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Interviewee: Charles “Butch” Farabee (BF)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

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TM: Today is Friday, June 26, 2020. This is Part 12 of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Charles “Butch” Farabee. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Butch. How are you today?

BF: Well, good, Tom. Thanks.

TM: Great. Butch, may we have your permission to record this interview over the phone?

BF: Yes. Yes, you may.

TM: Thank you very much. You know, last time we’d just started talking about the Grand Canyon National Park helicopter operations. Can you pick up that thread?

BF: Yeah, I can. But I think we need to backtrack for just a moment and tell you why what some of my marching orders were from the Superintendent.

TM: Great.

BF: That were relevant to the flying program at the park.

TM: And remind us who the Superintendent was at the time.

BF: Richard Marks. Dick Marks.

TM: Okay. And he was the one who brought you to Grand Canyon in the first place. Is that right?

BF: Well, basically, that’s true. In theory, it was a competition. My name was in with others to be considered. And I don’t know who else was on any kind of a list, if there was, in fact, a list. But I do know that he had told me, you know, it wasn’t like an order, but he did tell me before I got there that I needed to apply for this job that was coming up because he knew that the Assistant Chief Ranger Dick McLaren was retiring. So, as I said, it was a promotion. It was time to move. One of the things he wanted me to do once I got the job was that, um, he really wanted the Ranger, Ranger, Ranger, Ranger-type people. Rick Gale was the North Rim Unit Manager. However, he would use the helicopter to fly back and forth like it was a taxicab. And at that time, the park was just beginning to recognize its responsibilities in trying to curb noise intrusion into the park. So, Rick was— Most of his background was fire, although he had a real good skill set in other disciplines, as well, and is one of those Rangers in my time around the Park Service of however many years now, 60 years, I guess, that essentially should be on a pedestal, I suppose. So, Rick did have this propensity. His family lived on the South Rim. He lived on the North Rim, at least, in the summertime. He’d go back and forth, back and forth. And then also, coupled with— Talk about some abuse here, Dick

McLaren— We had a fire contract with a fixed-wing plane, a Cessna 206, I believe, out of Havasu City. It was a three-year contract. And each year there was an obligation, I think, of 200 hours to be flown and it was principally for fire.

TM: Okay. Like a lookout in the sky.

BF: Yeah. Correct. That's exactly right. You know, the Grand Canyon is so massive, particularly as it goes east to west or west to east. It's a long park in some ways. Then Lake Mead is right at the other end of it. There's always a need to deal with the folks both at Lake Mead and Glen Canyon, which is at the other, you know, the eastern end. But Dick had some suspicion. One, he wanted to curb the flying time of Rick Gale, and he wanted me to look into the fixed-wing time because as it turns out, the guy that I was replacing, Dick McLaren, was actually building up, getting a pilot's license by flying with the pilot, who was probably an instructor as well. So, there was probably some little hanky-panky going on there. But the truth is the park was obligated to 200 hours, so there was a need to get up and use the plane or lose that time.

TM: Right.

BF: You know, I'm not trying to justify anything. It's just that, you know, you could make a case either way on how the plane is being used. But anyway, Dick wanted me to check in on that. So, my very first year, and I have a pilot's license, although I may have told you about wrecking my airplane—

TM: Yes, you did.

BF: So, I'm not— I don't brag about being a great pilot. But I did have some sense as to what was necessary. Of course, I had a pretty good feeling for the helicopter use in Yosemite for almost 10 years. So, I talked to Rick about this. I got there in March. I still had the summer. It'd be the second summer for the fixed-wing fire contract of a three-year contract. So, you know, I talked to Rick about this. Rick is kind of intimidating, and I was his junior by a number of years. And I liked Rick, and he liked me, but still to cross swords with him would have been a little intimidating, I think. As luck would have it, Rick ends up transferring pretty quickly that summer and became the Chief Ranger of Santa Monica Mountains, I believe, at the time. So, I really didn't have deal with that, deal with Rick, but I did have to start, set some policy and some direction on how the ship was going to be used and, you know, to what degree and what sort of things it would be used for. And the park helicopter was used not only for fires, but it was also used for medical transports, for sling loading equipment for the pipeline, as well as getting some personnel back and forth from North Rim to South Rim. Not in a taxicab fashion, but for important meetings and sorts. Because people who lived on the North Rim, you know, they didn't shop in the South Rim. They would drive around, they would go to Page, they would go to Kanab for those kinds of things in the summertime or in the tourist season, anyway. So, I don't want to insinuate that everybody abused it. It's just that Dick wanted me to check on how it was being used. And then the fixed-wing, the 206, I went down and entered into a discussion and an agreement, not necessarily a written agreement, but an agreement with the tower at Grand Canyon Airport, which is pretty busy in the summertime.

I mean, it's not lots of big aircraft coming in particularly. It's just that there's a lot of sightseeing ships going out of both the helicopter operation as well as the fixed-wing tourist operation. So, it was a busy place, but because of my job in the park, I got to know these guys and talk to them, and we agreed that they would help me help the park with fire flights. So as the helicopter and— Not so much helicopter, but sightseeing aircraft would come in from Las Vegas, the pilots knew, based on conversation and probably some written stuff I generated with the owners of the Grand Canyon Airlines, particularly, that if they saw smoke, they would let the tower know. The tower would call me. So, all of the sudden, I've got all these fire lookouts flying into the park from Grand Canyon Airport. And generally, we would go out, get in the helicopter, and I say "we" collectively. I would do it occasionally, but others did, too. You know, we'd basically power up to a certain elevation or altitude and look to wherever the fire might be, and it might be way down to the west end of the park. And we might see it. We might not. But often we would see it, at which time we would go to a fire-fighting plan. So, we went from something like 200 hours, this is sort of

guessing now a little bit, but 200-hours guaranteed flying time per season with the fixed-wing down to probably less than a dozen hours.

Principally because, one, I wasn't getting a pilot's license, but two, we had the assistance of these other fixed-wing aircraft as they would fly to and from Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and back every day. And they were just great eyes in the sky, and the relationship was very good, and it was very beneficial. So, that was the second year of that particular contract. And the third year I was able to renegotiate in some fashion, and I frankly can't remember the nuances of all this, but you know, I got the contract reduced back down from 200 hours to something much more reasonable, like 50. And then, if necessary, we would then— There was a clause, I believe, that said that we could use the fixed-wing, assuming it was available, for a certain price after that 50-hour guarantee. So, the fixed-wing pilot was a nice guy. We had an apartment over the Albright Training Center for him. Young guy. I mean, he was younger than I was, and I was 38 or 39 at that point. He was probably even in his early 30s or perhaps even just 30 or so. But, you know, nice guy and was very helpful and very willing to do whatever we needed to do. So, the helicopter belonged to Grand Canyon Helicopters. We had a 24/7/365 contract with them. The park had this little heliport in the maintenance yard, which we talked about the last time. And the helicopter would be stored in one of the bays of what was then the maintenance facility.

TM: Was that a Bell JetRanger? What kind of—

BF: It was a 206, yes. Part of the time it was a LongRanger, as well.

TM: Which could seat two extra people? Is that right?

BF: Well, no. It was really— It was really a four-person helicopter. I'm trying to remember. Frankly, I don't remember ever having a stretcher on the outside, so I think we were able to— I think we went to a LongRanger where we actually could fit a stretcher in. You know, actually, that's a little fuzzy for me. But I do know certainly at the end of my time there, which was six years, that that helicopter had been formally approved by the State of Arizona by whoever approves these things as an air ambulance. Just like DPS had, the Department of Public Safety had. And that had some significance because that actually meant that we could transport, and Grand Canyon Helicopters could charge for insurance purposes, which I'll get into maybe in a few moments, but the ship, at the time, was the standard GCH orange-and-white, if I'm not mistaken, coloration. And that went on for— That was like that for about three years. And, of course, you know, this entire time overlaid with this, sort of, this umbrella concern about too much flying by the tour industry. They're being intrusive and going into places that they shouldn't. And it wasn't all Grand Canyon helicopters. Papillion Helicopters was there, as well. There might have even been a third aviation helicopter, aviation concern there, although maybe short lived. But these guys, you know, trying to accommodate their passengers, who would want to see the park. And so they probably pushed the envelope a little bit. But in those days there really weren't any tighten restrictions, I mean, other than what the FAA would say in terms of horizontal and vertical distance above crowded areas. You know, like a viewpoint at Desert View, say, or something. They really only had to adhere to the FAA standards. But they're getting complaints, and part of that complaint was, of course, there was this helicopter going down to Phantom Ranch, and you know, maybe it shouldn't be there and, you know, what have you. Well, it turns out it's the park ship, and I'm hoping that, in hindsight, that we didn't abuse that because we would only be going down there for some sort of emergency or some real necessity. It wasn't like we're flying down there to see Phantom Ranch. So, after about three years of this, I went to the senior, you know, the executive at Tusayan that I worked with, whose name I don't remember, that how about you guys, meaning you the helicopter company, you GCH, paint this helicopter Park Service green and white like a patrol car. And that way we will differentiate between the park ship, even though, technically, you guys own it, and you guys as the tour operators. And they bought off on it hook, line, and sinker. Because they were getting lots of complaints, as well. I mean, everybody thought it was them violating, you know, flying into the North Rim or flying into Phantom or wherever it might have been. So, it was really a plus-plus for everybody. And we got this helicopter. It was mostly white but had a green stripe around it, if I recall properly. And it looked really nice. It really— They did a nice job on it. I don't know if they did the paint job internally or if they sent it off. I just know that, you know, the ship that we normally use probably was taken away for a week or two, and we had a substitute, which we had anyway. And next thing I know, I've got this brand-spanking

new paint job sitting on the heliport there in the Grand Canyon maintenance yard. And so, I mentioned a moment ago that on the contract we had with the helicopter, we had a clause. I think the contract also stipulated a second ship available with a backup pilot, too. We had one pilot who's the main pilot, whose name I've forgotten, the first main pilot I've forgotten. Very nice guy, very competent, really trusted him. You know, you always felt safe when you were in the ship. And over time in six years, I probably— I can't tell you how many hundreds of hours I flew over the park for one reason or another. So, you know, of course, in retrospect looking back, those are one of the being paid in sunset kinds of things that the Park Rangers, in this case me, to look back on and have some sense of fulfillment, I suppose. But we had a second ship available. And the pilots we had were all good. Two of the pilots that I remember, I mentioned the other day, one was Dave Roman. I couldn't remember his first name, but it's Dave Roman, who also flew for the Department of Public Safety out of Flagstaff, and he moonlighted with GCH. And he was highly competent and, you know, a very nice guy. And, of course, he was a peace officer, but his main job was flying DPS, whatever they do.

TM: So, Butch, I want to ask you, DPS, the Arizona Department of Public Safety, had a helicopter, and they would fly that on accident searches and sorts of things. Why was it that the park figured they wouldn't just use the DPS ship for that?

BF: Well, we had too many other administrative kinds of things.

TM: I see.

BF: That, you know, and we didn't need to be impinging on DPS.

TM: Okay. Because they were busy.

BF: Now, on rare occasion, they actually did come into the park to help us out for something. I can't think of good example right at the moment. But I do know that they did come into the park. But generally, because we had need for a full-time helicopter. There's a 75-mile flight time in between, you know, between Flag and South Rim. And our pilots, of course, they had an eight to five— Not so much, I mean, not strictly eight to five, but they had a set schedule. And we would try to do all the maintenance work in terms of, you know, sling-loading pipelines, not pipelines, pipes and related equipment onto the pipeline, which often was breaking. I mean, that was really a big thing that the park had to work with the helicopter.

TM: That's been a problem throughout the entire life of that pipe. Gee.

BF: Yeah. Well, and, of course, you've got these pipes laying over rough rocks. You've got subtle vibrations, minor earthquakes, and that sort of thing. And there's always— And, of course, the pipeline wasn't brand new when I got there. It was, you know, it had these big patches. And the guys that were working, the maintenance guys that were working on the pipeline principally were just super. I mean, they were terribly competent, terribly involved with their job or, you know, very willing to, sort of, like, 24/7 work if they, you know, as a rule. And I enjoyed working with several of these guys all the time. So, that sort of answers about DPS, I guess, right?

TM: But, well, there's one other question I've got. I'm not sure if it's still true today, but in the '90s and in the 2000s, the helicopter had a set flying time. And there was a pumpkin hour where, you know, half an hour after sunset that ship needed to be on the ground. Was that an operational requirement when you showed up at the park? Or do you know the history of how that started?

BF: Well, that was— I believe that's really, since it's a single engine in my day. Now, of course, they got another helicopter beyond that along the way. But in my day, it was single engine, and I think that was an FAA requirement. Except in emergencies, and there were times, which I did on several occasions, I went up at night with the pilot with the helicopter. One was, and I wasn't on it this time, but Ernie Thompson was. We had the ship, but only by agreement with the pilot, the ship flew into the North Rim. They're willing to do this, and they felt it was safe enough. And apparently it was safe and efficient enough. They

were able to do it just fine. You know, there was a heart attack where we need to have a doctor look at this guy right now. So, we did that.

One time I remember going up on a search. We had a big search for two Math Maddox graduate students from NAU who were terribly accomplished as long-distance hikers and Grand Canyon aficionados. I mean, they knew the park probably better than I ever would, but who had gotten waylaid timewise. And we ended up having a pretty massive search for them. As it turns out, they were fine. They had gotten rimrocked. But I went up one night, we just went up vertically, mostly, so that we could look into a certain canyon almost straight across from the South Rim to the North Rim and we probably ventured out into the middle of the Canyon as well to see if we could see any fire. And if we could see a fire, like a campfire, then we would establish where they were because we were pretty sure there was nobody else in that particular area. And if they had a fire going, then at least they were capable of taking care of themselves at that point. This was late in the fall. I think we were facing some weather challenges also. And we saw the fire. We put back down. We didn't need to go across. We had some sense as to pretty much exactly where we saw the fire and were able to get there right at first light the next morning, and so that's a hell of a long answer to your question. I guess I think it was an FAA—

TM: Well, the question about pumpkin time. When you guys would go up at night, I'm assuming that would be possibly with some sort of moon because I'm assuming, as well, there was no night-vision goggles at that time.

BF: Well, no. Mostly, you know, there isn't. You know, once you get up 100 feet, there aren't any obstructions hardly. Certainly on the South Rim. So, the pilots, you know, they fly so many flights, tour guides, and flying for the park. These guys were just incredibly talented and had the ability to read between the lines for—

TM: They're masters in their machines.

BF: Yeah, that's exactly right. That's a good way to phrase that. You know, frankly, I can't remember if there was any moonlight or not, Tom. I mentioned that Dave Roman is one of the pilots, although he was, sort of, a fill in when other pilots weren't available or, you know, for some reason they weren't available. I mentioned John Thybony, who unfortunately was killed in that mid-air collision in whenever it was. '86, I think. And then the other pilot, I can't remember the— actually, the park's main pilot for years. But the park's second main pilot was a guy by the name of Tom Caldwell.

TM: That's right.

BF: Who I couldn't remember last time either.

TM: I couldn't either.

BF: And Caldwell was, again, very talented, very efficient. He had a little rougher personality. It was a little harder to deal with him, and at one time, I actually got him taken off of the park's rotation, flying rotation.

TM: Tell me more.

BF: Well, I mean, just because of his personality and the way he was dealing with the people that were flying. And it was just hard to work with him at some point. Now, having said that, I did like Tom. Got along with him very well.

TM: He was a well-respected pilot.

BF: Yes, and he was a very good pilot. I'm not suggesting he wasn't. It was sort of personality driven.

TM: I see.

BF: Or attitude driven. But, you know, once I put my foot down with his boss— And I don't recall. I suspect I sat down and had a heart-to-heart talk with him as well. That part I don't remember. I do remember going to his supervisor and saying, "This isn't working for us." Of course, they wanted to keep us happy because this was a pretty lucrative contract for them, which I don't remember any—

TM: Oh, so, this would be— Grand Canyon Helicopters would have been his boss.

BF: Yes, correct. But you know, even though he didn't directly answer to me as a supervisor, he did answer to me with the way he conducted business in that helicopter. So, I went to his boss, and we got him taken out of the rotation. I mean, he wasn't fired or anything like that. But I'm sure that they slapped his hand. And then during this time, he and I had some conversations. I know that I laid out— I can remember one conversation, in particular. He came out to the park, and he didn't live very far anyway. He came out, and we sat down, and I said, you know, "Here's why this is going on, Tom, because of this and that and whatever." So, it wasn't too long, I think a month or two, couple months, he sort of was reinstated. And I don't know if it was because all was forgiven or if we were just in sort of a dire straits and we needed a pilot again or what. And sadly— And then after I left the park, and then he went and started flying, I think for another company out of Page, Arizona, was flying a lot of medevacs over Lake Powell, in that area. And then on one of those, as you probably recall, he was actually killed in a mid-air collision outside of the Flagstaff hospital at night.

TM: [*Quietly*] That's right.

BF: There were two ships coming in, and there was a miscommunication on the part of the two pilots, and one thought— Well, I guess I don't know what they thought, but I think the interpretation was that one was coming, and one was going, and somehow, they each believed they were both going in the same direction, or something to that effect.

TM: Right. We actually were in Flagstaff when that happened. And it was in the mid-afternoon. And one ship came in on the other ship's blind spot. They just didn't see each other. It was— Many details that I'm not sure of. But it was an absolute tragedy. There were no survivors. It was a very, very difficult time.

BF: I think there was a patient on board Tom's ship, maybe.

TM: That's correct. That's right.

BF: Coming in from Page, perhaps. So, everybody was killed. I think maybe five people were killed total. I'm just winging that one, but I believe that's right. So, anyway, Tom Caldwell was a very well-established, very well-respected pilot that we used a lot.

TM: Do you have any stories you can share about him besides what you've told us?

BF: Well, I know one time— And he was pretty cautious, but he also put us, and I say "us" I mean me often into some pretty hairy spots, like on the Kaibab Trail. We'd have somebody go down for some reason. Oh, I've got a great story I'll tell you in a second. But he'd put us down in some really hairy spot where he didn't have too much blade clearance either with the tail. Not so much with the overhead, but the tail, mostly. And you felt comfortable. I mean, at least I did that Tom's at the controls. He knows what he's doing. And I'm not a squeamish flyer anyway, but even so, I just trusted him.

There's probably other stories I just can't recall off the top of my head, but one that does come to mind, which I thought was kind of neat. We had a young guy, 19 or 20 years old, came out from the East. He went to Babbitt's Store there on the South Rim, and he bought a flashlight. So, now we have a car that's been sitting at Grand View Overlook for several days, all night for three or so days. Finally, the Ranger that was out there, who I think was Mark Maciha, who's now having the Rangers School at NAU, he breaks into the car because the car's not stolen and they run a 1028, which means a registration. They find this receipt from Babbitt's. They find a park brochure, and there's a circle around Horseshoe Mesa, which is

below Grand View. And there's probably a couple of caves, but one cave in particular is Cave of the Domes. And, so, okay, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to think, well, maybe this guy has gone into this cave.

So, one of my jobs was running the Search and Rescue Program. I still belong to the National Speleological Society. Caving was my big thing in life all through high school and much of college. So, we organize, and I go out to my staff—well, not my staff—the park staff, trying to think, okay, who would be good in a cave search or rescue because caves take a certain personality. Not everybody is suited to go into a little, tiny hole with rock on top of them, sort of thing. So, I put together a group of about six or seven people. And Lori Frederick was the paramedic who was also an interpreter whom I mentioned a couple times back, who also was a longtime caver. Still is. Mike Ebersole, who had been a caver in his earlier days. So, we put together this group of six or seven, and we get flown into the Cave of the Domes, and the Cave of the Domes is off the rim maybe 75 vertical feet. But you can get to it by trail. You don't need to rappel or anything. It's just a little social trail into it. So, we got off on the rim, and we went in. And even before Larry Van Slyke, who was the District Ranger for the inner district at the time, the inner Canyon at the time... so before he and I, and Larry was not real happy about caves. He was a terribly good climber in the Rocky Mountains, did lot of big wall rescues there. I think he was much more competent than myself, but he didn't like caves. So, he and I are going in at the end. It took a little, like, arm wrestling with him or arm twisting, I suspect, to get him to go with me.

So, they end up finding this guy almost before Larry and I get into the cave. And this poor guy's, like, three or four rooms in. His battery— His flashlight's broken. He's been inside the cave for, like, three days. He has zero concept of how much time has gone by. He tried to get himself out by just sort of feeling his way around the room to go into another hole to get into another room to go into the opening or, you know, close to the opening of the cave. He had gone so far as to urinate in his flashlight, empty flashlight. I mean, he was getting kind of desperate, right? So, they find him right off the bat. He's sitting there pretty calmly, apparently. But they find him not hurt, nothing. It's just a matter of escorting him out of the cave. By the time they've assessed this, Larry and I are now inside this third room in the Cave of the Domes. So, they escort this guy out, and Larry and I are on our way out. Larry goes ahead of me through the entrance, which is just a round hole. It's probably twice the size of a manhole cover. It's not real big.

TM: Okay. But it's not super small. It's not like a manhole cover.

BF: No, it's not super small, but you'd have to duck. So, Larry's out, and I'm the last person to get out, and it's sort of like, you know, go down with the ship. I felt responsible to be the last person to make sure everybody is out in front of me. Actually, I guess Larry was still with me, and we hear this roaring, a very noticeable roar. And only a couple things pop into your mind when you're in a cave and one of them, of course, is an earthquake.

TM: Bats.

BF: Well, bats are probably a good— I hadn't thought about that at this point, anyway. But nothing was moving, and so we thought, well, you know, we want to get out of this hole! Well, what's turned out is that Larry and I had sort of lollygagged too long, and somebody on top had gotten nervous. And so, Caldwell in the helicopter is sitting outside the entrance to this cave, and he's not more than— He probably doesn't have more than, let's say, 50 feet of blade clearance at that. Which is not too bad. I mean, that's probably not unsafe, particularly. But he's looking straight into this cave, and it would have been a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo had I been able to take a photo of—which I didn't. Of course, I didn't have a camera. But take a photo of him sitting out there in this— I think it was before the paint job, so it must have been an orange and white helicopter. And he's just, you know, holding it stable, trying to assess where are we, because I think the guys on top are getting nervous. And I don't know why we were so tardy in coming out, but we were. So, we exit the hole and as soon as he sees us, of course, he pulls off and goes back up and sets back down. We did a lot of getting on and off in a hot mode, which means that you did not turn off. You just kept it on control, and you were trained enough that you didn't get your head cut off when you got out of the ship and back and forth. We were very alert to that, of course. So, that's one of my favorite Tom Caldwell stories.

TM: Nice. So, concerned guy and excellent pilot but a little rough around the edges.

BF: Well, it's just, you know, he had a— It's hard to describe, I guess, Tom. It's just he was a little, I don't know, "rough around the edges," maybe that's adequate. But sometimes he was a little bit too irritated, a little too quick to judgment on some things. And it wasn't just my observation. I'm actually a pretty patient person. But others on the staff that worked with him would, on more than one occasion, come to me and sort of complain to me about his, as you say, rough-around-the-edges attitude. I'm not going to beat up on a dead guy, because I thought he was a super pilot. Nice guy.

TM: Yeah. And in his defense, I think today, and again, I could be wrong, that there's a pilot and there's a— I don't know what the right word is, like a command operator. There is somebody that is managing a ship and what the pilot's doing, and the team and what the team is doing. And that person's job is kind of an extra eyes for the helicopter pilot and everybody else. And I don't— You guys weren't doing that back then, were you?

BF: No. Well, we only had, mostly, a four-place ship.

TM: Right.

BF: Right. Well, I've got another story for you, too, with Caldwell.

TM: Yeah, go for it. Please.

BF: But to sort of complete the thought on—

TM: Well, that Tom, you know, he had a lot on his plate to think about, and he probably didn't— I mean, I'm just going way out on a limb here to say he probably didn't suffer fools well.

BF: Well, that's probably true. I mean, there's probably some truth to that. But it wasn't necessarily while he was flying, either. I mean, it could have been, you know, once they put the ship down or before he got in or dealing with him in an off-flying manner. Because there was a lot of overlap. I mean, we worked with these guys— Once they landed there, you know, they didn't just disappear. They were involved, and we'd make sure that they were involved in any search and rescue training that we might have, if they were available. You know, that sort of thing. So, it was a nice relationship. I said I had another Tom— I was trying to remember what it was.

TM: Oh, good.

BF: So, I think this guy was a 19-year-old boxer who jumped off of the lesser of the two big waterfalls in Supai Canyon. Is that Mooney?

TM: The lesser of the two. Mooney is the big one.

BF: Okay, so Havasu Falls then, which is about 100-foot high. Right?

TM: Ninety-nine.

BF: But this guy had been drinking. Now, this is not in the park anymore, right?

TM: No. This is in the— Well, what year was this? What year are we talking?

BF: Well, so, '76. No, no. I mean, '76 was when the expansion, enlargement—

TM: January of '75 was the Enlargement Act, so if it's after that, then it's in the Havasupai Reservation.

BF: Exactly. And so, this is about '84 or '85. And it's in Ghiglieri and Myers' book *Over the Edge*.

TM: Okay, *Death in Grand Canyon*.

BF: Yeah. So, it's not in the park. I'd been having some real trouble with the Sheriff's Office, which— And I don't know if that's a Pandora's box to open up or not, but I'm not going to open up too much right at this moment. But we were having trouble with providing all this airtime for the Sheriff's Office for things that the sheriffs really should have been paying the bill for. And I was getting irritated about this, and my relationship with the Sheriff at the time, Joe Richards, was pretty thin. But the deputy, the South Rim deputy at the time, and when I first got there, we had two resident deputies, Don Daniels and—I'll probably think of it later—another deputy who came to me, anyway. I'm in my office, and he rushes in and tells me that this guy has— They got a report out of Supai that this guy has jumped off the top of, what did we say, was it Havasu Falls?

TM: Yeah.

BF: Jumped off, didn't come up. So, he wanted me, you know, he needed a diver real quick is what it amounted to. And I'd been under a lot of waterfalls—not a lot, but probably half a dozen waterfalls in Yosemite and had probably more experience than anybody in the state for that sort of thing. He came to me real quick and said, "This is what we got." I said, "Okay, let's get the park ship rounded up." And he'd get the pilot there and that sort of thing, and I said, "I'll be up. Are you pretty sure that we can get the state..." Because the state would actually pay for search and rescue for the county. And I know there's a fund set up and some things that I probably would have to do a little research to figure out all the nuances to it. But the state would reimburse the county, or in this case, reimbursed the park for the use of this helicopter. Because I was trying to cut as many corners financially as I could for the park. That was part of my job, as well, to safeguard the money. So, he said, "Oh, yeah. No problem whatsoever." So, Tom is the pilot, and I'm now in my wet suit and I've got a tank—

TM: So, I'm going to back up a minute. This is going to be your personal wet suit because I'm assuming Grand Canyon National Park does not even own a scuba diving suit.

BF: Well, that's not totally true. Actually, we did. I actually started a dive program there.

TM: Oh, wow. Okay.

BF: But it was a government wetsuit that I'd brought from Yosemite. So, I'm in my wet suit and I've got a tank and weights and, you know, all the basics, all I needed. There's just myself, and there's no backup diver. But, it goes back to sometimes I was a little too cocky, probably. In this case, it was perfectly safe as far as I was concerned, and it turned out to be just fine. It wasn't particularly death defying or anything. So Tom takes the sheriff's deputy and I, and we sat down right on the little piece of land right next to the water's edge.

TM: At the base of the falls.

BF: Well, at the base of the pool of the fall. And I think we were able to get some people that might have been sitting around on that spot to get out of there so that we can land there. And we're banking on a condition that divers know. It's called the mammalian diving reflex where in cold water, as an example, that's the reason you occasionally read about some little boy who goes under the ice and half an hour later, they pull him up, and they revive him. So, we're sort of banking on this. That's what we're holding— that's what we're using as a real justification for this kind of exigent circumstance. So, I go flip-flopping out into the water as quick as I can. And pretty quickly, I mean, within a couple of minutes I find this guy and bring him up. Of course, he's dead. And what he had done, according to the witnesses, is that he had been drinking too much, and he had jumped off, thinking that he was Tarzan and was indestructible. And part way down, he sort of lays out and goes in on his back. Well, as soon as he hits, that knocks the air out of him, and he sucks in, and he's gone. So, I bring this guy out. So, there's the deputy and Tom and this deceased boxer and myself. We put this guy in a body bag, and the sheriff's deputy is the one that— I have

zero jurisdiction there. But the sheriff's deputy does. We both agree this guy is definitely dead. I mean, he's already turned blue and there's no question about him being dead. But we can't lift out of, off of this spot with four of us. So Tom flies the deputy up, and there's an emergency strip above Supai on the western edges of canyon where there's an emergency fuel reserve. And they would actually fly fixed-wings in there on occasion. It wasn't SOP [standard operating procedure], but it was a place that they could go occasionally.

TM: This is up on the rim outside of the canyon, so it's a 15-minute, 10-minute flight up there?

BF: Yeah, maybe 10. It's pretty fast once you get going. Maybe even less than that, probably. So, you know, the pilot drops the deputy off, comes back for me and—

TM: Now, wait a minute. The guy with jurisdiction leaves the body.

BF: Well, yes. That's right. We put the body into the helicopter, so there's three to go to the top. The deputy gets out. Tom flies back with the deceased in this body bag, sitting upright in the back seat, strapped in as if he's a passenger.

TM: So, all four of you are in this, or is it—

BF: No, not at this point. The deputy's on top.

TM: Oh. The deputy is on top, so it's you, Tom, and the body.

BF: Well, let me clarify what we're talking about here. Down at the bottom, I guess, basically, the deputy and I put this guy in the back seat. Tom's at the controls. We put this guy into the back seat, strap him in, and then the deputy, Tom, and the deceased fly to the top. The deputy gets out, and two people come back. I get in. There's three of us now. We fly to the top of the rim, and we pick up the fourth person. Does that make sense now?

TM: It makes sense, but I'm confused as to why you did that.

BF: Well, it's the weight. It was too heavy to get out.

TM: I see. So, once you strap the body in the ship, you just leave him there. You don't take him out at the airstrip at the top. So, you're simply shuttling the deputy out, shuttling you out, and you're done.

BF: Correct.

TM: Got it. Okay.

BF: Yeah. So then Tom flies the deceased and I back up to the top. We pick up the deputy, and then we fly back to the South Rim. Of course, we've called ahead, and it's late in the afternoon. It's even on a Sunday afternoon. So, you know, sort of the dangerous part—and people who are around SAR, Search and Rescue, are probably raising their eyebrows, perhaps—but if that helicopter goes down, and I'm in a neoprene wet suit, and there's a fire, I'm really toast, sort of almost literally. You do not want to be in a fire with a neoprene rubber suit around you.

TM: Yeah. So, by this time, the Nomex garments, the fire-retardant, fire-resistant garments, was that standard requirement to fly in?

BF: Oh, mostly, I think.

TM: The little jumpsuits, you know, kind of just step into things and zip them up in the front and— Okay.

BF: Yeah, most of that. But when I was in D.C., I wrote 95% of the aviation plan for the Park Service. And one of the things I inserted into it was from just practical experience, looking back was this particular incident where I knew that there were always exceptions to the rule. The rule might say you have to do this and this and this and whatever. But there's always some minor loophole that needs to be threaded, some little part of the needle that needs to be threaded, I guess. And I reflected back on that years later as to having to do that. Well, nothing happened, of course. But, you know, I wasn't real cavalier. I was a little nervous that if we were to go down that I was in real trouble if there was a fire.

TM: Yeah.

BF: So, I guess if we landed in the river—

TM: You'd be set! You would have been the only one alive.

BF: I would've been probably fine. So, we got the pilot up in the front right. And then the sheriff's deputy is on the front left. I'm rear left. And then there's this deceased guy sitting upright in his body bag, this black body bag. And it's one of those memories in my mind that probably will never go away. And it's not a bad memory. It's just that it's one of those unusual circumstances like, you know, where else could you do something like this, right?

TM: Yeah. Yeah.

BF: So, Tom was the pilot, and he was exceptionally qualified, exceptionally good, was able and interested and willing to do what we needed to do. He liked sort of pushing the envelope. He liked unusual things. I think the more mundane— He, one time, had a blue goo outhouse, you know, a temporary toilet on a line below the helicopter, and something happened, and he ended up having to jettison the outhouse into the park someplace.

TM: I heard something about that. It was down at Phantom Ranch and—

BF: Yeah, I think that between Phantom and the Rim.

TM: Dropped it on the Utah Flats or something like that.

BF: Well, that could be.

TM: I'm not sure. Okay.

BF: It wasn't like that happened every day. But there were these kinds of things that would crop up with so much frequency that—

TM: Right. Again, in his defense I can only imagine that flying the tour circuit day after day after day, anything out of that ordinary must have been wonderful.

BF: Oh, yeah. That's right. Tom was, like, the second— For a long time, we had the two main pilots, and they backed and forth in terms of days off and relieving one and that sort of thing. And Tom was one and then— I wish I could remember the other guy's name. Very nice person, easy to work with, terribly competent, just like Tom was.

TM: Not Roman?

BF: No. Dave was more of a fill in. And he wasn't any less competent. It's just that he was flying full time for DPS. So, I don't know. Maybe on a weekend or maybe on annual leave or, you know, for some reason, perhaps, the DPS helicopter was down. I guess I can't think of any good scenarios, but I suspect that— But he was up in the park, and his wife worked for the park at least for a long time while I was there. Jana was her name, I think. Jana Roman.

So, getting back to the helicopter in general, the North Rim, there was a heli spot there that— A couple of things. One, there were a couple of big ponderosas. I mean, big ones. These guys were four feet thick. I mean, these were big, mature pines that were sort of a hazard. But the park helicopter people have been flying and have been doing this fine, had been accepting it, had been navigating around and nobody— There weren't any wrecks, but I did go to the pilots, because even to me when I'd fly over it, I'd recognize that this really was a little too close for comfort. And, you know, I wasn't a helicopter pilot, but I did fly enough that I recognize that my job is to not only preserve the park and protect the resources, but I also needed to protect the staff and, you know, and try to account for emergencies. So, I saw this one big pine, and the guy that ran the fire operation sort of for the park but he was stationed on the North Rim was a guy by the name of Steve Pyne, and Steve is an internationally recognized fire historian with any number of books. He got one of these MacArthur Fellowships, he got \$250,000 for writing. You know, very good. Very talented. I think he's still a historian, like, a historian emeritus for Arizona State University. But in the summertime, he worked the fire crew on the North Rim, which, of course, occasionally we would use on the South Rim. So, it was a, sort of a park-wide fire team of about 7,8,9 guys, mostly men at the first, but eventually we got some women on there, too. And Steve was the crew boss, the crew supervisor. And he had a number of years experience. But his real expertise, of course, was as a historian. So I went to all these guys and said, "What do you think about this? Would you guys like to have this tree out of there, because it seems to be a hazard for me, as far as I'm concerned." They said, "Yeah, that would really be helpful. We would really like that." I went to Steve Pyne, and I said, "Steve, could you drop this tree? Let's don't tell anybody about this. Let's just drop it." And he said, "Okay, we can do that." Well, somehow it got back to the Assistant Superintendent Bruce Shaw. So, the tree is dropped. They buck it up, you know, they sort of make it disappear. The pilots are happier. I'm happier because it's safer for everybody involved. The Assistant Superintendent calls me and really gets on my case, really reams me out, not so much for having the tree dropped because he understood the rationale. He had some real field experience in his tenure, as well, but he didn't like the fact that I had told my fire supervisor, this Steve Pyne, not to tell— I might have even said specifically do not tell Bruce Shaw. Well, of course, Bruce Shaw found out about this, and I get reamed out. And, you know, nothing was ever put in my personnel jacket or anything like that, but I know that I've been chewed out.

TM: Right. I mean, in his defense, just playing this back and forth, do you really think that it would have been moving heaven and earth to get approval to get the tree, as a hazard tree, to get it removed?

BF: Well, I don't know. The truth is, you know, maybe he would have been— Maybe I could have gone through some official paperwork channels, and at least had it on paper that it was approved above my level. But I was not so used, well, I was pretty used to working autonomously in Yosemite.

TM: Ah, okay.

BF: I think I was just trusting my good judgment. You know, this seems like a logical thing to do, and it benefits everybody involved. We're talking about one yellow pine that in the great scheme of things is one of our things that we need to protect, but at the same time, I don't need to have a helicopter crash into it and kill four people. So, that's the way I was justifying it, and that's the way I did it. And that was fine. You know, I deserve probably getting chewed out, and maybe I should have gone a little more formal route. But I also knew that if it was already a danger and had been danger for a couple of years, why am I waiting around? I did not want to wake up some morning and find out that the ship had hit that thing.

TM: While the paperwork was in process to get the thing removed. Sure. Sure.

BF: I mean, that's the way I conducted my life, at least professionally, I suppose.

TM: Yeah, I mean, some things, it's just, you know, the sniff test of rationality. It's like, oh yeah, look. That's a hazard, Well, deal with it. Okay, fine. Done. Next? Move on. Except that these are park resources and, it's like, wait a minute, you know, those are entrusted for protection for the American public, and you can't just chop them down willy nilly.

BF: No. No, and you're 100% correct, but so am I in this case.

TM: Right. Yeah, yeah.

BF: I could justify it. Now, did I put it on paper? No. Did I get formal approval? No. But I was also responsible for the fire program in the park and the aviation program in the park and search and rescue and lots of people's lives. So, I guess I would have tried to make a case had I been really chastised for this that, you know, if you could trust me to run an operation where you got several hundred people, you can trust me to have a tree cut down if it's a hazard to life and limb.

TM: Right. And the park has a whole hazard tree program where they look for trees that are trouble or could potentially be trouble falling on buildings or on people or on cars.

BF: In this case, this pine was not in a place where the public even saw it because the ship landed at a spot on the North Rim where they might hear it. Maybe they might see it coming in. But they really didn't have any access.

TM: I mean, even in the employee housing area. If there are trees that are hazards, whether the public sees them or not, they get dealt with. Yeah.

BF: Yeah. When I teach at Northern Arizona University with the law enforcement Ranger, seasonal Ranger school, I actually bring that up as an example and talk about that for several minutes that— You know, I'm trying to challenge the 20 some young people in the audience that, you know, I think that the people who drop hazard trees in the campground are doing as much protection as you are, even though you've got a gun on. Because I'm trying to make them understand that, one, it's a team effort, and two, don't get so high and mighty just because you've got a badge and a gun. So, I guess with what's taking place around the country right now, that might have some relevancy. But I do use the hazard tree as an example. So, you know, I enjoyed working with the helicopter operation. Again, probably partially— Well, actually this is after I got divorced, I suppose, but I was still single parent. But there were a couple of times when I would be out there at the South Rim, putting together sling loads because there'd be a leak of the pipeline, and the several people that were normally doing this sort of thing were out of the park for whatever reason or weren't around. And if we're going to work on this pipeline and try to take care of this leak and take care of the emergency, which, you know, at the Grand Canyon, water is a big emergency.

So, if we're going to do it, I'm going to be up there, putting all this stuff together. Now, am I highly qualified? No. But have I watched it and had hands-on enough that I can do it fine? Yeah. So, I was a hands-on supervisor and tried to fill in wherever I could whenever I thought, you know, some common sense needed to be inserted here. And unfortunately, you know, that sort of brought over into my private life, my family life, as well. During the day when I was a single father, I could call one or two parents and say I'm going to be gone for a couple of hours. And my kids will be playing with their kids, anyway. You know, if I'm not back by suppertime, can you take them in? And we did that back and forth. That's one of the beauties of living in a small community like that.

TM: Yeah.

BF: Have I rambled too far on the—

TM: No.

BF: What would you like to know more about the helicopter?

TM: Well, you've given us a real good review of Tom and your operations with the machine. I think that's—

BF: Well, I did what I needed to do with the contracts. You know, I did the review that Dick wanted me to do. It made a lot of sense. It was necessary. My predecessor, bless his heart, rest his soul, really wasn't on top of that very well.

TM: So, let's back up a bit because this is interesting. You're the second person that's told me that they either came to the park— You came to the park under Marks' encouragement. This other individual was already at the park and Marks had a job for this person, wanted them to deal with a troubling individual in the park. And that person went out and did that. Dealt with it. It's almost as if Marks came to his position and there was trouble in a way, I wouldn't say all around, but there were some things that needed to be dealt with.

BF: Well, but there always are. I mean you've got to—

TM: Got it.

BF: When you got a staff of 200 people and a budget of however many millions of dollars and a 1,000 square acres or miles or whatever the Grand Canyon is.

TM: Yeah. A hundred thousand acres out there.

BF: Well, yeah. That's a lot of things, you know, balls to juggle.

TM: No, a million. I'm sorry. A million, 1.1 million. That's it. Thank you.

BF: You can't work with so many neighbors when you're dealing with two counties, a couple of different tribes, some strong personalities among all of those. As well as internally, you've got headaches and issues. You know that you're going to have things that have to be resolved or at least refined and improved upon. I was not privy to the way Dick got that job. I was not privy to some of his internal thinking. But, you know, he had a couple things he wanted me to deal with. And I dealt with them satisfactorily and apparently well enough that when I, at the end of about four years of my six-year time there, the Ranger division, the protection division actually was having some real budget crunching. At that point, I was actually the acting management assistant for Dick, for the park, but I was still the Assistant Chief Ranger, my title, but I was like acting management assistant.

TM: So, you were doing two jobs.

BF: Yeah, and the management assistant is a high-priced gopher, unseen, for the Superintendent's office, to deal with certain kinds of issues, and to develop a variety of projects, sort of project-oriented. I was also the public information guy for the park as the management assistant. So, at the end of four years with this budget crunch in the Ranger division, I was in a meeting with the Chief Ranger, the District Rangers, probably a couple of other players in there, and I said, "Why don't we abolish my job and we'll divvy up some of this. We'll take the money that you would be paying me for as the Assistant Chief Ranger, and that will probably defray the shortfall that we were facing, I think.

TM: And so, you would basically collect your salary under the acting management, acting assistant?

BF: Yeah, right. And Dick at that point, and he— You know, it wasn't like we did all this in a vacuum. I mean, Dick was part of the discussion. So, Dick asked me if I would be the full-time management assistant. In many ways, it was an honor. I mean, it was a feather in my cap. It wasn't what I really wanted to do as a career too long, but I enjoyed the challenge. I enjoyed the opportunity to be exposed to different people at different levels.

TM: Was that a straight across transfer for you?

BF: Yeah. And the guy who's placed I took, Bill Dickinson, had moved on become the Superintendent of Hawaii volcanoes. And he ultimately retired as the Superintendent at Lake Mead. And Bill and I had a nice

relationship before he moved, and then I would confer with him after he moved. So, I became the full-time management assistant. I said, "But, Dick, I would like to retain being the Fire Chief and the Search and Rescue officer."

TM: Oh, wow. Okay.

BF: Which, you know, you'd be hard pressed to find anybody else out there either, one, dumb enough to do that, or two, had the gall, maybe, to even suggest that, and Dick agreed. He liked the fact that I knew what I was doing from a SAR standpoint, and I was— Of all the people in the Park Service at that time, I had one of the most advanced levels of structural fire of anybody around, which in today's climate, I just would have been a rookie. But I made a point of studying it and going to schools while I was in Yosemite and getting people that work for me to go to these various schools. So, I really took structural fire seriously, as well. So, I was still the Fire Chief and the Search and Rescue officer.

TM: Wow. And search and rescue in Grand Canyon in the summer is a busy, busy deal.

BF: Yeah. But now, that doesn't mean that the SAR officer is looking over everybody's shoulder all the time. You know, I mean, I wasn't dispatching people right and left.

TM: So, you're not the SAR shift supervisor, but you're up above them then.

BF: Do that again now.

TM: I think of the position as the Search and Rescue shift supervisor. So that person is going to be sort of coordinating who's going to go out and do what. And for multiple events, that's the contact with the reporting party and sort of oversight. Again, I'm way out in left field here on a thin, little diving board.

BF: Now, I understand what you're saying, and I suspect that's the paradigm that they use lately. For the last 20 years perhaps.

TM: Yes, that's right.

BF: But that's not the way it was working in those days and during my time there for six years. The districts, you know, personalities within the districts would start managing a search or a rescue. And, you know, a lot of that was taken care of at a lower level.

TM: Got it.

BF: As the SAR officer, my responsibility was to see that we are taking this seriously, that we are doing something, that we do have the equipment, that I'm getting training for these people or, you know, orchestrating the training for them. So, that's what the SAR officer did. If it got up to be a big deal, then I would sort of act as a— On occasion, I would actually run the operation, like the mid-air collision, which I stepped in and took over. But, you know, for a day-to-day big search, we had enough talent in the park and probably they were doing a much better job than I was. You know, we would do things. It was just my job to make sure that it was being done and at a level I thought was acceptable. So, that's what I did. It wasn't like I dispatched and coordinated everybody doing all the search and rescue stuff. That's not the way it worked. But there were enough occasions where I could step out of my management assistant hat, put on my search and rescue hat, go do something, you know, lead a recovery, which I did a number of those while the management assistant, come back, do the paperwork or, at least do my end of the paperwork, and might even put out a press release. It was really kind of an interesting dynamic that I had in the position that I was doing. But Marks was very agreeable to doing this, and I think it came down to he trusted me. He just knew that I wasn't going to screw it up. I wasn't going to make him look bad, which is always something you want to consider as well. I always worked under the premise, not the premise but the, you know, the red-face test. If Walter Cronkite put a microphone in your face and asks you, "Well, Butch, how come you guys did this and that?" that you'd have a decent, logical explanation and/or a mea culpa kind of a thing, but you didn't dodge it. And I've always conducted my life with that red-face, Walter Cronkite-

microphone-into-my-face kind of thing. Not even in the back of my mind. Often it was in the front of my mind.

TM: Yeah, very much so. When you get up into that level, you've got to keep the Superintendent looking good. Otherwise, you're going to be looking for another job.

BF: Well, that too, but, you know, you want to do what's right. And this probably has absolutely no place in this thing, but my very favorite movie is *The Magnificent Seven*, 1960, and it's so black and white as to who the good guys are, who the bad guys are, you know. I may end up getting killed, but this is the right thing to do. And that's the way I conducted pretty much most of my professional and, hopefully, you know, personal life. And so Marks, I think— Of course, it's hard to tell with Dick. It was hard to tell really what he was talking about or thinking about. But only on a couple of occasions, maybe just two that I can really think of, did I ever get really crosswise with Dick, and one of them I don't think I had any guilt in. But he was pretty good to me. In fact, he was very good to me, actually. And I think he liked me personally. He liked me professionally. He respected me. I didn't let him down, as far as I can remember, or I believe.

TM: Nice. Good. You know, I have a bunch of questions going forward, but I think we've been at this now a little over an hour and 20 minutes. Maybe this is a good time to wrap up this part, and we will pick this up again.

BF: Okay.

TM: Is there anything else you want to bring in, or is this a good place to wrap this up?

BF: Well, you know that soon as you hang up, I'm going to think of stuff. But for the time being, you know, I can't—there's nothing off the top of my head.

TM: Great. Well, in that case, we will call this a wrap for Part 12 oral history interview with Butch Farabee. Today is the 26th of June, 2020. My name is Tom Martin. And Butch, thank you so very much.

BF: My pleasure.