, you know, suppression, that we created these—I won't say all of it but—we've had a big hand in all these big conflagrations that we have these days. If we're—getting on a 10 or 15,000 acre fire was kind of a big deal 20 years ago, now it's 50000 acres—it's pretty much nothing anymore. We're seeing fires and that are several hundred thousand acres and burn for months, instead of days or

weeks. There is a lot of work to do probably letting some of this stuff burn under moderate conditions. I think it's what's needed to clean up some of the stuff that we've had a hand in in the past.

Hannah <00:09:52> I was talking to the public information officer for region five and I asked him, because I have a big grudge with Smokey Bear (because I just think the message should be more nuanced—because not all fire is bad). The cartoon Bambi that came out many years ago, I really think it created the public perception, the fear and I think. Pixar is just putting out the Planes, a fire movie, and I asked him, “Do you think this is going to cause problems with us?” And he said “No, no” And I just thought, “Are you kidding me?” People think right now that air tankers are the key and now we’re having an entire generation that is going to be raised on this movie thinking that air tankers are the heroes.

Miller You know when the public gripes, politicians get involved. And we’ve spent 30 million or 300 million on the new aircraft for the next 10 years. That's a lot of boots on the ground, that's a lot of prevention, that's a lot of prescribed burning, that's a lot of treatment.

Hannah Yep that's for sure. Can you describe a recent fire, either a shift where you really had to dig deep or your crew had to really dig deep to pull something off? Or a burn show that was touch-and-go for a while? Paint a picture?

Miller This was three, maybe four years ago now, down and Southwest Oregon. We came in and IA-ed a fire that was on the Rogue Siskiyou National Forest that was in the Coast Range. Extremely steep, hot, dry summer. Fire was already—I don't know—60 acres and had crossed the drainage, both sides of it, when we got there. The type III IC was in charge, there was a team coming, we had probably 24 or 30 hours of just kind of in that transition. So we started scouting and found a big ridge system up to the top, tied into some roads. We started out with ourselves and got, I think, four other crews in there and, you know, cut a big old line up the ridge. Southern Oregon; it was over 90° during the day, kind of a southern exposure; extremely hot, extremely steep. Took us, I don't know, probably four days to put the line in with

four or five 'shots crews and all the prep that we put into it, waiting for the right conditions. For 14 days we hiked almost 2 hours a day to the top of the division from spike camp. Once we were up there, and there was a lot of prep and we did burn it, but you know, I think for folks, pretty soon it got to be a real mental grind. Getting up every morning and eating a cold breakfast and walking, you know, almost 2000 feet in elevation in 2 miles, in about two hours every day of walking up the slope. A couple days it was 103° up there—well we had burned. You know, and then we started to burn out off the top, it was a really complex burn—.

[Battery Change]

Hannah <00:14:28> Okay, so the burn.

Miller So it was a really complex burn. It was probably two or three miles total, all ridge top, no roads to back you up. No water. It was basically just using the crews. If you do the burning right and make sure you don't lose it over the back side of the ridge, because if it goes over the back side of the ridge and we can't catch it, then were looking at adding another, probably, several thousand acres to the fire. Things were going pretty good until just about dark, you know, wind shift. Got a few spots but everything worked out really well, it was kind of a late shift.

You know, we worked until midnight or so and then back up the hill for the next, I don't know, four or five days—just mopping up and securing it and holding it. Probably the toughest thing about that was the hike every day. Some of the crew didn't enjoy it very much but, you know, we had a lot of people on the crew, including myself, that, you know, every morning, getting up and starting up the trail to the fire. It was like, "Oh boy, here it comes." But the challenge of every day going up and down that hill—and I don't think a lot of people realized it at the time, there was some grumbling about it, you know, "I can't believe were doing this." But every other 'shot crew on the fire was, "Man, we're glad we're not you guys." "Man that is insane, I can't believe you're walking up there every day."

To me, I took that as, like, that should be a big sign of, you know, that should be pride. I mean you did that everyday and nobody else wanted to do it. Half the time there was people who didn't want to do it on the crew, but you did it every day. It was tough but that's what hotshots do. I'm not sure that we do it quite as much anymore, but that's why we're there. One of the things that I always tell the crew is, "You know, if it was easy we wouldn't be here; there would be a type two crew here or an engine crew, it would be out. You're here because it's not easy, it's hard and it's steep and it's hot and it's going to be complex work. That's what we do." That was pretty good, two whole weeks, yeah for sure.

Hannah <00:17:02> It must have been challenging to keep the morale up with that.

Miller Yeah, it was. We had to, you know—running a crew, you have to learn how to motivate everybody and whether it's, "Hey, you know you're getting 16 hours a day." And "Hey, look at this as a challenge." And then some people, there's always the ones that's like, "You've just got to be quiet." You know, trying to figure that out is always a challenge. Finding ways to motivate people and keep 'em on track and keep their head up.

Hannah What was the fire behavior like on that particular fire?

Miller Yeah, most of it was fairly moderate. You know, it's big Southern Oregon timber, it was actually right on the edge of the Biscuit Fire from 2002. So, big timber, Southern Oregon, hot, steep, rattlesnakes, poison oak. The fire behavior was, you know, short uphill runs. It never really got real big, cranking, it was kind of a mild season that way. Just the biggest thing driving the tactics was the country. Not a lot of places to go direct and get a good anchor and do that, so fell back a little bit and went indirect and did some burning, you know? I think the original plan—we had already started it, but the team that was coming in had a bigger box that actually would have burned off several thousand acre, more acres. You know, there was some questioning about why we were doing this and it's only a couple thousand acres but, in that country there's a couple thousand acres of green timber, kind of. Getting hard to find with the Biscuit and some of the other

fires they've started around there, so—. It was a good plan, made sense, and we did cut off a good chunk of ground. I think we all feel pretty good about it now.

Hannah <00:19:18> When have you felt the most proud of your actions on the fire line?

Miller You know, I'd say in 2012 at the—late September we had a big lightning bust go through the region. It was late September, 13<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>, so it was really late season event where we don't get a lot of lightning up here that time of year. Had a storm in the Cascades—had started fires from Sisters in Central Oregon all the way, almost to the Canadian border. I think in about 48 hours they mobilized seven teams. We showed up on the Okanogan Wenatchee and pulled into—right there in Entiat. In that country, Wenatchee itself, you can just see smoke everywhere and there was to pretty good fires burning right above town, backing into town.

We went up to Leavenworth and it was just chaos. They had over 100 starts and fires all the way down to the Sisters. So resources were short; most of the other 'shot crews from the region were out-of-region at the time, I believe, in Idaho. So we pulled in, broke the crew into three squads, tight for IC's and we all kind of took off. The group I was with, we actually—we got kind of lucky with the 30 mile an hour winds—that we got the only fire that was kind of shaded from the winds. So we were able to catch it within about 24 hours at about 15 – 20 acres. The other two squads had their hands full and for a while there were seven hotshots and may be contract engine and a type two crew on 1000 or 2000 acres of timber burning. I picked up one of the squads and we went to assist him and the Poison Fire was already over 1000 acres probably. Houses impacted, yeah you know, you can save threatened—it was backing down the hill. We had to go, kind of, into defense mode.

We started prepping around everybody's houses and working with the homeowners. The crew did a very great, professional job of dealing with people that were, you know, pretty panicked. There was a lot of smoke in the canyon country, so we had no air over the fire for, I don't know, maybe 10 days. I took over as a

division—type I team came in and we continued burning. It was basically, you know, the 12 or 13 I had—the other group of folks was over doing firing operations for a whole division on another part of the complex.

We did a lot of really late shifts, resources were so short that, you know, we were having to burn out pretty late in the night and stay up and hold and patrol because there wasn't enough overhead at night or resources to really be there. Sleeping in people's yards if the homeowners were really nervous. We would bed down, maybe a truck or two and kind of keep people feeling better. I think the crew loved it. When you're waking up to fresh coffee and breakfast burritos in the morning from the home owners. But the whole time we were there, it was a lot of public, every day as the fire kind of moved up and down the canyon depending on the conditions, trying to keep ahead of it. We never had enough resources to really get ahead of it or anything. We just kept ahead of it. Did that for 14 days, dealing with the public all the time. The crew was really professional, we got a lot of kudos about, you know, what the work the guys did. And they did a lot of great work on it.

We had one night shift where the fire kind of got away from us. We lost a burn, had some fire almost impact some houses—so, some of the guys ran in there really quick and grabbed some hoses and, you know, saved some property. It was pretty hairy for a little while, but over that whole time, we usually worked 16 hour shifts. There was a lot of 17, 18, even 20 hour shifts—just, it's kind of what we had to do to get it done. The crew held up really well, it was probably one of the most things I'm proud of. I mean, late-season, everybody held up and did great work and did a great job. Did a lot of good things and hopefully the public is—still remembers that.

Hannah <00:24:33> That's great, any other good stories you want to share?

Miller You know, being a hotshot—I've been a hotshot for probably 15 or 16 years out of my career, 14 or 15. We've gotten to travel all over the place. I've been from Alaska to Georgia, to North Carolina, Tennessee, Minnesota, Virginia. Probably one of the most memorable trips was in 1999. We were staged in Craig,

Colorado for IA and Fourth of July they had a big blow down incident in Minnesota. Had a huge storm come in over the Boundary Waters Canoe area—wilderness—blew down thousands of acres. 110 mile an hour winds, and since it's Fourth of July in the Boundary Waters, I think, 5000 or 6000 people were in the wilderness for the Fourth of July.

They asked us if we would like to go to Minnesota to assist, under the clause of search and rescue, because of all these people in the wilderness. So, wasn't much going on fire season-wise and it was kind of a new thing. We've been on a fire in Minnesota the year before so, yeah, we said, "Yeah, let's go." So we drove all the way to Eli, Minnesota and we broke the crew up into four or five person squads. They outfitted us with pots and pans and food—fresh food and dehydrated food—and canoes and maps, and we got flown into the wilderness in a de Havilland Beaver floatplane.

They stopped in a lake and kicked us out and said somebody will tie in with you in the next 24 hours. But basically in about 12 days, we will see you over here at this location and you start cutting your way out. So we did a lot of portaging of canoes that. And cutting out all the portages, and then you know, you would make a camp and do all the campsites around the lake and make sure there was nobody trapped who was unaccounted for. Cut out any of the campsites and then you'd cut the portages, pack your canoe and all your gear to the next lake and do it again.

It was July, the weather was really nice but, you know, 12, 13 days in the Boundary Waters canoeing around just doing 12 hours a day, no H pay, but probably one of the greatest experiences I've ever had. You know, the only fire we saw was a campfire at night, but it was something really unique. It—yet, it was a great time, that's one of the things. If I wasn't doing this job, I probably couldn't even tell you where the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Wilderness Area is. I mean, in the places we get to go and the things we get to see—.

We were in South Dakota one year and we staged at Mount Rushmore on Fourth of July, in case they lit the monument on fire with the fireworks show. Staged at Mount Rushmore. 70,000

people on the Fourth of July. Something that doesn't happen for most people. Going to Alaska in the Upper Yukon out in the middle of, really nowhere. Totally off the grid for 14 or 21 days—working in those environments, it's always something that's pretty fun, pretty rewarding. Something that most people don't ever get to do or see that part of the world. To be able to spend 14 days in it and camp and do the work we do is pretty awesome.

Hannah <00:28:52> Those are great assignments, I didn't know that they sent crews out for the big blow down. I know they've had a lot of fires since.

Miller You know, it was '99, it was kind of a new twist on using the hotshot crews. Now they've—Katrina and Rita, and 9/11, and all of that kind of stuff. I don't remember much of that going on in '99. It was, "You're on a fire." And that's all you did as a hotshot. So it was a new experience for us; yeah, it was probably one of the best.

Hannah Yeah, it sounds like it. Can you describe an example of your favorite aspect of fire suppression strategies or tactics?

Miller You know, I think one of my favorite tactics is going direct. Just getting right up there on the fire and keeping it as tight and as small as possible—and keeping that one foot in the black. We don't seem to do as much of it anymore, I mean, everybody likes to fall back and go indirect. Likes to do a lot of burning—and that's good—it's just when you're on the edge, it takes on—. I think you're more aware, you pay more attention to what's going on, and your senses are a little higher than prepping a road that's three miles away. You don't know if you're even going to be there to burn it, or if you're going to be on another fire, or somebody else is going to burn it and you're going to be doing something else. Just picking up that edge and going direct and going as tight—and tied into a road or a rock or whatever, that's probably my favorite thing to do. Generally it's probably the safest thing we can do, I mean, we preach one foot in the black and some places it's pretty hard to do that. Here in Southwest Oregon, it's not a lot of good black and safety zones and there's a lot of other risks—steep terrain and big timber and rocks and stuff. Going direct is what I prefer to do most of the time.

Hannah <00:31:41> Any other thoughts any other memorable fires? Best shift ever?

Miller Well, I could tell you, when I was on the Smokey Bear Hotshots in '97 or '98, my first real probably—probably my worst 24 or 48 hours on a fire. It was when I was a pretty new hotshot, so—. We flew into a fire in the Gila that had some jumpers on it. And it was just a small fire, but it's—the Gila typically is 8-, 9-, maybe 10,000 feet elevation. Right as we got our crew in and half the next hotshot crew came in, it started raining and it was, it was probably June and, you know, the Southwest, the monsoons of kind of start stepping up a little bit in June, mostly July. But it started pouring and we kept digging line and it was just pouring rain the whole time and we finish the line and this fire was like five acres but the weather had gotten so bad that no food or water had come in. None of our war bags. They did get some sleeping bags and some Visqueen into us. So everybody's pretty tired, we'd been on some other fires before that, so everybody just kind of grabs some Visqueen, you know, Forest Service sleeping bag—not a paper one— but a Forest Service sleeping bag and lays it down to go to sleep. You know, being a rookie I thought I had it figured out and I'd laid some Visqueen under my bag and kind of wrapped it up, you know. As soon as we lay down, it just started monsoon raining, pouring, and within 10 minutes people were soaked already. And so the bonfire started up and I was kind of laughing at those guys, "Oh, they're already wet." Well, 20 minutes later I was soaked through because water had pooled up underneath the Visqueen—rookie mistake.

So, before I know it, 17 people on the crew were standing around this bonfire all night, scrounging wood. It poured, people were wearing raincoats, wrapped up in space blankets. It—with 17 people, it's kind of like you're all sharing the misery, so that's kind of a good time. At one point it started raining so hard that it put the fire out. And I remember my Supt., Bob LeMay, yelling, "Get that fire started or were all going to die." We're burning all the saw gas and bar oil. And I remember at some point, somebody tossed some gas on the fire and the Sig bottle caught on fire, so they flung it away and everybody was kind of

laughing about it until you realized the superintendent's space blanket was on fire and it was burning.

Just rain and lightning all night on top of this ridge. I mean, I remember guys felling, they fell a snag in the middle of the night just to get firewood because we had burned everything. At daylight one guy was hypothermic, his face was blue, he couldn't talk. Only two people stayed dry all night and everybody was like, "Man just get us out of here." Like, the rule on the Gila then—and still is today—that they will fly you into a fire, but you will walk out. So okay, we're going to walk off this fire.

Nobody had any food or water except for what was in your pack and they said it was going to be a two-hour hike. So some people decided to start down loading their pack and dumping water out to lighten it up. And we started up the ridge and we got up on the ridge on this trail system and it immediately started to rain and it started to hail and the hail got bigger and bigger and bigger until it was like golf ball sized hail just drilling you, banging off your hardhat, and nobody's got a raincoat. We're just trudging and there's lightning hitting trees around us and we were just going. It's like 4-inch deep hail and we just bailed then off the mountain. And we had a local guy guiding us out. I remember at one point, we're standing there kind of waiting where trail junction, and he is talking on the radio—and I don't have a radio—and is looking at the map and he's looking at these trail signs. And I'm like, "We're lost. We're lost." He knew where we were, but during the storm we had missed the trail we should have taken and nobody was going to go back up, so—. We went from hail and freezing rain to the bottom of the canyon 'till eventually, it was probably almost 90°. I don't know how many times we crossed creeks and walked down creeks in wet boots and hot. It was like a 15 or 17 mile walk out by the time it was all over and we'd all been up all night and limited food and water.

Yeah, so, every time I think I'm having a bad shift, I think back to that and just kind of laugh about it. I don't know that there's ever been a worst shift or 24 or 48 hours that I've ever had that compares to that one night on the Gila. So it makes all the rest

kind of laughable. That was kind of my, "This is what hotshot in is all about." So that's probably one of my most memorable shifts.

Hannah <00:37:40> Oh my gosh. That's nuts.

Miller Yeah, I mean, you'd have a mutiny these days.

Hannah Wow, any other thoughts, any other stories? This is all great stuff.

Miller Not that I can think of.

Hannah It's just crazy!

Miller Yeah, you know, just the Gila in general is a generally, like I said—and it still today. Actually two, three years ago we were on a fire in the Gila and they flew us out and it almost felt wrong, getting on the helicopter to leave. It was our second roll; we'd done 14 days in the Southwest and then R&R-ed in place, and then 14 days on the Miller Fire, big fire. It was kind of a different tactic than they usually do on the Gila, where they usually just kind of confine, contain, fire use, let them burn. But it was day 14 and they were going to fly us out and I had a really hard time getting on the helicopter. I was trying to convince the crew we should walk because it was only 12 miles and they didn't like that. They done some walks out of the Gila—2006, I think—four of us had to walk 21 or 22 miles to get to the trucks to move them into a different trailhead so the crew only had to walk 15 or 16. So it's kind of the way it is on the Gila; it's always been that way. So there's been some good walks on the Gila. Beautiful country—rough, but it's kind of the way it is.

Hannah <00:39:33> And just for clarity, for the public that would possibly be listening to the story on the website, when you're saying walks, you're talking hikes with gear and saws.

Miller Yeah. For gear, you know, you carry your line gear out. So, average crewmember, 35 pounds, and if you're a sawyer then you're looking at 60 to 65 pounds or more. You don't pack a lot of extra. Generally they'll sling your war bags in and you can sling that stuff out and backhaul it with a helicopter. But anything beyond that, it's on your own. In fact, that fire we walked probably 21 or 22 miles out of, there were some jumpers on a fire

just over the hill and they'd flown in pumps and all this stuff and there was only two of them. And they called their fire control and contained before they slung anything out—and when they called for the backhaul, they told them no because you'd already controlled your fire and we don't fly anything out once the fire is controlled. So, I think, I heard they ended up—I mean, there was too much gear for two guys to really pack. So they sent the mule train in there to pack all their stuff. They would not sling it out.

Hannah

<00:43:48> Ron Garcia, Kings River, served for a number of years—started that crew in the MEL build up. He told a story, I think it was last week, that he pulled one of those long shifts and fell asleep while he was setting up his tent, and it just collapsed around him. I think those types of shifts are really kind of, classic hotshot shifts.

Miller

They are. Like I said, back in the '90s, even early 2000s, it was kind of the norm and it was expected that when you showed up to an incident, that you would go on 'till you couldn't go or somebody told you to stop. Now, you know, we tried to limit it to the 16 hours, but I know in the last couple of years—Wenatchee was a good example of having to dig deep and pull extra out. Try to mitigate as much as you can, maybe sleep an extra hour in the morning.

Usually I would get up and start patrolling and making sure everything was okay and let the crew sleep as much as they wanted. Some of the stuff that we probably used to do—yeah I look back now, we used to fall trees at night. We would snag and cut burning trees at night and it's probably a good thing that we don't do that anymore. The long shifts, you know, we do a lot of spiking out and that's always, sometimes can be a problem with the IMT's it seems like, but, you know, spiking out we get more rest and better rest usually, instead of being in camp. Camp is nice for some things, but you have to stand in line for everything and there's all the socializing going on and, you know, people get less sleep.

When you spike out, you hang out for a little while and then you go to bed. You can be right up at six and eat an MRE and hit the line in 15 minutes, instead of the briefings and then fueling and

then waiting in line for lunches and then driving up to the fire. By the time you get up there it's 8:30 in the morning and you've got a walk an hour to get into somewhere and work. Spiking is probably one of the best tools we have and sometimes we don't use it as much. Things have changed a little bit in the organization and communication with the team and the IMT's and the IC's. At least in this region. And they're always kind of wanting our feedback on the plan and what's going on and what's working. It's kind of a, you know—sometimes we're at odds because we want to spike out and they want us in camp so they can talk to us and figure out the plan. So, something that we're still working on.

Hannah <00:46:42> I think that spiking out—like the best memories I have of hotshotting are from spike camps—because you have that chance to build at the crew dynamics and experience the camaraderie.

Miller Yeah, I still remember being on a fire in, like, 1999 in Nevada. We had walked up this mountain in the middle of the night and burned it out and just laid down in the dirt, wrapped in a raincoat or a space blanket. And, you know, 7500, 8000 feet and just as soon as the sun comes up—and standing up and looking around and seeing the remnants of the warming fire and everybody kind of rubbing the sleep out of their eyes and the dirt on their face and the sunlight coming up and you just being like, "This is why I do this." Just that whole sense of the beauty of the morning, and being in a place that nobody probably been in for who knows how long, and sharing the misery and all the work with the guys, and realizing what you'd accomplished—and had a sunrise like that and—. It's just like, "This is why we do it. This is the best part of the job right now." It's just a moment, a perfect moment. I don't like to say we get paid in sunshine and rainbows, but it is a good perk. A benefit to the job.

Hannah <00:48:35> That is going to be posted on my website, it's perfect.

Miller Oh boy.

Hannah Yeah that's great. Brett and I talk sometimes about writing the book, writing a fire book someday and our chapter titles. Well, I

have chapters titles set out and, "We don't do it for the sunsets," that's one of them. "When fires burn pigs die." You know, the classic kind of sayings, but I'd never heard that one. Anything else? This is great material—I don't want to torture you?

Miller

I guess my closing would be, you know, in the future to come, we're going to see more and more large fires, probably. It's going to be more of a challenge of how we deal with them as an agency and how we utilize the crews we have, and the resources we have. I mean, we have a huge loss going on right now in the agency with retirements and people moving up and people moving on. I think also the 'shot crews aren't the same as they were like ten years ago, where you had people—the majority of the crew had been on that crew for maybe five, six, seven, eight, nine years. It—we're looking at more people with less experience every year that are coming to hotshot crews with one, two, three years. And we're looking at—because that's all there is there.

So, something is changing. I don't know if it's the work or the pay or the culture or something, but the dynamics are changing with the crews. It's not so much—it seems like it's not as a career based, a short time—it's an adventure thing to fight fire for a few summers and go off and do something else. Be a banker or a lawyer or whatever. I think that's going to be a constant challenge. And with the change in the overhead, as they retire and everybody moving up, we're going to have a big—there's a big gap in things and it's going to probably take a while before that gap kind of fills in and solidifies.

So it's going to be interesting in the next, probably 5 to 10 years, because I don't think the fires are going to go away, I don't think they're going to get any less. We have a lot more people building houses in places that didn't have a road into them 20 years ago. So we're going to see a lot more of that. We get asked to do a lot more to protect those kind of areas at times and it's probably becoming a bigger mission focus than actually protecting the wilderness and the deep timber regions that we used to. It's mostly based on how many houses are in that vicinity and that makes it the priority over everything else. It's going to be interesting.

Hannah <00:52:10> Brett, something you said made me remember this, but always says that cell phones killed the hotshot crews. Do you feel that way?

Miller Well, it's made it different. I mean it's—cell phones, social media, YouTube. It's tough, there's people that can't handle being in the woods for 14 days without a cell phone. People might get fidgety, not having that constant flow of information—whether it's friends and family, or the news, or whatever. Yeah, I'd say there's some validity in, "Cell phones killed the hotshot crews" in a lot of ways, but I think it's bigger than that. Just the onslaught of media and television, instant gratification is a big one. It's a big challenge and I think we have—. This job for the most part is not an instant gratification job. I mean there's moments, but to make it through five or six months of the season, it's a hell. It can be a slugfest at times, depending on the season. It can challenge you mentally and physically and emotionally. So, once again, it takes a special kind of person to make it and it's harder to find those people that want to do it, that want to be out in nature and not attached to the big city—and don't have a problem being away from home for a long time. So, like I said, I think, you know, I think it's just a different generation that we're dealing with and what they expect. It's a challenge for sure.

I'll give you the quote from the 'shot crew that I came up with a few years ago, but I don't know if you can use it: "If this wasn't a big deal, we wouldn't fucking be here." And—you know, I came out on a mop up shift and, you know, "What are we doing here? This is dumb. We're just mopping up." And I just said, "Hey, if it wasn't a big deal, we wouldn't fuck'n be here." It's kind of a joke, but there's times like that, too. You can use that for your book if you need a chapter title.

*End of interview.*

**Issac Naylor**  
**Battalion Chief, Sierra National Forest; USDA**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 1, 2014 in Prather, CA for The Smokey  
Generation.

Hannah <00:05:49> For the camera can you give me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot?

Naylor Issac Naylor. I've been in fire for about 24 seasons now and about 16—I think 15—doing hotshots.

Hannah What kind of roles did you fill on the hotshots?

Naylor From the bottom to the top, from the grunt to lead Pulaski to lead saw, senior firefighter, squad boss, detailed captain, captain, and then superintendent. Made it through the whole arraignment there.

Hannah Do you have any favorite hotshot stories you want to share?

Naylor Yeah, I do. The one that is most memorable is my first fire. It was in Arizona. It was here—I was on the BD crew at the time, it was my first fire and it was the Dude Fire that we responded to back then. That was pretty—you could feel it, I mean, just emotional-wise what was going on there, and then just taking it all in. Just seeing how everybody reacted, because it was my first fire, like—it was, "How are these people dealing with this kind of deal?"

It hit the community hard, I think in a sense that what I've seen, but a day after that they sent us to the Coronado, to the south. Some lightning fires hit down there. Yeah, that was the first memorable fire, it was just the first one off the bat, "Hey do I want to do this or not?" Apparently I'm still here so, it was, it was something that hit me though; it is dangerous. You're up close and personal with fire and when it's, you know—you're trying to moderate it from that smoldering, to that little flame to—you know, when it starts to gobble up some trees, you know. It was gaining ground and you just got to know where you're going at all times. But, yeah, Dude Fire was pretty memorable and that's

kind of what I remember. The Mogollon, it's pretty significant geographical, you know, feature and it played a big part in that fire. So that's kind of what I took away from that, so that was good.

Hannah <00:08:16> What was the fire behavior like, can you describe your experience actually fighting the fire?

Naylor Yeah, at the time that we were there, we just got into staging and all this was happening. You just went—just emergency traffic type stuff going on—so we were just monitoring and listening to this stuff going on. We were off at a distance, so we could see the column building, it was lifting, kind of in that monsoon season type, July 26th, I think is when it was—when that event happened. And it just built in, you know, it was just fuel driven. It just built, you could see the column go from light colored smoke, to gray, to black and then it was all a mix of colors. It was all going into one big column. You could see it and then finally it anvil-ed out, kind of like a thunderstorm. Then you could see it just dropped in all directions after that. It just went everywhere, and yeah, that's pretty much all we could hear, just all that stuff—because I remember watching. Because I was just, first time, just taking it all in, like I said. Seeing all that smoke, the smoke column itself, just watching it.

And I got to experience that in another fire. I think it was the Incibato(??) Fire, it was in New Mexico, same effect. I remembered it, how that—I remembered how all that developed from the very beginnings of it, the in-draft, the inflow of that. You know, as you're staring at the fire, the winds are coming in towards you, you feel it at your back and you start to see the column lift. You know, because it was inversion at first and then you can see it clear out because all the air was sucking into the main fire. And then, once it went calm, you know—that sudden calm, you know—you get a few minutes of that and then it reverses and drops and that's what ultimately got the—ended up taking those firefighters out. But yeah, that's what I remember, just a big anvil and then the whole thing collapsing, going in all directions.

[Interruption from 10:27 to 10:40; phone ringing]

But memorable? The Cedar Fire—Ron said he mentioned that—but it was—it was one for the books. I mean, it was one of those fires it where, you know, it's point protection. It's going where you think the fire is heading, there was no real direction; there was really no command system set up at that time—it was just really chaotic. Public rushing out and you're rushing in. So we're just going to wherever people were making the announcements over the command channel and heading that direction. But it was day and night, it's just all blended in together after that first 24 hours. It's just, you just feel that punch-drunk kind of feeling after you've been up so long, and you're trying to take cat naps and kind of sustain yourself and keep going—. Yeah, but after the first 24 hours, it just started blurring—because after that it went into like three days, just nonstop—I mean it wouldn't let up, it just kept going.

The first area we went into it was a suburban area, kind of a rural area, into the brushy area there. The fire was backing on top and, I can't remember who it was, it wasn't the Forest Service, I think it was like a city municipal person came to us, gave us directions to start burning out and trying to save that community that we were assigned to. We looked at it and there was no way we could burn it. There were no lines, there was no place to tie it into. And, plus, it was backing; it was sheltered from the wind where was at, so it was doing nothing but good. So the backing fire was just slowly creeping back down. You know, you're only talking maybe half a chain an hour; slow rate of spread, not doing much—fuel type was maybe, you know, three feet average. It's the chemise; the button-brush type stuff. But yeah, so that was our first kind of assignment and that was about one o'clock in the morning (because we were released from a previous fire), so we just rolled into this one here and that was our first assignment. So we kind of just took advantage of it; we bedded down for a few hours and then by four o'clock, somebody else came up on the radio—on the command channel—and started talking. I think it was Viejas Casino area—Interstate 8, east of San Diego—that's where the fire was starting to push, making its push to the south. And so we rallied everybody up, you know, shook their bags, runaround and, "Hey, we got to go. Let's go."

So we headed there, tied-in with that battalion chief, and he was, I think a local right there in the town of Alpine there, and he's the one that was giving us direction. He actually gave a good brief of what was going on; give us a layout. By that time the sun was coming up, but it was really smoky, real hazy. So it's kind of like an overcast day, but it was all smoke. Yeah, just laid, laid down. So he gave us directions doing the same thing, point protection around some communities. There were rain gutters on some of those communities, they have rain gutters on the backside so it diverts the rain. So we kind of used that as our line, because it was all cement entrenched, clear around this community. So it was pretty good, it was already done, so why do anything else?

The only other thing we had to do was like go around door-to-door and make sure everybody was out. Come to find out as the fire was approaching, as we were getting ready to do the firing show, there were people coming out, like just waking up in their robes, looking outside like, you know, with eyes as big as the moon. Kind of staring at that fire coming down and we were trying to get people back down, like, "Hey, you need to pack whatever you need, whatever's important to you, you have like five, ten minutes. Put it in your car and get on the south side of Interstate 8. That's where you need to go right now because that fires coming." So that was all within, I don't know, 30 minutes or so trying to get those folks out, and then the fire was on us.

It was pulsing down as it came down; it pulsed down towards us and it as we started to feel that in-draft again, that's when we started lighting. It was maybe, I don't know, maybe 100 yards away from us. So we took advantage of that and started just from our starting point, we just kind of just started anchoring off of each other, using that cement trench and just using that piece all the way around. That kind of went off fairly well, except for one of the guys, he had fusees instead of a drip torch. He was trying to light and it was breaking all of his fusees. So that kind of slowed one section down but, I remember that and he had to take shelter behind, like a water tank. He really wasn't in that big of a danger because we already had fire coming towards him but that's where he ended up saying, "Hey, I can't get this going, I'm

just going to have to ride it out right here." And it wasn't that big of a deal. You know; our flame was going at it already. It was already pushing off, maybe five-feet of flame lengths. Same type of fuel type—that chemise, button-brush type stuff, with about three foot average. It was pretty good clearance around those homes. It wasn't that bad until you got maybe a mile out or so. Then it was that thick, heavy, you know, Southern California—just heavy brush. We went around him, we picked him up as we went around the tank and he just jumped and lined with us as we kept going.

So it was a good thing and that ordeal lasted from, that call being at 4:30 in the morning until about one o'clock—after we lit that whole thing off. And it felt like it was an hour—like less than that. It went so quick. So fast. You're just—your brain is just running in high gear and you're just functioning at the level, you know, where you're just on top of everything, trying to just make sure everybody is safe. Then the folks that were there—we had some municipal folks with their type one engines sitting there just kind of, for the ready of us—they kind of backed off and went to the freeway. They kind of thought we were nuts because that whole thing was just a big wall of flame coming at us. I mean, for like three mile stretches, as far as you can see, east to west, just flames rolling off the mountain.

But I think it's just understanding how fire burns and knowing when to do what you've got to do—at the time, when it's right. Understanding when you get some of those cues from just the wind direction, the weather itself, watching your smoke column, the flames themselves—it's just watching the fire dance, kind of, across the landscape and as you feel what's right and time to light, then that's what you do. It was a satisfying burn show that we did. It was good.

But that's about the clearest thing I can remember after that, because as soon after that we were headed to—God, what was that place? There's a town up top, can't remember the town but they said it's known for its pies and it's on the Cleveland National Forest. I know some of the Supts down south, they know that place because they've been there on many-o-fires. But that's what

they said, "Save the pies." That's all I remember, "Save the pies." And that's where we ended up, and I can't remember the name of that town, but once the winds died, that's where it came back up slope and that's where we were, Julian. That's the name of the town. The fire was coming on all fronts, you know, south, west, north, and that's kind of where everybody rallied to because that was where the fire was coming back up slope.

But after that, it gets really vague. I just remembered drinking coffee one day, and all the spots just landed all around us. And we had media all around us, like, right then and there (because we were in Julian). It was just one of those things, it just all blended, it was just so, it's just a like—this isn't a real. But it was, and you are in there.

That day, when all that happened, is when that fire laid down. It finally ran out of steam. Just the fuel type and a lot of the work that was done on the backside. There were dozers pushing, because we knew it was kind of coming back up, and then they already had it, kind of, set up to catch it as it came around. And, basically just a lot of burning. But it was just three days of just, you know, night and day just all rolling into one.

There were homes lost. Tanks, you know, propane tanks—oblivion. I mean it was loud and you could feel it, you know, the concussion, the blast of it. And like I said, it was like rolling through the community, and trying to get people out, because it's just coming and you can't save everybody's home, you just got to get out of the way. We tried a few times and we lost our burn shows, too, because of it. I remember that much of it. Yeah, it was just really chaotic—that Cedar Fire. For at least about two, three, four—up to about five days, it was just a nonstop. It just would not end.

The one thing that I remember the most about that—after we were relieved and went down to—it was some airport where they had ICP set up. And they bedded us down by this airstrip. They shut down one airstrip, but they kept the other one active. And there were all those folks there that were there, saying "they had their bush planes,"—it's just a private, just a little public airstrip right there. Not the big, you know, international style, but

it was set up there—and there were planes landing there all night and I never even knew that's where we were at. We were literally laying maybe three feet from the airstrip and then on the other side, I don't know, another 50 yards or so, was the other strip and that's where they were landing planes—and we were sleeping right there. Until I woke up and I was like, "Oh, this is where we ended up." It was just because, it was just so, like I said, you are so wrapped up in that and your brain is just working and once you get to that point where you just crash, I hit—I maxed. And I just wake up that next day, it was just, I felt refreshed when I woke up, but I'd just didn't realize how close we were to that airport. Because I just sat up and then here goes a plane landing and I go, "Huh." It was just, it was crazy—I mean it just came to that one point and yeah, it was memorable.

Hannah

<00:21:37> How do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Naylor

The role of fire. I think it needs to be in any natural form as it comes. Just here on our Forest alone, with the lightning fires that we do get, a lot of the stuff we're still putting out. In areas you can—we want it to burn in some areas, but policy and the way things are—the direction that we get is, you know, we have to put them out. Unfortunately, this year is one of those years—the drought year that we have—is probably going to be one of those years where we're snuffing everything out because we'd lose too much. It would just burn too hot. The vegetation's not up to its hundred percent; it's less than 50—and then the recoveries of some of the fuel moistures—. But some areas you can. I believe you can. We do a lot of prescribed burning here on the district itself, on the High Sierra here. And we've been pretty successful with a lot of stuff we've been doing here. And, you know, it's just knowing how to use it, when to use it, and it's a vital; it needs it.

In my native culture background, being Paiute from the Owens Valley on the east side of the Inyo's, that's where I grew up. A lot of our families, you do that, do that cleanup—the late fall type stuff, you know, leave your areas and they would use fire to clean out some areas. It was beneficial then and then just the studies alone, seeing the history of it, you know, it worked. It

keeps fire to the ground. It doesn't destroy everything. It doesn't engulf all the trees, you know, it just cleans up the ground. Puts the nutrients back where it needs to be and it's a continuous cycle. Fire is a part of it, and that's what I believe. Fire is a very good tool that we need to continue to use.

Hannah

<00:23:55> Do you have any fun hotshot stories that kind of demonstrate the camaraderie that occurs?

Naylor

I'm trying to think here—yeah, there's a lot—just trying to think; just trying to pick an appropriate one. I think, in itself doing the job, you know—we were on the Horseshoe 2 Fire. It's another fire, just a lot of line construction, firing shows, but it's one of those points where you're with fellow hotshot crews and when you build—because it's a trust thing—you have to build that within your crew, yourself, and others around you—and on the Horseshoe 2 Fire, it was a walk-in show. There was a section of that ground, there was no road access, it was all walk-in, and we had to have some folks volunteer. I mean, we volunteer all the time to do things, but this was one of those shows where you had to be precise on what you are lighting and hold it where it was at. And if you didn't—because it would've had so much more ground to burn, and there was really no other real place to catch it at—it was just rolling into a place where there's no—a false ridge, just rolling hills type. It was just covered in vegetation, rocky; it's one of the sky islands that we were at down in. I think it was, it might've been in New Mexico or Arizona, it was right on the border somewhere. But it was just one of those things that, "Hey," going to the crew, "I just volunteered us to do this, we're going to go do this job." And they're just kind of all running around like, "Okay, what are we doing?" I go, "We're going to go out there, work all day, plan on staying through the night, carrying fire as far as we can on a ridge where, if the winds dictate that we can continue to burn, we will continue. And once we get done that morning, some of the crews are going to start off early in the morning, you know, four or five in the morning, they'll walk into us relieve us. And then that's when we will shut down and take our rest and then rotate back out." But it's one of those things where, you know, it really wasn't our ground. You know, it's a region three area, which is cool, you know, Dowey

was there and he can contest to that. And I think that Mike from Payson was there, too.

It was just a fun fire, it was just something that—not just the crew itself, but the whole bonding thing with the crews around. I remember San Juan being there, too, and they took a section once we got it down to a certain point. Along with Mount Taylor. It was just something that it just all worked together, it was just a puzzle that was, you're just seeing—how is this going to work and it was just a combination of things, of us just trying to just work it all out. Not just with the crewmembers, but with everybody, the Supt., the division—division relay at the ops, "Hey this is what we plan on doing, do you support us? Because we think we can do this." And it had total buy-in from everybody on the ground. We knew we weren't going to get air support, so that's why we were trying to do all this stuff at night.

It—the ground that we had it on, where the fire was established—that was a workable ground. Not a lot of big timber, you know, it wasn't really that bad, it was steep in areas but, you just waited until daylight to work those areas. But overall it was something that, it just jelled. It just came together from point A, where we started, to point B, which turned into that, you know, that daytime point, see? Getting it to the saddle, that was our goal for that next night and we made it. We got it to where it was easy ground, which there really isn't any easy ground when you have fire, but still it was to a point where we could kind of catch our breath a little bit. It—kind of evaluate, assess. But we have next, "What's our next move?" And try to work it out to an anchor point to where we can take it to the desert. To where there is no fuel down there. But just overall the camaraderie, not just the crew itself, but everybody and that's really like the first time everything felt like it was right. Everything was just lining up perfectly and it worked. So that was a good experience, I love to that.

Hannah

<00:29:11> That's great, any other stories?

Naylor

Yeah, I guess, but some have too much detail because, yeah—I don't want to discuss it. Because it was more in-your-face kind of

stuff and I don't want to get into it. It's more of a personal thing. What else?

Hannah

What's your favorite part of wildland fire?

Naylor

I think it's the travel, seeing new places. You're never really in the same place. I mean at some point yeah, you may be cutting line or reopening a line, but the fire that you went to 10 years ago was on the left side and now the fire's on the right side and you're reopening the same line. It does happen that way at times, but for the most part you're seeing new ground and that's the one thing I like about that.

Talking with the local 'shots, wherever they're from, if we go into their region, you know, trying to get some of their input of what's going on here. Just trying to download as quick as possible, knowing what some of the issues are with fire behavior, the fuel types, the terrain, access, you know — it's just all that stuff that you try to gather as much as you can within that first 12 hours of your — once you show up on scene and just initially going out and scouting. Sizing up a — because that's, most of the time, what we do when we get there, unless there's something that they need help with. We will gladly jump in, but you're kind of going off of their trust, in a sense, and then you're trying to gather that SA and just build your slides as quick as you can — and then develop a plan and see what their plan is and go with that.

But yeah, overall, that's the most I enjoy about it, is the travel, meeting the other Supt's, just other firefighters too. It working with engine companies, you know, out of region — Texas — we went there, not me as a crew, but personally went out as a division — was a good time to. The just filling in as a division sup. for them and just meeting those folks. But for the most part I think that would be it.

We did have one assignment, I think, that made me feel really good. We were up in Oregon — I can't remember the fire — but we were with Zigzag and it's a lot of contract stuff in region six. And there's this perception in hotshots, region five contractors, Forest Service, you know, they all kind of rub each other, kind of wrong. I mean, I don't know if that's just personal or, from other points

of view from folks. I mean, yeah I've had experiences for the most part, but it's been very minimal for any kind of bad feelings to that. There's a reason why there was a bad feeling because there was something that I'd seen that was wrong that we needed to correct, but for the most part, working with those guys up there—the contractors I'm talking about specifically, you know, once you get to talk to them and get them on the same page as we're doing our assignment, it just works. You got to communicate and that's one of the things that I noticed, if you don't do that—break that barrier down, as soon as possible—yeah, you're going to have a rough ride and it's not good. Because you're not on the same page, there's no communication, the lack of—and you're just trying to figure out what is he going to do, "I don't know but we're going to do this." And that's not what you want. You've got to be able to work together and that's one of the things that I picked up just going out of region. I know we're the—kind of the strangers, once we come up, go out of region—but when they come here, try to absorb them as fast as you can to, "Hey, this is what we're about, this is what we do, this is our Forest." Whatever we're doing, we try to incorporate them as quick as possible. So they're on our team, you know, because we're going to be watching their back and they're going to watch ours at some point. We just need to build that relationship as quickly as possible. I think those are the few things I've really enjoyed out of doing this job. I'm in the battalion job now, but it's just one of those things—personally that I had to step out—but it's all good. It's family; I have kids, I have other things to take care of now, so it's all good—but that would be, those are the few things I really enjoyed.

Hannah

Any other thoughts or stories?

Naylor

Just in the hotshot community alone has taught me a lot. I mean, the friends that I've met and still keep today. The relationship that there—knowing how I work and how they work, you know, when we do get onto an incident. You know, it's that much quicker to build the team and the trust factor still there with a lot of that. Yeah, that's just one of the things that I still see that I can relate to really easily. Just talking with our local crews here, the superintendents, you know, keeping in touch with them. The

surrounding folks, you know, seeing them as they come into our Forest, when they come to cover and talking with them, gossiping, just catching up on what they've been doing. Wintertime is tough because that's kind of the wall for them—for everybody then—but it's just keeping that relationship going, I think, with a lot of the Supt.'s—and not just them, but everybody else. The relationships you build through the years, yeah, that's the thing I most cherish a lot about being on a hotshot community. It's a strong community.

Hannah

Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## Jessica Olson

Hotshot Crewmember, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:02:36> For the camera can you say your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot?

Olson My name is Jessica Olson and this is my second year being hired in fire. I did a half a season my first year with the Forest Service. Got lucky, I was a secondary firefighter and put in like three months of fire and this will be my first full season with hotshots. I just did a half season it with Lewis and Clark last year.

Hannah <00:03:08> So you got hired on to a hotshot crew your first season?

Olson Yes I did. So my first year I got hired on with the weeds crew and I was on the Salmon Challis and I had Halstead and Mustang that year and they both, together, burned over half 1,000,000 acres. So, because of that I got pulled—because I had a red card—and they put me on engine. So I did a couple rolls with engine and then did, I think it was just a two week. I did a fill with the helicopter and then after I did all of that, I got really excited because I really wanted to look at hotshot crews. I was like, "That looks so sweet, they come into camp and they're like tired and they look like they've done a lot of work." Growing up in a military family, that's just kind of like what I'm used to. You know, I'm used to having to work for my meals and having to be extremely tired at the end of the day and wanting to go to bed.

So after being exposed to that, when I was at the engine, I was like, "Oh, I really want to do that." So I got a fill with Logan Hotshots that first year and loved it. So just out of sheer luck I guess, like, I was—just kind of put my name out there so people would like know my name and maybe this year I would get a job because I was only qualified as a—I was barely qualified as a four. So I just put out a bunch of applications to hotshot crews,

got hired—accepted a job with a type two IA crew and then Lewis and Clark called me and they're like, "Yeah, we got a four for you." And I was like, "Okay," not really knowing what I was getting myself into. But I accepted it and I was with them 'till about July.

I mean, I was having a really hard time keeping up and so mid-July I talked to my squad boss and I was like, "Hey, it's July, I'm not keeping up, it's not going to get any better." And so they put me on one of the engines for the district for the rest of the year. So this will be my first full season.

Hannah <00:05:20> How are you doing so far?

Olson It's still hard, I mean, being short it's difficult. It's not impossible but there's just things to overcome. I'm getting there.

Hannah What's your favorite thing about fire?

Olson I love having to work for my food. I love feeling like I earned my pay and, at the end of the day, it's so stupid, but I love having tired legs. I love when my hands are clamped in the clock position. I don't know, there's just something so stupid about it, but so romantic about just being extremely exhausted at the end of the day and not having anything left in you.

Hannah <00:06:21> Do you have any memorable fires that really stand out?

Olson I don't have a lot of fires under my belt yet, but I do have—the very first fire I ever went on was Halstead outside of Stanley, 2012. And it was my very first fire ever and I didn't actually get dispatched out with the crew. Because I was secondary fire, I got dispatched out as what they call a human repeater. So, as the fire was growing—they thought it was going to cross the river corridor—and I was going to be in the river corridor just relaying messages back and forth. But it hadn't crossed the river yet and they were predicting it would in the next three days or so and 'till it crossed the corridor, they wanted me to just hang out with this division. And so I was really confused, I had never been on a fire before, like, I had no—I had FFT2, that was it. No extra quals,

definitely not single resource qualified, and so I went over to this division. I was like—I had my POV, I wasn't even in a govy rig—I was like, "Hi, I'm Jess, I'm not sure what I'm going to do here but they told me to come talk to you."

So you know, at the time I didn't realize the whole chain of command, and so now looking back on it I'm like, "Oh my God, I was just like talking to the division supt." But anyways long story short, I ended up just kind of bouncing around with different people. I was with a lookout for a few days, I was with a safety officer for a few days, and somehow this one day the division was just like, "You can hang out with me." And that was one of the days that they had this huge a burnout operation going on. They had like four 'shot crews on that flank and it was getting ready to jump the corridor, so they were burning from the road. So I got to be with the division and he had a Very pistol and he had some torches and I actually—first time firing something ever, got to like run along the road with a torch and then he's driving his UTV and I was like should shooting the Very pistol out of it. Ridiculous but that that was my first fire assignment.

Hannah <00:08:52> What great exposure.

Olson I know, especially looking back on it now, now I'm like, "I was hanging out with the division—." Like, if I see that person I'm like, "Oh God, look like I'm doing something."

Hannah That's awesome.

Olson Yeah.

Hannah Did you have a chance to look at this, it just has some topics that might stimulate a story.

[Off record]

Olson <00:10:15> So yeah, the biggest hiking that I've done and it's not even in the scope of hikes that I've heard of, it's not even really that big. But last year when I was with Lewis and Clark still, we went to the Salmon Challis and we were, if you know that area, it's just west of North Fork and then up Panther Creek a little bit. So it's still pretty steep and we get there and I was like, "It's my

first roll with Lewis and Clark and back on the Salmon Challis where I started my fire career." I was like, "Things are coming full circle."

I was kind of thinking I was going to have a good roll, things were going to work out and then like, probably day three, we got the order that we were going to go to the top and we were going to spike out. I was like, "Ah damn, like this is going to suck." You know, I was still struggling at this point and this is actually the roll that I talked to my squad boss and I was like, "This is, this is not, this is not a good idea." But anyways, it's super steep, Salmon Challis—normal Salmon Challis kind of stuff—and it was 2200 vert. And it was like strata. I don't know, I think I maybe stuck with the crew for maybe 10 minutes and I was gasping and fell out eventually. It was so hard because halfway through the hike I was like—I kind of made the decision in my head like this, this is it. Like I kind of realized that that was the end of my season with Lewis and Clark.

So it's like the worst hike ever because in my own head I knew I was done. You know, as soon as we got done with spiking out, I talked to my squad boss when we got to the top and I was like, "Yep, I'm definitely going to hang in there, do as much as I can well we're here but, this is my time, I've got to go."

So in my head I had absolutely no motivation to keep going and it was a struggle physically in its own way and then I had all this mental stuff going on. It's like, maybe halfway up and I had one of the EMTs walking with me and I was just like—I was such a mess—I had like snotty and spit because I was spitting. I was really dirty and ashy. I just look like a mess and like my eyes were tearing up because in my own head I was battling with all these things going on. All the sudden I just stopped and I was just like puking and this poor guy—the year before they had had a girl on the crew that kind of did the same thing, like ended up washing. But he was with both of us when we made the decisions. I felt really bad for him because he just happened to be there in the breakdown. Like, as I'm puking I'm just like, "I'm so sorry, I don't usually do this, I'm just really battling with all this stuff." And I told him, and I was crying and puking. It was such a

mess and he was like, "It's okay, I get it, I kind of figured this was coming." So, it was a long hike for me. I think it only took me, probably an hour and a half or two hours, so it wasn't like a long hike, but it was a long hike. But yeah, 2200 up and then the way down was not any easier, it was like butt sliding all the way down. We kept like 20 foot spacing between everybody, it was pretty gnarly.

[Off record]

Hannah <00:22:15> How do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Olson It's kind of like a two edge sword, you know? Like being a firefighter, we love fire and we get really excited and jacked up and it's exciting and it's fun—and we know it's good for the environment. So it kind of, I mean like, when you're talking with other firefighters or other people about kind of understanding how the role of fire kind of affects the environment, it's a little different because you can actually say, "Although it does look terrible for a few years, it's good for the environment." It gives us a job, it's something that we like to do so. For my perspective, I think it's fun, it's good, you know, there's a lot of good things about it. I think there are definitely different ways to handle it. I think it's really hard to, for me, it's hard to understand why we contain it all the time, especially in the wilderness. Like, why not let it go? Fire is good.

Hannah <00:23:25> If there is one thing you can tell the public or have the public understand, what would it be?

Olson If you meet a firefighter and they, if they talk about their job and they like it, don't look down on them. So many people that I know that don't understand fire, you know, I talked to them—I don't know, maybe I should change how I, like maybe my verbiage that I use—but they'll ask me, "How is my fire season?" Or "If I'm excited to go into fire." Yeah, for me it's really exciting. Like, I make good money, I get to be hiking around in the woods. Fire to me is exciting, it's mother nature and it's exciting to me. So it's really hard saying that to the public because they think of fire and burning houses and mass terror and horror. Wildland fires

are completely different than structure fire. We're not hoping that people's houses burn or people lose anything. It—we're just out there because we're little woodrats, like, we love the woods—woodrats I guess we should say. We just love the woods, we love being out there and it's hard for the public to understand sometimes that we get excited about fire and they're worried about their houses burning down.

Hannah <00:24:54> What about the camaraderie? You've been on for what, about a month, or so what's your take on the camaraderie?

Olson So, actually I have the privilege of being on engines and helitack. Well, I've detailed with a view different crews, so I've detailed with an engine and spent about half a season with an engine, and then did a fill with a helicopter crew—and I also dated a guy that was on a helicopter crew, so I got to know that crew really well. In turn, you know, hotshot crews. So I've gotten to know a few different styles of crews and there's nothing like a hotshot crew. Other crews, in every other crews situation there's always been some kind of butting of heads or some kind of competition within the crew. Unhealthy competition, not just, "I'm going to beat you in the run today." It's different, hotshots, because we're working together, working long hours for six months. Even if you hate the next person, the person next to you is really getting on your nerves and you can't stand them at the moment, like, you still got their back—no matter what. It really is a second family. It's so hard to understand if you haven't had it and there's nothing like it. I mean, I've been on college sports teams, you know, my dad was in the military—there's nothing like it.

Hannah <00:26:28> It's so true.

Olson It's so is, like you can be, "I'm going to kill you at the end of the shift," but still if something goes bad you're going to have their back.

Hannah Any other good fire stories, memorable shifts, or memorable incidents?

Olson I don't think so, I got my first helicopter ride last year that was fun.

Hannah Tell me about that.

Olson So my first helicopter ride—I was just on a little IA. This is when I was with the engine and they flew us in and it was kind of like, what I guess a normal flight is—the doors on, everybody is just kind of, it's tight, it was like a little five-minute ride in. It was like a four mile hike, so they were just going to fly us in and pop us out. So the flight in was fun. I never been in a helicopter before, but the flight out was awesome. So they were staging us and they were briefing us to get back on the helicopter to go out and they were like, "All right," I think they had just done a sling load but they had one of the doors off. They were like, "All right, we need somebody to volunteer." I was like, "Yeah I want to go." And they were like, "All right, empty your pockets." And I'm like pulling all this stuff out of my pockets and I stuffed it all in my bag—I was like a little schoolgirl. So freakin' excited. And I got in there and it was so fun, I was right on the edge, I was kind of looking out, like kind of hanging out the door a little bit—like hanging onto the guy next to me. It was so cool and they kind of did it, because they knew I was really excited, so they did a couple of passes around the fire and they kind of took a long way out.

Hannah <00:28:35> That's great.

Olson I love when people pick up and they're like, "Oh she is really excited, let's not get a little bit."

Hannah <00:29:54> When have you felt the most proud of your actions on the fire line?

Olson Good question. I think—so back to Halstead, We—this is when I was with engine—we were staged. So where the fire was, it was kind of coming down the hill or starting to come down the hill—this is before they did the burnout operation and they've got—so they got the main river and then kind of up the side they have another river, the Yankee Fork—and as I was kind of coming down there, right at the collision of the two rivers was. It was a raft company—kind of like, I don't know—convenience store, but not like a gas station. Like a mom-and-pop, like we've got ice

cream, will make you a sandwich, will take care of you while you're here kind-of-thing. The people were so sweet and so we were staged there for structure protection, just kind of watching the fire, making sure it didn't come down the hill. And the whole time we were there, we were—they were giving us ice cream and like, "Hey!" They were coming out and talking to us, like hanging out. What was the question again?

Hannah When have you felt the most proud?

Olson Proud, okay, yeah, that's right. So we were there and the fire did start backing down the hill and that's when they decided to do the burnouts. But before they got all the 'shot crews in there and started the night ops burning out, you know, we were there, we had the waterworks set up. They were all going, we were kind of patrolling the bottom of the hill making sure there was nothing rolling out. And so that was, I think that was probably my proudest moment of like putting on my pack and knowing these people and being there—kind of the buffer between them and what was going on. Being able to answer their questions. Yeah, it was nice and you know, just kind of seeing the fire there and knowing that it wasn't going crazy, it was just like creeping down and we had everything set up. Yeah, just like being there for the public and knowing what I was doing was directly affecting somebody; it was really fun.

Hannah <00:32:21> Any other thoughts any other stories?

Olson I don't think so. I guess the only other proud moment I have is, you know, the end of a long shift, especially if you're digging line uphill or you're coming down off of the mountain and you get to walk your line. Especially with a shot crew; it's 18 inches—it's like a sidewalk. Like you're digging, you're working all day and in your own head you're like, "We're not doing anything, this is stupid, this sucks." But at the end of the day, you get to walk down your line and you're like, "This looks great, we did some good work here." But, it kind of goes back to the whole, "Why do I want to be a hotshot." Like, I love just that feeling of being exhausted but knowing like I can see what I did, and it's cool. And you get into camp and you're just—you've got dirt

everywhere and people are looking at you like, "Well, I did not work that hard."

Hannah

Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## **Gina Papke**

**Program Specialist and former Hotshot Superintendent, U.S. Forest Service**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 12, 2014 in Portland, OR for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:06:12> For the camera, can you tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire, how many you were a hotshot, and your role on the hotshot crews?

Papke My name is Gina Papke and this will be my 35th fire season. I was a hotshot for twenty of those years. I've been on handcrews the rest of the time and the last few years I've been in coordination.

Hannah Weren't you the first female hotshot superintendent?

Papke I think there was a lot of debate about that. Maggie Doherty was detailed into the Lolo Hotshots for a brief stint, but it was not on a permanent basis, and she was only there for a partial summer, from my understanding. So, she was on the Lolo, I believe it was like a year before I became the permanent superintendent for Zigzag, so there's some debate, but I—Maggie Doherty was in on the Lolo Hotshots.

Hannah Do you have any good stories you want to share, just off the bat?

Papke Oh my gosh. There are so many of them. I think that with the—being on a crew, or hotshot crew, there's so many great stories. Every year, within that year, there's numerous stories that you could highlight and point out. I've had some highlight fires. Yellowstone stands out, in '87, where we were spiked out. I had actually left the hotshot crews for a period and ran my own, at that time, there were only type two's or hotshot crews. So, they had mistaken us for a hotshot crew, but we were spiked out for the majority of that time, we were there for about 28 days. That was a highlight.

And then just being on the hotshot crew working for Paul Gleason. I worked for Paul Gleason for three years—. Working underneath Paul—Paul's guidance for a good part of that—when

he first started teaching us about LCES, long before it came out to the public. He started teaching us and formulating the LCES components of the ten standards. Breaking it down into a more simplified version that people could memorize and remember. He was teaching us that in 1983, so, he was—. Then, I believe that it wasn't until the late '80's that the LCES became kind of common, common practice, and common knowledge for the rest of the folks. Things—just working for Paul, those first several—great years and some of the fires that we were on there.

It seemed like when I first started, we didn't carry all the gear that we do now. We had our fire shelter and such, and our water bottles, but we were more commando. As time moved on we started carrying heavier and heavier packs and—with the space blankets and all the batteries and everything else. But it seemed like when we first started, we worked longer shifts but yet we were more commando. We didn't have all that extra weight on us, but things definitely changed, you know, we didn't have tents to sleep in, we were sleeping underneath deuce and a half's half the time and it would be—. I think there were some near misses on that, when the deuce and a half's would start up in the morning—but we slept out in the open. We didn't have all the— all the gear that we have now. And a lot of that has been great, I mean, having your own tent. But we didn't have all that, we didn't pack as much gear as we do now. Just going in and fighting fire.

But there are so many stories that, my gosh, if you think about the New York fire when we were there in '95 on the Long Island. It was the first time hotshots have been to New York and we show up—there's more police on the fire than there are fire fighters. They were threatening to arrest us if they caught with fusees. The fire itself wasn't anything to write home about, it was just the experience of being in New York and on Long Island, of course. I mean, just working with the structure firefighters, while—ok, they were there—but I wouldn't say we were working with them. It was just an interesting experience and just being there. Like I said, the fire itself wasn't anything spectacular, it was just the fact that we were in New York.

You know, you can go back and look at all the different places you've been spiked out, and some amazing places that you would never get to go if you weren't on a hotshot crew. Some of the most beautiful landscape and no trails lead to them and you're hiking into these places, it's just—. I think that those stories that, I think, stay with people. Then the camaraderie you have with the crews. And each year the crew is a little different and brings a different dynamic and I think that is what keeps that bond, that respect for each other. Then, you know, there's always going to be some people that, they weren't made for being a hotshot. Being a hotshot was probably some of the best, it was the best time of my life.

Hannah <00:12:00> Who were the people who mattered most to you in your career? Paul Gleason obviously had some big impacts, but are there others?

Papke There are, I mean, 'cause when I first started I was on what was called the BD crews, or brush disposal crews, and I started on the Olympic. I think that when I started there, on the Olympic, we saw more fire than some of the hotshot crews. I'll never forget, we saw fire on a daily basis. We were burning slash on really steep units. Every day we saw fire. We always had escaped slash burns. Shelton was known for having a lot of escaped slash burns. But when I finally got to the hotshot crew, you know, Gleason, he was saying, "Hotshots are the best" and I said, "No burning—. I saw more fire than you guys do." It was always kind of a joke between Gleason and I. You know, there were other people, like the Ken Vanbuskirk's, who were not kind of—that stayed within the programs, the BD programs. They were, umm, jack-of-all-trades and they never really moved up; they stayed in one place. Their skill level and knowledge level, for leadership—because they stayed in one location, I don't think they got the recognition that the hotshot crews do. But Ken Vanbuskirk stands out as somebody who was instrumental in my life, as well as—Ernie Johnson was the AFMO, I believe at the time on that district. That guy was innovative. We—he was doing things like; he made the first helitorch. It was a barrel with some drip torch, basically, on the end of it. And we were using that to light some

of our units. Or laser lighting—and we tried that experiment and ah, I think we spent more hour on that unit, laying all the det. cord and everything. He always had these crazy, wild ideas for firefighter safety. This was before—. He didn't want the exposure to the firefighters. So he thought if he could come up with a more innovative way on not exposing people for rolling logs coming down out of those units when we were lighting. That was his goal. So those people actually had a huge impact on who I am as a person—just always looking ahead and showing their leadership in such a way that I don't think was recognized on a national level.

The people like Paul Gleason and Charlie Caldwell—and the Ben Charlie's and the Yazzie's. Those people, those names you always heard and you always wanted to be like them, and—they were amazing leaders in their own right. They had an amazing skill. But those folks that were in those non—or stayed at the district, stayed at the units, I think, had as much impact as the Ben Charlie's and the Charlie Caldwell's and the Paul Gleason's.

Hannah <00:14:52> Are there any significant events that have shaped your career? Or any significant fires? The moment you were like, "whoa."

Papke There were. I don't know if it shaped my career, I would have to say that, you know something's—the question has been asked to me from a very good friend of mine, Deanne Shulman, who was the first women Smokejumper. One of the topics we would go into deep discussion on, "Did the Forest Service change who we are, or did we change the Forest Service?" And I think the answer is both. I think the Forest Service made us who we were because at the time we came in, when women were first coming in was, you know—more direct—but there were defining moments as far as the fire suppression. I mean there were times where you could hear that freight train coming and then your superintendent would be, just, "Line out and let's move it." And you could just tell it in their voice, they only used a few words—where it would be just a few words used—but you knew you, everybody needed to get together and get going, and get out of there—and just hearing that freight train coming through the crowns of the trees.

It's like, are we going to make it? We always did; I never had a deployment, never came close to a deployment. But there were times where you—your hair stands on the back of your neck. It was mostly when I was working for other people that that had occurred.

Or if panic was setting in and how that was handled. One time I was on a fire where it was that freight train sound that—you have to be there—and someone starts screaming and they have to be hit, hit hard, to be—. Because it hits you right in the gut when that panic spreads, but the crew bosses at that time had the wherewithal—that they had—to take care of it. There were some physical hitting to get them to calm down and I don't know if that would be done nowadays. But I have to say, you have to get everybody to follow orders and follow directions and stay calm. I have to say that those early leaders in my life really showed me how they led and kept everybody calm when we were moving out quickly. They hardly used any words to do it, it was more of just—they stated what needed to happen, they didn't explain why, they just started moving and trotting, running, but you made it out. Everybody stayed calm and they followed, you didn't see people running in different directions. Are those defining moments in my career? I'm not sure, you know, I think everything just loads up in your hard drive and all those experiences—whether there close calls or whatever—I think it's just, you just take that in so you recognize it.

I remember a story, in fact it was Ken Vanbuskirk, he was on a slash burn; I think it was in 1990 on the Olympic. He was still there and an air tanker—because they had a little five acre fire slop—a little prop plane, it crashed into the side of the hill. So they bring in an air tanker to try to keep the fire from spreading and, at that point, he was the only one down the hill scouting out the fire. And he had said, he told everybody that his crew was up on the landing at the time. He told everybody to pull back instead of taking pictures. He would normally not do that, but he wanted everybody, he wanted them far away. He wanted them down the road. There was something with the call sign of the air tanker that—he couldn't figure out why he was telling everybody to pull back, but everybody pulled back. Well, that air tanker

crashed into the side of the hill. The fire ball went over his head, parts and pieces fell within, like, fifty feet of the closest crewmember and he tells the story about—what was it that made him decide to pull everybody back? And I think it was his hard drive because he had worked with that air tanker on the Yellowstone Fires and that air tanker was clipping treetops. And so he had to think about it years later and figure out why he pulled people back. But it was like your hard drive is loaded—it's not conscious, it's in your subconscious. You just go "Ok, I've had something similar so we need to take action and keep everybody safe." And I think that's what, maybe, what we're lacking now. I'm not sure if things are different now or not, but he did—he kept everybody safe, you know, all those experiences lead up to who you are as a leader and why you make the decisions that you make. So, I think he hit the nail on the head, though he couldn't pinpoint why he made that call.

I think that we all have done that—have done that in the past—when we were out there. Something just didn't seem right. You can't put your finger on it. Maybe you're starting to violate some of the ten—too many of the—you know, you start violating those, you can't compromise on that, you have to stay true to those. So, I think that all of those, all those moments that I've had were defining moments for me and I didn't take any of them lightly.

Hannah <00:20:24> I remember you telling me a story about being, I don't know you were the only women in fire camp, or one of a few, and the showers—the female shower time was in the middle of shift or something like that. Do you mind telling?

Papke I will be the first to admit that I was not one of those brave women that went in there with the boys, but there were a few women that actually went in there and took showers with the boys. It really made a huge scene and the showers aren't the same—they were different back then. If you were lucky there was a tarp and then some hoses coming out, but the shower times were never conducive for the women. They were always in the middle of the night, or whatever, and there were so few women. There was a group of, I think there were two or three women that had gone in there, 'cause they were just—we hadn't had showers

for, you know, a week or ten days. The showers weren't as available as they are now days, but we were lucky if they had showers in camp. But they went in there and striped and took a shower with them. Some of the guys were just angry about it; some guys were OK with it; but it just made a huge scene—oh my gosh. The word got around, you know. I could never have done that, but they did and they were the trendsetters. They pushed it—they made—thankfully, they're the ones who did push it, you know.

The same thing when I started it, we use to be called twenty man crews, of course, not twenty person crews. The arguments that use to ensue on those—oh my gosh—it was—there were some pretty vocal women and had they not been there, we probably wouldn't see too many women in fire anymore. They were the ones who were the trendsetters, challenged—challenged how things were done. It made it actually better for both the men and women—on having better showers and better hygiene, 'cause there were times where you would go for—there were no twenty one day rules—you would just go. If there was a creek to run through, than you'd try to do that, but—. Showers weren't a common deal. They usually, like I said, it was a tarp—with a tarp around it and you were standing on some pallets and the hoses coming out of these—it wasn't warm. Things have changed quite a lot. So it was for the better of all and having appropriate hygiene cleanup. We didn't have sinks to clean up in and things like that. Yes, things have definitely changed.

Hannah <00:23:27> You mentioned the ten a.m. rule, do you want to talk about that?

Papke Yeah, when I first started, one of the things they taught us was that the whole policy was to try to catch the fire by ten a.m. That was even bled over into the original BD crews when I was there. So, if we had an escaped slash burn, we would be working all through the night and into the next day and our policy was to try to catch that by ten a.m. Then it carried over onto the IR crews and then when we switched to IHC crews—or hotshot crews—I think that was, you know, it was still catch the fire by ten a.m. So

we would work these long shift and our goal was to try that, hook that fire by ten a.m. It was something that we strove for.

There were a lot of times you couldn't do it, the fire was too big, but that was something that they still instilled in us. I think that it started changing sometime around the mid '80, I'd imagine, and into the late '80's where there were major fires like the Yellowstone fire. There's no way you could've caught that by ten a.m., there were so many of them. Some of these mega fires have definitely changed how we— . that ten a.m. policy and was it reasonable to be working people, you know, those long shifts trying to catch a fire. The work/rest guidelines, I think some things have changed our policies and direction—and for the right reasons.

Hannah <00:24:56> Can you describe the fire behavior, or any particular shift or moment that stands out in your mind for the Yellowstone fires?

Papke The fire behavior in Yellowstone, I think—the fire, I'll never forget—working with the fire behavior analyst. They would try to run their projections on where the fire would be and I think that Yellowstone was—I mean there's been other fires like the Panorama Fire in 1980 down in Southern California—us using ICS—so that was a huge marker for us to change how we did business and using the ICS system. But the Yellowstone Fire was the, you know—. At the time the Park Service had this, a light hand approach on suppressing the fires, but I think—because of the weather conditions and the fuel build up with all the lodgepole—all of our fire suppression, I think, it lead to—all of the conditions were right for having the fire exceed everybody's expectations on where it was going to go.

When it would blow up—'cause there were so many fires—there were days like the Black Sunday, where the projections were just way off. It was obviously that there was so much lodgepole build-up and there was so much stand down and—that was the only thing to do is to kind of clean out that, the Park. Now you go back to the park you can see that that fire actually restored that park back to a more natural state and things have grown back—and lodgepole thrives on hot fire. But it was, I have to say, I'll

never forget when the—they would show their numbers, I said, "I don't think that's going to be right." Because the fire behavior, the RH's were dropping, plummeting to like four percent. Which was unheard of. It was like, "Oh my gosh." Especially for the Yellowstone area, just having that on every day.

There was nothing that we could have done to stop that fire at that time. They still didn't want us to cut wide swaths to try to stop that fire, so it was very—. We were still getting this, "well, just put a little scratch line in and go from meadow to meadow" And that wasn't going to stop it, and so it—. I don't know, I think they've changed how they now do predictions, because I'll never forget working with them and their calculations were not reflecting what the fire was actually doing. As we all, know that fire went on for—I think it was still burning that winter.

[Equipment check]

Hannah <00:28:03> How do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Papke You know, fire does have a place in the environment. I'll never forget that first year on the Zigzag Hotshot crew. I always thought, even back then, that we needed to do more burning on a large scale. I always had this—. "Pay me now or pay be later." If you pay me later, I'd make more money because I'm making hazard pay. But if you'd pay be now, I was just getting my base salary or my hourly wage or whatever. By doing these large landscape burns—I think we've tried that in a lot of places where it's accepted more, you don't have a big population base. Where the smoke doesn't impact. But now with smoke management and air quality and such, I think that also hinders us.

But fire is an important part of our ecosystem. I was fortunate to be able to see some pictures at the turn of the century. They were actually sitting up on Mt. Hood and they were taking these pictures and it was just hazy all the way through. If you read some of the settler's accounts, as they came across, they couldn't see for miles because of the smoke and haze where the Native Americans would come and set the fields on fire for a variety of reasons—for berries, for animal habitat, so they would have more

deer, and such coming into the area—and I think it was, they knew how to work with it. But they didn't have houses in the way, of course, so it wasn't that big of an impact on the peoples.

Now we have houses in there and I think that if—if you think about the fires, even if we had another Tillamook Burn or Yacolt Burn (on the west side) where those were large fires, in the 30's and—. And those were caused from logging operations, but we have more houses, even on the west side. There's a money value—if you look at California, people built in the urban interface and every year they have fires. We're putting more and more houses in it. But fire does have a place in it to help rejuvenate the landscape.

But now we're having these major fires where it's destroying the soil composition because there burning so hot 'cause we've not managed it well. But fire is a large part of it. Do we have to fight every fire? I don't know if we have to fight every fire. I think we spend a lot of money on things that—I don't know if we have to fight every fire. You know, would the fire have gotten bigger or smaller if we didn't put any people there? I don't have the answers, but I've been on several fires where I think that the fires would have probably not gotten as big if we would have not put people in there.

I think, sometimes, the decision making space that people are using there—pulling back and going in more indirect. They either throw fire on the ground and then it makes that fire bigger—would the fire have gotten there? Every case is different, I can't say it for every case, but I do believe that—. Do we need to fight every fire? I don't know if we need to fight every fire. With the fire borrowing—we've been doing that for years—I just don't know if it's, umm, the right thing to do. But we do want to protect homes and people's livelihood. There is a balance in there and I don't think we've found that balance.

Fire is a huge part of our environment and I think we have to accept that. And be willing to take the risks. I don't think were there yet.

Hannah <00:31:57> Do you have any favorite burnout operations or anything that stands out where either you had to dig deep to pull it off or it was just super fun?

Papke In my background, I did come from brush disposals, so I think that that skill and that technique is also another dying art. But, I have been involved in several burnout operations that were really very successful. In one—Happy Camp—where we were able to save about 30,000 acres for—using this old Jeep trail going up to a drop-point—and just pulling that one off. I always believe in having a bigger—a large buffer, there were certain times that, sometimes people only put a small buffer in, and I think that sometimes we need to deepen that buffer, depending on what kind of fuel type you're in. As far as the burnout operations, you know, not everybody is comfortable with burning and I think there's a fine line.

But I'll never forget this—here's a classic one. When we were up in Canada. We were along the Edmonton Highway and I don't remember the name or the number of that highway, but it was between Alberta and Edmonton, and we were working with the Canadian fire bosses. We were working with another hotshot crew—it was black spruce—we needed to burn this thing out and the first hotshot crew is taking it to a certain point and then we would take it after them. Well, the fire boss said they were going to slow and we saw this hunter's cabin, a beautiful hunter's cabin, right alongside the road—beautiful. And they were trying to make sure they could get around that hunter's cabin, to save the hunter's cabin. And the fire boss was not happy with us Yanks and so he took around the drip torch and he took off—and it was hotter than the dickens. It was melting the highway, as a matter of fact. He burned the hunter's cabin. Because, he has his head down, and I'll never forget this, he's going to go right for it—he has his head down, he gets within fifty feet of the hunter's cabin and he sees it and he looks up and he's startled that there's a house there and it was too late. Oh my gosh—I'll never forget that. And then there was some satellite, some sort of communications system behind that. Well, he burned that too. Like, "oh wow, that's how they—. They're ok with burning this

stuff." You know, we're always trying to save houses and stuff. It was a beautiful hunter's cabin, I mean, it was gorgeous. But it didn't make it, neither did the satellite communications system. But, I'd have to say that that was very humorous. But I would say that we take no claim in that one, 'cause we were not handling the torch at the time.

There's been some amazing burnouts. I love burning out, it was my favorite thing to do, just pulling it off and knowing when to push it and when to back off. I think those are things that come with more experience—and I don't know if that's something—. We don't have those BD crews where we use to burn and I don't know if that's—not saying that they still don't do those kinds of things, but I don't know if that comfort level is there. Because we use to be able to pull off some amazing burnouts and I just don't know if that's a common skill that is being taught, practical skill. I think maybe in theory, academically, where they're learning it in a book, maybe. But they're not doing it from their experiences. From what I've seen, the changes as well, getting that applied practice, that burning—and what fire can do and how to use it to your benefit. Pull things off or when to back off. I think that sometimes they're a little cautious when they could have gone a little harder and gotten it accomplished and been done with it and then put things to bed. But I've been on some amazing burnouts and pulled them off. Sometimes I'd push the envelope, but it was always the right thing to do to get it accomplished and we never had any issues—to where we had to—never compromised anybody's safety at all.

Hannah <00:36:33> When have you felt the most proud of your actions on the fire line?

Papke Umm, for me it was always, I think, the actions on a fire line. I mean you have your firefighting part of it, but I think that when you're able to pull off controlling your division and getting it under control so you can move on and do the next thing. There's been a lot of moments that I've accomplished with the crew, but I think that my proudest moments are with working with the people that came to work with me. I think, as I look, I was always proud of the people who, whether they made a career of being a

firefighter or not, but, just proud of those—all the people that I had been exposed to that came I, had worked for me. I think that those are my proudest moments—of the employees that I was fortunate to have, and seeing where they are now and knowing that they had so much potential. Whether it was in fire, or outside of fire, and just bringing those skills and everything that I was able to impart onto them. That they brought a lot of that on their own and taking it out into the world and just achieving their dreams and goals. I think that those are my proud moments—the folks that I have had the opportunity to have work underneath my management. I would have to say those are probably the highlights in my career. Not so much saving a division or, you know saving two or three divisions. That part really doesn't matter, it's really taking these—your people's lives and then re-directing them and saying, "Hey, this is who you are as a person and I'm going to impart some skill onto you and then you need to take it and go further than I can ever bring you." I think those are my moments that I feel very honored, I think—. I would have to say—.

Hannah

<00:38:45> Any other big fires that you can kind of describe what's going on?

Papke

I think there has been a change, I'll never forget, you know, when we would go out on fires, the biggest change is the fact that if they saw—. Being women on these fire crews, sometimes there were only a few of us. Reporters would hunt us down, track us down, and try and climb up into the units, or the burn, or the fire to get our perspective on it. We really felt singled out and I think that it's not so much the fire again, but the target. I forget about those moments because it was early on in our career where we'd be—they would find that there were women on a crew and next thing you know all these reporters wanted to get your opinion. We didn't want to stand out, because it was a different time back then and, you know, we were just trying to do our job. But I think the guys would give us a hard time because the focus was on us. I remember a lot of us would just try to skirt that—try to skirt that attention—because we just wanted to be there, just like the guys there did. But I think, you know, that part has definitely

changed—and then throughout the '80's there were more and more women coming in.

It was very clear in some cases that we weren't wanted on some of those crews. Then the trend started—now I see the trend kind of going back to that—so, throughout the late 80's, 90's, more and more women came in and started doing those things, but now I see the trend going back to where there's more—there's not as many women coming out onto these crews and making a career of it. I have to say that just the whole firefighting, I mean, the confidence it builds in people—if they do it for several years—and pride that they have in being part of something bigger than themselves, I think, that's—. If we can find what being part of something bigger than ourselves, then we've done better than most. I think it's about being a team. Sometimes those teams have some dysfunction to them, but I think coming out together as a team, makes you a stronger person. Giving of yourself to work on a single mission, which is to suppress fire and build this camaraderie and this friendship and this bond that no one else can replace. You become closer to these people than your friends, you know, outside of fire. A lot of people don't understand that and I see that now in fire management. There's some people that are in fire management—and I'm not talking about your FMO's and your AMFO's—but some people are being put into place that don't have that, they don't understand that common bond that you have when—for those others that are on hotshot crews.

Even to this day, there are people that I may not have worked with, but I've worked side-by-side with their crew and I knew who they were and I recognize them. There's always going to be this connection, there's always going to be this bond that can't be taken away. I think that's—I don't know if that's there anymore. Maybe it is. I'm in upper management now, so I don't know, but it seems different, it just seems a little different. I don't know if they have—. I just know that we wanted to be the best and that's what we strove for. We wanted to come home safe. But we wanted to be one unit, one team. I remember, for a while there, there were times when they didn't want you to talk to other crews. I disagreed with that. I think you need to build those

camaraderie, even with other crews. Good competition is always good for the soul.

Hannah <00:42:56> Can you talk briefly about that kind of competition, between other crews? I always share the story about when two hotshot crews are building line towards each other, the line gets really wide, because nobody wants to shut their saw off.

Papke I think it's just that, it's just tying in and seeing who can cut the most line in one sitting and who ties it in. I think that it was always good clean competition. It's like "Oh my gosh, they're leap frogging us. Well, we got to get this tied in so we can leap frog them and be the last ones to tie this in and say that we've done it." I think it's just more of just that camaraderie. And then when the jobs done it's like, "Hey, nice job." Then you know of—you know—go back to your crew. I always—. It was a positive thing, I never looked at it as a negative thing. We've got to get this tied in and see if we're the ones who can get this tied in before anyone leap frogs us, you know. It was always good. I don't know, I think that all that was good.

There were some excellent crews out there and I just remember the bonds, having with some of the other crews. In some years you were tighter with some crews than others, and maybe because you were always sent to the same incident as the other people. But there were some years, I'd have to say '94—'94 was a big turning point. A lot of us became very tight because we were always with each other and after the South Canyon Incident, a lot of us became pretty tight because we were always together. It seemed like we were always working on fires together, we were always looking out for each other. We'd still compete—who can hike up the hill faster, you know, who can get there faster. So, I think it was all good.

Hannah <00:45:05> Do you want to talk about your experience with South Canyon at all? Or. do you want to avoid that?

Papke I'll talk a little bit about it. I think, for me, that year was very interesting. I always had our crew ready to go by the first of May, so we were running on fires pretty early compared to some of the other crews in the region. So we were hitting some fires and some

of the fire behavior we were seeing—um, there were actually shelter deployments on other fires that just weren't noted; there was no documentation, but we were on those fires, where there were shelter deployments from hotshots. I'm not going to mention those fires, and I am not going to mention the crews that had deployed; they were individuals within a crew that had deployed.

So, we were seeing this trend in May and some of the fire behavior we were seeing in the various regions—because we had already been in region three and region five and a few fires in region six. We were starting to see this difference in the fire and how it was running and some of the things that were occurring. I think that we had been on two specific fires where there had been some shelter deployments that were not reported.

So by the time we get to Storm King, or Colorado I should say, I was on guard. And once I heard we were going to Colorado, 'cause Gleason always taught us about the Missionary Ridge Fire where there were fatalities on that one, or the Loop fire. We were going to Colorado, saying to the crew, "We need to be paying attention because of—remember the Missionary Ridge. What happens is the fire will burn underneath that scrub oak and will pre-heat the brush. It won't completely blacken everything and nuke it out. The fire will run through again." I was just making sure that we would be all squared away.

So I think that for me, once again, my hard drive was loaded up and off. There was something that just kept nagging at me that whole time in Colorado. Colorado, prior to that—they were not, that region in Colorado, they didn't have fires every year like region five or region three, or region six. So their fire interval system was in the longer stretch; but when they do have fires they're very extreme. So I think those were things that I just remembered from Paul teaching us, is that Colorado, is that fire intervals is not like the other country—for a variety of reasons, higher elevation, you know, they may have more snow pack or whatever. But I just remembered all those things and I think by the time we got to Storm King—or to Colorado—there were just some red flags over all.

I won't go into too many details on that, because I'm not here to judge or criticize, but there were some differences in how Colorado managed fires compared to some of the other fire regions that are more—typically deal with fire on a regular basis. There were some differences in how things were managed. Overall, from the time we landed, to the time we ended up on the fire that we were on—which was not the South Canyon—it was very different. They were not prepared to have us and they weren't prepared to give us the tools that we needed. Because when we fly, we don't fly with our fuseses and such, and so we need to rely on them to support us for fuel for our chain saws, torches, to carrying our packs—and they weren't prepared for that. But we weren't going to compromise and we were just going to make sure that we were going to be safe where we were. It was different.

So when that hit, the other thing I will say is that it was so surreal when we had heard about, that it was Prineville, and—because we weren't getting any information at all. I think that was another turning point on how they managed the whole critical incident stress debriefing—that was not managed well at all. Offering free alcohol to the crews was probably not the wisest thing once we all came back together after the fatality. It was probably not a wise thing, and there was no coordination or information given to us on what their plans were with us.

It was interesting, I would have to say that, I think South Canyon was a huge turning point. It was the first time that many people from the elite—the hotshot crews, and the Smokejumpers, and the rappellers were—had been burned over. It was a huge turning point, so they came out and did study after study after that. They did a lot of different studies on what would have attributed to it. It's when the work/rest guidelines started being developed and some other types of things were being developed—but it was a huge turning point for. You have these events that occur and then you see a change in direction, so it's kind of like a compass bearing changes just a bit. So in this case, the compass bearing changed maybe ten or fifteen degrees and it changed pretty hard—on how we suppress wildfire and such. A

lot of the other changes that you may see are just one degree segments, and so over time you may see the change, but initially you don't see them. But in that case, you have these major events that really change how we suppress wildfire, doing what we've been doing for years. Some of it's good, but sometimes when—I think we need to sometimes bring that back a little bit and try and find a better balance because maybe those, those hard right turns are not always the right thing. But there were a lot of good things that came out of South Canyon, but I think we need to revisit some of those things where they move a little too much, or can we come back. But I just look at life as a compass. Are those major degree changes? Or just one degree increments where over time you'll see the change.

Hannah

<00:51:59> Any other stories? Any other thoughts?

Papke

No. I mean, there's so many and I think, for me, I have to say that firefighting, it's such a passion and I hope that the kids nowadays that are coming in—I know that they're not going to have the same experiences and things are very different from when I started. I think the kids now coming in, they're used to women being their supervisors, where I was growing up when there was no women supervisors. It was rough for a time, but it was a lot of fun. There were a lot of fun moments that I'll never forget those early years, those bonds that I'd created with people and such. But I hope that the kids now, coming in, have that same passion, but I don't know. I know that society is changed, you know. There's fewer jobs, we have fewer positions for these people. Not everybody wants to be gone all summer and fighting fire, and they want to eventually settle down and they move out. You know, I would not change a thing that I did and I, still to this day—being a hotshot was the highlight of my life. If I do nothing else, I will never forget my years as a hotshot. I feel very blessed and very fortunate. Like I said, just the people I encountered and who came into my life and helped me along the way and also, too—whether they were my employees, I learned—. I feel that it was a reciprocal learning experience for me, as well as them. I don't know, I wouldn't change it for the world and I'm glad I lived in the time I lived. It was perfect for me; I was made for that

time. I'm not made for the time we're in now, I don't think, but I was made for that time that I came in.

*End of interview.*

## Josh Parker

### Hotshot Senior Firefighter, Entiat Hotshots (Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 8, 2014 in Entiat, WA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:01:33> Tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire, how many you've been a hotshot, and your role?

Parker My role on the crew. Okay, yeah, my name is Josh Parker, my seventh year in fire, my seventh year hotshotting. I was able to get scooped up by a crew—I had somebody, I had somebody that was willing to sort of vouch for me. Got an early really, and at this point still super interested in the IHC community. New to the crew this year, hired as a senior firefighter, so permanent five.

Hannah [Speaking about getting hired]

Parker At that time, I remember thinking the specific challenges were—. Going in I thought the challenges were going to be primarily physical and I certainly found out that was the case, but I was far more surprised by just the challenges of living in an environment filled with 20 other people all the time. That was actually, more than anything, what kept me coming back, originally. Now, it's sort of like, it's what my skill set is and I really like it.

Hannah <00:02:15> Do you have any stories you want to share?

Parker Yes sure, didn't really give it much thought, but one story that definitely comes to mind is sort of—it—you know that classic shift where you end up doing more than you ever anticipated for the day. This would have been late June, early July Las Conchas Fire, 2011, in New Mexico. Which at the time, I believe it was the largest fire in New Mexico history. Could still be, although maybe the Whitewater Baldy surpassed that. In any case, the day started out, we were just going to be doing a little bit of securing and patrolling, a little bit of mop up on some ground we had burned the previous day. We were kind of—big picture—hard to say exactly where we are just because that is sort of escaping me. We basically establish this long flank—and we had actually been part of the initial IA resources to the fire—anyhow, we kind of

established a pretty good flank, still some heat in the interior. We had good winds. Mainly securing, mopping up, we also had to folks that were doing a study for the Forest Service. Sort of like a particulate study, smoke and particulate study, so we were wearing—. Some of the folks in the crew had these meters that were gauging how much dust and smoke we were exposed to. What ended up happening, was that we were—a larger priority for us was on the northern division. So we drive for you know, 30, 40 minutes on to this ridgetop. We're going to do prep work—we're going to hold the road—so everybody unloads, augers in for about an hour and a half worth of prep work, creating a fuel break along the road, and we were hearing this chatter, you know, lower down in the division that we had left about wind shift and maybe a pinch point down there.

Sure enough, we end up stopping at what we're doing to assist another crew as part of their burn operation. But maybe just take a leap on them and try to create a little bit of buffer in front of this drainage to keep it from running up the hill where we had just been working. Back in the trucks, back down the hill, basically get out, get into an ignition pattern, put a little bit of fire on the ground, and within minutes it's just clear that we're not going to be able to hold what we got. By this point they're already worried about losing her—that flank we had created from the day before, with how much things were heating up interior.

It sounds like it was making some pretty sustained crown runs and they were concerned about spotting, way back closer to our anchor point. At this point, very well-developed column, you know, lots of smoke, lots of debris, kind of falling from the sky. And again, we're loaded back up in the trucks and going to ground that we didn't necessarily walk away from thinking it was all good, but it was such a large incident with so few resources that we were just trying to stay ahead of it, in any case.

We got back closer to our original anchor point, and as we're driving there I remember, I was at the wheel at this time, then you got the squad in the back behind us. The sun was sort of just obscured from the giant smoke column and just starting to see things like baseball sized cards of ash just sort of like a raining

down all around us. I remember that there was this classic, Andy Kaufman theme song, I think REM did it, and it was Man on the Moon, that was playing on the radio as we were driving to where we were ultimately going to jump out of the trucks and start burning out along this road—that hadn't been burned previously—to try to re-create another good buffer between us and the main fire. We were able to do that, started ignitions, really just one lighter working off the road. Everything was pulling in because that column was just sucking everything into it. Building and building and building and the energy was palpable, we probably had, I don't know, 250 fire personnel lined out behind us with an array of engines and heavy, big water tender with a canon on the front.

It—we were feeling pretty good about where we were at, primarily in the grass—timber, more interior. Anyhow, we're getting further and further and further and further up the road. Our superintendent was kind of trying to bring fire back to us, to basically burn off this road that we had left as a backup plan. We basically get to the point where the main fire is going to be able to make a solid push to the road. A little bit out in front of us, we're not going to be able to make it there in time and at that point really, our fire that were going to be able to put down isn't really going to be effective at holding the road.

And you—sort of all the sudden—feel these sort of outflow winds as that column was sort of losing its head of steam and starting to collapse. Giant outflow winds. We were in a good spot, really solid block that we had just a lit. It was cooling down readily enough for us to get right into it, not a big deal. But if we were to continue to advance and get into that timber stringer, you know, there just wasn't really a whole lot of options for us. So we ran it as far as we could, pushed everybody back to the black as the main fire was making a sustained run. We started getting spots across the road and I remember, like sort of through the chaos of this all, there was a couple of different resources attached to us—well we were holding the burn operation. This one crew didn't have the same communication as we did, nor the same experience, and I just remember this look in there eye of, this nervous energy of wanting to do something and feeling all of

this power at play and knowing that—. We knew that we needed to be in the black and they were sort of—. They were getting the same information that we were and they were just coiled like springs. There was this spot across the road in the grass and it was like, you know, they got catapulted off the road. They all just launched off the road, tools over their heads, running to this spot. We were able to get our crew boss trainee that was able to communicate with division, division was able to communicate to them, and they were able to round everybody up and get out of there.

Ultimately, what ended up happening—we all got in the black, air tanker showed to start flanking off this road and ended up going direct well into the night. Ultimately ended up getting some support from dozers and kind of tying it off some time around 2:00, 2:30 in the morning. Basically protecting and establishing a new anchor in the flank to continue progressing and tying it back into some work we had done out ahead. It just turned into one of those shifts where you do a little bit of everything. You did some mop up, you did some prep work, you thought you were going to be in this division working on the road all day, but you end up doing prep work on top of the ridge, to come back down to do this burn, to then do this other burn show, which led to chasing spots. Basically rerouting the whole flank of this fire.

I just remember feeling that, that true sense of relief of getting back to the buggy, getting all the guys in the back of the truck, and making your way home. I remember thinking that night as I laid down in the sleeping spot, I had days before on the fire, that in a sense this was what home had become distilled to. This little 3x8' chunk of ground, for all intents and purposes, it was my bed and was my home. Yet, it was just one of those good shifts, like I said, kind of hit on all those different tactics.

Through the chaos of it all, we had the two people that were attached to us doing the smoke monitoring—there was lots of comic relief with some of the guys. They were asking the questions, you know, "Is this like a typical shift or not?" They were very candid, but kind of a lot of head scratching and, "What

are you really asking?" Which provided a lot of, kind of, comic relief. I remember at one point, as we were getting ready, all the tankers were making their runs, one of the guys talking about how he was going to buy a home and settle down. In the moment of all that, that's where his head was at. Anyhow, in a nutshell that was a story, we kind of refer to that one as the Braveheart Story, because the way the guys leapt off the road to go chase spots.

That's one of the things about this job, you just never know what the day is going to bring. You have to be fully adaptable to whether the plan is going to change or just flexible enough in your own headspace to recognize that not everything goes according to plan. Everything is adaptable. I think if you can live with that mentally, you can really be set up for success.

Hannah

Thanks for sharing.

*End of interview.*

## Dan Pickard

Hotshot Squad Leader, Entiat Hotshots (Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 8, 2014 in Entiat, WA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:07:52> Ok, were just going to start off with your name, how many years you've been in fire—.

Pickard Ok

Hannah And how many years you've been a hotshot?

Pickard Ok, my name is Dan Pickard; I'm squad leader here at Entiat Hotshots and I started fire in 2002, with the state, Department of Natural Resources, and it was kinda a college gig at the time. I knew I wanted to get into fire, but it worked out real well with the state, with their schedule and school. So I did four years there, two years as a firefighter and two years as an engine leader and then, after getting a feel for the game, I knew I wanted to see more fire and I knew hotshotting was gonna be the best avenue for that—and to move over to the feds where I could travel more and see more.

So, after I graduated school, I went on a road trip and visited with, somewhere between forty and fifty different crews. I slept in my car and it was like 5,000 some odd miles I traveled in January. And, so that, that was fun, getting to talk to a bunch of different crew Supts. and how they work. Anyway, kinda ended up on the trip down in the southwest and Santa Fe Hotshots was the first one to really just kinda say, "Alright, here's our start date and we'll see you then." Everyone else was a little more formal and had the clipboard and had everything else. So, march came along and moved down there and that was my first year hotshotting, and—. I wanted to get back home, my wife had moved down with me too and she had gotten pregnant while we were down there. Always wanted to get back here in the valley, this is home for me. So, I kept bugging Entiat that winter and they had a few spots open so I bugged them as much as I could without getting too annoying, and got here in 2007 as a four and

worked my way up every year. Kind of went from a four to a temp five, to a permanent five, to a detailed squad leader. So, I've been a squad leader since 2010. Detailed in '10 and got the job in '11, been here since I was '07.

Hannah

What's your favorite thing about hotshotting?

Pickard

Boy, I was so excited to see extreme fire behavior. Seeing it on the news and kind of growing up here, too, and having big fires around—I wanted to be up close, as close as I could. Even when I turned sixteen and got a driver's license and wasn't old enough to fight fire—. I use to work at Arby's, but close up Arby's at ten, then drive to whatever the closest fire was or as close as I could get and just watch it. I knew I wanted to do it. Definitely, early on in the game, the most exciting thing was getting excited about fire and kind of feeling nervous at times. But more recently, in the last few years, I find the funnest challenge is moving up in a leadership role. The risk management process and decision making process. I find that to be a fun challenge and to try to teach, you know, the guys that you know are going to be up and coming in the program in fire. So that they can take the best of what they learn and make it their own, too. So that's been the funnest challenge that I've seen. Almost everything thing there is to see in fire, I feel, umm—. But I still get excited about fire, for sure!

Hannah

<00:11:40> What do you perceive as the role of fire in the environment?

Pickard

You know, I got a degree in resource management, environmental resource management and did a lot of flood study and geology work, and the more I am in fire, the more I really feel—. Of course it's a natural process. Before we were ever here—and even when we were here—we had to learn to live with it. So, you know, I feel like there are ten year floods, one hundred year floods, and thousand year floods. Maybe those thousand year floods are the most severe. I kind of feel that fire follows that same progression, naturally, if we weren't messing around with it as much—where every five years there'd be these clean under-burn. And then there's going to be those drought years, even in natural conditions—without human interaction, where there is

going to be an extreme fire on its own that would change the landscape.

So I feel like it is a natural process and we've kind of—over the last hundred years—kind of messed with it a little bit and now we're seeing some of the consequences because of it. On top of that, whether it be natural or human caused, accelerating global warming—it's definitely playing a factor in what we're seeing, year-to-year now. With the seasons being longer than they use to be; fires being a lot bigger than they use to be. You don't think of things in the natural landscape changing that quickly over time, but we're actually seeing a change in our lifetime (and our career). I mean it's exciting for me because, like I said, I love fire and I want to be where the most excitement is. But it's pretty eye-opening, really, to see it's changing over a short period of time (in the really big picture). Yeah, it's definitely a natural process and I feel like our role on a hotshot crew is wherever we're needed most to make the biggest impact. It feels like in the shoulder seasons we're really trying to be more of a benefit to a prescribed fire program or a fuels program. You know, thinning, putting in line for project fires, prescribed fire.

Hannah <00:14:09> Do you have any memorable fires or stories that you want to share in particular?

Pickard Yes, so I have been thinking about that for the last few days. So, I guess one story, it's kind of fun to share—. 2011 was a fun year; it's always an interesting experience to go to Alaska and it was one of our first, maybe second role of the year. It was just outside of Fairbanks, and of course it kind of rained when we got there, which happens every time we're there. But it doesn't take long for fire to pick up there, so we chased some fire there for a few days, but where things got real interesting was, when we ended up in a spiked camp, midway through, with about five other crews. Miscellaneous crews, 'shot crews, along with some type two crews, some native crews in there.

Started having a bear problem. Black bear's to be specific and the first instance was the—we left a guy back in camp. He kind of cleaned up some of the trash, got some of the food ready for that evening's meal. He was back there—and we were just getting

ready to hike back to spike camp—and he called our Supt. over the radio and he said, "There—There's a bear in camp!" And of course, we left this saw back there to cut some fire wood, so the Supt., you know, calmly said, "Well, start up the saw and scare it off, it's just a black bear, no big deal." He gets back on, he's a rookie this time, he's stuttering, "We... it... It's next to the saw!" And so, all the sudden, we're hiking behind the Supt., and our speed gets faster and faster, and we're kinda double-timing it now and running down there. And as we get within, maybe, about a hundred yards of the spike camp, he orders our saw teams in line to fire up their saws and start throttling, as we're running down towards this camp. You know, just hearing the fear in his voice—.

So that was the first for a lot of the guys, having a bear experience and getting them kind of excited. Well, as it went on, it just kind of became a more of a nuisance, these bears kept showing up in camp; it didn't matter what we did to the food. We'd hang it from the trees; we'd bury it in the permafrost. They were pretty bold. Soon as we would crawl in to bed, they'd be—and you'd hear the coolers opening or rustling through where we had some of the food boxes.

I remember one night in particular, myself and a few seniors waiting up—. We kind of each had our weapon of choice, if you will. One was working on carving a little spear, one had a Pulaski in hand, you know, but we were sitting there pretty quiet, just knowing it was going to come back. We must have—you know, the sun doesn't really set up there—we must have stayed up until two or three in the morning and no sign of the bear. Sure enough the next night, you can hear it, and everyone's getting out of the tent real quick. Supt's in his underwear chasing the bear and one of the other guys, kind of a beefy guy on the crew, he picked up this big round and—. We were really trying to scare the bear; we didn't want to see the demise of the bear. That was the worst case, they had to shot her in camp, and we had already heard of a couple that had been killed. So really trying to scare them from humans and food, so it didn't come to that end. Some guy threw a big round at the bear, of course it only landed about five feet in front of him, but it was pretty funny to watch.

Then the night after that, we knew that the same bear was going to come back, and sometime late in the night, hadn't heard any noise until just the loud "Boom." Everyone, of course, crawled out of the tent and we had a little trail built to the latrine that we had dug for the crew and this bear had come into camp again, of course. And somebody called the shooter that was in the spike camp and had shot this bear on that trail going out to our latrine. Literally pulled the trigger, you know, between a bunch of our guy's tents. Right in the middle of our camp. That's always a fun story to share, with the bears. I hate to see them get killed like that, but they also gave the meat to the native crews. So they tried to do what they could. There's always bears in Alaska.

Hannah <00:18:21> Do you have any awesome burn shows that you've done?

Pickard So, 2012 was a pretty spectacular year; it was one of those years where we were in the right place at the right time. We had great assignments and then saw some really good fire behavior.

We got ordered to the Bridger Teton National Forest in Wyoming on the Fontenelle Fire as it was just kind of getting out of initial attack. They knew at some point they were going to need some help and we showed up at the right time. It was the first day of red flags and it was in lodge pole, where they were starting to get some of that bug kill.

So, we saw some real extreme fire behavior on that fire — from the moment we got there when it was probably, I don't know, less than a hundred acres and watched it make some pretty impressive runs.

We spent the first week there—real long hard shift with pretty hairy burnouts—like, over-slung along roads, where the trees...you can feel even a single tree torch. Really feel these trees just exploding with power. You know, it really kind of—it gets you on the edge and the hair stands up, knowing that you have to have everything dialed, and know where everyone is at at any given time. And it finally got to a point in those long days and

really extended... it was getting hard to get out of the sleeping bag in the mornings, like by day seven.

We bounced to another division; it was a piece of the fire we hadn't seen [before] and we pulled up and knew it was (more or less) kind of the direction that the fire had been heading for the last week. So, we pull up to this area and there are these really nice cabins that you know have probably been passed down for generations. You could see they had been working for a few days, setting up pumps and getting things in place for structure protection. How they were going to go about it, they didn't know. They were calling us in there to take a look, knowing that the fire (potentially that day) was going to get to that point.

They had a lookout up between us and the fire, saying "yeah, it's down in the drainage getting ready to run up this side" and that's all it's going to take to get to these cabins. So, the plan was, we were going to go into more of a point source protection mode and not worry, even though there was a pretty good solid road behind us, knowing how this fire had been moving throughout the crowns of these trees every day, that we probably weren't going to hold the road, but we were going to do what we could to save those cabins.

Like I said, there were probably a dozen of them or so, all without buildings, and coops and everything else. So, we were going to try to do it on our terms. Try to do a burn out around these cabins before the fire got there, knowing that we were probably going to lose it behind where we could chase it later on.

As quickly as we could, we started getting familiar with what was in place, the pumps and the crews that they had there to support us. We set up as quickly as we could and by the time everything was in place, of course, it's one, two o'clock in the afternoon. We had a quick briefing with the crew and got into place to start burning out around these cabins. I was holding; I wasn't lighting that day. I was a Squad Leader, of course, trying to get people in the right place, extending, and then kind of [working as a] liaison with the type two crews spraying water on the cabins.

This fire, by the time we lit our back burn and the main fire came, they came together right on the top of this ridge. It was the most impressive, explosive fire behavior. I mean, you know, three hundred foot flame lengths, a wall of this fire up in green/dead trees, it didn't matter. We had a lookout actually across on the next ridge behind us and he's taking photos of this thing and it's just...something you can't really grasp or believe until you've seen it...how much fire there was. We had a really green, big open field; we were all comfortable, but just to be that close to that impressive of a fire was something I had never seen before.

Definitely looking back now, you know, I am not sure I will ever see that kind of fire again. It was in timber; kind of that area ignition where it wasn't a matter of fire kind of carrying through to the next [tree] and torching. It was just, once everything decided to go, the whole slope went at once. You could feel it; you could hear it; it was really intense.

Of course, we never intentionally slick off a hillside during a burnout on a wildfire; whatever we can do to try and bring it down [slowly with lower intensity]. Well, there was none of that on this fire. We had to just get it done the quickest, safest way possible. And of course, that whole slope was just black sticks standing. It took just hours until it was just a little bit of smoke coming out of there because it burned so hot and fast. I kind of felt bad that it looked like it did, after it was all said and done, but they were so grateful that we saved every cabin.

In fact, there were people talking, of course, amongst themselves, "you know, what are the odds of all of them—how many of these ten or twelve are going to make it? You know, half? All of them? None of them?" No one really knew what was really going to happen. And as optimistic as I feel like I am, I really didn't have a good feeling that we were going to save them all.

Sure enough, after it was all said and done, every cabin was still standing, every outbuilding; the whole deal. It was a great feeling for the crew; we really felt accomplished after that was all done. They kind of gave us a pat-on-the-back, the team did, after it was all done (with a little certificate and all this stuff). That was really

neat to see that come together and the big thing there was just seeing that impressive of a fire. It was pretty incredible.

Hannah <00:25:10> How do you perceive the value of the work you do?

Pickard That's a great question and there's so many ways you can look at that, right? Just in the crew atmosphere, the friendships—the lifelong friendships that you build—you can't even put a price on that. There are so many great parts to this job and that's one of my favorites. Getting to know a crew over the course of a year, or several years even, and then keeping in touch and seeing where they go and what they do after. That camaraderie that you get over six months of living, sleeping, eating with the same—being stuck in the same trucks through the whole year. Yeah, you can't put a price on that. That's one of my favorite things.

Of course, you know, there's the other side of it too where people get tired of each other after that long, too—can't wait for a day at home. But, I love that part of it. Then for the value of the work we do, we really strive, I am sure every crew says the same thing, we strive to be the best 'shot crew in the nation and try to make an impact everywhere we go. We try to get where we're the most helpful. Try to work our way into those spots where we feel like we can make the biggest difference. Give that intelligence they need to make some informed decisions. I don't know that you can put a price on a lot of that stuff. I feel like there's a lot of value in the IHC program that you won't find in other places.

Hannah <00:26:56> Are there any significant events that have shaped your career?

Pickard Yeah, in 2000 we had—so this was my second year on the crew—we had a sawyer, and—of course I was a crew boss trainee on the assignment—and we had one of our sawyers—was snagging, prepping for a burn. He was at the one corner where it was kind of close to the fire before we had burned it out. This is in Southern Oregon and a tree had burned off at the bottom where he couldn't see and he got hit in the head and shoulder. You get that call and it's like the worst call—umm—you know he was unconscious. We weren't sure what the outcome was going to be at that point and so, did the best we could with, you know, with

all the training we'd had and got him flown out of there. He kinda, he came to in the middle of the whole ordeal. But seeing, you know, how it affected him at that point, was really hard and, of course, as the crew boss trainee, thinking, "What could we have done different?" You know? It's tough. In hindsight, of course, and then, still—so I—that's something that really weighs heavy on me even today. Any snag patch—really anything where we're facing more than just that little risk that is always there, I really feel there is an inherent risk in everything we do.

People look at that in different ways; I try to put things in black and white for myself in numbers. For me that one in a million chance will be out there and a green tree—for no reason at all—will fall, or a meteorite will fall out of the sky, or something. So there's always that one in a million and the environment that we work in is not controlled, it's not a factory where you can control everything. So many variables—with the weather, with everything, and so, when do we need to start reevaluating what we are doing? And our decision making processes? When we're at one and a thousand? One and one hundred? Obviously one in fifty for sure, right? But there's not—. You can't really put a number to it, but for myself that's kind of how I grasp that risk management process.

From that experience, I feel that's helped me along the way to learn from those—I don't know if mistakes is the right word—. Learning from what could happen in the worst case scenario—and that's one way I have tried to teach the guys, too, in any scenario. Maybe 99 times out of a 100 we'll get out of this fine, but what if the worst case scenario happens with the fire or with the weather. What's our backup plan?

Hannah Did he make it out alright?

Pickard Yeah, I'm sorry. So, medivaced to the hospital. He broke his collar bone, he had a concussion, he had some cracked ribs, messed up shoulder and then the impact to his head kind of caused some long term mobility issues and strength issues. But he came out—. Luckily for him, he was a really strong guy to begin with. And any less of a guy wouldn't have made it, I don't think. He came through. He still stops by now and again. He's

getting around fine, there's still some long term issues there, but definitely the best that could have come out of that.

Hannah <00:31:11> Who were the people who mattered most to you in your career?

Pickard You know, when I first started fire, I had a great mentor that got me excited about fire. I was already excited, but he kind of kept me on that path. Jim Duck, I don't mind saying his name, he's at dispatch center right now—he's moved up since. But when he was running things for the state, when I was on an engine, he was kinda at that upper level where he was attached to a team and he was going out on these big project fires as a safety officer. Getting to go places where I wanted to be all the time, to get to see these big fires that were around here and elsewhere. He was always talking about it, the stories, kept me excited. So he's definitely, kind of, the first guy that got me really going.

Since then, it's been kind of on two different levels. There's the guys that you take things from that, "I am never going to do that." Of course, there's all those great mentors too, that you kind of try to pick the best out of and try to make it your own. So there's been a lot of those over the years. I don't really want to name names there. I mean, definitely, compassion is a really strong virtue that I think goes a long way in this job, especially in a leadership role. Just caring about your crew or your squad, or you saw partner, even, and showing that. It goes a really long ways and I've seen that in some really great leadership over the years that I've tried to take away. On the other side, things like negative reinforcement takes a lot longer to get people moving the right direction, I feel. Seen enough of that. There are times, of course, where you need it. But if that's the only mode you're going to go into, I've kind of learned, seen—doesn't help in the long term. Just kind of taking the best of everything I've found, and tried to push away all the negative stuff I've seen.

Hannah <00:33:34> Do you have any other fires that stand out in your mind?

Pickard Probably the coolest experience I ever had on a fire—there wasn't much fire to speak of—was Pagami Creek, Minnesota. Again it

was 2011, you know, it made like a 100,000 acre run in one day and of course that's the day they ordered all these hotshot crews. By the time we drove out there, a few days later, it was pouring rain and shut down.

[Battery change]

<00:37:11> So Pagami Creek, when we showed up it was pouring rain in Minnesota. The whole day's drive into Minnesota it was pouring rain—frogs jumping across the road, epic proportion type stuff. So there was no fire, really, to speak of when we got there. But the fire was in the Boundary Waters near the Canadian border. I think there's probably as much water across the landscape as there is land. So the first, kind of, couple hours was an orientation where they taught us how to paddle canoes. Most of us had done it in the past, well we had—of course, we picked the day where there is gale force winds. One of the things they mentioned during this orientation—While sure now, we had one of our leads with a fill in—get this gust of wind that blew him into some reeds and tipped over. I don't think I've ever laughed that hard in my life; I was crying. And the lead was so upset when he was hiking out of the water. Holding his paddle. Felt bad laughing at him. The fill-in is out there trying to drag the boat back to shore. It was great.

That experience there—so we extended, we did 21 days in the Boundary Waters. Not much fire to speak of, like I said, just the experience was so phenomenal. I'd love to take my family there someday and spend a few weeks because—. Basically they give you a canoe and fire gear and you paddle out there. You portage across the little land bridges until the next lake and paddle and portage, and paddle and portage. As we extended along the fire, there's more and more of that. We ended up breaking up into a couple of groups just so we could spread out even more. But after twenty-one days—and it was one of those assignments where there was no cell service, no contact whatsoever with the outside world. The only thing we had was just command, that would get on the radio with us once a day maybe, to check the status.

I think it must have been day nineteen or twenty. These wilderness rangers from the Boundary Waters made it out—it

was almost, by that point, a full day's paddle and portage out to where we had been—and we're all pretty haggard and kind of loopy at this point. We were doing things to entertain ourselves, like having skits. We were breaking up into groups and doing skits at night in camp. Really silly stuff, looking back. Anyways, these two wilderness rangers paddle out just to check up on their camps that they had out there, making sure they weren't getting too trashed and we were taking good care of them. They get out there and they were asking—we kind of bombarded them. We were in camp when they showed up and we were asking them a bunch of questions. They brought a newspaper with them, which was nice. There were so many questions being asked to these two guys at the same time. They were trying to answer, who won this game—. One of the things they said was "Well, well you guys probably haven't heard yet that they are kicking out the Occupy protesters out of Times Square." We all kind of cock our heads and look at each other like we are suppose to know what he is talking about. This was probably the first time we were all quiet and somebody finally spoke up and, "Wha—. What? What's the—what's the Occupy?" And he kind of stopped and kind of thought to himself for a second and he cocked his own head, "How long have you guys been out here?" is what he said. (Laughter)

We had probably lost track of days at that point and he'd finally realized that we had no idea what was going on in the outside world. Pretty much had to take a large step back to fill us in in what was really going on. Even for us, you know, "We really have been out here for a while and haven't seen ourselves beside the reflection in the water in a long time."

And the experience was so great out there. I kind of had a little collapsible fishing pole I snuck in my bag. There was one night—. So we kind of had this rotation, either you were doing dishes or making lunches for the whole crew the next day, or you were making dinner. So, there was a group making dinner, I was out there fishing—I never caught anything, of course—but the northern lights were out. I had never seen them before. It was amazing, across the lake we were on—it wasn't a big lake—there were wolves howling. It's something, like, I look back—it still

gives me chills. In that moment, it was my heaven. You can't make this up; this is the most spectacular moment I have ever had. I'm fishing, which I love to do, there's northern lights I've never seen, it was awesome and then the wolves were howling. It was this great camping experience for us. Gosh, it was, for an experience on a fire, I don't think I'll ever be able to beat that. That was a great time. That was a long time, but it was a great time.

Hannah <00:42:43> Have you had any close calls yourself? Any "oh wow" kind of moments?

Pickard Well, so there's been times I felt, like it was, you know, a point where I needed to speak up and maybe take things to the next level, you know. Where we all might be thinking something, but it's not being said. So, that's happened a couple times. You know, there's other times where we've kind of talked amongst ourselves and didn't really—. It was like, "We really should evaluate this."

So one instance was in 2011 in Wyoming on a different fire. It was kind of south central Wyoming. Really there are just a couple of ranges out in the middle of these big open fields, and this small little mountain. It wasn't even a range, just one mountain with a couple little peaks around it. It had fire on it and each night when the sun went down, it would kind of make these big downhill pushes. That was what was giving them headaches day after day. It was something we said when we first got there, "Just let this mountain burn and catch it on the flats." We all saw it right away, and of course in the end, that's exactly what happened.

The last night, when we tried to catch it, kind of half way up this mountain, it was something we hadn't seen leading up to this point. We didn't have much time to prep, we just kind of drove up into this saddle half way up and then, you know, got caught up with trying to prep it real quick, with trying to make a plan. Originally we were just going to look at it, you know, some of that crap fell into place where we just got kind of committed. Prepping and getting into place and all the sudden we're ready to start burning. I still kick myself for this, and I know I am not the only one—I had one of those feelings; it was one of those nights or—it was still day, so one of those days—where we were talking

amongst ourselves like something just feels off, but no one could quite put their finger on it.

Well, of course, right as we're getting ready to burn—the time had gone by pretty quick—it was right when the sun was setting and in this bowl there was already—. We started in the saddle, the plan was to try and burn this mid-slope that came down to the flats, while in this whole bowl against us, there was kind of fire already scattered along in it. Right as we were getting ready to put torches to the ground, is right when the sun set and we decided to give it just a minute before we started lighting, just to kind of take a collective breath before we got committed.

Sure enough, in a matter of seconds after that a transmission came over the radio, the wind picked up and pushed this thing down slope. That whole bowl lit up so fast where—it was scary—one of those moments I was fairly nervous. Most of our group—all but just a couple—were pretty close to this saddle where it wasn't that big a deal to get up and over the other side and get away from what was going on. But the way that whole bowl—getting those guys together and then—. It was one of those as quickly as you can count, make sure you have everyone—. But of course we had one of our guys working with some engines that were half way down and he kind of needed to find his own way out. Of course, he had his escape route already in place, but you know—. Worrying about him not being able to communicate because we were trying to get out the other way. Our lookout, who was down farther in the flats, he was already getting ember wash all around him. He was in a good spot, but wanting to get the vehicles out of there and he's worried about us and the other guy who's working his way down.

It was one of those ones where, had we gotten committed with firing halfway down, we couldn't—potentially would have been a lot hairier of an experience trying to get everyone off that hill. I like to think that we would have, but it would have been a lot more chaotic. Outside of fire—there's been fires where I feel like we got luckily. We were in some bad snag areas with a fire and maybe had—not maybe—we did have some near misses, some close calls. We try to mitigate as best as we can, but looking back,

it's tough to really challenge yourself to say this, but, "Should we have been in there in the first place? Did we kind of get away with one of those one in one hundred or one in fifty situations, maybe?" So those are always kind of tough to think about. I feel like, again, there's always that one in a million. Any day where we're even driving somewhere hazardous. Hearing about other crews every season. Not just hotshot crews, but engine crews, flight crews, or type two crews, you know, helicopters—right. So, it definitely. We try to do the best we can every day, knowing that the job is risky but trying to mitigate it as best as possible.

Hannah <00:48:27> Can you talk a little bit about the sixth sense that you start to acquire as your fighting fire? Whether it's intuitively knowing that RH just dropped, or just getting that feeling on the back of your neck that something going wrong?

Pickard I can sure try, and that's actually—we try to have some sort of discussion during our critical, where we, you know, look back at something that happened last season with somebody else. Where we just try to open up a discussion where we try to put our finger on something. And that is exactly what we're aiming to do this season, is kind of putting our finger on that bad feeling. How should we take that to the next level or when it is appropriate to swallow that? Or is it ever appropriate to swallow that? It's so hard to put your finger on that bad feeling. Any more, it's just, let's talk about it, let's get it out in the open, lets address it—because maybe you're not the only one with that bad feeling and then that person that you're talking to says, "Yeah, I'm feeling the same thing." And now let's reassess what we're doing.

It's so hard to put your finger on that sixth sense; it really is nothing more than a feeling. Experience definitely builds into that. Those slides and what you've seen happen in the past. But, you know, always trying to keep in the back of your mind that worst case scenario and when you start seeing—maybe early on in the day, you've got this worst case scenario painted in your own mind—when you start seeing things kind of fall into those lines and those dominos falling in that direction, that definitely start getting that bad feeling. Maybe it wasn't even spoken about as a group, but here's my worst case scenario for the day, "Boy

it's sure going that way right now." Maybe it's time to talk about it, let's get it out there. I guess that's my take on that.

Hannah <00:50:32> Any other stories or thoughts?

Pickard I feel like I've talked about everything; I feel like you asked the right questions.

Hannah Well. Thank you so much.

*End of interview.*

## Nick Robinson

Hotshot Squad Leader, Sierra Hotshots (Sierra National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 30, 2014 in Oakhurst, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:04:38> For the camera can you give me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many of those have been a hotshot?

Robinson My name is Nick Robinson, I've been fighting fire for 14 years, and been doing the hotshot thing for about 10 of those.

Hannah What is your favorite part about hotshotting?

Robinson Probably just the whole camaraderie—the family part of it. I love the physical portion of it and always being physically active, and being out in the forest, and just always busy. Something new every day; it's not just sitting at a desk or, you know, something that is normal every day kind of thing. So it's just getting out, getting out into the woods. Just being pretty much physically active and just, it's like a family. Being away from the family all summer, it's helpful to have those 20 people to come back to come back to and have like another family.

Hannah Do you have any classic hotshot stories?

Robinson I can think of—there's a couple. One that always sticks in my mind is one of my first years in fire. Being out in Arizona and it was our pretty much first fire of the year. We were, let's see, we were doing a backfire. The fire pretty much stood up on us, into the trees, and just started kind of moving pretty fast. A little bit faster than we had planned. And we didn't light that fire, but it was coming towards us, so we ended up having to do a big backfire. It was us and another crew—and I'll just leave that crew nameless for now. So we were supposed to split off of each other and start burning two different ways.

We started our side and they kind of slowly started their side and what ended up happening, is it came too fast and we had a couple of little spot fires. But the other one, they didn't burn fast

enough, so it kind of blew out on them and went for another hundred acre slop-over. So I just remember that fire, I mean, we were no more than 100 feet away from it and it was standing up—150 feet flame lengths—up in the trees. Just having to kind of stand back and get behind a tree and get back and dig in whenever you can. And then we had to go and help out other crew. All night we cut line and ended up bedding down all around, like, midnight or one o'clock. About an hour after we bed down, we woke up to little spot fires all around us. And so we woke up and there's just—. Luckily our captains and overhead kind of had a good head on their shoulders and just told us to put on your clothes real quick and let's just hit the spot fires real quick. Ended up taking the whole rest of the next day to kind of clean it up. But, that's just one that really sticks in my head. It was fun, just kind of doing the hotshot thing, I guess. Fun though, fun shifts.

Hannah <00:07:53> Do you have any other good burnout stories?

Robinson Just, yeah. There's one—and there's many—but one that really pops into my mind, too, is one of my first years back after the apprenticeship program, back with the crew. My superintendent and I, we drove down into this house that had some fire around it, but needed to be burned out around, and there were still people in there—the houses had, but it had the aluminum wrap or the wrap around the house. It—we just got in there and we had a two-wheel drive truck and we had to go down this dirt road and there were logs across the road. He told me to get out of the driver's seat and—I mean, it's on fire going down into there—and he told me to get out of the driver's seat and he can do it. And so, jumped into the passenger seat and just drove over a couple of little logs. Got down into the house and ended up having to burn around the house and got it all done safely. It was just him and I, so the rest of the crew kind of stayed up out of there, so it was kind of fun. It was just another good story with my superintendent.

Hannah <00:09:21> How do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Robinson                    It kind of depends on where and when. I think that when done right, and when done tactfully, I think fire in the environment is a really good thing. I think it is something that when in a controlled environment, and the right times of the year, it just does it really well. It takes out, you know, what needs to be taken out, as far as brush, and let's trees grow to be taller, and makes everything kind of more of a park-like setting. I don't know if you've been up in Yosemite, but you can see how nice Yosemite looks and it's because they introduce so much fire to Yosemite. Then you look at some of these other forests and they're just too cluttered with stuff and it takes away from some of these bigger trees and makes them stress really hard (to get water and sun and all that stuff).

So, I think that if we introduced it more, then possibly some of these fires, some of these bigger fires, would be a little bit less consistent. It seems like every year there's at least one or two really big fires and I think if we were able to do more prescribed burning, and more stuff like that—introducing it at the right times—then there wouldn't be so much fire at the wrong times.

Hannah                    <00:11:00> How do you perceive the value of your work?

Robinson                    Some days it's—I think it's a really good thing to be a firefighter; I think it's a really helpful thing. I think that California—and all over—it needs firefighters and I think that being a hotshot, sometimes you're definitely perceived a little different than other, you know, firefighters—firefighting entities, or what have it. But then other times, you know, there's always up shifts and down shifts, there is some shifts that, it's like, I feel like we could be doing more. I feel like there's times where we just don't do enough, sometimes. Most of the times on fires it's, it's a busy, busy day and I just think that it's a good job and very needed, I guess.

Hannah                    <00:12:10> Tell me what you would like people to know and understand about wildland fire? If there's one thing you could tell people about fire, what would it be?

Robinson Oh, that's a tough one. That it's not always bad. You know, in the wrong places, yes, of course it's bad. But fire is definitely needed. It's always been, you know—from history, it shows that it's always been a good thing to have a little bit of fire in the mountains. And it's that, and also—I'm trying to see how to word this—I feel like the job that we do, I don't see it as some of the other, like, people that are fighting forests and all that stuff. And some people look at hotshot crews and really look up to them and look at, you know, doing, like, a huge service—which it is, but I don't really—. The people, like with the crew, that are crewmembers and all that stuff, we don't see it is that. We just see it as, you just go to work and this is what we love doing, this is our job, and it's not really, you know, something that we do for fame or for money or anything like that. It's just what we like to do; it feels like this is what we were, most of the guys, it's what they were kind of meant to do, so—. Some of the folks, I don't know, it's definitely, the perception of people looking in and the way we look at it, looking out, is just two totally different views. I don't know how else to put it, it's really hard to explain.

Hannah <00:14:20> Describe your experience with different management efforts, you know, strategies or tactics out on the fire line. As a hotshot, you're exposed to fires all over the country. Different fuel types, different conditions. Can you maybe compare a couple of different fires that you've been on in different regions?

Robinson Yeah. It seems like just with the California, we're into a really—attack everything and go for, pretty much, put everything out and don't use fire for really good or—. It's kind of hard with how many people we have in the state and how many homes, you know—our urban interface—right up next to the forest. I think with other regions, they have a little bit more leniency and open land to be able to let fires, kind of, do good to the environment and do good to the forest. So as far as management, you definitely see it in different regions. Maybe not so much from Forest to Forest in California, but definitely from region to region, how they manage fires. With California it's just, throw everything at it—if it's available, you put firefighters on the ground. You deal with it, but out in other ones, it's, I mean, it could be, you

deal with a fire in California, let's say —. I remember being on a fire in Montana that was 100,000 acres and we were the only hotshot crew on it. Versus when you have 100,000 acre in California, you're going to have 2000, 3000 people on it and probably 20 or 30 hotshot crews. So it's just — and it's good, but it's needed in California because of the urban interface that we face here, and in Montana when we were on that fire, I mean it was few and far between for — as far as homes and stuff like that.

Hannah <00:16:35> Do you have a favorite place to fight fire?

Robinson Northern United States probably — anywhere from Montana to Idaho, Oregon; I just love it. I guess in the more, the forest and timber. Southern California is fun but, you know, it's not the kind of stuff that —. I just love it up in the hills, you know. Born and raised up here in the mountains, so mountains are my thing.

Hannah What's your role on the crew?

Robinson I'm one of the squad bosses, out of two.

Hannah Can you kind of describe your progression through the crew over the years?

Robinson Yeah, when I first came on — I filled in 2002 — just ran — I had a Pulaski and it was a Pulaski for that year and the 2003, I was a Pulaski for half the year and was able to work my way into a sawyer position for about half the year. And then from 2003 to about 2006 I was sawyer. Then I got the Apprenticeship Academy and went and did my own thing, went to a couple engines and stuff like that. Came back in 2008 and did, pretty much got the — one of the lead firefighter positions on the crew and I've done that all the way up until this last pay period. So I just stepped into this position, which is pretty cool.

Hannah <00:18:24> You mentioned northern, the northern part of the Western United States is kind of your favorite place to fight fire because it's timber. Can you talk to me about some of the big timber fires that you've been on? Can you describe some good shifts?

Robinson No—one I was talking about earlier, which actually was a timber fire, but it was in Arizona and that was a pretty —. One of probably the best timber fire behavior fires that I've seen in a long time. Pretty much almost all of my career. It just stood up into the timber and just went for a couple of thousand acres, at least. That was definitely one of them.

Let's see, there was another one actually here on the forest, one of my first years as well, and it just kind of, same thing, the wind just picked up just a little bit and it had preheated all of the fuels and it pretty much just stood up into the timber and ran for, I think, one or two thousand acres—which isn't a substantial amount, but to see it right in front of your eyes is a pretty spectacular thing to see. Let's see, as far as, Northern California, yeah, you know, I haven't been able to see that many up there. I just loved it up there and I love fighting timber fires that are little bit more dangerous with the snag issue and stuff like that, but it just feels more like home to me.

Hannah <00:20:18> Can you talk to me a little bit about being a sawyer on a hotshot crew? Just kind of that role, you spent three years as a sawyer? Did you have any close calls kind of stories?

Robinson You know, I don't have any personally don't have any close call stories, which is a very good thing. But being a sawyer in general on a crew is something you really hold—not dear to your heart—but it's just something that you just really hold the value because it's a position that not everybody gets to do, or not everybody gets to try or be put in that position because, you know, you have to be really physically fit and pretty knowledgeable about saw and where to put the line location and just a bunch of different things. So being able to call yourself a sawyer on a hotshot crew is a pretty big deal, in my eyes. So to see those sawyers on different hotshot crews, you look at them and it's a lot of respect. You look at somebody in that position.

As far as close calls, I don't have any, like I said, but I do know—we were on a fire in Oregon and, you know, saw teams work in twos. And one was cutting, focusing more on a cut and what he was going to next and his puller behind him was moving some

stuff—and it was on a really snag infested piece of line—and one of the trees—I think it might've been even green, well not green, but it didn't have fire and it, it was just a snag—came down in-between the two guys. Luckily they both escaped without any harm or anything, but it's just one of those things. There was no fire and it, there was no—. Not really—I mean, it was a dead tree, but there's a lot of dead trees out there, you can keep an eye on all of them. So they were lucky in that.

Hannah <00:22:32> Wow. How about some good examples of how camaraderie is developed on the crew?

Robinson As far as developed, I think just working together—just working, just going on our PT hikes and working hard, sweating, getting really physically driven to the point of breakdown, and being able to work each other through that, and just being next to each other when that happens. You just, "You got it, you got it, keep going, keep going." And it just builds trust in each other and it builds, just, that camaraderie, that family, like, "Okay, he was right there to help me out and, you know, if that were him, I would do the same for him." So, it just kind of keeps building and it seems like—I think with any hotshot crew, you're going to have that family feel to it and camaraderie, and it's all—. It seems like a lot of people on hotshot crews are very competitive. So with that camaraderie it's just, you want to be better than the other person but when they do a good job it's like, "All right, we're all getting stronger because you're getting stronger." So it's just a bunch of people working really, really hard and just getting better together. And I think that's part of the reason why I like being on a hotshot crew, is just seeing people get better and getting better myself.

Hannah <00:24:15> Did I have you look at this list?

Robinson No, I don't think so.

Hannah Take a look at that list and see if there are any—it's just kind of an idea of the different types of stories. I'm trying to think of some stories that we haven't heard yet. Do you have any good wilderness fires that stand out? Or—.

Robinson

Wilderness—.

Hannah

Or small fires or Eastern fires over—. It seems like in my experience, the fires that stand out were either the ones that were just ripping, or they were the small ones where we were spiked out and it was just the crew or one other crew. It was remote, just that feel-good, you've put in a good hard days work, and you get to sit around a campfire at night—.

Robinson

<00:25:20> There is one. It was—and it seems to be a lot of these fires that stand out in my mind are some of my first fires with the crew and seeing all this stuff—that just ingrains really deep in your mind—just because you haven't seen it really before, being on an engine or wherever you've been.

So, one of them was the last fire of my first season with the crew and it was up in Yosemite. Up in the—I think they call it Little Yosemite Valley—up kind of behind Half Dome. And right off the bat, we got to fly in over the Valley and got to loop around the top of Half Dome. And then just landed right behind Half Dome and that was just, to me, I don't think I had—I think maybe I had one other helicopter flight before that—so just to have that one was just, I think was ingrained really deep in my mind. And then, just that whole fire, we had—. When we landed and jumped out of the helicopter, I think it was 19 or 20 degrees and there was minimal fire behavior. And the people coming off the fire said that it just ripped the day before and made them get into their safety zone and stuff like that. And we were just kind of like, "Okay." You know, listened to it but didn't quite think like, "Yeah, it's really going to do that again." Well we ended up, you know, walking around the fire and checking everything out and sure enough around 1500, it stepped into the timber and kind of moved us out and each night.

It was amazing, each night it got down to, into the 20s and frost on the ground and then you'd wake up the next morning and it would just keep going. But it was really cool because it had the three hotshot crews from the Forest, just, it was just us three crews on it, and so it was really kind of fun just working with all of them and just being us up there. And definitely hit in a way,

back up in the hills, and I think we spiked out on that for five days or so. Yeah, it was just a fun, fun trip—especially to kind of end the season with that was really fun.

Hannah <00:27:37> You got to fly into that Valley!

Robinson Yeah, because we were—the flight out was the one we had, I think we had either the superintendent or the captain, so we got to recon, and recon again, and recon, so it was—yeah, we definitely got a lot of pictures out of that one, that was fun.

Hannah That's great, that's great. How about, I haven't had a chance to get any stories about fire camp. Do you have any fire camp or any stories that stand out?

Robinson No real stories as far as fire camp but our last—. Our superintendent that just retired—a really smart man—he liked to stay away from fire camps as much as possible. Just with the sickness and the clusters, getting in and out of camp, it just seem like every day took so long because, you know, with big fire camps, it's just lines of, you know, fire engines and other things. It's just hard to get in and out. Over the years we've tried to stay out of fire camp and spike out, or just be at a park away from the fire camp, just because of all those things. Although sicknesses, you hear, when you're in fire camp, you just hear people coughing all day and all night—just cough, cough, cough. So any time that you can stay away from that and keep the camp crud away from your folks, it's a good thing. But as far as other actual stories—. I can't really—can't really think of too many.

Hannah <00:29:22> Most of the fire camp stories that I can think of are too embarrassing or stupid to share with the public.

Robinson Yeah. One fire camp story—it's not like a real, you know, fire camp story but it's—. We went down to one of the Santa Ana fires back in 2008 and one of our folks had jumped into one of the port-a-potties and, right about—either when he was stepping out, or before he stepped out—it tipped over from the wind. And, luckily, he got out unscathed and, um, he wasn't covered by anything or—. I think he still changed but, yeah, very close call. I think it set the fire camp close call—.

Hannah <00:30:14> That's great; it must of been embarrassing.

Robinson Yeah.

Hannah Any other thoughts, any other stories?

Robinson There are plenty of stories—most of them are a little too crazy, or too—you know—[we] try to keep them under wraps. But let's see, there's got a—be one more. I mean, I could tell stories all day about my superintendent but I don't want to put him on the—. But if you ask anyone of the folks from our crew it's, they've got plenty of stories about Ken. But yeah, it's, off air there's plenty of stories, but with the crew thing you just, once it's in the crew you kind of keep it in the crew as much as you can.

Hannah How about equipment? As a lead or even a senior/squaddie you're dealing with crewmembers, making sure crewmembers are keeping their equipment, you know, right at fire ready. And you're seeing a lot more of the trials and errors of customized equipment and things like that. Do you have any thoughts on the evolution of equipment and tools over the span of your career?

Robinson I've seemed, you know, with our tools, we like to try to make our tools ourselves. Yeah, they slowly progressed to be what we're using today but just the—. Starting from an engine, you just have the basics. You have just a normal shovel and the Pulaski and so going from that to the crew it's just—because you actually dig more line and do stuff like that, having these specialized tools is so much better. I've seen a lot of different ones throughout the regions and throughout the crews, and stuff like that, and it's just kind of all preference—what you feel works for you and to your advantage and stuff like that. Even person to person on our crew, we have—. Me and my captain, we have our own personal tools that we want to deal with and we want to sharpen them and stuff like that.

And then, we've tried with chainsaws, we've tried to kind of, you know, do some specialty stuff to them. It seems like for a little bit, it works but just leaving it as is, for us, with the chainsaws is the basic—they sell them, you know, they've tested them so much it's

like, “Why change anything that they've done to them?” So we try to keep them pretty stock and stuff like that. But yeah, I've seen some people with—I've seen a really tall person with a huge, I think the shovel was about as tall as me and it's just funny to kind of see the personalized tools that each person kind of takes out and takes as their own.

So, here on the crew, we kind of stick to, pretty close, with our last—with this crew we kind of keep it, try to be as—not professional but cohesive—and have everything pretty close to the same. We all wear hats, we all, you know, the hats are the same, all the shirts are the same. We just trying to keep it all uniform so we don't differ too much, as far as each person having a different tool or different stuff like that. But it's, I don't know, it's nice to have your own tool and kind of make it—and working all winter, you kind of do little things to it. But it's—progression, it's—since I came on the crew, it hasn't changed a whole lot. So, that's about it.

Hannah

[Side conversation]

*End of interview.*

## Stephanie Rogers

Hotshot Crewmember, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:03:10> Please say your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot?

Rogers My name is Stephanie Rogers and I've been in fire, this is my sixth season, and this will be my second season on a hotshot crew.

Hannah What made you decide to get into fire?

Rogers My freshman year in college a real good friend from my hometown told me about firefighting and how much he loved it, and convinced me that it would be a really fun summer job—and I've just kind of stuck with it. I love it.

Hannah What's your role on the crew?

Rogers I am a grunt. I am a scrape. I am in the back of the line and help with quality control. Also in charge of the supply bin.

Hannah <00:04:03> Do you have any favorite stories you want to share?

Rogers Last season we were on the Big Windy Fire and we were assigned to a spot fire. There was no easy way of getting us in there other than by raft. So we rafted the Rogue River into a spot fire, spiked out for four or five days, and then rafted out—and I remember thinking, "I can't believe I am getting paid to do this. I am rafting on the river right now and there are helicopters, you know, sky cranes pulling buckets out the river ahead of us." It was really cool, incredible.

Hannah <00:04:54> You got to do that?

Rogers Yeah, I was wearing boots in a raft; it was mind blowing.

Hannah Tell me about the fire itself. Can you describe the fire behavior and what your objectives were?

Rogers On Big Windy? We did a lot of prep work until we were sent to that spot fire. At that point, the ground was just—not good for walking—so I think they wanted to send one crew out there and there wasn't a whole lot of activity where we were at, just sort of mopping up at that point. Most of the activity was on the main fire, we didn't see a lot of it because, like I said, we were prepping a lot. Doing the big box tactic.

Hannah <00:05:44> Any other good stories? Any favorite burnout operations?

Rogers I don't think I have a favorite burnout operation. As long as I am on the torch, I'm usually pretty happy. We did do a pretty good burnout last year on the Klamath—and by good, I mean it kicked our butts and we were going fast and we were going all day. There is something really gratifying at the end of the day, when your feet hurt and your body hurts and you don't know how you went that long, but you did it and you feel accomplished, bad ass. I don't know if I can say that, sorry.

Hannah Please speak freely. Where is your favorite place to fight fire?

Rogers I love fighting fire on the Umpqua. I have spent six years on this Forest and it's funny that, coming onto a hotshot crew, I was expecting, you know—I've got to see a lot of different fire behavior and different regions. Alaska was a different planet as far as firefighting goes, and when we got back to Oregon, we were assign to the Whiskey Complex in Tiller, which is my backyard. Everybody was grumbling about the steep terrain and the rocks and the roots and the poison oak, and I was excited because it's fun that way, I guess. I don't know, it's beautiful, its green and it's worth it. So, "Defend Tiller." I don't know—.

Hannah <00:07:55> What do you perceive as the role of fire in the environment?

Rogers I think the work we do is important and also very misunderstood at times, I think, especially because of the media. People look at wildfire as a scary, terrifying thing that blows through town and destroys homes and families and land and it's—fire has been

around for a long time; wildfire is a natural thing and there are some plant species that can't even germinate without the help of wildfire. It's a naturally occurring event, but I don't know, I think it's important that we protect values (as far as homes and land resources), but I'm a big fan of the "let it burn tactic" as well, in some situations.

It's funny, I was trying to explain to my little brother, who is nine years old, what we were doing in some photos that I had taken last season. And it hadn't really occurred to me to explain to a nine year old, why we would be doing a burn out. And I told him, have you ever heard someone say, "You don't fight fire with fire?" Well that's kind of what we are doing here and in some situations that's what you need to do. It's just misunderstood by a lot of people.

Hannah [Side conversation from 9:34-9:55] That actually brings up a good point with your brother. If there was one thing you would like people to know or understand about fire, what would that be?

Rogers I would want them to know that there was a difference between natural caused wildfire and human caused wildfire. Ever since I was little, the idea that, you know, Smokey the Bear saying, "Only you can prevent wildfire" and "a careless match destroys forests." It's true, people can be careless with their campfire, or their cigarettes, or their matches and create devastating wildfire—or just being carless on the Fourth of July—but there is also natural caused wildfire and if you look at the trends of what regions, especially, get hit each year, it—. I don't know, it seems like it is—. I don't even know how to explain that. It almost seems like it creates a mosaic across the nation, as far as the areas that get hit every year. It wipes out some, you know, I can't think of it. Wildfire can destroy invasive species or cleanup a lot of ground litter and do things that are very productive for the forest, as well as burn down a barn or a fence or some grass. It's misunderstood, I guess.

Hannah <00: 11:56> Talk to me—I haven't had a lot of people kind of describe to me what it means—what it's like to be on the scrape. I've had quite a few sawyers talk a bit about the challenges of cutting and swamping. Tell me about, do you have

any hotline stories that come to mind where you just had to push and push and push as far being on the scrape?

Rogers I can't think of individual stories; I don't know why.

Hannah Well, let's just start with, how does the scrape work?

Rogers The scrape is constantly trying to catch up with the saws and when we do, the saws hate it, which is fun but—. I am in the very back of the scrape, we're in quality control, where it helps to be a bit of a perfectionist, I guess. Yeah, I think, I guess if there was a challenge about being a scrape, it's that you've got to remember to keep your head up. Keep an eye out for overhead hazards for your crewmembers because usually you've got your head down and just going for it until you're done. I guess that would be one thing.

Hannah <00: 13:21> How about the communication, being in the back, you know, in some ways, in some cases your setting the pace. You can slow them down or bump them up. How does communication work on the scrape to make everything jive smoothly?

Rogers The person in the back usually lets everyone know if we're going too fast, to slow, take more, take less, bump one, bump two. Sort of code words you get to use and know every day. I am in the back, so you have to relay those. If your standing around waiting for the person in front of you, you've gotta tell them to get out of your way, "Keep going, I've got it." But, I don't know.

Hannah <00: 14:14> What's your favorite part of fighting fire?

Rogers My favorite part—. There's too many favorites. I get to travel, I get paid to stay in great shape. I get to see things every day that people will save up and maybe get to see once a year. I get to eat burgers and drink a bunch of beer on my days off and I am still in great shape. I don't know.

Oh, my favorite thing about fire is that it makes me appreciate everything else in life so much more. I appreciate toilets, and being barefoot, and food—so much—and I think when you're out in the elements and you're outdoors and you get use to just being filthy all the time, you have a day off and you never thought you

would love taking a shower so much or wearing a dress and looking like a girl, putting on mascara. Oh—. But, yeah.

Hannah <00: 15:33>Do you feel comfortable talking about—and feel free to say no—talking about being a female in a male dominated industry at all? This project is not about, you know, “go women” or anything, but if you feel comfortable talking about it, it brought to mind so many memories of like coming off of a roll and putting on a sun dress or summer dress and just feeling “Oh—.” A bit of femininity

Rogers Yes, Yes, exactly—umm. I definitely miss being a girl after two weeks of working with a bunch of dudes and looking like crap, and smelling terrible. And then the moment I take a shower and put just the smallest amount of mascara on, I think I look so beautiful. But, yeah, it’s definitely male dominated industry. And even just today, I met somebody who had already met me, and it’s kind of hard to remember guys you meet of fire because I feel it’s maybe one girl to every ten to fifteen guys. Maybe one or two girls on a crew. He remembered me, but I meet so many guys in the summer time that, you know, I don’t remember them as easily, I guess. Yeah, it’s a different world being with that many dudes. I kind of become one of them, yeah.

Hannah <00: 17:05> How about, do you have any, some of my favorite fires are wilderness fires or really remote fires where you’re spiked out. You know, you have that sense of self-reliance and the camaraderie, it seems like. Do you have any of those memorable types of fires that stand out?

Rogers Yeah. We flew into a small fire in Hells Canyon and spiked out for maybe five days. And it’s a lot of fun when you’re not at fire camp with a bunch of other crews. You’re responsible—or a couple of people are responsible—for cooking meals at the beginning of the day or the end of the day. Definitely a sense of self-reliance. Well, that aspect, as well as just working and getting—maybe break off in groups of two or three and you’re kind of in charge of an area. It’s nice.

Hannah <00: 18:27> What was the fire like on that particular fire?

Rogers The fire behavior was pretty mellow where we were at. We were kind of just in charge of waking along a ridge like and monitoring what we could. There was a lot of what people call goat rocks, so there wasn't a whole lot of hiking that we could do. We watched a lot of helicopter drops and called in smokes below. Really just monitoring at that point, so that was really nice.

Hannah <00: 19:04> Do you have any shifts that stand out where you really had to dig deep, either to, I don't know, dig deep because they were hard?

Rogers Oh yeah, last season we were flown out to Alaska and spent the first couple of days mopping up on a tiny little fire. We were kind of there more for severity because they had record dry, hot, weather. We had been mopping up for most of a day and got called out to the Skinny Fire. It started out as a small, maybe a hundred acre fire. And in Alaska, they really push the sixteen hour shifts because there is sunshine all the time in the summer, so you can work really late and we did.

It was maybe one in the morning and we were just prepping and prepping and cutting and brushing and swamping, and it looked like it was noon outside, and you're eating a really late dinner at what looks like lunch time, and that's kind of when the delirium starts setting in. You don't know when they're going to pull you off, or if you're just going to roll into the next shift—not sure what. I mean, it was only, maybe a 28 hour shift, but it seemed extra insane when it looks like it's noon the whole time. That was a weird one.

Hannah <00: 20:42> What was the fire like?

Rogers A lot of black spruce, white spruce, and most of it was just creeping where we were at. So I think that's why—well, I mean, we started to cut hotline a little bit, but then started prepping, and they were doing a lot of bucket drops and some planes out there, so, just prepping. We did a lot of prepping last year, a lot of prepping, a lot of big box tactic.

Hannah Not a lot of burning? Or was there burning in there as well?

Rogers We did some burning as well. Yeah, actually, just this time last year we did some prescribed burning in John Day, which was awesome. The beginning of the season, it wasn't quite a fire assignment, but it kind of got our crew where we needed to be, in shape-wise, camaraderie-wise. I remember one day, a group of eight of us broke off and burned, I think, eight hundred acres in a day. I just remember us sitting down at dinner that night, much later than the other crew—they had already eaten and gone back—and none of us really said a word until one of our crewmembers pulled a tick off of himself at the dinner table and then we were kind of brought back to life by it, because it was so disgusting. But, yeah, that was a good day, yeah.

Hannah <00: 22:17> Can you tell about working with other crews, a lot of times where is some competition when you work with other hotshot crews, anything come to mind?

Rogers Umm, I know of the hotshot competition among crews better than I do out of experience. I think our crew especially, I heard this before—that they were a very friendly crew and get along with other people very well and work with other people very well—and I've seen it and I've lived it and I am proud to say that I am part of this crew because of that. I haven't seen any kind of arrogance from the people that I work with as far as, "We're better than that crew." Or, you know, "We've got to make them look like wimps." That's a nice way of putting it. Yeah, we work pretty well with other crews, especially, I feel, on R6 there's ten hotshot crews in R6. Is that right? I don't know. And we end up working with a lot of the same crews over and over again, so it's always kind of good to see the other guys out there.

*End of interview.*

## William Sanders

Hotshot Crewmember, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey Generation.

- Hannah <00:02:34> For the camera if you could say your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many you've been a hotshot?
- Sanders My name is William Sanders and this will be my third season in fire and first year on a hotshot crew. Looking forward to it.
- Hannah Do you know what role you're playing on the crew?
- Sanders I'm on the third saw, so, if they need a third saw they pull us in, but other than that, I'm just here to be told what to do pretty much and learn as much as possible.
- Hannah You're a month into your first hotshot season. So asking what your favorite part of hotshot is—do you have an answer to that yet? Or are you still feeling it out?
- Sanders Correct. I would have to say camaraderie, so quickly. Everyone just seems to come well together pretty quick and the workouts are nice. We had a fake incident, trying to—a medical incident—and everybody came together really well. Hauled the guy up the hill. It just feels good, you know, everybody's there for the same reason. They want to get out on a fire and make sure everybody is safe.
- Hannah And that fake incident was a training opportunity?
- Sanders Yeah, a medical training incident.
- Hannah <00:04:04> What type of modules were you on prior to this?
- Sanders I started on a type six engine with the state and federal cooperative, the Timber Protection Association. Last season, I got on a 20-man handcrew, an initial attack hand crew with the Forest Service.

Hannah Do you have a favorite story you want to share? A firefighting story?

Sanders A favorite story—. Honestly I haven't seen too much action yet, I've had two seasons prior to this but they were pretty mellow. One that stands out the most is, we were in New Mexico on a fire and we were in a section where it had already burned over and we were just cold trailing, mopping up. There was another 20-man crew in the area and they were walking through and—I was looking over and I was just observing them walking by—and out of nowhere, a tree had come down and took the guy out in the very back of the line. It hit him right in the back of his fire pack, so he popped right up, everything was fine, but he didn't even see it coming. And so that was just an, "Oh wow" moment. Just a reminder to always be looking around because they literally just walked by that tree and got the last guy in the back. So that's the first one that pops out in my mind.

Hannah <00:05:39> That's crazy, how about fires, as far as—do you have a favorite type of fire to fight?

Sanders I think everybody, especially on a hotshot crew, wants to be up front. But I tend to like the timber fire a little more than the grass fire. They just seem to be bigger, a little more complex. I don't know if that's a good thing or bad thing, danger wise, but I enjoy being up in the mountains and I think that's one reason I enjoy this job. It's just all the different places you get to go and see in such a short amount of time.

Hannah Can you describe a timber fire that you've been on? Kind of, what the fire was doing, what your assignments were?

Sanders My first year in fire we were up in the Boise National Forest in Idaho and there was, probably about 30 lightning strikes in this given area and so we were going around chasing a bunch of fires. It pretty much got to a point where they just called it one fire, but the whole hillside was just lit up. It was pretty neat in the middle of the night, you just see all these trees burning, and we're on the opposite ridge in our safety zone, but in my role, it was to pretty much dig around the engines so we put in a little bit of line but

mostly it was water support. Making sure all the other guys had the water they needed.

Hannah <00:07:26> What made you get into fire?

Sanders I've always drove up in the mountains, so that was one part of it, and then right out of high school I didn't know what I wanted to do so I didn't go to college. I didn't want to waste the money and time and be like a lot of people who got a degree and then they don't use it. But after a few years, I had some friends get into fire and it kind of piqued my interest. Hearing their stories, their adventures, and seeing them come back all dirty. That was sort of the starting point of it all. It's mostly the adventure of getting out and being part of a group.

Hannah <00:08:32> How do you view the role of fire in the environment?

Sanders I think fire is a natural thing, you know, lightning starts it up, it's healthy, it burns away a lot of old growth, but it can be very dangerous. I think, some proper precautions are being met, kind of eliminating some of the fuels, so we don't get these big fires that just devastate a lot of land and people's homes and the public. I think it's a natural thing and it's good to have people there to kind of, fight it, to not over consume.

Hannah <00:09:17> Are there any particular fires that kind of let you through that belief and that understanding?

Sanders My first season on the engine, we were sent to Colorado, on the Hyde Park Fire and it was a big eye-opener. Just kind of how far the public has gotten into the mountains and the precautions that some take to protect their lands and some don't. When we were up there, it burned lots of houses. And we got up there at the point where they started letting some public back in and it was really hard to see their reactions. Everything they ever worked for burned up and coming up to me and asking, "Why my house and why not theirs?" And that was really hard. For that reason having firefighters out there to try and protect public land and public houses—it's just sort of a natural thing that happens.

Hannah <00:11:07>[Handed the list of topics]

Sanders One of the best shifts I've ever had was on the Boise National Forest and we got coyote out up on this peak. That was something that I always remember. We flew up on the helicopter, it was just our crew, and they had us just going down into the fire and mopping up. At the end of the day, you hike out, back up there. It didn't feel like work, you know — you're just camping out with your buddies, making food, telling jokes, and everybody is dirty and gross, but at the same time everyone is just enjoying it. You can't just, kind of, walk off for a second, if you want and take it all in. That was my second helicopter ride and that was a lot of fun.

Hannah <00:12:00> Can you describe the fire?

Sanders The fire at that point, it was at a type two, but by the time we got up there they'd backed it off to a type four. So not too much action. There's the big stumps putting up smoke, at that point it was just more political smokes, people would see them and stuff like that, but it was pretty mellow for the most part.

Last year, my second year in fire, my first year on handcrew, it was the third day of work and we're going through some refresher stuff and just got our gear and all of the sudden they said, "Load up, we're going to the helicopter site and we're going to fly you out." That was my first ride on a helicopter, so they flew us out to an old prescribed burn that went up and we spent a few days out there taking care of that — and that was just kind of a, I want to say a big eye-opener, but this is it, that was fun.

Hannah <00:13:32> It was a prescribed burn that — ?

Sanders It was a prescribed burn that the local hotshot crew had taken care of and then there was a section that flared back up, and so they called us in to go mitigate that and get it under control.

Hannah Helicopter rides are always — especially your first couple — are so thrilling. What's your take on that feeling, the thrilling aspect of fire?

Sanders It's a natural adrenaline rush; it keeps you on your toes; it makes you think more clearly or think about things that you never

would've thought about. The helicopter rides really fun. I like going skydiving and stuff like that, so that was fun. The scariest part I thought was—so I'd never been in a helicopter and I sat up front for the first time which was super cool. You know, you forget about the fire for just a couple of seconds and you're just looking around and the pilot let go of that yaw stick—it's what they call it—and I about had a heart attack because I thought we were going down. It was no big deal, but it's kind of getting out of that comfort zone and the elements that you're comfortable with.

Hannah <00:17:02> Have you ever thought about going into other module types? Or are hotshot crews kind of it for you?

Sanders Well, I started on the engine, so you know, I got a feel for that. And then went to the type two handcrew. And then, I thought about helitack but right now all I really want to do is be on the 'shot crew. They see so much more and get the opportunities to do so much more. If you do it long enough, you learn just about everything with the helitack and the engines. You know, kind of get that opportunity everywhere.

Hannah <00:17:42> Any other stories that come to mind?

Sanders You know, cutting fire line, this is my first year on, and I wasn't expecting to be on a saw team my first year on a 'shot crew. We were prepping line for some prescribed burns and, you know, first time with a saw partner too, so were trying to learn how each other cut and signals and how they communicate for our own safety. I was the swapper at that time and he was cutting. I grabbed a big bunch of brush and went to throw it. And I turned, it he was behind me and I turned to my right and he had turned to his left and my wrists hit the bar of the chainsaw and that was like an, "Oh crap" moment. Luckily we had our communication and if we're not running our saw, the chain break is on and the finger is off the trigger. But as soon as my hand hit that bar, my heart stopped, and we both looked at each other like, "Okay, let's keep going." It could happen like that. That was just one of those moments to remind myself just pay attention and always know what's going on around you.

Hannah <00:19:25> Have you been able to develop more of that communication and sync since then?

Sanders Yeah, it gets to a point where you can just look at each other and you know what to say or do. You're right at each other's hips and you got that chainsaw going, so you guys both have to be on the same page.

Hannah Do you have a scariest tree you've ever dropped?>

Sanders My first tree, when I got my certification, my first year in fire. I was cutting the tree, went to do my back cut and it sat back before I could get a safety wedge in there and instead of just sitting in it completely popped off. One of those things, you have your escape routes in place for a reason. So, I let go of the chainsaw and ran out. My certification teacher was right there in the back of the tree and everybody had to bolt. He was like, "You learn something?" I'm like, "Yeah." He's like, "I did too." That was scary, the first time.

Hannah <00:20:41> How big was the tree?

Sanders Oh maybe 10 inches, not a massive tree, but enough to do some damage.

Hannah So by the time you got your bar in it was close enough to the holding with that it could pop.

Sanders It was to the point where, like, there was not even enough for, really, a safety wedge but just enough to get it in there if you needed to.

One thing that I like to is when you are out in the public traveling, not even as a hotshot but as a firefighter, sometimes you'll see kids look up at you and like, "Who are they?" And their parents are like, "Those are firefighters." And their eyes light up and they kind of look up to you as a hero. It's just doing a job but seeing someone like that, put a smile on their face, and give them a Smoky [Bear] sticker or something. That's something else I like doing.

Hannah

Great. Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## Cameron Stinchfield

Detailed Assistant Superintendent, Wolf Creek Hotshots (Umpqua National Forest;  
USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 5, 2014 in Glide, OR for The Smokey  
Generation.

- Hannah <00:03:20> For the camera can you give me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many years you've been a hotshot?
- Stinchfield My name's Cameron Stinchfield; I've been in fire 14 years and just over half of that as a hotshot.
- Hannah And what role are you playing?
- Stinchfield I am assistant—detailed assistant superintendent.
- Hannah Do you have any favorite classic hotshot stories?
- Stinchfield I don't know, I've been trying to think of one, a good one. Probably—I mean there's a lot, I don't know. Maybe we can come back to that one.
- Hannah What do you like most about being a hotshot?
- Stinchfield I think—the travel, the camaraderie amongst the crew, and even other crews that we see on a fireline. Generally, I mean, within the region we usually kind of get on the same rotation as another crew in the region and work with them most of the summer. So just, overall, the camaraderie.
- Hannah Where is your favorite place to fight fire?
- Stinchfield Probably, region three, by far.
- Hannah Why's that?
- Stinchfield It's pretty fast-paced, it's fairly simple; it seems like there's a lot less political influence on how fires are managed down there. We're just fighting fire, we're trying to put the fire out—not, we

can't do this because of this, or we can't do this because of this — it's pretty straightforward. Whereas other places, it's not.

Hannah <00:05:41> Can you kind of described the roles that you played on a hotshot crew?

Stinchfield I've done everything from, filling in—I didn't have a lot of crewmember time, most of that was fill in time—but ran a saw, swung tools, was a squad boss—still am technically—and then I was the detailed assistant last year, as well. Pretty much the gamut.

Hannah I've been asking leadership level folks to describe the characteristics of their ideal hotshot?

Stinchfield Commitment, good attitude, self-starter, motivated, thick-skinned, and having the ability to make a decision. There's many, many more but those come to mind.

Hannah Do you have any memorable fires, either fires that required you to dig deep to pull it off, or even burn shows that stand out in your mind that took a lot?

Stinchfield We were on a fire in Alaska one time, outside of Fairbanks, and it was a burn—it was us and another crew. We were burning one way, they were burning the other way. And it seemed okay, the fire behavior was, like I've never seen fire behavior before. In black spruce, 150 foot flames, as soon as you put a torch on the ground it was in the crowns of the trees and off to the races. Operations was flying around in a helicopter, it was a type I fire, so it was operations from a type I team. He's yelling and screaming at our division to get us out of there into a safety zone because he thought the fire was racing up towards the line. Which it turns out it wasn't, but—. That was, I don't know, it was a pretty straightforward burn, really, but I'm not sure what operations was worked up about. It worked out, everything worked great, nobody got hurt, the burn went well and everything was fine. I don't know, I don't know—that's always stuck out. I don't know why. Just to have someone at that level be as worked up as he was and for no apparent reason, it turns out.

Maybe he was seeing something that we weren't, but it never materialized at our level.

Hannah <00:09:52> Some of my favorite memories on hotshot crews are small remote fires where it's just the crew and they're up spiking out you have the ability to build on the crew dynamics and enjoy the work and enjoy the place you're at. Do any of those fires in your work history standout?

Stinchfield There's been several of them. And even, not so much even the small fires of—but just maybe us, or us and another crew at a spike camp. We had one of those in California several years ago. Where was that? Outside of Bakersfield? But it was supposed to be a fire use fire and we'd been on the Mendocino—this was in 2008—it was a busy year for California especially Northern California. We'd been on the Mendo long enough for everybody to be covered in poison oak. Left the Mendo and went to Bakersfield, had a really cool assignment planned for us; when we got there it was a fire use fire.

They were going to fly us in for a couple of days, they needed to dig one more piece of handline and then we'd be flying out. When we got in there—and the day we got in there—the fire blew up and ran, I think, ten miles that day and was no longer a fire use fire. 14 or 15 days later they take us out, we ended up hiking out. We pretty much stayed at the same spike camp for most of the trip and it was fun, it was one of those memorable moments. We were in the Golden Trout Wilderness? South of the Inyo. I don't know why it can't think of the name of it. Awesome spot; really, really cool spot.

We had a fairly new crew that year, so it was a good opportunity for us to kind of bond. I think it was our first assignment of the year, it was May or June. That was definitely one of those—but, along with today, you're only going to be in there for one or two days, so of course nobody packed anything. "We'll make it quick. Will put three people in a bag, those of you who needed to, throw an extra pair of socks in, or whatever." So some people had no socks, no underwear, no toothbrush for 14 or 15 days. A majority of people. I would've liked to have seen us from the outside. We stopped at a little store, as soon as we got out—I think we

shocked the poor little store owner. He thought we were probably subhuman at that point.

Hannah <00:13:36> How do you view the role of fire in the environment?

Stinchfield I think it plays in an important role. We haven't been doing a very good job of maintaining its role, I guess. Right now we're so far behind that it is—I don't know if we can catch up at this point. I think the damage might be done and we'll continue to deal with the massive fires that were having right now, into the future. Overall, I think it plays a very important role on the landscape.

Hannah <00:14:25> If you were to tell the public one thing about fire and have them understand, what would that be?

Stinchfield I don't know, I would just try to reiterate that it's not a bad thing. The land needs it.

Hannah Is there any particular fire that made you come to understand that?

Stinchfield I don't think one fire in particular. No, it's listening to the older generation of firefighters that have been around since the '80s—when a 5000 acre fire was huge. And that has grown exponentially, every year since then, it seems like. I don't know, I think it's just that, I guess, the process of how everything is growing, getting bigger. It seems like fire season is lasting longer and longer every year.

Hannah I understand that you have a bit of a bet going on right now. Do you want to describe that?

Stinchfield We do. Well, I have to grow this mustache for one year without trimming it. We're about halfway through and along with the mustache, I also have to not cut or trim my hair, as well, for one year. Most recently the beard was thrown into the equation as well.

Hannah How's it going?

Stinchfield It's going fine. I'll be happy to cut my hair, at least. I've usually had facial hair of some sort in the past, nothing to this extent, mustache-wise.

Hannah <00:16:47> What's the bet for?

Stinchfield It's for a fairly substantial amount of money. It started at, I think, \$1200, which was \$100 a month for the mustache and \$100 a month for the hair, and it went down from \$1200 to the sixth month of mark at \$600 and then from the six month mark to the 12-month mark—it starts going back up again, back to \$1200. At the end of the year it will be back to \$1200.

Hannah Who do you think is going to win?

Stinchfield I don't think either of us will crack. I don't know what's going to happen. I'm actually a little afraid because of I think we're both going to make it to the year mark and then there's going to be a double or nothing for a perm or something silly like that.

Hannah Talk to me about—you know, on a hotshot crews those kinds of bets and antics—who eats what for how much money. That adds a lot of character to the season and helps with morale and that kind of stuff. Would you talk to me about that?

Stinchfield It does. I don't know that I've been on a crew where that hasn't taken place. I'm not sure why it happens, really. Sometimes it's boredom, you know? Then sometimes I think it does help with morale and I think people—a lot of people—that work on hotshot crews, they have a sense for that, for overall morale of a crew. In some cases it maybe, you know, it'll bring the morale up. Somebody's having a bad day, bring them up. Or whatever it may be. As goofy as it is, I think it's important.

Hannah <00:20:13> Did you get a chance to look at this, this is just a bunch of topics that might bring to mind a story.

Stinchfield Did anyone tell you about having to shoot the bear in Alaska?

Hannah No.

Stinchfield

I wasn't there; I was at a different spike camp, but the crew was down, down off this ridge right below where I was at. They had a bear coming into camp—we sent people back to cook. That's kind of a unique part of being Alaska, is the spike camps and the fresh food and the elaborate camps that you get to build. It's really nice, but your food is kind of out in the open. There's really no bear-proof way to store anything. But we usually have two people go back and start dinner, so by the time the crew gets there, no one has to stay up two hours later making dinner. We can eat and go to bed.

The two people that went back that night discovered a bear in our kitchen, eating loaves of bread and bags of tortillas. They ran the bear off once and then it came back. They ran it off again with chainsaws, it came back, and they ran it off again with a helicopter. Eventually they had to call the shooter. The shooter came down and it came back again, and again, and again, and again. Eventually the bear was shot, and of course we had some bear hunters on the crew, so they butchered the bear and we ended up eating a big portion of it for the next couple of days—bear-ritos's. It's too bad for the bear, but it's just one of those unique situations in Alaska, I guess.

Hannah

Any other stories?

Stinchfield

Not that I can think of, nothing profound or crazy stories—no G-rated stories; no made-for-TV stories.

*End of interview.*

## Andy Thorne

### Retired Hotshot, Smokejumper, and Engine Captain

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 4, 2014 in Redding, CA for The Smokey Generation.

[Andy was speaking as I was setting up the equipment, so his interview begins with him speaking on a general topic.]

Thorne <00:01:58> Well, you know, I guess I don't like to name drop, right. You're connected right? Somewhere, someone either mentored you—you learned something from somebody—or you are supervised by somebody that left a mark on you. That ends up being your character and I used to tell people, well I guess I should wait for the camera, but, you know, people cross your bridge in life and hopefully you've provided a good experience or a platform that allows them to learn something in the end when they're old people and they can reflect back and say "hey wow." You touch people in some way, whether it's—hopefully it's always good, you know.

Hannah I think that mentor piece is so key. To be able to share that knowledge.

Thorne You know, mentoring, influencing, I mean, who invented the word mentor. And, I mean, should we get the dictionary out and start breaking words down first? You know, it's language; that's what it is. Directions direct. Language. Let's convene. Are we convening now in front of the camera?

I went to the leadership days here, in February. I was invited to do my history display. My big thing is history; you probably didn't know that part. The frames out in the hallway—I kind of put all that—well, some of that was donated through crewmembers that have detailed here as they'd come from places—well, all that is out there, and a lot of what I've donated from my personal collection, and the time and effort to design the frames there, so it's probably one of a kind: a hotshot display of their crew patch or, like their insignia, their colors. It's something to associate with and that's kind of part of the fire world, the

psychological part of it, a lot of it comes from association—which we learned from the military.

When a crew designs a patch, you know, a lot of the culture and heritage of that crew comes from that standard. That's like the Redding emblem or any crew emblem—the Klamath Hotshots all the way back. I remember designing the crew patch of Smokey Bear [Hotshots] when I started down there in Region Three on the Lincoln [National Forest].

<00:05:01> So anyway, I'm Andy Thorne and I started my career in June 1973, Actually I started with CalFire, or California Division of Forestry Department of Conservation, and worked a couple of fire seasons out of Red Bluff, California in Tehama County. And then I moved—I was still in school and was recruited by a district ranger. I went out to the district, to the west on the Trinity National Forest, before the Shasta-Trinity [combined] and became a fire engine crewmember in 1975. That's kind of how I got my start and, at that time, I remember I was connected through people and one of the dispatchers here, actually, I used him as a reference.

I think I applied for the Plumas [National Forest], the Mendocino [National Forest], and of all the things, the Redding Hotshot crew. Because, I think, in the summer of 1975, I think they went back to the detailer program, so they had a couple of years where Redding was a—1972 and 1973 you could hire on as temporary help, you didn't have to have an appointment—finished that summer of 1975 and I actually, finally got on a hotshot crew.

I applied to Region Three on the Lincoln and they were just forming. I think at that time Region Three was on a buildup mode for hotshot crews. They had some pretty nasty fires like around the Mogollon Rim, the Sitgreaves, the Coconino had experienced some large fires up in their timber to country and I guess they were beefing up the resources. The New Mexico side of Region Three, I think a Lynn Vitisson(??) was the director then, or it might have changed. So I got a job, I got hired and I went to, of all places, Ruidoso—with the ski lift, the mountain and everything else that's involved around.

Because essentially you're still a temporary employee, but I noticed the one thing, the training had become—I went there and I started work, I think, February 23 of 1976, and we had fires already. So it was a dry year, I think it was, things were already set for the '77 drought, so things were pretty dry. We ended up down in a place called Mayhill. We had a bus, of all things, and it was a yellow bus, it was like a school bus. We didn't have crew carriers back then. But the fire, it was on the, what was called, the Sacramento River. Growing up in the North Valley here, the Sacramento River is this big body of water and I'm thinking I can literally jump across what was, down there in Mayhill, what was called the Sacramento River.

I think it was the prior year of '74, that Lincoln had a large fire that, you know, in the '70s, 20,000 acres, it was a pretty sizable fire and that was a major catastrophe. You know, fire behavior, it burned in Mayhill, I guess it was 17,000 acres, the Mayhill Fire.

So with all these things that had happened prior to, I think Region Three hiring, and everybody was new, so here's the Smokey Bear Ranger District, named after the little bear they found on the, I think, the 1953 fire that was on West Capitan mountain there in the Capitan's. Where the actual live symbol of Smokey the Bear was found by the New Mexico National Guard, I believe. Then they used him as a live symbol, they sent him to the zoo and what's kind of ironic, in the end, I think in October, late October, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, a bunch of us went—the little bear finally died in 1976, so we—I was a crewmember on the crew, still working, we went and attended the original living symbol, the little Smokey the Bear that you see pictures of, and he's all Band-Aid up and they're flying him to, I think, to Washington D.C. zoo is where he spent his life in Washington DC. That was kind of a neat thing and then the fact that we were named after, the crew was named after the little bear.

Hannah

You were saying before that you designed the crew logo?

Thorne

I did. Actually it was, and to this day because I put my patch that I wore on my—in those days we didn't have packs and, you know, so it was a made up—the web gear, it was made up.

Military surplus, the flat, a GSA bottle, they did have the canteen holders so I would load up six of them holders with little flat canteens. So what was that? A gallon and a half, I think, I was carrying—what's that? A quart each. But we used the Filson vest, which was the Okanogan thing, a modification of a timber crew's vest. Our first helmets, I remember, they were pretty ugly helmets. The district there had ordered these helmets and finally, I think, in June we got ours. Red; the metal helmet was kind of going out, so we had these red Bullards. Which were pretty cool and we got our new logo put on and a little Forest Service shield on the front, and your name and all this.

So, we thought we were organized. I think the biggest thing was, we probably lacked some training. I don't think—training was as far as what your crew foreman and assistant foreman's were going to teach you because—yet they still had the Basic 130 and 190. There was no such thing as refresher, it was just, "this is what you're going to do now." It was out of the book from the fire management—or actually the Forest Service handbook had a section on fire. Right, is that the 51, the 51 section, right? The Forest Service handbook is a whole other thing because it's huge and it's got all this directive in it, but anyways we went on.

That summer we got going, but I remember immediately we—and it was funny because in those days, our crew and Region Three, I don't know if all the hotshot crews—there were some other brand-new crews, I think Carson Hotshots, Santa Fe Hotshots. The only crew that I think had been around for a while, well they were, was the Gila crew and then Silver City started a crew. Then on the Arizona side, there were a lot of crews that basically, I guess if the District could round up 20 people or 25 people—and they were kind of handing out the word hotshot pretty freely, you know. It wasn't like you had to agree on anything or comply; you had chainsaws and all your hand tools and you are equipped and had transportation, there was some training and then you would—gosh, you'd either show up at the airport to get on a little plane—a Twin Otter, I think, we flew quite a few times to Arizona. There was also the Convair that we flew outside the Region to different locations.

But the spring in New Mexico and Arizona, the Southwest, used to experience the monsoon in July and then kind of August, but up until about the end of June, we'd get a lot of lightning and a lot of fires. We'd always end up over on the Tonto National Forest. We used to call it the annual brush cutting jamboree on the Tonto. So you either got stung, bit, or poked by something— rattlesnakes, some kind of poison oak, or a bee or something would bite you—or snakes. There were a few of us, I remember, that had come from California, from the California Region, that came with some knowledge. And I guess after my brief extent with the CDF and then the Shasta Trinity, because I had experienced some campaign fires while in California before going to New Mexico, so I had a little foundation build there. Then, a lot of the young men that were hired were either local, right there in town because they just put out a flyer (it was the old 171, a simple civil-service form that you filled out and then they'd actually call you right from the office. So it wasn't this huge, the job thing now, it's like totally difficult to not only apply but then to get selected for an opportunity to work. It seems so much simpler back in those days to get hired on, just get a phone call "hey come on down were going to do this" and then you'd have to do a step test.).

I remember a lot of physical training. The whole thing. We used to drive to this track over there by the school and line out and the assistant foreman—that individual, he was a little—he was from the Marine Corps, so he liked the calisthenics, jumping jacks, the whole push-up, the whole, I forget, the squat thrust, squat thrust back up, squat thrust back up. Then he'd throw a jumping jack in there, and then you'd go back down to your knees and do your push-up, back up. It was like six or seven counts, one through seven, two, so we do like 50 of those and then we'd run around the track. I think back in those days it wasn't, we're going to go for a run on some dirt road or out in the woods, it was, here's the track you're going to run like 25 laps or something.

But as a young man, I went there, I was 19, so there was a lot of other 19 and 20-year-olds then. I think that might have been just under the average age and there were a few older folks that were

then 25. "Man, that guy's old," you know. But the things worked out because through the course of that summer, 1976, we spent a lot of time, after all of the refresher and training—I remember finally we used that one bus, we called it—we put on there, "Smokey Bear Hotshots" and—I'll have to show you crew pictures with that bus. Our red shirts, we looked pretty good we had a lot of—haircuts weren't a big deal back then, so it was like, you know, I think the culture then was, people were still long haired. I mean, very few cowboys that worked on a crew back then.

But we did have a lot of fun, I think, the majority of the time. That's probably why I lasted so long in the firefighting community was that it, every summer and every fire season you find those reasons inside yourself. Networking with people and meeting different people and coming back for that same. That culture that you're learning and instilling in other people as they're coming up, or when you become a supervisor. Back then, when I was an early Hotshot, that summer lasted from, what was it, 23rd February to November 1<sup>st</sup>—what is that? Eight to nine months. It was a double season.

I remember by the end of the monsoons, and they would get some lightning—a little dry lightning, a little wet lightning—we'd traveled, gosh, I think up to Wyoming and spent most of our time over in Arizona on the Tonto and then locally there was that Gila and a place called the Cibola [National Forest], which was a really dry area between Albuquerque and Ruidoso. Albuquerque was to the north of Lincoln County. And the fire behavior, it's the same as what they're getting today and I remember my superintendent had—I called him a superintendent, the crew foreman—had spent a summer, the first summer that Redding had their program, here in 1967, and so he's actually in the first crew photo out there. I think at this time he's passed on because here recently, right before I retired here last June 2013, young crew men would ask me questions and I would say "well those people are retired or dead now, they've passed away."

Then I remember my second, after the second year rolled by, 1978, I was still in New Mexico but my engine foreman then had

spent the summer of 1977, because by '78 I was on an engine, so I'd left to the hotshot crew after 17 to 18 months. The next season was a little longer, '77 was a record season. That young man, he, Robert LeMay was on the '77 crew and I know that was a stellar year for the National fire scene and the movement of resources. I think, you know, hotshot crews then—I think there were 36 hotshot crews, maybe, that were recognized as resources available to large or project type fires.

Oh, we did go to Minnesota. That was one of the highlights of the whole 1976, Minnesota and flying up there in the dark. You know, I hadn't done a lot of flying until I was on the Hotshots. So flying at night to Minnesota from, I think, Alamogordo, with the Gila crew. I think that was just those two crews, Gila and Smokey Bear. You know, Gila and a Regional crew and we got up there, to a place called Lake Isabella, and it seemed like every morning— Then we had paper sleeping bags and it was like— And I'd experience paper sleeping bags before but they— You'd wake up and there'd be dew because the moisture, the relative humidity up in Minnesota in September is like, it's almost like you've been rained on, but by two in the afternoon things were—.

They had the peat bogs, almost like Alaskan taiga, the tundra stuff that was—I remember digging down, the first night up there and we were out doing handline in this carpet stuff and I thought, you know "what are we doing here." One of the things though, I want to go back to leadership is, I guess, you have trust in your crew foreman and your squaddies. We had three squad leaders and we had one foreman and an assistant. Each squad had a function and I think I was put on what was called a squad three. So I had my local young man that was the squad leader, who had grown up there locally on the Lincoln. So, for whatever reason, squad three always got everything that was left by the other two squads, things that were done or leftovers. "Here's an assignment they need to go take care of it," So it was never squad two or squad one. Squad one, they basically had the saws and a few Pulaski's upfront doing the major—putting a dent in the ground so the other two could come through and see what was going on. I always remember just following the guy in front of me. I turned 20 in June of that summer of '76, so and I thought

"okay, I'm learning something, I've seen some fire behavior out here in California." But the whole Minnesota thing, I think we were up there for 25 days, which was a pretty good assignment.

The camp food was— they were called a hairnets, I believe. It was like a little net—I think the bag was in the net or something—they would just drop these in there frozen, in trash cans and boiled them. But you are getting hot food, which was a nice thing, but they were always kind of consistently the same. They might have had three different menus, hairbag one, hairbag two, and hairbag three. So it was like, everybody would fight over hairbag three because it was the cornish game hen and then nobody would eat hairbag one because—I forget, I never had hairbag one, so.

But the thing was, a lot of the Regions, large project fires, it was almost like you are in a big spike camp, so we're out away from civilization and that was the most convenient way—cost-effective and meets the objective. We're going to feed them and everybody is going to get the same thing. There was no variety and I don't even know if there was a nutritional value to the hairnet except that the meat eaters, everybody liked hairnet number three because it had the little chicken in there. It was pretty tasty but there was a few times and I remember being up there it seemed like, it seemed like it just went on and on and on and as a young man—.

Right now I'm trying to think about the weather. It got really dry as we were up there because—I think Michigan was having a large amount of fires at the same time northern Minnesota was burning. The upper peninsula in Michigan was actually having some large campaign fires and I think a lot of Forest Service hotshot crews, I know from Region Six had gone, came through our camp, one being Redmond, they came through our camp, had dinner and left. The news was "Oh, they're headed to Michigan." Everybody was going to Michigan but we were left on the Isabella Fire and spent pretty much the whole month of September there.

Hannah

<00:26:17> Can you tell me a little bit about how the fire was burning up there? It's unique fire behavior.

Thorne

Well, you had what they called a blue spruce and a Norwegian spruce, which was a real stunted. A full mature spruce would be maybe 100 feet in height and just with a lot of moss, just covered with moss, and that moss wouldn't just grow on the trunk it fanned out through the tree itself so it was all on the branches and kind of hanging and then when you had perfect conditions, when everything lined up at the right time, the fuels and the weather, had we got some winds in there.

You know it wasn't something I paid a lot of attention to, except, "Okay, the fire's blowing up." And "wow," we'd all stand there and watch it. That's a natural thing with humans. It's exciting and we're going to watch the fire. But at the same time, I remember the fuel with the groundcover being, you know, it wasn't really tidy, it was a Minnesota tundra that we could dig down like a foot and you'd hit the permafrost; they had permafrost. I don't know if they have permafrost now, because it's 40 something years later—or about that. With the environmental change and global warming, maybe Minnesota doesn't have any more permafrost. So back then, you could dig down and there was—you really couldn't hit dirt, it was permafrost.

But there were areas that had—you could dig down and actually scrape some dirt and it was really muddy. We basically cut one side and just pull it back like a carpet. So it made it really convenient. I remember we—. Being there with that fuel type, we switched to day shift, which I think the management—the team running the fire was called the blue team of from Region Three that flew with us up there—they were, I think, Bill Buck's team off the Coconino and all of his components that make up the team back then. I guess there were "class one" teams and "class two" teams and I think that was a type one or they called them a class one team. They liked to use the word class for some reason.

I remember the division [group supervisor], his name was Major. He had one name. He said, "call me Major," and he was from the Ouachita; they were out of Arkansas in Region Eight. A bearded fella, a little older, probably mid to late 40s, but I think he had a lot of experience. One of the things he told us to do—there was three of us and we were out doing some work and the whole

crew was kind of spread out that day. The fire just, it got up in the crowns and made a pretty good run—10, 20, 30, 40 acres. But at that moment it was like, we're either going to be stuck on this side of where we're at, or get back across towards where the lake—there's a lot of water up there—and get back over where the rest of the crew is. Basically at that time I wasn't even thinking the safety thing. You're a young kid you're following the guy in front of you, but you're listening to your supervisors. At that time, it was the division and we're just three crew people. He just says, "run." And I look at my buddy there, and it was like, you know, "run." And basically he wanted us to run in front of the, I'd say it was probably about 100 foot flame lengths, but we're out and then you're running through the kind of a shaded timbered area but the forest floor is this, is that carpet again, and you're not really getting good footing. You can trip up and it, you've got your weight, too, and all your gear. And I think we had one guy with a saw. So, it was like were hauling all this stuff. But he goes "run" and I'm like— And I look over here to my left, because I remember the fire was coming from the left, the north, and I thought, "okay." But he led us. It was like, "well, he's running, so I guess will follow him." And at that point it was—. We made it to the other side, and actually it wasn't that far, maybe a couple hundred yards across through the woods there to this other point. I think it was a shoreline and a clearing to get away from the canopy, the timber. Which was pretty exciting. Even to this day, after all of those fire seasons, I remember that one day when that guy from the Ouachita said "run."

Hannah

<00:31:45> You basically ran in front of the head of the fire?

Thorne

We did. And we were, I would say it was 100 yards off to our flank there as we ran out in front of it. And I think that's part of training. I mean, even now I remember doing the—when I came on and got hired down there, we had the classroom time and we did the, all the book work and the binders and I still have all that paperwork to this day. The tests and all the stuff. Basically it's what they are teaching them now but may be a little more—the recipes changed a little. It's was still the same basic fuel, weather, topography. I mean that's a no-brainer when it comes to that part.

We've added a lot of things to complicate stuff, but when everything lines up, it's like common denominators.

That's a big thing, that was a big thing back then and we'd talk about it. I think we were using 10 and 13, I think. And now it's 10 and 18 and I'm not sure when the 10 and 18 occurred, but 10 and 13 and there was no limit on—I don't even know if we got per diem back then Oh, I think I did get a per diem check. But the 10 and 13, you know it's funny right at the moment you don't address a lot of things because you're thinking about the fire and not maybe thinking where do I apply—. When you learn these things you want to be able to recognize the problem and apply the situation from your—. We didn't have an IRPG. I think the squad leaders carried fireline handbooks, but the crewmember, I think we had our idea pad and a pen, but there were no pocket guide books like IRPG like they're using today. I can talk about that later but the whole Minnesota thing was a big wake-up and, you know, and out of all that, the camaraderie and learning. You know, like lessons learned—you learn something.

I think one of the things in camp was, gosh, if you had dayshift and you came in by sundown, you'd better prepare for the mosquitoes because they're going to tear you apart. That was just one element of the situation which was living and traveling with a hotshot crew where the insects and the environment would just tear you up. So that was quite a time. We came back in September and I think we continued to have fires. We went over to the Gila, I think it was at the end of November actually, that Gila got—actually I think they got lightning fires of all things.

That was one of our trips up through Winston and out through the Beaverhead to a place called Negrito, which is way out in nowhere. Beautiful country; you're in the largest stand of, well the bottom of the largest stand—the ponderosa runs all the way up to the Prescott from the Gila there; it's really pretty country. But then I'm not concerned, waiting, "oh they're going to feed us." So we went and did a couple shifts on this little fire and then we bust on into, I'm trying to think, we had what we called the fire freighter. That's what our hotshot transport was, the school bus, and it was a small sized school bus, so actually we could get

that thing up to like 53 miles an hour. The bus driver was a crewmember; he was hired to just drive the crew. I don't think we had seatbelts, though. But the concern was "oh they're going to feed us at Gila" at the Negrito. At Negrito, we pull in there and I didn't know this was where the Gila Inter-regional crew, actually this was their station, their home station out there. I think there was an Alouette Six sitting there on the pad; it was a big helicopter base. The Gila [National Forest] liked helicopters; Region Three liked helicopters, so it was a big deal down there. I think at that time, you know, the Gila being a huge Forest too, traveling around on the Gila was a great, great experience.

But midway through June we'd probably hit, from Mount Taylor which is way up by Grants, to the Guyenes(??) Fire over by Corona, to the Mountain Air, to another fire there in Mountain Air which is up on the Sandias right there above Albuquerque. A lot of local, small local fires right in the town of Ruidoso. I think the one I remember, mysteriously started, the assistant foreman was running the crew. So basically the town's in panic and so it's like, the city fire department is having a problem—I think there are some structures that were either threatened or on fire—and so you have a urban interface and woodland right there (I mean, what we call Pinion and Juniper). Some large junipers, but these B-17s were flying out of Alamogordo and they are coming in—I'm sure there was a regulation on height from the ground, but at ground level these guys are hitting the top of that ridge. It just seemed 50 feet from the treetops and breaking junipers off, like 50 inch DBH and not only breaking the tree away from the stump, but tearing the roots in the stump out. It was tearing the tree out of the ground and breaking the tree off that's the kind of Foschek [fire retardant], or the slurry they were using was really heavy, heavy—rock hard.

Basically I think they dropped on that house and did some damage, they were dropping so low. But that is the thrilling thing about firefighting is when the aircraft comes in its like, it's kind of a word-of-mouth like, you can see him coming around, get back, okay he's going to drop here, we know that's what's going to happen so—. I remember that day it was an exciting day for everybody. The civilian population in town, I don't think they

had a fire since the Javelin Canyon burned the year before. 1974 Javelin Canyon had burned and I think now if you go back, I haven't been back on the Lincoln since late August 1978 when I left there. I showed up in December 1975, but Javelin Canyon was one of the other reasons, with all the fires that they had the previous year, for the large buildup. Then and '75, that summer actually too, because this was the summer of 1976.

Then we came back around to the, I think it was March 1 of 1977, we geared up and our first big campaign was, March (it's kind of wintertime sort of). So we got on the Twin Otter and flew to a place called Show Low and we were out, actually we blew into a place called Winslow and then drove to a place called Chevelon, which is a ranger station on the Sitgreaves [National Forest]. But out on the edge of the plains and the timber, where they both meet. You'd probably like it. Gosh, I think you're at 6000 or 7000 feet there, and that's where we had the hairnet thing again. Region Three liked using the hairnets. I don't think that anybody had invented the MRE and another big thing that we used a lot of were the military rations, which were just a little gray box and all the cans in the box were green. So they were the military coded green with a little spec number on it and I think one of my favorites were pork slices and juice. Well, it was meat, so I devoured that stuff pretty quick and a lot of people didn't like it. I guess it was like canned ham, basically is what it was. With the round disk of flour, the cooked flour, which was called a cracker, you could invent something pretty good there. And then the cheese spread, which was in another little can. But the funny thing is it took forever to open the cans with the P-38 [can opener].

Then I remember that next summer, after that fire, it snowed on us and that was called the—that trail goes down on the Tonto there—Horton Creek, March 1977. Then its up from there, it was April, and we headed off to Satus Pass. We got on the big Convair this time and flew with, I think Silver City, yet it was basically just a two crew thing; almost like didn't know about the strike teams yet—and they probably did—they just didn't call it that it was just a written thing—a word. Let's make up some more words, right. So we flew to Yakima, I think. We went out on

a fire, Satus Creek Pass, which is up on the Washington side of the Columbia River there as you come down into the Yakima Valley. But what was a great event. That night I remember working in the Creek and you've got the mark three running, and, you know, you're smelling the fumes, that's making you sick, and it's getting cold and you're down in the bottom of this Canyon, and then the rocks start rolling. Because, it's real rocky country up in there. We were actually pretty close to one of the main highways that runs north-south all the way up to Wenatchee, I believe. About the big thing it was, all of a sudden they'd handed out to the new — well we didn't know they were new — but the modified — looked like the commercial — rations. So you got the same little box that was more of a brown box, same size, same food in it, the same condiments and everything, but they had labels on them. So, they were to military green, they would actually say Hormel pork slices and juice, and you'd get the little macaroni and cheese. And, I think one of my favorites was the beanies and weenies. That was pretty good stuff. So you do a lot of hoarding, yeah hoarding, that's basically the word, hoarding or, there's some other words we'd use. I think all the hotshot crews that I ever saw had the film center, that Okanogan crew vests with the large pocket and what — I always hated it — those night shifts you'd get.

We'd started with the metal headlamps, with the electrical cord coming from the battery container, I think it held four batteries. So then you'd get inventive and tried to invent that, your cord, so it wouldn't get tangled up with whatever you're doing. Some people would run it through their clothing and back out and up behind their shirt and onto their helmet. It was like — I think I just put the thing in, and they had a special little pocket on these vests for the headlamp container, for the battery pack to sit in. Because it was shortly after that they built a plastic container, which was really was pretty cheap. It would fall apart, the little clip would always fall off, and your batteries would fall out, and there you were. But the headlamp was a vital piece of equipment, because night shift — it would get cold and basically up there on Satus Creek, like, for some reason, you're in April and in Washington and it got cold. It went on and finally June arrives and things started happening by the end of June. And, this was a year that

set a precedent with fire, especially in California, but everywhere. Because we traveled, I don't know, I have my old logs from those two years, and I think we were hitting over 50 fires as a 'shot crew, which was a pretty good count for back then, considering that it was generally just the Hotshots that were traveling. And maybe, when fires got really large or if they got a lot of large fires that—they would bring in the contract crews that were the Native Americans from Region one or the Swift crews from Region Three. It was probably a pretty small part of the program, in the hotshot realm, that you still had all these crews and crews would show up. I remember going at the end of July, they said, I think, Santa Barbara had a— lightning had hit California, gone all the way up the West Coast. So, our crew was getting sent to—.

Smokey Bear was going to get to go to the town of Wenatchee on a detail. This was probably my biggest event in my memory of my hotshot experience. They said, "Okay, everybody has to drive their personal vehicles." So it was like, "oh man, and no supervision," you know. And, "You have to be at this location at the state." So, you got, like, 20 hotshots with probably 8 to 10 vehicles going all, but maybe, the same direction for a brief instance. But we all showed up in Wenatchee and we— basically, the Forest there, the Wenatchee Forest, put us in a hotel, which, I don't know if that was the right thing to do either. But, that was the greatest time. We started there, we did our orientation, we hung out up in a place called Entiat and of all things—that's the home of the Wenatchee Bushman [Hotshots].

So, they were having disciplinary problems, I think, kind of threw some of those, '74 was one of their, not their best year. They were a good crew and they worked hard. They had a name like all the hotshot crews. Things come and go with your style I think a lot of it evolves around leadership, again. That, I think is the main, the inspiration behind things. Either it can be stopped now, or things continue and either you have a—you can have a bad outcome.

So we ended up in Wenatchee and things were pretty good and I remember driving around, they gave us weekends off and, gosh it was just like we were doing things. But, we weren't really

getting at fires yet. They had—just had—a guy, Neely, I think it was in the Gibson Creek fire—perished. I think he was a—at that time—working for the county or back on the forest. He had jumped 1, 2, maybe 3 years in Winthrop and then went back to the county and that was—kind of a lot of people did that. They'd just go back to the city service or County and local agency to work and get out of the Forest Service. I remember he perished and that was one of the things, all of the sudden. The east side of the Cascades is getting a large amount of fire activity so all of a sudden they're pushing crews up to the Wallowa and on up to the Wenatchee. The Wallowa is in Oregon and that whole eastside was just getting hammered.

Finally, we made it down to—we had our government vans and I believe—. You know, I can't remember if we flew or drove our vans. I think we actually flew over to Portland from Pangborn is the airbase there. Ended up on Mount Hood, called the Happy Fire, and then from there we ended up, of all places, in Redding, California here, close to where I grew up. As a child—. I start reflecting on the fire camps at Shasta College, of all places. I'm thinking they're feeding us in the cafeteria there and finally, we went out on a fire there up on the Shasta side—a place called, I can't remember. And I've been up there many times. It's up across from Lamoine, up in that area. I'll think of it. I'll think of the name of this fire. Because, there was my first experience with—.

We hike in there with the Rogue River [hotshot] crew and we did, like, this night hike. And it's just the nastiest brush and the fire—I think the fire was may be 10 acres. We get in there, and it's like midnight. And here are these—all of this burned up equipment. Well the smokejumpers were in there already. So, the next day we basically did a night shift and a day shift. And we contained the fire and controlled it, basically at that point.

I think, the Big Hand [Fire] was the—. I think they were Redding jumpers in there. I remember meeting, the next day—all this gear had burned up and then— fiberglass from the helmets was everywhere. The next day we were working and I remember cooking. I thought I had a regular can of chili beans that I had

packed around with me and I wasn't going to budge off the hand line. I'm a Hotshot. I'll tell you what, back then, in those years, I didn't even have the slightest idea of what a smokejumper was. And, I didn't really care. They were hiking out with their gear — up to catch a helicopter to fly out of there — and I wasn't going to move my little warming fire. I was cooking my breakfast. But, I met an individual who ended up becoming a great friend of mine through the end of my career — who actually grew up in the town I grew up in. But, he was Smokejumping at that time and a great, avid hunter. He actually took the time to talk to me about things and wasn't just going to go on up the hill.

So we left that fire and that was a jungle, the Shasta, because here's my crew, "Oh, you're from this forest." And they look at me — "Hey, Andy," you know. They started criticizing — the Shasta T this and the Shasta T that — and I'm thinking — "Hey man!" What, was I 21 then? So, I had finally turned 21 then and we're in the midst of the '77 campaign.

I think after that fire we headed off. We went back to the college, got back on a crew-haul of some sort, and headed off to have breakfast at Beaver — up in Beaver, California at the CalFire, or CVF, where they ran their helitack out of Lassen County there. And that was a pretty good breakfast, they had bacon and eggs, and the normal breakfast. This fire was actually called the Scarface, which was a big, big fire almost 100,000 acres and we went back out. "Okay, you're going to go to camp." And so, we drive for hours out towards a place called Longbell and ended up at a — not at Longbell — but the camp was by the power lines for some odd reason. Just the mix of crews that had poured in from Region One, when I'd never really gotten to experience — Coming from Region Three. I thought, "Well, they're pretty skookum down there." Region Three, you know, the crews had good equipment and they were all of the same type. Where all of the sudden these Region One crews show up and here's a crew called the Nez Peirce Hotshots and I'm thinking — . And they're wearing flannel shirts and they're all just, I guess they're college students, but totally looked unorganized. But then I remember one day, we're in there, here's the Redding crews in there and the big deal back then was, on the back of your yellow fire shirt —

and these were the good fire shirts— they would spray paint or stencil their name on there and that was, like, Redding Inter-regional. I always thought that Inter-regional name, that's like the big time. That's like the varsity of firefighting. Here comes a common, I don't know. I think in the same day as people are mobilizing at this camp, a large spike camp was being formed up on one corner of the fire. I guess so they could get a handle on this whole Scarface thing. I actually have some very nice convection columns of that event, so you'd probably like that. Along with the white bread at lunch, the sack lunch had the white bread. And, I'd look at my friend and I pull the mint jelly thing out and I thought, "Isn't this what they serve at Thanksgiving?" You were supposed to put the mint jelly on our white bread and that was— a couple dry carrot sticks, and I'm thinking, "There was no meat in that lunch." I'm thinking no meat, I'm getting mint jelly that's a decorative thing for Thanksgiving on white bread and I'm thinking, that is nutrition right there. So that caterer, whoever was making those lunches, I don't know what they were doing— if the food unit leader or the camp boss was doing his job. But during that same course of time we spent we spent, probably, a week in that camp.

But I remember another crew that showed up that was strapped right to the hilt and they were the sought to— another Inter-regional crew that came from Idaho. And they had— they were still wearing metal helmets and they were a beautiful blue, painted blue— and you talk about crew cohesion and unity and their association. They had it together. And, their crew boss, this old boy—. But they all had the Levi's or Can't-Bust-ums, with the Brown— what are those shirts called? — Brown, like what Cal fire made me wear. Just like a military shirt, basically, is what they were wearing, they weren't wearing a server shirt but it was a work shirt— a button long-sleeved work shirt. And, they all looked the same and their cuffs were all rolled, probably to 3-inches. So, you know, they were spit and polish and you could tell because they all— of Anglo descent. And that was part of the culture then— probably in the potato region of Idaho. The farm boys that were coming out of that area were going to get these jobs there. But they were straight out, and I'm sure they did a—.

They had a production rate that was pretty high— and back then in 1977.

So, I think, Sawtooth, they were probably in their 10th or 11th fire season and by then as an organized crew. I would see that and I would think, kind of, “Gosh.” We were still, basically at that time, because the year before in ‘76 when Belmont happened, then we finally got—. Wearing the fire shelter became mandatory. Like, you had an option before that, before July 17, and then the whole new directive. But they actually issued fire pants, nomex. So, by the next summer, by the next fire season of ‘77—except for here comes Sawtooth. Why are they still wearing their, like, Levi's or dungarees or what they were wearing—blue? But they were probably all cotton. But the new fire pants, I thought—. I looked at our crew and I looked at these other crews and thought, “Man, we still look pretty good.” I took his image— image is a big deal. And, it doesn't matter what age or what crew you're with, in the bitter end production is important, and your objectives, and, “Okay, this is what we're doing for the shift, this is your time period you're going to work.” But, you've got to look good while you're doing it. You got to look good when you show up and you've got to look good when you leave. I think that, in the hotshot world, and I think it's still a big deal now with the crew colors, the shirts, the sweatshirts, the ball caps. We had ball caps and they were red. Our shirts were red. And, I remember when I designed that emblem with— basically, I think I took the emblem from the comic book. It was the little Smokey the Bear story that was about the 1953 Capitan fire. Somewhere in there I just took, basically, the image of the little bear hanging on the burnt tree and did my own rendition there— my own concept of it on a paper. And then kind of took it to— we had these huge placards that we had at the station that we'd painted, that were back at New Mexico, in Ruidoso— even to this day, I think.

You know, I remember I was in Alaska in 1991 and we jumped this large fire, called the—something. They kept re-staffing the fire. It got huge. So we were out there and all of a sudden here's my old crew. Here's Smokey Bear, up there and this is 1991. So, I'm meeting some of these guys and my original engine foreman from '77 or from '78, who, when I went to the engine after the

hotshots in '78—I was the assistant tank truck operator of a model 70, which was 600 gallons of water with a 12 speed. It had a six-speed stick with a two-speed rear end and two speeds are kind of gone to the wayside now, with the types of automatic transmissions they have. New Allison all world transmission right? You can't mess it up. The computer can mess up the—. But anyway, Bobby LeMay, there—. He is up in Alaska, 1991—and I'm speaking the next time I saw those guys, I had—.

I was on my engine as a captain in 2005 out on the, way on the edge in BLM land east of Cedarville, California in Nevada and here they show up with their nice huge Chevy 3-ton units. I think they had three of those units and the Sup's rig. So they had four units. Here's Smokey Bear [Hotshots], the new Smokey Bear. They didn't have a school bus and the Supt's rig has the squad in the back and old Dolphin, Rich Dolphin is running the crew. And I'd known Rich for a while. I'd met Rich— he was an old McCall boy—and I'd met him in Alaska in 1984. He's running Smokey Bear and I'm thinking—as things progress in years all those loops closing.

As your network and friends and people that you associate with, which is probably the greatest value, to this day. Like, I'll sit at my house and look at things and reflect on the people and events. But it's all those little things like the hairnets and the firefighting.

But I tell you we saw some good fire behavior over on the Tonto, in places. In one particular situation we were up on a ridge that was all rocks, and this was called the Ord Fire, July 1976. So, that's a year before—I'm going back, one year again. Because, we spent a lot of time over there—Pumpkin Center and the fires just rolling down the hill. And then, our Supt. or the foreman is like, "Hey, we're going to cut line here." I think it was with Prescott and a crew called Hannegan which was from the Apache. Because, I looked at these guys—. I talked to the Hannegan guys, because I thought, "Where'd you guys come from? Whose Hannegan? And, I was already learning hotshot history. You know, like in my early days I was collectively thinking— and there were so many crews in New Mexico and so many in Arizona— and if you worked on my list, you aren't a hotshot

crew. So Hannegan shows up and I'm thinking, "Hannegan, boy that sounds Irish." But anyway, we end up down in this drainage and luckily we're on the edge of the drainage and the rock and what became our safety zone, and the fire rolling off the hill, and I've got pictures of this event, to end the column. And, we hear Del Rosas way. They'd come from Southern California. The great Del Rosa comes over to the Tonto from Southern Cal. and so that was like a big name back then. We're working with Hannegan. So well, okay—but that fire—. I'll tell you, you can't—. When the fire goes into transition and we learn that, back then, 90 years ago and even today we learn it. We learned last summer that things change really quick. I just remember standing there and we're in—I don't know if it's oak and teal or some kind of oak or red shade or whatever they called it down there— just brush, like tree brush. It's just all brush, all hardwood, and small brush, big brush, dry grass and it comes rolling off the hill. And then, the foreman or the squaddie goes, "Hey, it's spotted behind us." Luckily it was just in grass and we got a handle on it. And then, finally, the thing just pushed right up to our line. But it was like, pretty intense. I would say 50 to 800 foot flame lengths again, right in our face. And I'm thinking, "Yeah, maybe we should move away from here." Finally, and pretty quick order we— what is it RTO?—like, "Let's get out of here!" So, we boogie down and across into the wash, where the dry creek bed was, and up this ridge. What's odd is that that whole drainage, by the time we left— if we would've hung out down there, we would have probably—. Well, we did have fire shelters. It burned up all the way out onto the alluvial, which is the washed area in the smaller brush. So, it burned off the mountain and right down.

I remember the Hannegan guys, in this situation And, I'm not sure what the tactics there were because, hey again, when you're a crew person, you listen. And, your squad, he informs you of what he knows—and that whole briefing concept. I mean, I think back in those days it was—. Fire behavior was probably the most important thing that you watched. What was going on not so much that someone is going to spin weather or, that anticipation or pre-calculate something, like a nowadays they'll say, "Hey—." When you go to briefing in fire camp there talking about—. They're taking information and lessons learned, kind of, and like,

"Okay, this is what is going to happen today. This is going to happen tomorrow." Well I don't even think they had fire behaviorists in briefings that—. It's like here's operations, these are the divisions, this is what you're going to do. You're going to go out and either mop up cold trail or put in some indirect. There was a lot of indirect back then. But, there was a lot of hotline. We got tons of hotline because we showed up on a fire and it's already 10 to 50 acres, cranking in PJ (Pinion Juniper) again. And so, it's not up to the local district, like a type III organization. It was like, "Here's the hotshot for men and he's going to take over the duties. He's not only going to call the shots, that—. He's kind of running the crew a little bit and hopefully the lookout." Yeah, we used lookouts.

, when we were on the Tonto—that was July 1977—that they were using—. These guys were our lookouts, even though we could see what was happening. It was pretty evident so. It was funny, I talked to an old friend of mine and I saw him—well, I shouldn't say old—I met him in 2000, actually '99.

<01:11:48> Yeah and getting back to fire behavior again, I believe it was August 1976 that we were down in Los Cruces, the town of Los Cruces. The fire camp was at the—. They did put us in a hotel actually— one night. But then, after that, the fire camp went to the high school, there in the town of Los Cruces. But, it was a BLM, on BLM, Bureau of Land Management fire, there in a place called the Organ Mountains. And, it's just a huge pile of rock, huge rock. So we drive to the edge of town and it's brush, all brush, thick (kind of the same stuff that grows on the Tonto) and these large long drainages that go from the alluvial plain back up the canyons—may be a few—two tracks—out there and some game trails. Luckily, you'd get on a ridgeline and that's kind of where you'd stay, in the rocks. That was kind of your safety zone and you didn't want to be down in these large basins, draws, or canyons. I think, I'm not sure what crew was down there, but they actually did a—at that time you couldn't really call it a backfire. I guess it was a burn out. But, there was some fire moving down the canyon towards the town. But when they lit that thing, I remember watching that. Our whole crew was up on this hill watching this event with another 'shot crew. And that

thing— almost looked like a vortex reaction to the weather, the fuel. Then, the fire coming down the hill and the amount of time it took, and the large—, and miles that it consumed so quick. The flame front was so large that—. And, it laid down and it was just incredible.

I never did—at that point. I don't think I had my camera or ever got any—. You know, actually I do think I have the slides of that occurrence. I used to record a lot of anything I could. I used to carry a camera, all the way up until the bitter end of my career. You know, not that it was bitter, to the end of my career. I think that documentation is an important thing. I've got piles of pictures, fire behavior, people pictures—socializing type people.

But that was probably one of the greatest—at that moment, that fire behavior, to that time, and even to today. I'm thinking— any large, great fires I went to in the span of my career, either from Southern California. I think some of the best fire behavior was in Region Three, either on the Tonto or over in, for instance this BLM fire. The Los Cruces fire is what it was called. It didn't last long, because usually, in the desert, the brush burns. And that said, you go through another burning. And, then you're walking on some ash with sand and what's left. So, there's not a whole lot of duff out there in the desert. But, that was a great huge event there with—. The way that things moved, the behavior there. I'm thinking the only other thing I can compare that to, that moment, that day and I'm thinking. I've been on a lot of small fires, a lot of large fires. I've been on career fires around—I'm thinking—I never actually counted them. I did count them and it's up around 800, which is a few. So either from a small, little IC type for fire or campfire, like a smokejumper type fire to a—actually parachuting into a fire where there was no fire. We thought it was a fire. It was a water dog that we identified as a—smoke. But it wasn't smoke. So, I'm talking straight to the camera this time. But that was an event. But that was years later after my hotshot years. But, the hotshot years—. It was long ago.

And then, finally, when I turned 22 the next summer—. 1978 is when I went to the Capitan Work Center, which is still in Lincoln County. The Lincolns is a great large, pretty large forest. It

extends from the Texas border up to the Capitan's and from there you have the Cibola. On top of it, then, from there, that runs up to the Sangre de Cristo, which is the Santa Fe— the Carson—. Then you're in Colorado after that. That was a great experience. And, I think today, if I was to say something, you know, I'm glad that— not that you put things together when you're a young man and figure out—. It's always kind of like, the lesson's learned and then you figure it out. The leadership that we had actually had some pretty good training for that day, considering the superintendent had attended the Redding program in the first year of '67. Then, my next foreman also came from this program. So, I felt, you know—. I didn't put any of that, and I didn't value that, and I think that's the thing.

If somewhere in there, now, right now, we can take those crew people and those young people, that are between 18 and 25, or 30, and make them appreciate what value and how to learn value, how to extract value out of either something that is either physically happening, or they're being taught something of verbally, or through a written direction and that it doesn't always have to come from example. Generally it's through on-the-job training. It's how you learn, right? That's how you get from point A to B usually. But I think the hotshot experience there, for me, even to this day—. And, I remember all of the good things, and the flying so many places, and—. I should get my roster fires out and remember all that stuff and each fire that I was on. There's always that special event that happens, either through bonding, or some association with fellow crewmembers, or event. Whether it's small—. I know there was a lot of— when you're off the clock, because that was pretty important. You weren't going to get paid, but you could be in camp, but you're going to be off the clock. But we used to work shifts that would go, generally, 21 hours, 20 hours, 21 hours. I think there's 24 hours in a clock, right? Midnight to the next midnight, or to midnight. Obviously that's all changed. I, you know, in my later part of my career, with the staffing levels and the two-to-one work/rest, and the 14 day tour of duty. The days of going for 30 days or 50 days—. Yellowstone and '88, or just traveling and not coming back to Redding. Going to McCall and coming back 50 days later, or something. But not spending all 50 days on a—. You're on an assignment, so I guess

the way they've written the assignment thing can be— whether you're in a hotel or a fire camp, actually on the fire line, and getting quality rest of some sort.

One of the things that I remember, some of the aircraft we flew on. Like, we'd fly into Phoenix. We'd fly out of Phoenix. They put us on an old DC-6. Or actually, it was a DC-6, but it had no seats in it. So, we actually climbed up a ladder to get into that thing, throw all of our bags in, all of our red bags. And I'm thinking—. That was the first year we actually got a red bag. Because, before that, it was just the green knapsack with the leather straps and buckles, which was kind of cool. But, you couldn't put much in there. Because, that's the first thing you learned, how to pack your little bag, when it all started with the Forest Service.

Then, DC-3 didn't have seats, so we all sat on one side of the plane. And they had one large, four-inch cargo strap with a ratchet on one end, and basically, we were all secured with one strapped. One strap secured the whole crew. It was a, you know, a one strap deal, right? At the other end. So, you had all the cargo and then you had all the people, basically using the same strap. Then, you could hardly see out the windows because you're down sitting, prone, on your rear, your back to the bulk and one engine is smoking— like burning oil, like, bad—and blowing oil. So, it's not only burning oil, it's blowing oil out of the exhaust ports. And, we're thinking, "I guess this is the way it is, right, this is normal." And, I'm not sure if that plane was probably on some kind of contract, or maybe they inspected it when it went on contract, or they just decided that these guys needed to get home and this is the available transport, right. We never flew commercial back then, it seemed like. Until, sometimes, you'd go to Alaska, you'd fly back commercial. Or you'd fly commercial up to Alaska— and I'm talking later on in my career, like in the '80s and '90s. Going back to the hotshot years, it was always the Twin Otter, the Convair 580, — which came with a stewardess. But they never served you anything. They were just there to load you, and unload you, and smile. Which was cool. I remember going to a fire in 1977, before the big siege. It was early June. We flew to the Medicine Bow in a little town, Saratoga. And then there was another town, Virginia City. And, this fire was getting

up there a couple thousand acres. But it had started out, is what we found out, which I thought was ironic, kind of funny too, Wyoming's not known for big fires (or fires in general). They do have some good seasons; they've had some good fire. But, it was a training fire for their district or maybe even at the forest level. They were putting on an actual live fire simulation. That's what we used to do— was a live fire, that's how you learned. "We're going to light a little fire." The FMO, the DFMO, the District Fire Management Officer, that was his title, District Fire Management Officer. He had these assistants, the ADFMO. Anyway, they went out and lit a fire. But, I guess it got out of hand and it became a full on suppression effort. One of the things, I was always aware of this, the tree roots on those—and I think there was a lot of lodgepole up in Wyoming—and those roots don't grow deep. Here we are, we're doing dayshift. And we have a little wind event, and were just mopping up and you could see the areas—that had large vast areas—that had crowned out. I think I have pictures of this event to. The trees just started toppling like dominoes, like crazy. Like a lot of trees at one time. And I don't know if it was the soil. Just in that general, in that small ecosystem, but they were coming down like candles. So, that was kind of a scary deal. But, a lot of work for someone to do—a lot of firewood. But, camp was back at the ranger station. And, I'm trying to think of the kind of food they fed us. There was very few times that we actually got to go, unless it was on the Tonto. Because, the Tonto seem to have money. And, I think the money came from the Lake. Lake Roosevelt was recreation, so they had money to spend. And, when they had these large fires on the Tonto, then you'd get a full on camp, which meant you were going to get a caterer that could feed you actually something resembling a restaurant type of food. But other than that, you make do with the hairnets and rations, the C-rats. And, I've got lots of C-rat stories. I was actually kind of a fire line— SPAM— a specialist— with cooking SPAM on a shovel and creating different things out there after shift. Of course, you have a short time period in that 24-hour clock again. Or, you had to justify it on paper.

Hannah Let me ask you a few questions. If there was one thing you wanted people to know about the role of fire in the environment what would it be?

Thorne Well, the role of fire has been in the environment before we became involved in fire— or the fact that we would either try to change, suppress, or alter natural fire, like through lightning. I'm just going to address natural fire, which would be lightning. And, generally, it just depends on the weather and the conditions and the topography. Yeah, I think it's good. It's been going on for years and we've had to deal with it. But, mother nature makes that allotment, or that arrangement, and deals with it. It might be a wound, or a scar, and the habitat takes a little hit here. But in the end, I think, there's a better meant—. There's progress with keeping the fuels to a minimum in that area and there's a reason why it might open up pinecone seeds. Or, maybe, there were too many grasshoppers that summer and they take it or some type of wildlife. There's[sic] benefits to everything. More than anything, natural fire is a benefit to the ecosystems. And if you don't get involved and try to alter it and just let it burn and burn, what's it going to burn? You know, special complexities—. What ends up happening in—. Certain areas might burn a little hotter than others but then there's also the—. And I think prescribed fire of today is of good use. We've learned a lot from mistakes that we make. We've continued to do that— but whether large or small. But, then when it comes to intentionally setting fires, like arson, and for whatever their motive is—. Once you light the match it's still the same reaction. You get combustion. You get fire. You have fuels. You have topography. You have weather and things happen. For whatever reasons, those intentionally set fires are, a lot of times, set in areas that are, that individuals or people, know that they're going to get this type of activity— is going to be created from, at 2 o'clock— and this is what I'm going to do. So, but I think, there's[sic] the greatest benefit is from the ecosystem and the earth to burn and burn the fuel and change the habitat a bit. And it does affect all the microsystems and the macro systems. Is macro smaller than micro? Macro, micro— it's all there in molecular biology. That's something you need to study on. So, we're all hinged together, so. And in the end result is that

through these activities of the natural occurrence or intentionally set fires, we've developed a system of business. You know, within the government, the federal government, the state, the local resources. The private sector now is involved heavily. Everybody from— any function in camp to operations and logistics, to—. Everything evolves around that— equipment and people, resources. And, it comes down to the money thing. And, I think we tried to stay, like in the days that I was on my hotshot crew—. Yeah, there were budgets and there were— Either you're in the black or you're in the red. Or, either you're in the black or in the green, no red. So, I think money is looked at differently. Spending is looked at differently. And, I think sometimes that has a direct effect on—like today, suppression. Back then, I don't think, the managers of the old days, or back then, 30, 40 years ago, yet you had people that kept track of all that but I don't think it affected—. The great effect that it does now. Where did they prioritize and assign the money thing in that echelon, when we needed to order more hairnets or, "This is what we need to do is feed them and rest them." So, those resources can do the job to actually suppress the fire. But, I think, in the long run, I think we should still, like in some way's, either monitor lightning occurrence fires that are going to be in areas, that once they burn, just let them burn. White Creek, is it White? Up on, between the Nez and the Bitterroot? Where they did some of the first original, let burn type stuff go, up in Region One? I spent time in, in 13 states. I don't know how many different National Forests and private and Federal land that I've been on. I should probably count all the forests I have been to. But 13 states... And, I've had fires in every Region, and every Forest Service Region, all nine Regions in my 40+ years of suppression effort.

Hannah <01:32:51> Tell me how many years you've been in fire and how many of those years have been on hotshot crews.

Thorne I should've done this right at the beginning, you know sometimes I—. Right now I forget things because I'm retired. So, I did the CalFire— I call it CalFire. I did CDF in California here in '73 and '74 on a hand crew. I was on a fire truck— was my first job— and then a hand crew in '74. And then I went to an engine in '75, and then went to the hotshot crew, Smokey Bear [Hotshots]. They're

still there. They've been around almost, what, almost 40 years. Like '76— were getting close, what 38, 37 years—. Did that for two. Went to an engine in '78. Went to helitack. Came back to the Shasta T., did the helitack in '79 and '80, in Weaverville. And then— I learned a lot from a man name Dietrich— and then, went to an engine the next year at a place called Trinity Mountain, which doesn't exist now. I always ended up at the dirt road station, which was a great thing because then you are out in the woods. Then, I repeat at that Redding 'jumper base in 1982. And then I left there in the end of 1995, got an appointment, well a little bit after that. But then I went back to engines at a place called Lakehead California, up on the I-5 corridor. We get quite a bit of action there. You learned a lot. I went from just a truck and a shuffle, and this and that, to a metal backpack pump, to a breathing apparatus, and protocol, and a lot more training. You know, don't get run over, don't get out of the wrong side of the engine on the freeway side. So then, from there, I became the supervisor for a street technician in 2002. And then retired in June 2013, as the engine captain out at Harrison Gulfs, where I started. On that same engine that came from White Rock, on the Shasta T., on Yolla Bolla— the great Yolla Bola, the mountains there, west of Red Bluff. Of all things— I close the loop folks. Hopefully I'm not a little goofy there. You've gotta put some character into that, right? I think I'll get interviewed again because I'll just compile a whole other set of things. It'll be like another chapter of Andy. It'll be the film version of my book, right? I guess that's a good way to write a book. It's just, "Keep talking," right? Then whatever translates— does that type it out?

*End of interview.*

**Mark Youmans**  
**Retired Smokejumper**

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 14, 2014 in Redding, CA for The Smokey  
Generation.

Hannah <00:04:14> Can you tell me your name, how many years you've been in fire, and how many you were a hotshot? Or you could break down your career?

Youmans Okay, my name is Mark Youmans. I started out in Southern California. Got out of the service and came out from New York, where I grew up, and really I didn't know what I was going to do. There was a couple of us that were overseas together at a house at the Santa Barbara District. One of the guys had a job at a diesel place and it happened to be right around the corner from the Forest Service station, the district office. We didn't know what to do so we said, "Hey that looks like a pretty good job, we could go in there." It was a little later in the season, so we got on a crew that did a lot of project work—went on some fires—but it was really like a pickup crew. It was a Forest Service crew, but no particular name or anything. I guess you'd call it a BD, brush disposal crew.

The next year I went to an engine crew at Pine Canyon, down on the LP. I happened to see a flyer in the district office about Smokejumpers, recruiting for Smokejumpers. I'd seen that movie, Red Skies Over Montana as a kid, but I didn't know if it was real, for one thing, because I grew up in New York—or if it was real at one point, but then it still wasn't going on and it was something that was old. Then I saw that recruitment poster, so I put in for it. I got selected the next year in 1981 and then I came up here, I jumped '81 through '86 here in Redding. And then I transferred over to Bureau of Land Management out of Boise and '87, '88. Then I had gotten a couple little minor injuries—what happened is my anterior cruciate ligament eventually just sort of, kind of withered away and I didn't have any blood supply, so I had to have a new one put in there. In the surgery, they tightened it down a little too much and so it kept scarring over and over again. So I knew I wasn't going to be able to come back really

quickly after that. I spent about 2 1/2 years, really getting 10 operations on my knee, so I knew I my career jumping was certainly going to be over with.

I just went back to school during that time I was rehabbing. I got a couple degrees and then I got teaching credentials and started teaching. So that's kind of my story as far as firefighting. I never experienced anything growing up on the East Coast, you know, that would have prepared me for working outside. I liked it immediately; it's just beautiful, nature's beautiful, and to be out there and doing things was a lot of fun for me.

Hannah <00:08:08> Did you spend time hotshotting or did you go straight from engines—?

Youmans I did. I worked a lot with the helitack crew that was down there, but wasn't on the crew. I worked a little bit with the Los Prietos 'shots; but I wasn't on the crew then either. Because I immediately, almost after two seasons, I basically started jumping. Then, when I was on a crew here, the jumper crew, often times the Redding Hotshots were short people and—some jumpers, you know, didn't want to really work on a crew, but I always liked it. They traveled all over the place, they met new people, you make good money, obviously, and it was pretty easy to do. You know, you just—Charlie Caldwell just said wear a shirt and walk in line. Those were the only two requirements. And Charlie had been a jumper, so he kind of knew the proclivities of jumpers to not follow instructions. And so I worked with them almost every year that I was here. I was on at least—at one instance on a fire team with them, so that was good. Then when I went to the BLM, of course I didn't have that opportunity.

Hannah <00:09:20> What was your favorite part about fighting fire?

Youmans Wow. There's just so many things really. Being outside is certainly one of them and being in areas that most people probably aren't going to go. Particularly as a smokejumper, you're out there with very few people and that was pretty cool. The elemental—just the elemental thing of fire, it's such a force anyway, you know? If it's true that a lot of firefighters are just,

you know, arsonists at heart or something—I don't know if that's true—but there's something fascinating, I think, for human beings about fire. How much power and mystery that is. You know, the physicality of it was good; you had to keep in shape, you know, in order to be successful out there. And then the camaraderie that you have with individuals was a big factor, I think, in making the job really special.

Hannah <00:10:21> Do you have any stories that come to mind, firefighting stories?

Youmans There's a lot of different stories, sometimes you have a fire that starts out really small. We jumped a fire in 1988, actually just a drainage away from South Canyon where the firefighters were killed, outside of Glenwood Springs—just above the town of Glenwood Springs. I remember, it was right on top of a ridge and very, very steep. Extremely steep country and then the big drainage with a lot of big high brush. But it was just piddling around—it was early in the morning and just piddling around—one of the guys on the aircraft said, "We'll be out of here by the end of the day."

We jumped the fire, the sun came up and the heat came on it and it was so steep stuff kept rolling down and rolling down and down. We ended up—we were on that for several days and ended up calling in more crews. It just went really kind of crazy. Fortunately we were able to contain it for several days, but it took numerous aircraft and several hotshot crews that came in. It didn't turn out the way we thought it would; it looked really, really easy, but it just took off on us.

Then a fire in Oregon once, '85 or '84, I'm not sure of the year, but we flew all night from here and didn't have a lot of sleep, so we hit it right early in the morning. It was a very dry year. The wind came up, and it was that sort of open—a lot of sagebrush country with rolling hills and some timber. It just took off; we could just watch it roll over the hills and we just chased that thing for a couple of nights—just trying to keep some kind of line along it—but basically it was just really following it. It just blew up.

Then Alaska is a particular area that has a lot of interesting fires—in Alaska—because it's such a different topography. We flew out to a fire on the Seward Peninsula and jumped the fire there. It was probably about seven miles long, but about 30 feet wide. You could see people on the other side and wave to them. You are beating it out with burlap sacks that have moss in it and these spruce boughs that you cut—because it's all swampy. It's just really burning over the top of this tundra. It's just an amazing thing, you can be knee deep in really a bog and the fire is burning over the top of it. It's just all the dry stuff that's on top. It's an interesting, interesting place and you get million acre fires up there. One time I remember, we were demobing the fire on one side of it and they were jumping to the other side of it, you know, with other jumpers. It's just kind of a crazy, kind of, a crazy place. I know it's probably changed now, a little bit. They don't jump, they're a little bit—I don't want to say better—but they're a little more economic, I think, as far as the fires that they jump. Maybe a limited attack at a certain time of year.

We jumped into Canada. We were in Canada, I mean, the Canadians weren't even jumping that fire. We ended up, I don't know if it was by accident or what, but I remember being in Canada once. Fighting a fire in Canada, unannounced to them, I imagine. There's so many really, and they're all unique in their own way. Yeah, there's just a bunch of different ones. Those are just some of them that had little things with them. There's a lot—particularly with jumping—there's a lot of stories. It might be a really difficult spot to get into or everyone is hung up in trees or the cargo is hung up.

Well, one time we jumped a fire—actually Andy and I jumped, and a guy named Kev Hodgin(??) jumped the fire by Belden. Really, nothing but timber, huge timber—that was our spot. It was just smaller trees essentially, and so we—we all landed in trees and we got out of the trees but they dropped—the cargo all landed in trees. Kev—he had these new radios and I don't think he paid attention to the radio in the radio class—but he let the jumped ship leave it before we could find our cargo. So we had to actually go around to the fire and we used our hardhats and

rocks to try to scratch this line on this steep little section. Fortunately the fire wasn't very big. It had hit a big old dead tree and it had come down; it started the fire but it wasn't taking off. The timber was pretty thick so it wasn't, the sun wasn't really getting down on it and we were able to actually sort of the line this thing, crudely, with rocks, sharp rocks and our hardhats and then what they ended up doing was jumping the rest of that load on our gear essentially and then they brought the gear down to us.

What was funny was after we got off the fire, the dispatchers from that Forest sent a box back to us here and they had, like a stick with a—. A rock tied to a stick and they had all these primitive, almost Cro-Magnon looking tools with, like they had been partly burned and they had notes saying, "Your jumpers left these tools on the fire." Because they had heard about the experience. There are things like that were pretty funny. And the fire was really—the fire itself wasn't any big deal, really. A bear came in and scared somebody—it was little things like that that happened on a fire that really are almost incidental to the actual fire itself. Sometimes the fire is just gigantic and you're just so busy trying to get some kind of handle on it, and other times you have a little fire that all kinds of other things are happening that make it really memorable, too.

Hannah <00:16:48> Are there any significant events that have shaped your fire career? Any memorable changes in the way you thought?

Youmans Well, I certainly learned a lot about fire behavior—and not only from observing it, you know, from different fires at different kinds of topography—but learning from individuals. Charlie Caldwell, for one, on that crew, a lot of experience. Some of the older jumpers that trained me and other folks at different bases. I learned a lot that way. You learn how you can use fire to actually be your friend in many ways, where you wouldn't think of that, I think, if you haven't been involved in it as much. That you can actually take fire and use it as a tool. Much like the Native Americans did, you know, when they cleared areas. You wouldn't think of that as much if you hadn't really been involved in it. But you're certainly—you certainly respect it, that's for sure,

because it's a—. They can change quickly and I can say it's almost its own entity, you know, you wonder sometimes if it doesn't have a mind of its own. It's just a powerful force of nature that leaves you in a sense of awe. It's kind of like you're attracted to it but you're like a moth to a flame almost, you're also—. It's scary. You want to go towards it but it's a scary thing to, so it's a little bit of both.

Hannah <00:18:21> Are there any particular people who mattered the most to you?

Youmans Yeah, I think, when I first got here as a jumper, Dick Tracy was the base manager and I had a lot of respect for him. He was probably a big factor in just shaping me as a firefighter and just as a person really. Gary Johnson was the operations foreman—great guy; I learned a lot from him. When I went up to BLM Steve Nemore(??), was the operations foreman there; just a great guy, great leader of people—like, he was able to get along with people above him, some of the bureaucrats, but he was also able to really make it a nice place for people to work. And that's not always easy to do with Smokejumpers, in particular, because there's so many individual qualities that these guys have, that come from all different areas—that they tend to want to go off on their own sometimes. And then down when I first started, people like Jerry Bean and Jim Chestnut, I learned a lot from them, as much as—my two foreman that I had when I was down there. Even though I only spent a year with, them I learned a lot from those guys, too. Then from individuals, just scattered throughout the time I was on fire, I sure learned stuff too, but those are probably the biggest influences I had.

Hannah <00:20:00> Do you have any thoughts on growing up in fire?

Youmans Well yeah, for me it—I had been in the service, I spent some time in the service—but I was 23 when I started, and yet you're still pretty young, you're still forming all kinds—. Particularly when you come through a place like I came from, New York to California, and was very new to California and really didn't see it as what kind of a state it is, with all these different types of things you have here. You can do anything; it's great topography, everything's different about California. And so, yeah, that shaped

me a lot. People that I met, the job that I did, Yeah, I kind of grew up that way because from 23 to—went into my 30s, mid-30s, you know—that's kind of a particularly growing. I think, hopefully—hopefully some period of maturity—and I think I did, even if it was, like, to drink less beer. I learned how not to do that, maybe. Yeah I feel the same way, you just kind of grow up, even though I didn't do it for an entire career, like many people do.

Hannah <00:21:18> What fire stands out most for you, any particular fires?

Youmans As far as what maybe?

Hannah Maybe fires that set you back on your heels a little as far as fire behavior? Even just shifts that made you dig deep?

Youmans The fire that we jumped above Glenwood Springs was something like that. It was very, very steep and it was really easy to—. You had to be very careful, one side of it was this way and it went right down to the river, the Colorado River, Glenn Springs was there. It ran down like this and then it went down this way into a bowl. Very thick brush and the fire had got down both sides of that. So you had to be really careful, things rolling down, you don't want fire below you, so that was difficult. It then just cutting a line down into that brush to try to go up and put a line around it that way. It—I was in charge of the fire and so you always feel a little, a lot more responsibility when you're the one in charge of it, obviously. I always wanted to maintain that they had some safety zones.

As matter of fact, when I first got there, the fire was beginning to boil up and so I asked one group where their safety zone was, and they said, "The Pizza Hut in Glenwood Springs." Because you could see the Pizza Hut from the top of a mountain where we were at, and that was their safety zone. Of course they were joking because they never would've made the Pizza Hut. They were well experienced guys, I didn't worry about them, but you still do because you're separated from each other and you know how things can change really rapidly. You like to think that something bad would never happen to you, but if you look back on all the fires you were on, you can easily remember that if

something had changed, drastically, you could have really been in a lot of trouble—it just didn't and you are okay.

That was a tricky fire. Like, it took us about three days, three or four days to really—finally, with a lot of retardant, too. Because each day, when the sun hit it, it would pop up again and that was—. I got some hotshot crews in there, but it was the same thing—if—you want to make sure they were safe, once they're down in that bowl. And this is, like I said, a couple of drainages away from South Canyon; steep country and really brushy, so—. That was one that stands out, probably one of my last fires, so it stands out, too, but it had a lot of those aspects of it.

There was a fire in Oregon that we jumped on top of a ridge and it was way down in the bottom of this drainage. It was on the Siskiyou's, Illinois Valley—which is very steep, very brushy country. The brush was over your head and we essentially were walking beneath it—crawling underneath it—to get down to the fire. You think, "Boy, we're walking down to the fire through this brush that's thick, we have to crawl through it, and it's at the bottom of this drainage. It could easily come up; we'd have nowhere to go." Fortunately it didn't; it was still dark and we got there early in the morning, the sun wouldn't have been on it for hours and it was way down, so it was pretty damp and kind of humid down there. It didn't go anywhere and we went down there and put a line around it. Got some other jumpers that came in and took them in the top—came down from Redmond—but that could've gone bad if it had been some different circumstances. You know, because we really couldn't jump down into that drainage, it was so steep down there, you couldn't really see, so we went up on top. You know, it could've went bad.

Hannah <00:25:32> There is an inherent risk in the wildland fire, fighting fire, and then you have additional risk as a Smokejumper. What drew you to jumping other than that initial exposure in the movies? What made you keep doing it?

Youmans Well, I jumped in the service, but this was different. Obviously there are some similarities in the training, but obviously different purposes. It just seemed like a cool job, really, and it was a small group of people. And I think I'd probably been drawn to that sort

of thing maybe—not counterculture but away from, maybe, mainstream things. I'd usually been involved in stuff like that and I loved the outdoors and I thought that would be cool to see. Plus to see if you could do it, to see if it was something that you could actually do.

Then once I get it, the job itself and the people that I worked with made you want to come back. We used to joke, back then a lot of it was seasonal, most of the jumpers were seasonal or they had different appointments that they worked on. There was only a handful of folks that were doing it year-round. We talked about things like, since we had to climb so much that maybe we could get a monkey to do the job, kind of like the astronauts would talk about the monkeys going with the first trip up. We said, "You can get a monkey to do this job, but you can't get him to come back every year." These guys were always coming back, it was so easy to come back, you know? A lot of guys would work at a ski slope in the wintertime and then come back. It was just an easy job to come back to—even if it wasn't a permanent full time job—and that's why a lot of people do it. Now days I think it's better, because I think it's more professional in the sense that it year-round. They're used more and more efficiently and do more things. So, I think it's more professional in that way—although I don't think they have quite as many characters as they did in the old days. Maybe that's a good thing.

Hannah <00:27:52> What do you see as the role of fire in the environment?

Youmans Oh, it's a crucial role. I think what happens when people get involved, sometimes—we've altered things that often times make things worse. Even though we don't intend to do that. I know in Yellowstone in '87, I was up there and in areas, it was difficult to hit the ground. You can walk over all this downfall and never touch the soil and it was just like, "Wow this place is—this place should have burned a long time ago." All this stuff has been building up on the forest floor; it normally would have been, at least some of it would have burned. Then the next year the whole park went up. The only fires that they really got ahold of were the individual ones that the jumpers put out. They got engulfed,

you know, in the larger conflagration. So that's the kind of a thing—.

I saw that in a couple different places, where you'd think, "Well, this place really needs to burn." But over the years and decades, that stuff starts building up, then it's not going to burn like it normally would. When you live on the land, close to the land, like the Native Americans did, then fire does become a tool because you're a part of that whole landscape. Modern people, it's difficult to do. You know, we build homes in subdivisions and places that. You know, you really shouldn't build them if you're talking about safety. But we do it, and there's obviously reasons for it, but it makes it much, much harder to deal with natural fire that happens.

I read a book years ago—two years before the Mass(??) Fire—Richard Henry Dana, he had come— he was kind of from a wealthy family—but he took two years on a boat and he came around, all the way around South America and up and is coming into California, San Francisco area—it's by Santa Barbara, actually—and it's nighttime and he can see all the fires just burning up the mountains. He was just amazed by how much light it put out and how you could watch it.

It's a natural part, certainly, of California and most other places too, as well. It's hard to do that now, you have people that move from the city to a country area that want it to look natural. And they think natural means not cutting anything. But it's not natural to build a 3000 square foot home in the middle of the woods either. But they don't look at it that way, they wanted to look like, like it is a wildland area—and don't really think much about what fire could really do. They don't look at it that way. I see that a lot in this area, you know, people coming from the city. They're not sure how to take the brush away and make it fire safe without having it looked bad. Where it's just denuded of everything. But there's certainly a way to do it—it still looks like a park—which is really what it probably should look like. You're much safer in a park from fire than you would be, just out in the woods.

Hannah <00:31:22> When have you felt the most proud of your actions on the fire line?

Youmans I think any time you can stop a fire from going somewhere, that's a good feeling. When you work really hard and even if it's for three or four hours, where you're working as hard as you can and you get a line around a fire and you contain it, it's a pretty good feeling to do. That's one thing that I liked about the jumpers, is that you could keep fires from getting big, that's the goal is to keep them from getting bigger. Even though, when you do that, the average public doesn't see the fire that didn't get big, they just see the fires that do get big. They don't see what you have prevented, you know, but that's just how it goes.

I've always felt good about that, about working really hard for several hours and controlling a fire because you're against the fire, in a sense, you're competing against nature and that's the elemental force of nature is that fire. You're competing against it in a sense, to keep it from destroying other things. I shouldn't use it the word to destroy because in many cases it's a purifying act, too. But there's, you know, the yin and yang of fire. But that's usually the most, I imagine if you are a structure firefighter and you're saving a house, you're saving some people—it's similar to that. It's a good feeling you're helping people.

Hannah <00:33:13> Any other good fires stand out in your mind? Any really fun ones?

Youmans Let me see, fun fires. I like to say all of them were fun, you know? That's not always true, though. I mean, there's times on fires where you're wishing it would end. I had kind of an experience—maybe my reputation—it seemed that I was on a lot of bad fires. Fires that were ugly fires, as you would say, that they took off or the jump spot was really bad. I seem to be on a lot of those fires. So maybe I had bad luck when it came to that. When you're on a fire somewhere and almost every fire you're on, somebody from some other place is saying, "This is the worst fire I've been on." And you're on all of them, you know, you start to think, "Well, maybe I shouldn't do this job, maybe I'm getting all this bad karma or something."

There're so many of them. There's one in Montana that we jumped, and we didn't think that was going to go—it was like '85, I think—and we jumped out of Missoula. We didn't think it was going to go very far, but the wind picked up—and the 1980s were, I think, were a very dry decade, generally speaking. It happened to be close to where this large area of bug killed trees were, so they were all dead (they had died a number of years earlier) and it got into that area and it just took off. We had to have more jumpers brought in.

Some of the guys that I was with, you know, we had a big jump list of people because it was a lot of activity out of there. So I took off and they were, you know—some of the guys from Redding were still on another planeload and they thought, "Oh great, he's gone, so now maybe we'll get a good fire to be on." Maybe an hour or two later, they get a fire call and they take off and they think they're going to another fire. They were just coming to our fire because we needed more jumpers. I went up to meet them—I actually came through the smoke, it was almost like some kind of Hollywood movie where the smoke is just engulfing everything—I walked through the smoke and there they are and of course they're going, "We figured it was probably you on this fire." You know, "We thought we had gotten away from you, but you sucked us in." So that was one of those fires that just went on and on and on and it was, you're trying to get a little bit of sleep when you catch a little area. And you're trying to get a little bit of sleep because you've been up for so long and then you'd wake up and some embers had gotten over and started a little fire and you've got to stamp those out. That would go on all night long, you're trying to get a minute or two of sleep here, but something was always happening, you were always on edge because something was blowing over and everything was so dry that any little ember that got over would eventually start getting bigger and bigger and bigger. So that was a fire that I remember pretty well, because we worked on it a long time.

Alaska, the fires are—sometimes they all go into one fire in a sense because it's the same kind of country, typically. But mostly up there, you remember because there's tons of mosquitoes and

sometimes, like I said, you're knee deep in a swamp and you're fighting a fire. It just almost seems ridiculous, that you're doing that. Sometimes—many of the villagers up are used for fires, so you do get a chance to work with them, a different culture. So that's kind of interesting, to see these little villages all scattered over this big huge area. It's like two and a half times the size of Texas. It's neat to meet those people and see what kind of culture they have. It's a different place, it's not very populated for its size and it's so massive.

It's kind of funny, they had a tradition up there where they wanted you to be on a fire call, as a jumper, six minutes—within six minutes of the call, your wheels should be up in the plane and you should be heading out to the fire. And so that's what we got, we had to hurry up and make sure we got that six minute getaway. What was funny was, it was such a big state, you'd get away in six minutes and then you'd fly for two and a half hours. It almost seemed—what's going to matter if it's eight minutes, you know what I mean? Eight minutes or nine minutes, I have a 2 1/2 hour flight to get out to the Seward Peninsula or something like that—it just seemed kind of funny. Alaska's kind of its own environment there.

And then, when I jumped out of Boise, we had that Great Basin area, Colorado, Utah, a lot of high desert, Nevada—and that's a whole different country too. So you get to see a whole different type of fire behavior, you know, there, as well. Sometimes—just in the desert you wonder why you're there sometimes. The sun—there's nothing, no cover, you're just trying to put some sagebrush fire out. It almost seems like, just let it burn. I think sometimes they do do that now. I think they're probably—we've learned so much more about using fire—I think we're better at letting some things burn and not letting others (and even using prescribed fire to lessen the danger). Again, that's an ongoing thing, you know—you never know. Lassen Park experienced that recently, where they let a fire go and it just—it got big and it impacted lots of communities, to risk-wise and things like that, health quality-wise. They could've done that 100 times and 99 times it would've worked, and this one time it got out and of course they get criticized. I'm not privy to all that information

but, it happens to anyone, it could happen very easily. It seems like it's just poor management, but a lot of time it's just really bad luck.

Hannah <00:39:16> Have I asked you yet where your favorite place to fight fire is?

Youmans No, my favorite place is probably California. It's probably the toughest place to fight fire, I think, overall. And I think it's—as far as the jumpers go—it's the toughest place; the jump country is the toughest place. Cave Junction was very tough, in Oregon, and before it closed; '81 was the last year that they had a base there. That's just surrounded by mostly, you know, really steep, rugged country.

California has so many things, I mean, you can go to Southern California and get that sort of, really erratic fire behavior with that Santa Ana winds, and it's kind of the low and high desert scrub country. You have big trees up in Northern California, lots of rocks, poison oak, extreme heat. So you have a lot of areas that are really challenging and scary in many cases. So that's probably my favorite. It's not the easiest place, but it's probably my favorite because it's really so beautiful and there's so many different types of fires that you can be on and so much different topography that—that's probably the most fun I've had, it is in California.

Hannah <00:40:41> As a jumper you do a lot of climbing and you also do a lot of felling. Both with chainsaws and cross cuts, right? Do you have any good stories about either climbing or felling, or trees in general?

Youmans Yeah, one. I think this was in '81, it was just two of us—jumped out of Winthrop, Washington, we went up there. It's a small base, it was—jumped down—it was in August, I think in '81. The two of us went on this fire. Very windy, managed to get in there, my jump partner thought he broke his ankles when he landed. We were both coming in backwards pretty good, jumping the old T10—the shoots are a little more maneuverable—and then the BLM has the square shoots, which would've been great up there in that wind. We got to the tree; it was a really healthy looking tree and it had a line down it and the fire in the bottom where it

got hit by lightning. And we couldn't tell, it looked like there was some smoke up there and some smoldering going on, but we thought, "Well, maybe it's out; it looks like it just went down." We don't see any smoke billowing out or anything, but you couldn't be sure. We had lined the bottom, it was a very small little area. We thought, "What are we going to do?" If we just think it's out and we leave, what if it starts back up? So we couldn't allow that to happen, so we ended up making it the decision to cut it down.

We had a crosscut and we were cutting it down and that pitch came out of that thing like it was shot out of a cannon. I'd never seen that before in a tree, it just didn't ooze out, it came squirting out. And we were both trying to—there's a certain rhythm you get, you don't want to work against each other—and it was kind of funny. It was a tough tree to get down and as we were going back and forth, each of us were kind of looking around at each other, like, "Why are you holding on to that thing, you're supposed to be—." We were kind of blaming the other guy for why it was so hard.

Once we got through it, and the pitch just came out, it was really something else. It was a good-sized tree—probably a good 150 feet tall—it was a big sized tree. It came down and we checked it and it wasn't on fire. I still feel bad about that. It's kind of interesting, we both felt bad that we killed the tree when we didn't have to. But we didn't have climbers and it was probably a good 50 feet up to the limbs. The plane had long since gone and it had a whole bunch of fires they were dropping to people on, these little fires. We just felt bad about it. We had to drop a tree down when it was a healthy tree, but sometimes you just can't take that risk, you don't know. And the last thing you want, in charge of a fire, is to have them call and say, "There's a re-burn; it started up again." That's a lot of egg in your face, but it's not very professional and it looks bad, so the last thing you want to do is that. So we erred on that side, you know, I'm not dragging it around with me—it's not a big thing—but I do feel bad in a sense because it was a healthy tree. You don't want to do that. I mean, the more you work outdoors, the more respect you have for nature and the more you don't want to, you know, randomly go

through and delete stuff laying around. Litter, just cut stuff you don't need to cut, I think.

That was—that's certainly one with a crosscut. Crosscut, it's easier to carry out with a pack, you know, you can just bend over—and it's a lighter than a chainsaw—but of course you can't really do much with brush. It's basically just for this one snag kind of a tree. So we didn't get the crosscuts as much because more times than not, you needed a chainsaw, and of course you have to lug that stuff out to. That's probably the most memorable one I had with a crosscut.

The chainsaw ones kind of all blend together, really as far as like what you—. I've cut down some big trees for helispots and things like that, but nothing really stands out that was, you know, dangerous in a sense that I felt like something bad was going to happen. More so with cross cuts, taking down a big dead snag where things might be falling down on your head. We had to build—it was very steep, so we had to build—probably out of bark and boughs of trees and other limbs that we got—we made almost like a bulwark that was probably about 12 feet high just so we could have an even ground for two of us to cut this thing down. It was a really old, dead tree—probably a few hundred years old—just a big guy. So that was memorable too, something like that, because before you even could start to cut the tree you had to spend a couple of hours trying to build a, you know, a platform in which to stand on and then constantly be looking up for stuff that would fall on your head, that was interesting.

Hannah <00:45:08> Any other good stories that you can think of?

Youmans Of course some stories I can't repeat, I think, some of that—which things happened, that I probably can't repeat for public consumption I'll say. I'm just trying to think of some that might stand out.

[Side conversation]

Sometimes, when you tell stories like this, from a particular, specific group of individuals that do a particular job, you know, it can get blown out of context. People aren't aware of certain

things; they tend to look at things in a different way and it sometimes seems worse than it really is. Every job has that sort of thing. If you're working in a prison, you could probably have some kind of humor that would be looked upon as being bad, but that's your way of dealing with the types of stress you have in that job. So there's some of that and just silly stories about people doing stuff that would be a lot of fun to tell if you are sitting down and sharing a couple of beers or something with somebody, but you're never sure how that's going to translate to the big screen, so to speak. I don't really think of any particular other fires; I'm sure there are that just jump out at me as having some sort of memorable—. I could, if I sat down, probably, and just started thinking through the years of different fires that definitely would pop up.

Hannah <00:48:20> Do you have any thoughts on just the changes that you've seen, either throughout your career, from your career to what you know of Smokejumping now?

Youmans In jumping in general?

Hannah Jumping in general or even fire in general.

Youmans Well, there's a lot more research into fire, certainly. I think people are even a little more aware of it because—maybe it has to do with climate change, or it seems like there are more hazardous years, I'll say, in fire—quicker, every couple of years. I remember a few years ago—that was a bad fire season—somebody said on the TV, "This is the worst fire—." It was like 2008 or '09, "It's the worst fire season since 2002." You know, which you'd think it would be 1952 or something you'd say. But in six years, you know, there's another huge destructive fire season? And those seem to be happening more often than not. So that's changed.

I think of the year-round ability of a lot of groups, particularly the jumpers. More professional stuff that they do, it's become a full-time job, a career, where before it was a career for only a few people. They really had to go back to the district and do other things like that, or move on to some other agency or whatnot. That's certainly changed.

I think people that are drawn to the job are probably pretty much the same types of people that we had. You like to be outside, you like to do things physical, you like a certain camaraderie with a small group of people, that's challenging, and you're doing something, I think, that most people look at as positive. You're doing a positive thing for a community or for people. So that's probably stayed the same, I think.

But hopefully we've learned more, scientifically, and how we apply ourselves—I think we have. I don't know if it will revert back—at some time when you forget all the sudden those things. I don't think so, it seems with how dangerous these fire seasons are, it seems like it's happening more often that they really can't afford to do that, that they really have to stay on top of how to use fire to help you, because it seems like there is more—.

It's not just in California, Texas, Florida and places that certainly have experienced fire, but are typically not known for those kinds of devastations that you see out in the West. So that's happening more and more. Politics change, but I think the jumpers, they're probably a little safer, too. They probably stress a little safety. I don't think that we didn't stress safety, but I think, just in general, of going to a fire and where you would drop the jumpers, as opposed to where they might think they were taking more risk before. Sometimes you learn over time, you know, it's better to do this, this way. If you're older jumper, you can always kid that they're not as macho as they used to be—. "Back in my day—." You can go back farther, people before me in the '50s or '60s, would probably say the same thing.

The equipment wasn't as good. Better equipment—so that increases your safety. I think there's more of that. That's probably it; I don't think it's radically different, really.

I used to think, when I was in Alaska on fire and they're using these of burlap sacks and spruce boughs, or we're flying an aircraft jumping these square parachutes, these crude wings down to a fire then, "What are we doing? We're not using any modern equipment, we're just taking a branch or a burlap sack full of wet moss and beating out a fire like they could have done

200 years ago." It's funny, the new technology that we have to get to the fire, but when we get there, we're using the same methods that they probably used a couple of centuries before—and they're just as effective. In most cases, that's a unique area. Nowadays, of course, you know, everybody wouldn't want to go back to not having a chainsaw or not having a bulldozer or fire retardant, but that's maybe a unique example. Yet, that sort of thing, I could say it's pretty similar, I think it—generally speaking, I don't think it's been a radical departure from what it was before. Same types of people drawn to it, same type of tactics almost, you know, but refined over the years, and obviously technology has improved with the tools that you used for fighting. Fire hasn't changed, I don't think; it's the same old guy.

Hannah

<00:54:05> Any other thoughts, this is all good stuff?

Youmans

It's funny, I mean, there are a lot of stories. Individual stories about people that probably are the most fun to talk about, but then again, you might not want to do that because you would be telling the story but you wouldn't have had permission by all these other people that might not want that story out there. Even if it's not a bad story, maybe, they might be embarrassed about it or whatnot. It, nowadays, with the internet, it's everywhere and you can't take it back, so it's a whole different ballgame then, as it would be in the past.

*End of interview.*

## Steve Zavala

### Hotshot Captain, Kings River Hotshots (Sierra National Forest, USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on May 1, 2014 in Prather, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah <00:03:21> So, do you want to share one of your favorite hotshot stories?

Zavala One of my favorite hotshot stories, going back to year 2000 when I was working on a hotshot crew from, well—let me start over, okay? I was on a hotshot crew and we were working with another region five hotshot crew, we're out of region in Arizona on the border of New Mexico. It was the Selez(??) Fire. And as far as the shift goes, it was the high 90s, low RHs—single-digits—and it was two superintendents going at it, you know, just old camaraderie because they came up together and they were pushing each other, pushing the crews. So we had a long shift of just cutting line.

I was on the saw at the time, but, yeah, it was one of the hardest shifts. It just beat us in, it was like, "Don't let them bump us." You know, camaraderie type from crews. But come to find out, after the story was said and done, the two superintendents had a little bet going on between each other, who would outlast who, because both crews had had a big turnover throughout the year. But yeah, it was definitely, you know, very hot, very hard-working shift.

I think we, you know, actually—one of those old shifts where you don't do too often anymore. Where you're digging line for an actual 12, 15 hours a day rather than taking little breaks. Air tankers doing drops, and it was one of those bark beetles—well, we have another name for them, but for other reasons I won't express that right now—but, yeah, those bark beetles were everywhere. I just remember retardant drops falling and they were stuck to us, just crawling all over us. The ground looked like it was alive from all the bark beetles that got hit with retardant. Yeah, that just adds to the stress of the fireline and getting into your shirts, in your back. I remember we had a gal on

the crew and they were all in her hair, up in her bun and literally three guys had to just stop and help pull them out of her hair so she could calm her down. But yeah, it was definitely one of the hardest shifts I've ever had.

Hannah <00:05:14> Just for the record, will you describe the bark beetles. Just because nobody else knows what bark beetles are—would you describe what they do and why they make things a little tougher?

Zavala Well they—the other little name we use for them is called "Mike Tyson" beetle, just because they're hard to kill, they bite and you can't feel them on you. So it's like, you're working, they're drawn into the heat so they smell smoke and they can come from miles away, from my understanding. They can pick it up within, I think they said out at 30 miles, they can pick that up and they can, you know, come to the smoke. Different areas, it gets where they're infested, you know, they respond differently and, you know, the population that's going to show up. Yeah, they're very intense, as far as aggressive, they bite, and it's not a little bite, it feels like, I can relate it to, maybe, a meat bee's bite. And it's just an irritation. It's just, when they keep biting you one after the other and somehow they find a little way to get up your pant leg, through the boots or down your shirt—and it's just, when you're already sweating and you've got dirt all over you and you're fighting this hot fire and, you know, you're digging hard line it's just like, now you have to stop and try and fight this off. And it's like, you can't ignore it because it's like down the middle of your back and it's just, you know, you start screaming, "Ahh, somebody help me." Or like, "Try and get this off of me." Yeah, so—.

Hannah <00:06:38> How about, can you describe what the fire was doing for that shift. Just the fire behavior and kind of what you are up against?

Zavala Yeah, so the fire behavior, it was pretty active. It was a moving fire so we were basically one foot in the black, flanking the fire. Fire was moving progressively throughout the day. Ships, well, fixed wings, were putting retardant drops just trying to knock the head down. And helicopters were keeping the flanks cold for us. So it was a pretty hot day, like I said, it was 96, 98 degrees and,

you know, the RH's were single digit. It's so it was, mixed ponderosa type—fuel type—so it wasn't, patches of brush just a mixed, but, you know, the cheat grass carrier down in there. So it was a pretty active moving fire and as far as flanking wise, no room for dozers. So it was all hand crews stuff. Just far from the road but we were actively working well with the ships and we were able to hold our own with one foot in the black.

Hannah <00:07:50> How do you perceive the role of fire in the environment?

Zavala Fire is a good thing, you know. A lot of people perceive fire as something that, you know, it's bad because there's been a lot of mishaps. But as far as its role, what it actually does out in the forest? You know, it does a lot of good. It does more good than bad. Media puts it out there that, you know, "This thing has charred, damaged so many acres." But, you know, if you come back and look in retrospect a year or two later and what it's actually done, it's helped regenerate a bunch of seeds and get that stuff established in the ground—nutrients, the soils. You know, it's just starting the process all over again, which is what every forest needs. You go back to history with Native Americans; they used to do that. That was their use for managing land and it works just fine. Now with the influence of urban interface, there's a lot more reason not to put fire on the ground and use it as a tool, but overall I think, you know, it's probably the best for the forest.

Hannah <00:09:05> How do you perceive the value of your work as a hotshot?

Zavala You know, that's kind of a tough question, but there's the glorified hotshot name. I guess everybody's got a lot of pride and honor in what we do, as far as carrying that title, wearing hotshot on your shirt. But, you know, a lot of people are thankful for what we do. We go to fires and, you know, whether it's in-region or out-of-region, we travel around the country quite a bit. But to myself it's a lot of camaraderie, a lot of teamwork and that's what I like working with. A little bit of an adrenaline rush; I may be an adrenaline junkie—somewhat of it. We know the risks, we train well for it, but as far as going out there and doing it for the pat on

the back or for helping people, kind of deal, we just go out there and do our job. That's what we're mainly out there for. Yeah, we're hotshots and we're just another type of firefighting resource.

Hannah <00:10:10> Do you have another story that you can think of?

Zavala What would be a good one here. What was the other one I had?

Oh, it was a Rodeo-Chediski Fire; 2001; Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona. I was working—I was a lead saw at the time also. We were attempting to fire out a road and we knew that the fire had a lot of force and it was coming for us. Well, not coming for us, I take that back, it was moving towards us. But yeah, we attempted to fire out the road; we had good safety zones on each side of the road (or meadows, excuse me). So we tried lighting the road off. We had everybody establish the hold and the supt's truck was out ahead, and he had firers just staying out in front of him.

We thought we had plenty of time and, before we knew it, the fire was moving a lot faster. And, if I could describe the sound—because it was within my first five years, it was like one that just stays in memory—but if I could describe the sound, it would be like standing five feet away from, maybe, a freight train as it's going by, you know, at full speed. Or I've had a jet fly over, you know, and F-16 just fly over *low* and while you're standing there and it just shakes everything and it's just, you hear this rumble and a roar. You feel the intensity. Your hair starts to tingle and stand up. That was the feeling. So, I remember looking back and just seeing ember wash. The winds were blowing across the road and, from one minute to the next, the winds were more of a switch—where the fire intensity was actually drawing more air into itself; it was calling for more oxygen.

So smoke was laying over the road but then started drafting back into itself. I do remember that and I remember looking back and seeing us all spread out as the guys were still firing out ahead of us and looking back and saying, to myself, "I think it's time for us to pull out." You know, RTO, and as I turned back to look, my squad leader looked back at me, at the same moment—and I just

remember—we pointed at each other and we were like in agreement, and we just called for RTO (which is a reverse tool order). For everyone to turn back and head back to our safety zone.

We established our safety zones, within a, you know, a good distance; we time them so we can make them in a feasible time if we had to get out, if things went gunny sack or worst-case scenario. So that was definitely mitigated before and it made us feel safe. But at the same time, this fire was—I believe it they said it was a half a mile head of fire. It was ripping through ponderosa pine and I just remember seeing embers starting to fly across and we're sitting there, literally starting to run out of there, and it was probably, maybe 50 yards at the most that we had to get back, but it just made that 50 yards feel like 500 yards. Because it got so hot, embers flying.

We get back to the safety zone and everything is fine, but were sitting there—it was midafternoon about 3 o'clock—but just from the size of the flames, 200-foot flames coming off of it and the wall of fire that was coming towards the road, the whole sky turned dark and it just felt we were at night. And we just watched this fire run past the road, watched it move up and go over a ridge beyond us, and just keep going. It was just like "Well, we gave it a shot fellas. We'll try again later." But yeah, that's one of the memories that sticks in my head there, as far as trying to fire a road and just hearing that, the old saying, "the freight train coming."

Hannah <00:14:02> That's a great story. How about, do you have any fun stories about the camaraderie or, you know, the antics that you do as a hotshot, coming up through the ranks, just to keep morale up. Downtime and spike camp or, you know, something like that?

Zavala Some of the antics, some of the stuff that's kept, I think, throughout the years. I know some of the things that I've held onto—one of them being just sitting in camp and to just sharing stories with folks. Or spiked out for a couple of days and it's halfway through the season. Everybody's stuck eating MRE's, so it's kind of like the same old deal and it's like, you know, for us,

some of the guys carry canned food so it's like, spam and such (which I know I've a lot of people carry) but, yeah, just camaraderie, sharing.

They've got, what would you call it? Lemon base and orange base powder drinks that you can add to water to give yourself flavor. So you know, you just get creative, start making recipes. So you start pouring that on a can of spam as it's heating up. You add the little Tabasco's that they give you from MRE's. The boxes of MRE's is another one is just the same stuff, so what I've done with the folks is, as a leader, just to change it up a because it's the same guys getting stuck with the same meal every day for three days consecutive. So just do a blind grab, so all rip everything out, just throw the bags on the floor so nobody can see it and let the guys free for all scramble it and, you know, just good fun. That way you see who gets stuck with—like the omelet—you know, kind of deal. So it's not the same person all the time. But we end up trading stuff either way but just to keep the camaraderie going, keep the crews cohesion up. Some of the other things is like—. I had one, I just lost it, sorry. Come back to it.

Hannah <00:16:10> Do you have any stories about fiber tape baseballs with other crews, or stuff like that?

Zavala Oh yeah, I can remember—I think it was the East Basin Fire a few years back, 2008 I want to say. You know, fiber tape a ball, just to get a piece of cardboard, a piece of paper, anything, you just wrap fiber tape around it. You know, the fire is doing what it's doing—we can do nothing, so were in a holding pattern—just to pass time. So playing stick ball. Set up some tape and use that and maybe find a stick, a piece of oak or a hard limb that you can use as a bat and using that to just play stickball. You're hitting the ball. Set up to boundaries—well, actually three boundaries, one being the pitcher. The ball has to pass the pitcher by air or it's an automatic out. The second line boundary would be a base hit and you have folks spread out just to catch the ball, so it's an automatic out. And then the third line and, of course it would be, a home run. Then, like I said, you just count ghost runners. It you just count how many people are on base and then it goes off of

that. But yeah, that is definitely something fun to do, I've done that—. I remember going back east, like—we've always done that, so it's good to find another crew that wants to do that. You go into it, "Yeah, let's challenge these guys, they're not ballplayers, yeah, will beat them." And then they and up a whopping us five games in a row. So, it's something to laugh about.

Hannah <00:17:40> That's great, how about—is there an example of a time you felt particularly proud of your accomplishments on the fire line?

Zavala I guess I'd answer that, as just like every time I come off the line I'm proud. Just, one being, you know, where I'm at knowing that we pulled everybody off of the line safe and we gave it all we got, whether we accomplished our goal or not for the day. I think every time I attack something, you know, we're going indirect or we're going direct—everything, I think: I'm pretty proud of what I do. I'm happy doing my job. Yeah, I don't think—I've thought about where I'd be if I weren't fighting fire and I don't think I would be as happy as I am today. I love what I do.

Hannah <00:18:49> Can you describe a time when you used unusual fireline tactics or, it even MIST tactics, where you had a classic kind of fire? Or tactics that you've never tried before?

Zavala Let's see, for tactic wise, I think one of, maybe, that was not uncommon but when I could think back—2003 in Southern California and I was on an engine at the time and I remember, I was with my captain, who was a strike team leader. So was in a strike team leader vehicle and the fire was running hard in the grass and you're, you know—on the Mexican border and I can't remember the name of the fire—but we were driving and we were literally firing rounds from the back of the truck to just try and catch up with the fire and get this fire to start pulling in on itself. I think I've done that a few other times, I just can't remember them all, but I know I've done it and it's—kind of that borderline safety deal, whether, you know, what you're doing is completely safe or not, too. But sometimes if we can pull it off for that short time, it's not normal practice, but it's one of those things. If we can do this, we might be able to save the fire from

crossing the road or crossing a boundary and creating more havoc.

Hannah <00:20:20> Just for clarity, you always have safety in place, can you—?

Zavala Yeah, right, we always have safety in place, were not—we're not, it's not, like I said, normal practice. Not anything we trained to do, but if it is in place then, you know, definitely have somebody else where—it's not like we're driving and shooting. But it's like you're literally on the back of a truck, they drive and stop—it's not like they're going and I may be, like, "Yeah, keep going." Or—not cowboy-ing it at all. But it's just not normal practice, normally you're on, you know, you're on the ground doing that kind of deal. Yeah, so, fire moves a lot faster on the ground, so it's just trying to gain that edge and be a little bit more proactive about it.

Hannah <00:21:04> Any other good stories? Any classic hotshot stories?

Zavala I know I have a lot of them, they're just not popping up right now.

Hannah Would you like to look at my sheet?

Zavala Yeah.

<00:21:24> Extended shifts. I can remember an extended shift to being—I was on an engine; it was the first year on the engine. I was on the Los Padres, it was the Kirk Complex—the Kirk Fire—and we were doing 24 hour shifts. Well, on the way out we were—I believe it was called Devils Canyon—we were protecting some structures.

We drove out to the Highway 1 and it was a narrow road, you can get only, you know, engines—so many at a time were preparing structures for, you know, possible fire over run and one of the engines blew a tire. So it pretty much blocked the whole strike team in, after we were already doing a 24 hour shift. I think by the time we got it repaired and got out and got back into camp—because it was a long turnaround for the drive time—it was probably 30 hours or somewhat before we had

scheduled breakfast. What should have been at eight in the morning, but it was more like lunch, about 12 or one.

So I was supposed to go and bed down, get my rest—12 hours off the clock and be ready for the next morning shift. It didn't happen. I just couldn't go to sleep. It was hot, you're sitting out there in a tent and its, during the day, it's like one, there's flies everywhere—I can't just put a sweater over my head because it's so hot. Too, it's just like, your body's been up so long and it's like daytime, it's like, "How can I put myself to sleep?" So you start getting into that mode where you're like on the verge of turning into like insomnia or what would you call, what's the other word I'm looking for? Zombie mode, is what I'm looking for. So yeah, you're kind of caught up in that mix. So I remember, I just didn't know what else to do, so I ended up—so I ended up going on a five-mile run and you know, running out these roads at Fort Hunter Liggett. And I ran out five miles and came back to camp, took a shower, and after taking a shower I was able to relax. But yeah, I had to work some of it out of me, I guess. So some of it may have been some anxiety just being not able to rest and I was just restless from long shifts. But—it wasn't a hard shift, but it was a long shift. So you take the good with the bad, I guess.

Sometimes, it's the other way around, you have a long, hard working shift, like on a crew. But yeah, that's definitely one that stays in mind still. I look back now and I can't believe I did that back then, I was like, "What? Were you stupid or something?" You know, but yeah, you had that long shift and now you're going to go run five miles. But it worked out at the end, I got a little bit of rest.

Hannah <00:23:57> That's crazy. Wow. Any other thoughts, any other stories, this is all really good.

Zavala Let's see. I can remember another fire, this was back East. They sent us to North Carolina, late in the year—that's typically when their season starts. Flew us back to North Carolina. We got assigned to a fire and I was on a hotshot crew at the time. There was a whole different—kind of like a whole different world when you go back East from California, West Coast. Hardwoods, different types of forest—and firefighting tactics were completely

different. It for us, we like to keep them small as possible and, you know, put them out as soon as possible. Meaning, mopping up. You're going in, you're cooling everything off, and securing the perimeter so nothing can escape on you. Well, back East, their mentality is, just put line around it and leave smoke in there. It took a day or two to understand this, but the reason being is, they still have a lot of people that are pyro's. They go out and light fires purposely and it's a lot of locals. They know who they are, but they can't catch them in the act.

So we're attacking this fire—it's on a slope—and I'm sitting there, we're chinking line together with two folks, you know, and I can't remember what I was on—because I was on a saw at the time, but back East they use leaf blowers, you don't really need a saw. So I think I was on the leaf blower and the guy behind me was on, I think he was on a scrape or something. And I just remember, we were talking to each other and I don't know, we heard something. We look up on the hill and here comes this tire out of the fire—the smoke—just bouncing. It rolls past us and keeps rolling down into the green below us and you know, the drainage is not that steep over there, but it was like, it started a fire below us and were like, "Did you guys see that?" "Whoa, what just happened?"

So we send some folks down and started attacking it, you know? It got—I don't remember—it was under an acre in size but it was so dry it started picking up. The case was, after this was done, that locals, they still ride around out there while you're chinking in line, trying to secure this fire. They lit fire from the top of the hill—they know all these roads, these back roads—so they were on a quad, someone put gasoline in a tire and lit it on fire and then sent it down the hill.

So they sent that down between us. It was something different, kind of eye-opener and crazy, but going back to what I said at the beginning, they don't like to put them completely out, they want to leave smoke in the air. That way the locals still think that there still fire so they don't keep setting more and more. But it was kind of nice not having to mop up.

Hannah <00:27:13> Will you talk, just briefly, I've heard that lighting, burning tires, rolling them downhill is a technique for arson in Kentucky, in particular, and it makes me think of Krs Evans, who was the Plumas Hotshots— who got hit by a tree on an eastern fire. Give your thoughts on people intentionally setting fire and the impact on firefighters, as far as exposure and its risk and things like that?

Zavala Yeah, fire of its own, you know— natural caused is one thing, but when there's people out there that are lighting fires intentionally for their own reasons— whether it's a personal tweak that they get or, you know, they're upset at an agency as a whole, the government, or whatever it is—. You know, I don't think they're taking into thought what they're actually doing, what the potential outcome is. I think they just look— they just want to light fire and take a look at it for that reason.

The outcome, yeah, we've had plenty of fires that people have gotten killed on. I can think back to the Esperanza. They caught the guy that lit the fire but, I mean, five firefighters lost their lives to that. Not just the firefighters, you know, there're repercussions to families. How many people, you know— their family, they were married, they had kids, loved ones or friends and then, that's the immediate and then, as a whole, it really does touch everybody as far as firefighting community goes.

We look at it as a tight niche with the, you know, hotshots. We've always had that saying, "The brotherhood." So, you know, it's firefighters regardless of whether you're a hotshot or not. You're Forest Service firefighter, CalFire— we're all doing the same thing out there. And, you know, whether you're wearing a blue shirt, a green shirt, it doesn't matter what color a hard hat is. We're all out there doing the same job and, you know, all the differences aside— whether it's a jurisdictional, you know, invisible line— we all want the same thing. That is for everyone to come home safe. You know, nobody wants to go on the hill with 20 and come back with 19. That's my thoughts on that.

Hannah <00:29:32> Thank you. We've gone almost a half hour. Are you feeling it?

Zavala                    It's up to you, I mean, if you've got what you need.

Hannah                Yeah, I definitely do unless you have any other good stories you want to share? This is all been really great.

Zavala                    This is actually triggering a bunch of things if I look at it. Is there something you'd like else? Like I could try, I'm just trying to think of something you'd want, more over an actual story to hit on.

Hannah                The ideal story for me is one that describes what the fire is doing and what the objectives were and that kind of thing. So if there's anything that kind of fits that, that you'd be able to describe —.

Zavala                    Ideal fire meaning?

Hannah                I'm sorry, the ideal story would be just any type of fire. If you could describe what it's doing, what you were doing, and that kind of stuff.

Zavala                    Well, something I could — like a recent fire that's fresh in my mind. Last year, here on our district, we had the Aspen Fire here on the Sierra National Forest. We had monsoons come through and I think within one day we had, I think it was 18 strikes from one afternoon. The Aspen Fire was in the San Joaquin River drainage. We know already that that is a bad area. We had past fire issues — the Big Creek Fire that was back in the, I believe '94 or '92 but —. In the back of my head — we were chasing these other little lightning fires, just small type five, you know, eighth of an acre sized fires — but I knew sooner or later, being that it was our backyard, we were going to have to address these fires some time.

So the next morning that became our task. Just knowing where it's at, in the back of my head, it's not good overall — just on its location, the access — and just knowing what the wind does up that canyon. Normal diurnal winds, your up canyon flow from the heating of the valley, you know, vice a versa, the cooling from the night.

So we went down, flew in—it was myself with my superintendent, who was the acting ICT3 at the time—tried making access, you know. Another crew captain flew in with us from the Forest. This fire was hard to get into, it was humid down in there, at the river bottom. We found access in after fighting it and I think by the time we got to the fire—we already knew that we were just going to try and take a look so we could go back with some ammo and be able to say, "Look, this is where we got to—it's poor access." You know, you look at the 10s and 18s, you know, broken ground, in country not seen in the daylight, and just terrain makes your escape routes very difficult. No adequate safety zones either.

The fire was probably 3 acres to 5 acres at this time. Just about 12 o'clock or so, 1 o'clock the ceiling lifted, the inversion lifted and—within a matter of 10 minutes—the fire just came alive. Air attack started calling out spots; it's spotting a quarter mile ahead of itself and by then we were working our way down the hill. We were going to have to back off and start looking at the big picture because there're no adequate roads, access was poor. So within that, I think that first, that second day shift—well it was the first shift on the fire but the second day the fire—yeah, it was well over 300 acres and it was just moving.

We ended up flying back out, trying to go back in and pick up where it had blown over a road already, and tried securing the slope over. But that was working through the night and it was first—initial attack type deal. By this time, the second shift came around, you know, daylight got on it. It got hot and dry again and the fire just kept pushing. But it had been—oh, what? At least 20 years since a fire had burned in there. So it was ready to do its thing again. But ideally, a month later we're still on the fire and were in mop up stages. Rehabbing the fire. But, even looking back to the question that was asked before, what is fire's role on the forest. It's a lot a good regardless, it may kill some trees, but overall it did a lot of good. Looking at all the reports that were done post fire. It did a lot of regeneration; it's really good for the forest, good for the ecosystem, and habitat too.

Hannah

Thank you.

*End of interview.*

## Andy Zink

### Hotshot Captain, Klamath Hotshots (Klamath National Forest; USDA)

Interviewed by Bethany Hannah on April 2, 2014 in Klamath River, CA for The Smokey Generation.

Hannah                    Okay. So basically the purpose is to get stories. Just cool hotshot stories, but I also want to ask a few questions maybe at the end about how you view fire in the environment. So any stories that talk about when you've seen fire just written totally wrecked things or maybe how many times have you been on the line where it's like, "This fire is only doing good." So things like that. So do you have any stories that come to mind at all?

Zink                        Stories that totally wrecked things?

Hannah                    Just any best shift ever kind of stories.

Zink                        Best shift ever—. We had a lot of fun when we went to Oregon. It was after Veale and me and Brett went back to the crew for just for a little short piece and we took them to Oregon. Late-season—like October, September—late October probably. And we were going to do some—we were holding line a piece on the ridge, getting a couple of spots—we got all those corralled. We were starting to get everything done, and it was getting towards the middle of the night, and they asked us to come over and burn a ridge piece down from the top down to the road. Because fire had gotten down into the draw below that. And it was one of those where we all got out of the trucks, we all got our briefings, and a short time later, there were a few more on the hill little bit further, and now the fire has made it to the very bottom and wants to come up out of there.

The rest of the crews up above us are burning and we have them hold up. Some of them are supposed to go back to the trucks and some of them are supposed to come down the line with us. It ended up all of them coming down the line. But it was really late-season Oregon, single digit RHs, and it came up out of it bottom and just nuked over everything and cleaned it up. Just moonscaped it. It was severely black. And we walked out down

through the bottom and left our trucks at the top. And that was basically the night. It just—when it came across us, we were on the ridgeline and it was just in the canopy the whole time. Never touched the ground. And it ripped right up over the top of us.

Hannah How big a flame lengths do you think it was?

Zink It was in the middle of the night, but we were in 150 foot tall timber and it was easily that high flame lengths—and it never touch the ground, really it just came up out of the bottom and it took a really long time for that ground fire to catch up to what was in the crowns. Yeah.

Hannah What's your position, just for the camera?

Zink Foreman for the hotshot crew.

Hannah How many years have you been a hotshot?

Zink This'll be my fourth season as a foreman and total being a hotshot is somewhere around seven or eight years.

Hannah Do remember the name of that fire?

Zink No, I don't think I do.

Hannah I know they'll blur together don't they?

Zink Yeah.

Hannah What about your personal reason for liking hotshotting, why are you still in your job?

Zink I started on an engine here on the Forest and I didn't know hotshots existed. It was something to get me out of the house and I didn't want to go to school—I had just a high school education. So I got into the Forest Service because my parents knew people and pretty much got me the job. I didn't know hotshotting existed until we went to one of the big campaign fires; it was going on for a long time and we'd see these hotshots out there—we'd been mopping up for like four or five days straight—there was a big piece that blew up and at the end of it—I remember it was all said and done—and they went in there and got it. And it's like,

okay, tomorrow the engines can go in there and mop it up. And these guys come out of there and it's like, that's where I want to be. That's where I want to go. And it's—it's lost a little bit of its glamour from that, but still, it's still really fun, it's still where I want to be. It's still—it's still something I like doing.

Hannah How many states? If you would give an estimate of where you fought fire, where would it be?

Zink Anything in the Western United States and Minnesota and Alaska. Haven't been to Hawaii yet, haven't been to the southern states—Tennessee and all that, and all that stuff. But anything in the Western United States.

Hannah Where is your favorite place?

Zink Um, I really liked Colorado. When we're there, I had a whole lot of fun there. Alaska was a lot of fun there also, we just didn't—I don't know, I like having my trucks, I like being with the buggies, being around the vehicles because they are a huge support system for us. And Alaska didn't have that for us. We probably ate a lot better because they fly us in fresh food boxes and stuff in Alaska, but I like having our trucks around with us.

Hannah Talk to me about the fires in Alaska. What—how are they different from your perspective?

Zink It's usually further out. Usually, we're out away from everything. It's a lot different from fires in—around urban interface, and things like that—that you can get sucked into doing structure protection and things. The ones in Alaska, you can just go out there and you move your stuff every few days and you don't ever really go back to the—you just patrol that piece of the fire and there's not a whole lot of mop-up. I'm not a big fan of it. So, it's nice not to do mop-up, you just kind of pull the edge and it goes out. You don't see the fire behavior like you normally do in other states—it's Alaska, it usually burns really hot or doesn't burn it all. So that's when we usually do a lot of our catching it. So once it lays down we just go around and catch it. So usually by the time we get there, it's like that. It's a big camping trip basically.

Hannah Do you have any stories that you want to share about like close calls or “oh shit” moments? Anything stand out there?

Zink We had a few—the one earlier in Oregon—that was a pretty big eye-opener. And if the fire had been lower to the ground, or if we had had different winds and stuff, it would've been a lot different scenario. And it just worked out that we were able to be right there when it was happening.

There's been several accidents—well, not accidents but close calls—with trees and stuff. Once you're out there for so long, it's not if you're can have one, it's when. We did have a tree come down way up the fire—you just can't account for them all. When it came down, it broke into a couple of pieces. And it ran right next to people and it was a lucky thing I was on kind of a little rock ridge. It ran down, it funneled right down the draw and I wasn't there but five seconds before that—I was there because I was working my way up to the top the ridge.

And, we had another one cutting trees where lightning had struck the top of it years prior and burnt the top off and that it was just a bunch of limbs sticking out and burnt off at the bottom and then—it rolled over in all limbs were supporting with it. And so I was all right, we went to cut this and get it down on the ground. And we put a couple of drops from the big K-Max and Vertol and it didn't move. So it was, “Okay, we'll cut a little bit here. Okay, well that's pinching me. Let's try something different.” Go to the other side, “Okay, it's starting to open up and it opened up far enough that when it finally did cut all the way through, it pinched my bar right there.

Hannah It pinched your bar even though the kerf was opening?

Zink Yeah. As it was, like—as soon as it opened up it was, but it was, I don't know it was opening and once I cut all the way through, it slid down and pinched it. Not like, not like the kerf closed on it but that it slid down and caught on it and I just couldn't push my chainsaw to the ground and I got out from underneath it and ran across from there. Luckily, I didn't have my pack on, so I was moving pretty quick. But the thing came and toppled right over

where my chainsaw was. But when I push my chainsaw down to the ground, there was a big root on one side and a big rock on the other and it rolled right over the top of it didn't touch it.

Hannah That's an 'oh shit' moment. [laughing]

Zink Yeah, it was pretty eye-opening right there. And it was like, "Okay, get out of the way really quick." And the guy that was in charge of me just quit chewing, and it was like, "alright." We get out of there and I pulled my can of chew out take a big old dip—and he'd been three months without chewing and was doing really good—and he was like, "Okay, now I need one." And I was like, "Alright, here you go."

Hannah That's a good one, um. How about—talk to me about the set-up of a hotshot crew.

Zink The ones I've all worked on are all one superintendent at the top, with two captains, two squad bosses, and then a number of senior firefighters down below, and then older members of the crew, and then it's fillers on down.

Hannah And then as far as line order, talk to me at a little bit about the line order—because you are a captain, you've been a sawyer, and I'm assuming you been a tool as well.

Zink So, when I first started out, I started out in the back. My first year was—I was in the back of the line. I ran what we call a monkey paw, which was just a rake, and ran a regular tool—just a grubbing tool—and went from there and later that season I moved up to the saw teams and was just a swamper. So basically whoever runs the chainsaw, I just moved the stuff they cut. One of the more physically demanding jobs of the trade there. And then sawyers, senior firefighters, that's really the transition from going to be from one of those working people to calling some shots and being in charge a little bit. But you also get to do all of the fun stuff still. And squad bosses take a little bit more of the crew aspect of that stuff away, and he got a step back and keep your head up and keep paying attention more, and the further up you get the more of that you get.

Hannah What do you consider the fun stuff?

Zink The fun stuff is actually being—being right there next to the people working hard with them, and the camaraderie that comes with that. Some of the stuff that takes away from that, is going out and scouting the line and not actually being able to cut line and move the debris with them, you're just kinda standing back, and it weighs on you a little bit because you think you're not doing a whole lot—but really you're watching out for people's safety and making sure they're doing things right and keeping things moving along.

Hannah Do you have any other fires that stand out in your mind?

Zink A lot of the fun ones that we've been on, there's usually something along there that made some fun. We went to Alaska one year and we spent—we started out on the LP and did a few days at their base and then it was like, all right, well, we spent three or four days doing that and then we went to Alaska. So it ends up being an extended shift, we were doing 21 days out in the wilderness of Alaska. And there wasn't a whole lot going on, we were making good progress, and every three days we would get a new food box. They would just sling stuff up and we would just keep going. So we were never in one place for very long; it was a lot of fun because we were moving along and seeing a lot a country.

They actually gave us a shotgun for bear protection, but they didn't give us anyone to operate it, so now we have their shotgun. We never did shoot it, we never got to do any fun stuff with it, but it was cool just to have the shotgun with us. We were pretty excited about that. The guy that I ran saw with was colorblind and he had a big old chunk of flagging stuck to his tool. To make fun of him we would rip the flagging off and chuck it into the woods. And he would have to go find it. There'd be multiple—. The Alaska trip was really fun. We had a couple of people come along with us that were really new to the crew and had never done it before and other people that had been on crews before that came with us. And we just had a lot of good people there. And there was enough downtime to have fun. And you'd

sit around and it was daylight all the time, so it wasn't like, "Okay it's dark we've got a go to bed." It's hard to go to bed because now it's daylight outside. Now we are just sitting around.

Hannah How big where the fires you are fighting up there?

Zink They were considerably large. We moved—we were up there for 10-15 days up in the woods, and we really didn't see anybody. We saw a couple of people the first day we got there—right where you are going to start here and go to here. After midway through the first day we never saw another crew for 10 days until we got tied in with somebody. Hundreds of thousands of acres up there. Pretty remote and not a whole lot of people telling you what to do, you just kind of went along there and you worked your edge and you kept going.

We went to Minnesota one year and it was fun because we got to do canoe training. Nobody went into the drink for the canoe training, but the instant we got out there on the water, you knew which team of people had been in a canoe before. It was really funny to watch the canoe training and the people who had never been in the water paddle, and their boats would just go in circles, they would just be weaving and then if you got a really good partner who worked with you, you were on line and you are out in front of everybody. Every morning it was—you would canoe out to wherever you're working and the biggest running joke was they had the steepest in the longest portage in the whole Boundary Water Wilderness—and we went out there and it took us five minutes. We just crushed it because there wasn't a whole lot of elevation gain out there. Not a whole lot of distance between the lakes, so it was just hopscotch between the lakes and paddle your canoe. It was a lot of fun.

Hannah How did the fires burn up there? Were you dealing with the blowdown?

Zink Yeah. There was a lot of blowdown there. It was a wind driven fire when we first showed up, and then after the first couple of days the wind stopped and there was just a lot of edge out there to go in and pick up. And it was really ratty and really scattered

and just a mess. It was just a lot of blowdown, a lot of time-consuming stuff, but there wasn't a whole lot of handline to put in—just the saw line was enormous. Immense.

Hannah When you say ratty, I know what you're talking about, but when you say ratty can you describe it?

Zink It really doesn't burn in a straight line. It's all over the place and it doesn't burn everything on the ground. There's a little piece here and a little piece there, and it's scattered out over a large area so you have to make sure you get everything picked up and get line around it—and make sure everything's out, make sure everything's contained within your line.

Hannah What do you see as the role of fire in the environment, from a hotshot perspective? You see a lot of fire and a lot of different landscapes, and fuel types, and that sort of thing. Is your perspective that—what is your perspective on how fire is playing a role in the environment?

Zink I don't know if I would call it a hotshot perspective, but a personal perspective, mine, I would just say that it's a natural piece of the environment. It needs to be there, it performs a role and it does great things in the right situation. Fire is a—I think it's a real important part of the ecosystem.

Hannah Is there—can you maybe tell me about a fire where, any fire where you were like, “This is doing good. Why are we here? You know, that kind of situation. What experiences led you to understanding that fire is a part of the environment?”

Zink As far as where it's doing really good things, I've been on a couple of them and some of them that get me, the best is—I've been on escaped controlled burns where we went out and it's okay on this side of the hillside, but once it jumps over to the other side, it's still not burning intensely and it's not destroying anything, it's doing all the same good over here and why can't it do the same good over here. So we go over there and pick that piece up and make sure it doesn't go any further than what we wanted—to what we confine it to, or tried to. Why do I think it's doing good things out there? The teachers and mentors who have

taught me all say it's a good thing and you can see the benefits of it when we go in there and do the rehab and the repair for the fire that we do—it's like already it's like new growth is coming up, it's done a lot of land clearance, there's not as much brush there, you can see a lot of the wildlife coming back into those areas, really relatively quickly. There's still smoke and there's still fire and there's still hot areas of the fire, and wildlife is already moving back into those areas and there's already new shoots of green coming up; I think it's a renewal of the environment out there.

Hannah                   What do you think people should know about fire? And that was a really good point that people think fire kills Bambi and you're saying that that they just move out of the way and then come back afterwards, essentially. If there is one message you could get to the public about fire, what would it be?

Zink                        It's a tool. It's a tool and if it's used right then it's a great tool to be used. And if it's not used correctly, then it can be like anything else—it's not going to do what you intended it to do. And also it's not something that is that easily controlled. You gotta to have a lot of things on your side, and you gotta do a lot of stuff to make it that way.

Hannah                   When if you felt the most proud of your actions on the fireline? That's a tough one. Sorry.

Zink                        Um, I think that the one thing that I really wanted to do in that particular instance is, I really wanted to be a crew boss and get my crew boss stuff signed off and we were on—it was on a fire on the Plumas and it was sections of this ridgeline that we picked out and it was like, “Alright, well.” I went and scouted it and came up with a plan and it was like, “alright, well, this crew's got this chunk, this crew's got this chunk, this one's got this one, this one, and this one.” And I was fully in charge of the crew and running my piece of it and the fire hasn't made it down to us so it's not our turn to light yet, and it's not our turn to hold anything yet. The piece above us—they're picking up spots and they were having a hard time picking it up—and we went up there and helped them out and picked up a small piece of slopover. And it was several days of getting everything going and by the end of it

we ended up catching it and it actually held on the ridgeline. We lost it over the edge a couple of times. We got to light our piece finally, and we did a lot of work for it. Stopping it right there was a pretty big piece of it. For me personally to be in charge of that piece of it and doing a lot of the planning part of it and then to be up there with the guys and nobody actually got hurt and nobody was really complaining that much—we were busy, we are having a fun time.

Hannah And the coolest or most fun part of being hotshot is—?

Zink Twenty other people are forced to hang out with you. [Laughing] It's not really a lonely position. Yeah, they get paid to hang out with you. It's not really about lonely in the position, you've always got 20 people. We eat together, we sleep, we travel around those trucks, and it's a big family. It's camaraderie, it's an extended family once you get to fires, you know all those people, you've talked to them for years, you've come up through the ranks with them. You see them quite often during the fire season and it's a big team aspect I love that part of it.

Hannah Any other stories? Classic Butters, classic hotshot stories?

Zink I don't know. We always have fun when we're out on fires and some of the most fun stuff we do is when we get down time and we come up with our own things to do—which isn't always the best, but it always makes for good stories.

For fire stories, we ran a small one right down here and it's like us and the dozer, local resources, IA-ing things. And, we were trying to pick up the bottom piece and the dozer is going to come up around and pick us up. And somebody told him that he could go down to the bottom of it, and he's more than 200 yards away from us and the dozer gets stuck. And you can just hear him down in the bottom cussing up a storm and just telling people how it is and over the radio—and he'd been in fire for a long time and knew all of these people personally and grew up with them—and he told everybody exactly what he thought and had to make a road to get out of there. He was just frustrated and mad and didn't really do a lot to save the fire or anything. It was

just one big old line way out and around. And I just remember it being a good fun fire.

There was a small deer that ran out of the fire and just ran into me and another guy who was on the line. And it was just tiny, it still had spots, and it was fuzzy when you felt it. It didn't have the course hair like a deer would. It was like, "Alright, we will get this thing back up on its feet." We will get pointed in the right direction, and send it on its way. And it had singed hair on one side, but it was like we got it out we got a moving. I don't know, we have a lot of fun when we're out there and most of it's during hard work situations and that's what we're — we have the least amount of photos from those, but it's hard work and it's fun, and that's what we usually end up talking about at the end of the day.

Hannah

Have I tortured you enough?

Zink

Yeah [laughs]

Hannah

Thank you. This is great stuff. So thank you.

*End of interview.*