

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Charles “Butch” Farabee (BF) Part 14

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Charles “Butch” Farabee recalls his experiences with several national parks and explains the use of short hauls and how it came to be useful in many rescue-related missions. He then discusses more rescue missions and his time training rescue teams and firefighters.

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TM: Today is June 30th, 2020. This is part fourteen of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Charles Butch Farabee. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon Butch, how are you today?

BF: Hi Tom, I’m good, thanks and you’ve got my permission to use this, so...

TM: Thank you. So I won’t ask you if we have your permission to use this recording, over the telephone or make this recording over the telephone, so thank you for that. During the last interview, you had talked about how you had to work with the Office of Aviation Services (OAS) in Washington D.C. to get a variance for Grand Canyon National Park to use helicopters for short hauls where you actually hang a person in a basket from a rope suspended under a

helicopter. Can you recount some of the short haul uses that you actually did in Grand Canyon that were the reason why you wanted this variance for this rule.

BF: Yeah sure. OAS was in Boise, Office of Aircraft Services. There's actually a station in Boise, Idaho because at that time and still is I guess, it's the head of the government's national wildfire program. And it was natural to have them as an aside there I guess, but you know I did go through a lot of effort to try to get a variance for using short hauls, which not only would be a stretcher below a helicopter, but also for raising somebody up or lowering somebody- well not lowering so much, but swinging somebody in or swinging somebody out without the basket.

TM: So actually, putting someone in a hazardous location or in a, well I'm thinking about a boat stuck in a rapid.

BF: Well I'm gonna give you one of those examples actually.

TM: Oh okay, great.

BF: So, I'm just sort of clarifying what my perspective is on what's called a short haul and usually the rope might be less than 100 feet below the helicopter. And the helicopter in those days was always a single engine and that was a concern of OAS. And if it's got a twin engine, you know a larger ship, then they didn't have the concern at least initially because if one engine quits you still have the other. Which when you look back on, it really isn't quite correct either but that was their reasoning.

TM: And, having never been in that situation, when you're a hundred feet below a helicopter are you far enough away from the rotor wash or are you still getting pushed around by that?

BF: You don't get much effect from the rotor wash. You get some effect if you're moving forward or you get an effect from flying through the air and I always refer to it or you know a hoist in and out of a bigger ship perhaps as like the E-Ride at Disneyland. You know, pretty scary, pretty impressive and in the great scheme of things, you know it was actually dangerous but it's a pretty calculated risk and the truth is really, not much danger, except unless you're on a big wall or something like in Yosemite. I'm not trying to negate any of the hazard, but you know it looks good, it's pretty impressive, it's very effective. So anyway, we were talking about this

guy that wanted to commit suicide in the Grand Canyon in November, I can't remember the exact year, but it was probably about 1985 or 86. He was at Desert View in November and his way of committing suicide was to go into the park and die of dehydration and starvation and I can't think of one of the worst ways to go. So he goes into the park, scrambles down off into Desert View through some low angle rocks and brush and stuff and he trips and falls and he hurts himself and he ends up rolling to about 15 to 20 feet of the edge, the upper edge of the Redwall, which is a 4 or 5 hundred foot limestone cliff in the Grand Canyon. I think it's limestone isn't it Tom?

TM: Yes sir.

BF: Yeah, I think so, and at this point you know this guy is trying to commit suicide and starts yelling for help, somebody hears him, the park responds, and I'm still management assistant but I have search and rescue underneath me and something like that would catch my attention because I always had my radio on which most of the rangers did much of the time. And a young ranger, very talented ranger by the name of J.D. Swed and I frankly can't remember what the J stands for, it's either John or Jim, I guess. And J.D. would go on to be one of the park service's foremost incident commanders for major events, not fire but all of the other stuff, you know, earthquakes, and hurricanes, and inaugurations and presidential visits and stuff. He was truly very qualified and so at this point he was still young in the trade and he was a permanent and he was a young permanent, a Yosemite permanent ranger. So he's running this operation, we bring in a H-46, a jolly green giant out of Luke Air Force Base from Phoenix to help out because it has a winch, you know and here's a huge helicopter, twin blades, you think it could do the job, but in fact it could not. It could not hover out of ground effect well enough to do what we needed to do. So I'm no whizbang on helicopters and their performances, but we knew that we needed to have that ship up there, but as it turns it out was basically worthless. So, there's a device that we began using in Yosemite, it's sort of a nylon partial suit that's a sling that was used in Vietnam, so the Navy when we were in Yosemite gave us several of these and it has snaps and hooks and things and derings and things in the right spot so you can hook somebody on. It's embarrassing that I've forgotten the name of it, it's sort of a silly name but it adequately describes what this device looks like. It's very light and only weighs a couple pounds, it has a heavy-duty nylon mesh. So we had one at the Grand Canyon and I don't recall we ever using it before this, but perhaps we

did but I don't recall that, it wasn't very common that's for sure. So, it goes down to where this guy is and he's not hurt, like you know broken backs and that sort of thing. Perhaps something like a broken ankle or something.

TM: Could you tell he was mentally deranged?

BF: No, I wasn't even on the scene at that point. But, you know you sort of have to be a little bit off by trying to commit suicide by dying of starvation.

TM: Yeah, but assuming the rangers first on scene wouldn't have known that, they would've seen that some guy is down here and he fell.

BF: Yeah, that's a good point and I don't have a good answer for you particularly, but I do know that the ranger that was sort of on the scene, the guy by the name of Joe Quiroz, was married to the park doctor, Cheryl Pagel. So, I'm seeing this guy not too far away from the lip of the cliff, there's about six or seven other rangers. But it's terribly bouldery, rocky, fully high angled, and to carry a stretcher out of there would have been a real risk to the carry out crew which is often the case for a lot of these things. A lot of people will tend to be very empathetic to a victim and I have some empathies for the victim but I have more empathies for the rescue team first. So, a decision is made to lift him out with the Jolly Green giant which of course does not happen. The park brings in the park ship which is a single engine jet ranger and Tom Caldwell is the pilot. Now at this point I'm actually out at the scene although I'm not in charge, J.D. is in charge. I'm just sort of a grandfatherly figure sitting in the background and once we decide and I say we collectively, once the decision was made to put this guy into this nylon mesh partial suit, you know that would support you and your back and your hips and the upper part of your legs. Once that decision was made, and then to sling him out, I stepped in and took it over. I came on the radio and said, J.D., I'm taking this part of this rescue over from you and I made it very clear that I was in charge so that the intent was not to upstage or create a problem for J.D., it was really to prevent him from being sued or having some major liability problems if something went wrong because we did not have policy permission to fly this guy out in that manner. Had Tom, for whatever reason, had to jettison this victim at the end of this rope for had something happen where the guy got caught in a tree or something and ends up getting seriously hurt or being killed, then, J.D. who is probably ten years younger than myself, but at the time had a heck of a

lot less rescue experience, had something gone wrong it would've been more awkward and harder for him to stand in a courtroom and justify through legal procedures how he came to that decision. But I on the other hand had a heck of a lot more experience, particularly with this kind of situation, not so much the short haul in this, the name of the suit that we used to call it was a screamer suit. And that was a shorthand for some long army term. But it would be harder for J.D. to justify, much easier for me and if anyone was going to be sued and taken to serious task for this I wanted it to be me rather than J.D. And J.D. and I made our peace within minutes having done this afterwards and he fully understood. I don't think he was necessarily pleased about it but he understood, so we put this guy in the screamer suit and he's lifted up by the park's helicopter via short haul. And it isn't very far from there to the parking lot outside of the Watchtower at Desert View, and he's raised up and swung over maybe no more than, probably no more than half a horizontal mile, probably less than that and then lowered pretty gently on the pavement at the parking lot. And everything is fine, nobody gets hurt, no helicopters crash, nothing very significant. It was an interesting dilemma that the Jolly Green Giant that we could not use it in that scenario and of course they were super in other scenarios but not in this one. So, that was one time we used the short haul and another that comes to mind that you mentioned the boats and wrecks on the river. Way down canyon, beyond Havasu canyon, I don't know what river mile that would be but way down canyon, there's a raft trip that has gone awry. And at least one of the patrons has been stuck on a little beach and the beach is probably not much more than say 50 feet wide and maybe 30 or 40 feet deep and it's surrounded by these huge cliffs. I mean, 4, 5, 6 hundred feet high cliffs which are pretty vertical and there're also crummy rocks and since it's so far down the river and of course it's his boat, the boat that he fell out of or went over, whatever might have happened. I don't remember why he ended up but he's safe and sound and he's not hurt but he's trapped in this small beach.

TM: So, this story I'm trying to remember this guy's last name [David Whittlesey], but he was on a one-person trip all by himself and he flipped. Was it in Killer Fang Falls at 232 Mile or something and he ended up on the beach and the boat was gone and he's sort of there on the beach and he can't go anywhere.

BF: Well, I mean that could be the scenario, I frankly don't remember whether he was by himself or if there was a little bit larger group. You know, there are enough boat trips along the

way that if it were a solo trip, probably somebody would've come by and saw the dilemma fairly quickly. And again, the nuances without looking up for a rescue report or something, I can't tell you, but I can tell you how we resolved it. Which is, myself and one other ranger flew down and we had a rope. Because when we went into the scene we didn't know what was going on and we didn't know what the scene looked like in terms of cliffs, you know not being able to get across the river and that sort of thing. So we got down there and I make the decision that if this guy is willing which, sort of, he didn't have much choice. If he was willing we were going to make a horse collar out of the rope, and we actually made more of a triple bowline so that he could actually sit in it but we're gonna lift him up and fly him across the river to where we are, which is I don't know, someplace, the river is you know, 150 feet wide. Someplace that is really pretty broad, and it wasn't something you could swim across and the way the cliffs were designed you couldn't even jump in the river and float down and get out on the other side. And you needed to get on the side that we were on because the side he was on, he was gonna be trapped there forever. So, the other ranger who I'm not sure who it was. It might've been Larry Van Slyke. Whoever it might have been went over and was able to jump out well enough that he could help structure this rope. And I'm sure we had the rope pre-tied, and Larry would help him get into this temporary swing which is something that you learn in rescue 101, how to do. You know, we told this guy this is what we're gonna do and he was up for it and it was all slick as heck, he got in it and he was probably 50 feet below the ship and was brought across and I got him out of it fast enough and then the helicopter just basically slid back sideways, I mean I didn't even have to turn it around or anything. Slid back across and whoever was on the other side, let's say it was Larry, got into the same rope and same knot and sling system and got slung back across and he probably was not more than 25 or 30 feet above the water all the way across. Pretty fast, minimal real danger. If for some real bizarre reason that I can't conjure up, had he had to go under the river he would have been safe although he would've had to swim to shore at this point. The victim, if he didn't have a life jacket on I'm sure that we put him into one, but fortunately, none of that was ever necessary and I think the whole thing once we got going, once we made the decision, once we got the rope tied in the right spot underneath the helicopter and once we got the knot tied and that sort of thing, the whole thing didn't last more than 5 minutes. And, you know, it's like a lot of stuff I've been on, I've got a pretty nice photo of the helicopter with both doors off, slinging this guy across. So, anyways that was another example of a short haul, in this

case the guys life wasn't in jeopardy, but in order to really actually get to him and rescue him, would've taken a huge amount of work and effort and danger and the trade off on this case was you know, pretty safe, pretty minimal, not very invasive, you know that sort of thing, so...

TM: And all of this, both these events were happening outside of policy?

BF: That's correct. Yeah and you know there were a couple of other incidents, one with a stretcher off of the South Kaibab where because where the guy was, if I can remember this right, I think maybe even Earnie in this case was pretty adamant that this guy had a serious heart problem and needed to get to definitive care quick and you know, rather than having a bunch of people trooping up and down the Kaibab trail, which is not necessarily that easy, anyway you know, this was the way to go. And it was outside our policy but in those cases I mostly said, screw it, this is what we gotta do, it's the right thing to do, let's do it.

TM: Once you had the variance in writing, did the use of short hauls then greatly increase?

BF: No, I don't think so, I don't think it was...you know it wasn't like we were using it as an excuse to start doing more short hauls.

TM: Well whether the need was actually greater, but you were reluctant to use it because you didn't have the policy.

BF: Well I think that's a good assessment, but you know, all of us including myself were a little nervous getting outside the policy, I was less nervous about it. I've always conducted my life, well not my life so much, but my professional life as if this is the right thing to do, then we could probably do it and if I need to justify it then well that's plan B and we'll work on it then. I don't know that they increased, I do think that, you know, around the whole park system, the use of short hauls became a little more common. But you know there are only a certain number of parks that would have that kind of need anyway. So it's not like everybody and their brother was being tied below a helicopter and being flown over the park, so that's my take on short hauls there, Tom.

TM: Nice, well thank you for covering that because I think it's really, again, today, we take for granted.

BF: Yeah, that's right.

TM: I wonder if this would be a good time to talk about the park's relationship with Coconino County Search and Rescue and sheriff Joe Richards given that the park had a different management structure as you mentioned in Yosemite where Yosemite was free and clear of any jurisdiction, but Grand Canyon was not and had a responsibility or a cooperative agreement. I'm not sure exactly what the language would be, but had a relationship with Coconino County for rescues.

BF: Well we had either a memorandum of agreement or memorandum of understanding and there is probably a legal difference between the two, but whatever it was, we were obligated to play friendly with the county by written agreement in law enforcement and in search and rescue and death and probably a few other things that I had forgotten, but from my perspective that would be the thing that would be the most relevant. Fires might not be so included, I know that we would keep them in the loop but you know, the Coconino County and certainly the sheriff's office was not involved with fire management particularly. But the park was obviously. So, because of the jurisdiction which is concurrent which means that we can enforce certain laws, but the county also has the responsibility to do that and over time when I first got there, there were two resident sheriff deputies. I couldn't remember the other name last time, but his name was Steve Luckeson, and then Don Daniels, were both deputies when I was there and because of budget cuts and stuff, there'd be a couple of years where they might only have one and there were probably were times when there weren't any deputies that were resident just because of the expenses that were you know, involved. So, and the park buy and large had a good relationship with the county right often at the lower levels we worked with these men, at the time I don't recall any women, but we worked with the deputies pretty closely, generally pretty well, pretty good. And they lived either in the park, I think they always lived in the park when I was there, but I think they also could actually work out or live outside the park as well in Tusayan. And at the time, Joe Richards was the sheriff, it's an elected position in Flagstaff. And in Flagstaff and within the county, and I think Tom would probably agree if he remembers Joe very well, pretty high profile, pretty politically involved, he had to answer to the Coconino County board of supervisors. They were his boss. So my involvement with Joe, you know, early on wasn't of any great consequence, it was more at the local level. But over time as I got into the job and I was

there for 6 years and for them as the assistant chief ranger and two as the management assistant, and my interaction with Joe increased over time, but one of the things that would happen in this was very irritating to not only myself but to the men and women that worked with me and for me and around me and worked for the park was that from a search and rescue standpoint, which would involve a fair number of people falling off of a cliff and dying kind of stuff. The sheriff would take undue credit for doing certain things. And so the news prepping the next day would be something like this and I'm obviously paraphrasing which is "Coconino County Sheriff's deputies make body recovery off of Yavapai point involving where victim John Doe fell five hundred feet and had to be evacuated." And that's the way the clipping would read and often times there would be zero mention of the Park Service and in truth, the rangers, the park provided the helicopter, paid for the helicopter, provided the rescue or recovery rescue team, would make the five hundred foot repel or whatever, d to recovery, get the body back up to the rim where the sheriff's deputy often times dressed in his cowboy boots, would look and say yes, this guy is dead, and then do whatever paperwork he had to do then ship the body off. And that was a consistent theme throughout the years that I was there. And it was very irritating, very aggravating, and for a while I would suck it up and my peers would suck it up and just say that's the way it is. So, and as I said, this was quite frequent you know, there would be a bad car wreck and the park would respond and have all the medical attention and provide the ambulance and do whatever. And you know, often times, the park was never even mentioned.

TM: Was this because the sheriff's department had a better connection to the press?

BF: Yes.

TM: Okay.

BF: And so to sort of finish that thought a little bit, about five years into my time there which means I was now the management assistant and worked for Dick Marks, and Dick would be one of the two signators to the memorandum of agreement or understanding, whichever. As would the sheriff, but I was the guy behind the scene's helping Dick make decision and I'd be in the meetings talking about well we need to adjust this clause and add this or take this away, kinds of thoughts. And of course, we had already worked on these things as has the sheriff's office. You know, everybody is trying to do a good job, it wasn't like anybody was trying to hurt the other

particularly, but of course I'm biased, but it seemed like the sheriff of course was trying to take advantage, and we were trying to be smart enough that we would not let them take advantage. So, you know, it's like probably every other not meeting, but agreement kinds of things you get involved with professionally. But anyway, one of these agreement things, we had to renew this every couple of years, I think. I told Dick, Superintendent Marks, that I wanted to call the shortcomings or irritating things about the way the press was handling us to the attention of the sheriff. I said, I want to flat out show him as opposed to just talking about it, so I went and I had a lot, probably about 15 or 20 news clippings and related documents. I laid them all out on the table. In those days, the superintendent's office, well I guess it still is actually, was in what used to be the visitors center and there was a meeting room at the bottom of the first floor with big tables and stuff and I laid all this out and as we were going through this process of several hours, and Sheriff Joe would be there with some other people including one of his main lieutenants, who is now currently the sheriff, Jim Dreskel. He had maybe his under-sheriff or whatever the proper term is. So, I said "Sheriff I'd like you to take a look at this." So I went through these and I don't know if I went through every particular incident, but I did point out some that were pretty egregious and sort of collectively made the statement that, you know, "Sheriff, we did all this work ourselves. We provided the helicopter, we provided the money, we provided the man power, we provided the daring do, we did all of that and yet in this clipping and this clipping and this story and this story, the park is not mentioned and if it is mentioned it's only a minor two or three words, something like rangers assistant, or something pretty minimal." And he says, well I have no control over what the press does. Well I wasn't, I guess I liked to think that I was probably politically sensitive but also did not want to take any kind of real abuse, and Dick Marks is very, very happy to have me do this. He liked the fact that I could represent the park justifiably so and keep him out of the middle of it so that he could maintain a more professional, sort of upper level relationship with the Sheriff and I understood that. I wasn't trying to provide a problem for Dick and he knew that and he trusted me to do this. So, I said "Sheriff, with all due respect, you have all the control in the world, you could have easily said that based on my information, how the rangers did this, this, this, and this like that and the county assistant, something like that," I said "you could easily do that." So I don't remember with what he responded, but I do know that afterwards because I was still, as the management assistant, I was also was the public affairs guy, and I would put out to the press releases, but I also was in charge of the search and rescue and

fire. I mean it was a heck of a combination and responsibilities which sort of diverged from each other. But Dick Marks said, I want you to get if you can, get these kinds of stories into the press and to the press and to beat the sheriff at his own game. And you know, that became a challenge for me and something I thought I would enjoy doing this as much as I can. So that's what I did and very quickly, I couldn't actually pinpoint a date, I think there was a plane wreck at Desert View and 6 people were killed at night, within a mile or two of actually the Desert View complex. And it was real messy and fortunately no fire, and all 6 people died, at least 5, I think it was 6 people. And I was not running the incident although I had overall responsibilities for search and rescue, but after this particular incident was to get out there, get the basic information, and I called the Flagstaff paper and the Phoenix Republic, right off the bat, wham bam, to give them the story and highlight that the park was responding and had done this, and it appears that all these people are dead because of course I didn't say this but, the injuries were such that there was absolutely no question about them having survived and sure as shootin' the next day, the story was just fine and it really gave the appropriate sort of respect that we deserved and gave us the correct... what am I trying to say...

TM: Recognition, maybe?

BF: Yes, that's the right word. They gave us the right recognition for having done all this and I can clear as a bell remember sitting in the little tiny ranger office at Desert View, calling the Phoenix Republic and the Flagstaff paper, what is that, the Daily...

TM: The Daily Sun?

BF: Yeah the Daily Sun to give them this information.

TM: And I'm surprised up to that point before you became the public relations officer, that nobody had done that; had made those relationships with the Associated Press and Flagstaff and Phoenix papers.

BF: Well I don't know that they didn't make a relationship, it was just that my immediate predecessor, Bill Dickinson, who is a terribly nice guy and terribly efficient, great manager. As I had mentioned the other day, I went to U.S.S. Arizona's superintendent and back to Lake Mead for a long time as a superintendent. But he did not have the background or the search and rescue,

or the law enforcement, that kind of a background. And you know, his agenda was to maybe provide information, but not in the competitive way that, one I wanted to do, and two you know, the superintendent had given me some mini-marching orders which didn't take much to do this anyway, but it was nice to have Dick tell me to do this and you know, so, again, I'm not following my predecessors because before him was a guy by the name of Rodger Gidding and he was very good as well, it's just that they didn't have this perspective that I did. So, you know, as I say that was a pretty good, pretty bad example of trying to take care of that issue and it went like that, I think the sheriff at that point started to have, I don't know if I had any bearing on any of this, but I do believe that, you know, the papers and the sheriff's department were starting to actually give us more credit for things we actually did. So things started leveling off. I got one other example if you want.

TM: Please.

BF: And you know, I'm saying things that I don't even remember about until I rambling like this.

TM: That's good.

BF: Roughly 1986, so you may even remember this, Tom. There was a father and his son, [Don safely and his son Gentry] from Page, Arizona. And the father and the son who was a boy about 7 or 8. The grandfather had taken up his little Luscombe which is the same plane I wrecked. Taken up his Luscombe and had flown into the canyon because he had some friends that were on a river trip. They were not too many miles below Lees Ferry] and so they flew in between the walls and they were going to wiggle their wings to say hi and then fly out.

TM: Maybe dropped some ice cream or something?

BF: Well, not that I remember.

TM: Okay.

BF: That makes the story better, perhaps that's true. I don't remember that part of it but I do know that the guy, for all I know was a pretty good pilot, but he ended up being trapped between the walls basically, tried to make a turn and stalled out. And once you put that little plane on its

wings and you're only, even a couple of hundred feet up, you do not have a lot of control for a while, you want some altitude, and he ends up stalling out and going into the river. And they know exactly within 50 yards anyway, of where the plane has gone. You know, the boat people do stay around and of course they're looking for survivors, they don't know there's two people on board, they obviously know there's one on board. But nobody surfaces and after an extra amount of time they realize that the planes gone, the pilot and passenger are gone, so they keep on going and of course this notice was sent out, so...this takes, to finally find this airplane, was weeks. The water is brown, the visibility was about zero, because it was below the Paria. And it was close to Badger Rapids, if that makes sense. And was that stream of the rapids. So, you know, in the park at this time we had a little dive team. There were... I think 6 of us that were certified, you know, had tanks in the SAR cache, and people had wet suits. And it wasn't like there were that many opportunities but at least twice I was there that I'd actually go on drownings in the river. Part of the time you'd do these kinds of things, one you hope to find somebody, but two there's also a PR aspect to this. To let the families know you're trying to do something. You know, you're trying to make an effort, you're trying to really do the right thing, but you also are a realist and try to understand that you know, when the visibility is absolutely 0 and the waters moving, the odds are pretty minimal you're ever going to find anything. So, we get into a real broo-hah, I mean, something that made the newspapers, several different times, because our sheriff Joe wanted to capitalize on publicity, and it would certainly be a feather in his cap so to speak that the county would find the victims of this and the fact was I believed the sheriff was good friends with the pilot who was the chief of police at the time. So there was a relationship there as well. You know, I don't fault the sheriff for trying to make this kind of an effort, but at the same time the park also had this responsibility, but technically the county also could join in. And on one occasion, the newspapers says you know, sheriff Joe Richards is bringing in an FBI team with a side scanning SONAR and they will be finding this plane tomorrow morning; something as elementary as that. And it's all in the papers and it's essentially front page. Well of course nothing happens. The side scanning SONAR, I think it's working properly, the guy that's running it I think actually sees the airplane but doesn't recognize it. But anyway, the sheriff comes out with minor egg on his face because he's made this promise that this plane would be found tomorrow and the victims will be located kinds of journalism. Well this goes on for the next numbers of weeks. The sheriff, in this case Jim Dreskel, who was the

Lieutenant that I worked with sort of the field Lieutenant of that part of the county anyway. And I had a very good relationship, a pretty good friendship, and sort of a professional respect and early on, that very first day, Jim got hold of me and asked me if I would put in some divers and I knew that the river was absolutely 0 visibility. And it was right above these rapids and I said "Jim, no.". I'm not putting any of my people in there, I'm certainly not going in and I'm not gonna let my other divers go in. So that's not what Jim wanted to hear, that gets related to the sheriff and I don't know, within a day or two the sheriff has gotten hold of the Coconino, no not the Coconino, the Maricopa County Dive Team which are basically volunteers.

TM: Out of Phoenix.

BF: Yeah, out of Phoenix...to do this. Well I mean, technically the sheriff had that ability or the legal right to do that. These guys get up there, they look at the scene and they say...and so this goes in the newspaper, right. Sheriff Joe Richards is bringing in the Maricopa County sheriff's office divers and they will be up here in the next day or two.

TM: Right. Gotta find the plane, gotta do the bodies all over again.

BF: Yeah, but the sheriff makes the mistake of having it in the newspaper. Because it's good publicity and he's voted into office. Well of course they get out there, and without even contacting the park, and I don't care if they contacted me particularly but there was no notification of the park that these guys are even coming.

TM: Okay.

BF: I think we read about it in the newspaper like everybody else does and they get up there and get on scene and say absolutely not, we're not going in there. The water is zero visibility, it's above the rapids, we don't know exactly where the plane is...we're not doing this. So now the sheriff got egg on his face again. So this goes on that sort of way for a number of weeks. The little boy floats free, he is found downstream a long ways, I mean 20 or 30 or 40 miles I think down by Nankoweap several weeks later, bless his little heart. He's obviously dead but he's at least located.

TM: Right. Which is so helpful for the family to have closure.

BF: It is. And that's surely very important and that's one of the reasons why we do a lot of things that we do which are fairly dangerous actually, is to help bring closure to the families and satisfy some of them. We still have the pilot who I think is in his 30's if I remember right. And a Luscombe is a very tiny airplane, it's what I owned, it's actually the same model. You have to crawl into it practically, you have to be sort of a semi-contortionist to get into the front seat. There are only two seats anyway and they're side by side. So the odds are pretty fair that the pilot's still in there. The little boy, much smaller, comes up floating free somehow. The whole thing goes on for several weeks for sure and one other small, very small incident was the sheriff was friends with a reporter, helicopter reporter from Phoenix whose name I've forgotten but it was pretty visible, pretty famous I think in the local area for reporting on various incidents from the air. And he flies up to the park, with I guess it's a T.V. station helicopter, and the park talks to him, I don't believe I ever really talked to him but we tell him that we don't want him to do certain things because of the air traffic, it's not an emergency, and he ends up getting cited because he violates, he lands in a place he's not supposed to land and we get into this confrontation now with the T.V. news guys. And what are the odds of us winning anything like that probably, but we end up citing him which was whatever the exact right title is, it's like illegal landing in the park. So that doesn't help anybody, the sheriff is obviously very irritated about this, he comes to the superintendent and raises cane and this has some slop-over on this guy's pilots license and of course he is now talking from the air about different things related to us not being very helpful kind of things.

TM: Right, and I'm assuming, in quotes, that the reporter wanted sort of on the scene filming or footage and maybe wanted to see if he could see the plane through the water from the air?

BF: No, not so much that. I think it was more just personal, one-on-one on the scene kinds of reporting and I think in this case maybe when the Maricopa County divers went up there.

TM: Oh, I see, okay.

BF: And it wasn't like he hung around for 3 or 4 days, but he was in there on and off for at least part of a day for sure. So anyways, that goes on and on then finally one day I pretty much wake up and see that the Paria is no longer running and the water's actually clear. Now clear in the Colorado River at that point is really sort of a misnomer. The visibility might have been 6 or 8

feet. But, it was 6 or 8 feet more than we had a couple days before. And I also knew that the park had a river trip that was launching from Lee's Ferry eminently, like within the next day or so. There weren't any storms forecast, so we kind of knew that the Paria would not flash or run brown again and the Paria is just a side canyon but it has a lot of silt, and sand, and dirt in it. And it colors the water and that's what for a lot of the ways, that's what makes the Colorado red which is what Colorado means anyway. But in this case that stream was not running, it was not discoloring the water, the visibility was 6 or 8 feet. I knew that there was a river trip about to launch, the park had a river trip which would take about 10 or 12 days. I asked, in this case, Kim Crumbo, who was the river runner, had been a Seal in Vietnam, a Navy Seal.

TM: River ranger?

BF: He was a river ranger.

TM: Okay.

BF: But he's also a boatman.

TM: Okay.

BF: And you know Kim, don't you?

TM: Oh yes.

BF: So I said can we pull on some tanks, have some gear taken in, so we put this gear on board. We will meet you at whatever this spot is and there's actually a couple of beaches on both sides fortuitously for us. I said we will meet you at such and such a time, I get hold of Jim Dreskel and Rex, the Sergeant in Page, and I'm pretty sure, I think Rex is his last name, I forgot his first name perhaps. But I said here's what were gonna do. We're gonna go in and see if we can find this plane. You guys wanna go? They said "Yes." And of course, we want them to be there. They're the ones who are gonna be officially taking care of the bodies, etcetera. Jim and I are good friends and I said, the one thing I would ask of you Jim is...once we do this, and we fly them in, and then we fly in ourselves. The park helicopter flies in, lands on this beach, we bring in 4 divers, and I'm one of the 4. We fly in these two sheriff's deputies, one's a sergeant and one's a lieutenant just to be there. They don't have any real active role at that point anyway. The

boats land, we get our tanks, we get our equipment, and the first two divers, Charlie Peterson and Bev Perry go in and I'm with some other diver whose name I forgot right at the moment and we're sort of back-up and or gonna be another team looking elsewhere kind of a group. Well literally, within I'll bet you 30 seconds of Charlie Peterson and Bev Perry going down, they find the plane. And of course, we don't or at least in my case, I'm not telling Jim or Sergeant Rex, anything different other than we're just professionals, we know what we're doing. When in truth there's probably some luck involved there, right? But they go down, find the plane, they can see that the pilot is still on board. They actually come up and signal that they found the plane and the pilot. They go down, they have to break the leg, at least one leg to get him out of the plane. He's been underwater for several weeks, 3 weeks maybe perhaps. Warm water... I mean this is not a pretty scene. In the meantime, I and I think maybe the other diver, we swim across the river to the other side and they bring the body up. And they get the guy to me and I don't know how descriptive you'd like me to be but I end up tying a piece of nylon webbing around this guy's chest because I do not want to touch him even though I got rubber dive gloves on, wet suit on, his skin is sluffing off, this is a terrible scene and we get him up to the beach. I pull him upstream, pull him up about 30 or 40 feet up the stream, side of the stream, the river, to the beach where the sheriff's deputies, they take over. They take the body over; we help get them into a body bag. Everybody is flown out and the river trip proceeds with what it's gonna do and we take out the tanks and stuff. Everything is sort of cleaned up if you will.

TM: Hang on, I'm just gonna jump in here for detail. Did the plane get removed as well?

BF: No, I think the plane's still in there.

TM: Okay.

BF: I don't know that 100% but we did not move the plane the whole time I was there the next several years.

TM: Okay.

BF: And I kind of suspect it's still down there.

TM: Yeah this was '86, the water has not been very high since then, you know, 40,000 so it certainly hasn't been that little spike up to 90 some thousand in 1983...so okay.

BF: The thing is it could have floated off-

TM: Sure, could've tumbled down and broken up into bits, yeah of course.

BF: We never took it out when I was there.

TM: Yeah, okay.

BF: So the next day, and I remind Jim because to this point everything on this part of the incident is being done by us, including paying the helicopter cost because the helicopter is not free. We have this contract, we pay for it...even though it's a 24/7-365 kind of a contract. Plus we're flying in the deputies and flying them out and all that kind of stuff and everything works smooth as heck, everything is very good. And the next day, I think I probably reminded Jim, I said, please give us credit with what we've done.

TM: Did you race to the phone as well to call Flagstaff and Phoenix?

BF: No, no.

TM: Okay.

BF: And I was sort of beyond that point perhaps anyway. But in this case, I guess I had my fingers crossed but at the same time trusted Jim and the next day, the headlines on the front page give us full credit for having found the plane, removed the body, that sort of thing. So I was very pleased about that, but we had this ongoing thing with the sheriff about this sort of thing. I don't know that it ever cleared up, I think it got a little bit better. I think perhaps I'm hoping that I had some impact on that part of the parks and the county's relationship.

TM: Well, any more, the park handles its press releases entirely about its in house search and rescues.

BF: Well we did too. It wasn't like we didn't do it. It was just that either we weren't fast enough to the phone or the sheriff had more oomph than we did. And he got top billing.

TM: Interesting.

BF: I don't have an explanation for it except it wasn't like we ignored us doing something although I think we tended to downplay a lot of what we did because it came sort of routine for us, which from an outside perspective, somebody looking in, they might of actually been pretty...pretty newsworthy. Maybe we got cavalier and blasé about how we treated these things. One of the things that happened along the way with the sheriff, which is, I'm still talking about if you still want me to talk about the sheriff.

TM: Yeah, sure.

BF: Is that, my wife and I separated in the fall of 1981, the divorce is actually a year later, but after the fall of '81 we weren't living together anymore. So and I had two little boys, I was a single parent at home for a lot of reasons but I had the kids and during this time the sheriff came to me or the sheriff's office came to me and asked me if I would train their high altitude rescue team and I said well sure. I enjoy doing that and I think I'm qualified, yes I'd be pleased to do that. So I ended up spending a bunch of weekends or at least a bunch of days over a couple of weeks. 48 members and I don't think they were all deputies, some of them were volunteers. But, putting this group of maybe 8 to 10 people through a quasi-structured rescue, not so much search but rescue training. Grand Canyon's got these nice little short cliffs, 40 or 50 footers. Great place to train and everything was ideal. We used the park, much of the park's equipment to do some of this and I was doing this all for the sheriff's office, totally both free as well as just good naturedly; I enjoyed doing that. I'm sure that I had 1 or 2 other rangers particularly Larry Van Slyke helping me out because Larry was probably more qualified to do this than I was. So we did that and that was fine. Now keep in the back of your mind I'm divorced, right? So, a year later perhaps the...I can almost come up with their names right now, but the Sedona Fire Department comes to me and asks me if I will teach them, if I will put them through sort of a qualifying vertical rescue school to take a couple of their paramedics, some of their volunteer firemen, they only had a couple of payed firemen at the time and put them through a rescue school of which took several weekends, I went out on my own time on my weekends and my kids would go spend the weekends with their mother and their reason for wanting to do this is because a car is going over the cliffs in Oak Creek Canyon and going into the river kinds of scenarios. Which over time turns out to be true, they ended up having a lot of this over time. And I sleep on the couch at the main firehouse, there's no charge to them. I'm sure that somebody brought me a

supper along the way perhaps. My only request was, I said, if you guys know any nice ladies maybe you could introduce me. Because I was lonely. Yeah, sure we got Sedona. Lots of nice ladies down here. So they do and I meet a very nice lady and spend time with her over the next several months. And Sheriff Joe, Joe Richards, a couple things. One, he was jealous of the Sedona Fire Department doing any of this. He wanted to keep tabs on, keep his fingers on this. He wanted his guys, his teams to do all of this, he wanted his department to do this. And I wasn't in the middle of any of that. Whatever Sedona and the county wanted to work out, that's their relationship. I think Sedona had some autonomy in that they didn't have to rely on the county for certain things, but that was way beyond my pay grade as well as just not of any real significance to me. So I end up teaching these guys, putting them through a number of weekend classes. They have fun, they learned a lot, they ended up having me help them buy equipment. So they ended up making themselves a pretty well-equipped and trained operation.

TM: Nice.

BF: Which, I have to take pride in it.

TM: Sure.

BF: So, one of the things that happened as an outfall in all of this is that somehow the sheriff learned about my request to just a couple of these guys that if you know of any nice ladies, maybe you could introduce me. And he turns that into me being Tarzan, swinging out of the trees, and grabbing Jane, and swinging off. I mean, it was pretty primal from his perspective. Or at least the way it was related to me and it affected our working relationship professionally. So finally, along the way and this is about within, I don't know, a year and half or 2 years of my divorce, the sheriff and I, sheriff Joe Richards and I clear the air. We meet at the Red Feather Lodge in Tusayan and have lunch. We sit in the back corner for probably an hour and a half or 2 hours, just he and I, one-on-one, nobody else around, clearing the air. When I told him about all of this, and of course, he was very upset that one, I'd been teaching these guys but, two, I said, well I'll teach anybody. I taught your guys and I was happy to help you and your team and I'm happy to help them. Everybody wins as far as I'm concerned. So, okay so we left that and then we got into my personal life, and what I described to him the fact that my wife had run off with another ranger and I was raising two kids by myself and I was frankly just lonely, and was

interested in trying to meet somebody because I couldn't, very easily at least as a single father. Just wasn't too easy at the Grand Canyon.

TM: I was about to say it's difficult at the South Rim.

BF: Yeah, and you don't wanna get involved with anybody that you live close by in a small community like that at the Grand Canyon. So what I explained is, you know I think the sheriff finally realized that I wasn't as, whatever the right word is...I wasn't as primitive...there's probably somebody that can articulate better than I could probably explain as easily. But I wasn't as bad as it was seeming...

TM: Well it sounds like he was trying to very much protect his turf and he was able to keep ahead of the park service while the park service did all of the work and that was changing and he was trying to keep his rescue people being the top dogs in the shop.

BF: Yeah, I think that's all true but I also think though that somehow he was taking it out on me personally which I didn't fully understand. One, it wasn't any of his business but two, I wasn't doing it in such a manner as to be visible about it, I wasn't out-pimping. Nobody was pimping for him. It wasn't like that. And he came across that way initially that way. And I think that at the end, we parted, at the end of my time there, we parted respectfully and pretty professionally but it was hard to get to that spot. There were some rough edges perhaps on my side but also on the sheriff's side as well. And the other thing, and I don't know if this is totally politically correct, but the other thing when he was looking at me after asking if any of these guys have lady friends they could introduce me to, he had become sort of born again and this I think colored his perspective on me as a male and as a human being and that sort of thing. And it took a while to clear all of that out, get all that back story cleared up for both of us probably. So anyway, when I left, I think we parted respectfully and professionally we were fine. We weren't friends, but we were I think professional acquaintances anyway. So there you have it.

TM: Thank you, this is always interesting to learn about the relationship between the park service and its neighbors. In this case, it sounds like the park did a really good job to take credit for what it was doing. It was really wonderful.

BF: Well, I'm sure both before and after my time there that these relationships had hard times as well, but you go up and down any organization that deals with people or rules and policies and stuff. You got ups and downs all the way through.

TM: And funding and training, I mean if the funding is reduced for search and rescue in the park, I'm sure the park would be relying more on Coconino County search and rescue.

BF: Yeah. Well, and the other part of that is that you know, Coconino I think is what, the 5th largest county in the country? I've heard that before.

TM: I wouldn't doubt it, yeah.

BF: I've actually heard 2nd, but I'm not sure about that. San Bernardino county in California is the largest. But Coconino is way up there and they got plenty to do, law enforcement and managerially, and search and rescue, and other parts of the park, and they're happy to let the park take care of its own problems as a rule. But when we would do that, they would end up taking the credit for it so... I don't know how it existed and I'm not so sure I wanna know.

TM: Yeah, I wouldn't wanna say either so...neat well maybe this is a good place to wrap up part 14, we've been going at it for about an hour and 20 minutes. Does that sound like a plan?

BF: Yeah, that's fine with me.

TM: Okay, well with that, this will conclude part 14, oral history with Butch Farabee. Today is June 30th, 2020, my name is Tom Martin, and Butch thank you so much.

BF: As always Tom, thank you.