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Interviewee: Charles "Butch" Farabee (BF)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

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TM: Today is Friday, July 10, 2020. This is a Part 18 Grand Canyon oral history interview with Charles "Butch" Farabee. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Butch. How are you today?

BF: Good, Tom. Thanks.

TM: Thank you. May we have your permission to record this oral history interview over the telephone?

BF: Yes.

TM: Thank you. Great. So, we left off at the end of Part 17 in summer of 1987. You'd moved to Washington, D.C. and found an apartment and actually the first time you're able to buy a house, buy an apartment. That's a big deal. And it sounds like you had the chance to bring a pretty incredible skill set, field-oriented search-and-rescue, aviation, emergency medical services, diving skill set to the agency.

BF: Yeah.

TM: And had a chance to work with a good friend of yours, who asked you, it sounds like, well, didn't quite ask you to come do the job.

BF: Yeah, but I had to apply for it.

TM: But certainly made sure it was on your desk, and that was Walt Dabney. Maybe we could start with Walt. What do you remember about Walt?

BF: Well, I remember a lot about Walt. He's one of my best friends. I talked to him on the phone two nights ago. Well, Walt— I'll be 78 in October, and he is 74 or 75. In fact, he told me the other day; I think it was 75. And very charismatic, the graduate of Texas A&M. I think he was the highest within the military aspect of Texas A&M. He was the commander of the troops, if you will. If he wasn't the No. 1 guy, he was way up there anyway. One of his real credits is he ended up spending a long time, like a year, before

he got into the Park Service, he spent a year taking— I'd have to take a quick look and figure out who it is, but a very well respected, but not Park Service, interpreter around all the parks. And the other guy, the man that he was helping, you know, Walt was sort of acting as a tour guide, if you will and was just interviewing and getting information from all these parks and all the managers and stuff. So, Walt had a pretty interesting beginning with the Park Service agency, anyway. I think his first real job as a Ranger was in Yosemite, and he was working for me. And this would have been in about 1972, probably right about there. But nice looking, good shape, very enthusiastic, smart. I mean, he was the poster boy for Park Rangers. Then he ended up retiring. He was the Superintendent at Canyonlands, and he was recruited to be the director of the State Park system for Texas, which he did for probably 10 years, maybe 12 years. I actually went over and worked for him, I think five different times, four for sure, managing some of their state parks that were having trouble. They were recruiting for a permanent manager for each of these parks, and I would go over there from three months to five months. So, I did that after I retired. But Walter was essentially the chief ranger in the National Park Service but stationed in Washington, D.C., and two kids, lovely wife, Carey.

TM: Did he go from Yosemite to D.C.?

BF: No, no.

TM: Okay.

BF: No. He was a district ranger in Mount Rainier, then became the law enforcement specialist at Grand Teton. I think from Tetons, he went to Washington, D.C. No, I sorry. Then he was, I think, chief of resources in the Everglades. And from there, he went to Washington, D.C. I'm trying to think if there is something in between there. I think Rainier, Tetons, Everglades, D.C., D.C. to Canyonlands. I think that was it.

TM: Nice. Okay, so he had been in D.C. for a little while before you showed up.

BF: Yeah. I guess six months, maybe.

TM: Okay. Oh. Not that long. Alright.

BF: Yeah. Not real long.

TM: So, it sounds like he targeted you to come into this job.

BF: Yeah, I've never really asked him that question that bluntly or that directly, but I think that's probably true. You know, I was a good fit with them. We only lived about a mile and half, two miles apart out by Dulles airport in Herndon, Virginia.

TM: And you guys were carpooling then together.

BF: We carpoled together for the four years that I was there.

TM: Okay. What were some of the policy documents that you worked on when you were there?

BF: Well, I oversaw—now, make sure you understand—I did not supervise anybody. I didn't have any real hands-on, direct supervisory or managerial control over anybody or any of the parks. But I had overall policy and, well, I guess, sort of policy managerially. I don't even know exactly how that would be interpreted, I suppose. But I had search and rescue; EMS as you said; emergency medical systems; aviation; health and fitness; diving; the incident command program; and lifeguards, which I think last time I said I probably didn't do much with lifeguards. So over time, over the four years, I ended up writing what in those times was called a directive. I wrote the directive pretty much single-handedly for diving. Of course, I would ask people and get input. But I took it upon myself to revamp the policy for driving. And these would end up being documents that might be half-an-inch to an inch thick.

TM: Wow.

BF: It wasn't like it was a page or two. So, diving, and I wrote or certainly orchestrated probably 90% of the EMS directive, health and fitness, although it never got, was never completed because we got waylaid by human resources people, which is kind of an interesting story but—

TM: Well, then tell it.

BF: Well, so let me—so health and fitness was— I'd probably written 60% to 80% of it at the time. Let's see, I said diving, EMS, aviation.

TM: Right.

BF: I ended up producing a document that I had some help on but wrote probably 75% of it.

TM: And then Incident Command.

BF: And the Incident Command was just starting, which now, of course, is a big thing all around the world, ICS. And the Park Service got on board officially in about 1985 before I actually got back to D.C. But now, you know, it's all the big fires, all the things that would require a lot of manpower, like an inauguration or hurricane response or other big emergencies, or the oil spills. Anything that would require a lot of manpower is now being managed by ICS, Incident Command System. In fact, the things that I saw the beginnings of and helped, I think, the very beginnings of an Incident Command System are now being used by FEMA. And FEMA has these teams now, which the Park Service was the first to do this. They adopted the model, so I feel real good about that.

TM: What's the principle— We're going to leave that health and fitness thing for a minute and head off into Incident Command. Because when you recounted the story of the helicopter and the fixed-wing crashing over Grand Canyon, I immediately thought when you said, "Okay, I'm taking this over," I thought of Incident Command where you bring in somebody who knows a lot, who can do the PR with the press, but then can also help direct all of the different components that have to come in. So, it seemed as though it was a natural progression. Does that—?

BF: Well, that's probably right. I mean, ICS is now, as I said, being used for lots of big things. Not only emergencies but just, you know, places where there'd be crowds and

where you needed additional manpower, and you needed to be sort of a high-level, over-umbrella kind of management structure. You know, it's a pretty impressive operation, and it's gotten way, way more involved and complex than I even ever tried to imagine. I was never involved in a big fire structure. I never was on any big fires. I was on a fair number of small wildland fires that might require upwards of maybe 20 people. And then I managed searches that had over, maybe, 100 people and helicopters and dogs and things. But we didn't really manage any of that under ICS. But today, there'd be like a Type 3, a Type 2, and a Type 1 team.

TM: What does that mean?

BF: A Type 3 would be sort of an in-house operation. You would take people from within the park. Let's say a place like Yellowstone, which has got a lot of manpower, and you'd have these Type 3 teams that would have an Incident Commander, and then maybe four or five sub people: operations, logistics, finance, so they would do it internally. Then a Type 2 would be the next size up. And then Type 1 would be for the biggest events. The big Warren Fire that we had down here that went, like, 100,000 - 125,000 acres was managed under ICS, of course, and it was a Type 1 team that was overseeing it. A team would be, at that level, might consist of 40 people. And the beauty of ICS is that it expands and contracts based on the need.

Type 2 would be probably a little smaller. In fact, I think they—using this as an example, this Big Horn Fire here around Tucson in the Catalina Mountains—is now being managed by a Type 2 team. And these are not necessarily people who have less experience. It's just that they may not have as many management overhead. Currently there's roughly, I think I heard on the news last night, like, 300 people still involved. But at its height, there was over 1,000 and, I think, probably 10 helicopters and five or six fixed-wings with several, you know, the largest retardant bombers. So, that was pretty complicated. And that was being done by the Park Service too. You know, it all came about in the 1970s in California with all of the large fires that were taking place all around the state. At the time, neighboring agencies could not talk to each other. They didn't have comparable equipment, nomenclature was different. And the governor, I think it was Brown at the time, asked his state fire people, the California Division of Forestry, or CDF, to come up with a way of streamlining this. And so that's how ICS came about. It was because of the fires.

TM: And did you in Yosemite pick that up then?

BF: No, not really. I mean, we had management, but it wasn't under an ICS formula.

TM: Okay. And then the Type 1 teams, are those designated teams that do nothing but Type 1 incidents?

BF: No, that's not necessarily true.

TM: Are they still the local people, just kind of rearranging from Type 3 to Type 2 to Type 1?

BF: Well, it's sort of all the above. It's a mixture. I think there are some Type 1 teams that mostly look to fires, but they're involved in other things as well. You know, like a hurricane would be another good example. And, you know, some of the Type 1 people

that are certified, they aren't necessarily walking around with a thing on their chest that says "I'm the Incident Commander." They might be full time, but mostly it's people who have other day jobs, and they have an expertise, and they've been groomed by training and experience. Their supervisors have allowed them to participate in these programs, or not programs, but these events. So, mostly it's people who have another job.

And there are maybe a few exceptions. But when I was back there, Rick Gale, who was a terribly interesting guy that was one of those rangers' ranger, he and I, and he had a lot of big-fire experience, which I did not have. He and I were going to the Association of National Park Rangers, which I never even mentioned that. I was one of the three founders of it. It got to be pretty good size, several thousand members, and it's in its 43rd year, I think. We put it together in 1977, and it's been pretty healthy up until the last five or seven years. Membership has gone down. But Rick and I, in my office, actually, with Walt sort of looking in, because Walt oversaw fire as well. Rick was the head of the fire program for the Park Service at the time, but he was stationed in Boise, which is mostly where the fire operations for the country come out of. So, Rick and I decided we would come up with these teams to manage these events and fires and whatever. And we did not have anything really totally in mind. We had this ICS structure in the back of our minds that this is what we want to do. And we want to have these teams available for things sort of off the wall things, like, oh, the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

And all of the events surrounding it. You know, the probably a week-long, not celebration as much as just recognition, I guess, of that event. And that was managed under ICS. Hurricane Andrew in 1992 was, I think, the first time the Park Service managed an emergency under pure ICS. But Rick and I, with Walt's blessing, and Walt's probably had a lot of his fingers in the pie on this a little bit, as well, but we started to put together an organization. We pretty much knew all the players, all the emergency-type people around the Park Service, a good chunk of them anyway. And what we were going to do was just, sort of, conceptually in your mind's eye, you know, we were going to take a sword and knight these people, tap them on the shoulder and say, "You are now the logistics chief for this team." And we would make sure that, one, they were interested, and two, that they could get their supervisor's permission. So, they came up with a Type 1 team that he was going to be the IC, Incident Commander. I was going to be the Operations Chief, which is sort of the guy that or the part of the operation that does the hands on, you know, does the firefighting itself as opposed to providing equipment and taking finance and that sort of thing. So, I was the Ops Chief, Operations Chief. And we figured that after about a year, we would sort this all out and probably start identifying needs for training, come up with some position descriptions, you know, what does that person really do. Remember we're fitting ourselves into a system that already existed.

And a lot of that had been done. I mean, the requirements of an Operations Chief, as an example, was already written, it was already established. Now, there's room for improvement and cleaning things up. But it wasn't like we were creating all of that. What we were creating was identifying the manpower and putting this group together to make a team. And as I said, I would be the Operations Chief. And then after a couple of weeks, I realized that— Because once you go out on an incident, you could be gone for three or four weeks or more to a big hurricane. Hurricane Andrew, I mean, over time they had a couple hundred people go through the, you know, working on Hurricane Andrew. Not all at one time, but over time, these people would come and go.

After about three weeks of working on this and trying to do a lot of other things at the same time and taking care of two little boys at home, I realized I could not disappear for three weeks at a time as a single father. I don't regret that decision. I ended up pulling myself out, if you will, of that position. Then we ended up getting some other people to fill in. So, I don't regret having made that decision, but I've always thought I would like to have been involved at the very beginning like that.

TM: But your job was to write these directives, to sort of write the policy directives, if you will, on how IC works? I mean, I'm thinking about how EMS works.

BF: Yeah. Now, I didn't write any directives for Incident Command. It was really setting up the team, the first team. But I did work on these directives: EMS, and diving, and health and fitness, and aviation a lot, which doesn't mean that I was sitting there, hunched over my keyboard, doing nothing but writing, although I did a lot of that. There was a lot of interaction. Taking EMS as an example, you know, with parks in, I guess at that time, probably 48 or 49 different states, we have to fit the Park Service and the Park Rangers and the EMS programs that the parks were doing into the state standards and state laws, the state— You know, we had to have compliances with whatever they were doing. So, I was involved in a lot of interaction, mostly by phone, with, again, using EMS as an example, with the directors of these state EMS programs, the State of Montana or the State of Texas and stuff. So, there was a lot of coordination and involvement, getting permissions and letting people know what we're doing, and back and forth interchange of ideas and whatever. So that's how I had to do these directives, the policies, the overall policies for the Park Service. Something like diving, you know, it wasn't nearly as— I wasn't involved in that many other states or other entities. But, you know, I had roughly 225 to 250 divers around the country that I was trying to manage in some fashion. Divers at Glen Canyon and Lake Mead and Channel Islands and, you know, operations around the Park Service.

So, diving, I didn't have to work with the states as much. There wasn't any real need to do that, but there was a need to make sure everybody was certified at certain levels, and then creating these regional diving boards that would oversee the diving within their region, within the Park Service region. So, there was that ball to throw up in the air and try to juggle. And then at the same time, aviation, EMS, health and fitness, I was doing pretty much— I mean, I would interview and go and talk to the Navy and the military and find out what their standards were. I had four or five balls in the air, trying to balance all these at one time.

I know I've strayed away a little bit from ICS, which I think that was one of your earlier questions a moment ago. But it was just an exciting, interesting time for me. Whenever people would ask me, which they have a lot, what was your favorite park? I mean, that would be an obvious question. I almost always, like 99.9% of the time, will say that my most interesting and rewarding position was in Washington, D.C. And, of course, their eyebrows would go up and, like, Holy Moly, why would you find that interesting, particularly after all the stuff at the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Death Valley, and whatever? But the truth is I had my finger in so many national pies, if I could use that image, I guess, that I just found it really rewarding, challenging, interesting.

It was a pretty much 8-to-5 kind of a job because, one, I was raising two boys by myself, at least during the school year. They were with me the school year, and they were spending the summers with their mother in Flagstaff. So, even though I wanted to be on

one of this very first incident command team, which I think they started off, and I think it was named the Gray Team— And there's always been this sort of running joke that they call it the Gray Team because the group at the top, the team itself, were all these old guys. And I don't know if that's necessarily true. I think it had to do with the color of the uniform more than anything else. And, of course, you know, they've changed that name, I think, since then. But I would like to have done that, but not at the expense of having sacrificed somehow raising my two boys.

I always thought that Yosemite was the funnest job I ever had, or jobs, I guess, There were several within Yosemite. But in terms of sheer reward, I thought my four years in Washington, D.C. were the most rewarding. So, ask me a question here. I'm running out of steam.

TM: Yeah, no worries. Let's go back to health and fitness. You mentioned that Personnel got involved in that.

BF: Well, yeah. What we were trying to come up with was a volunteer system for the agency, not only just park rangers, although that would have been the initial thrust, but it was a way to try to assist in the overall health of the employees. One of the aspects was to give time on the job to go workout. And I forgot exactly what we were talking about, but I think it was, like, three hours a week where you were permitted an hour three times a week to workout. And it could be lots of different things. It wasn't necessarily in a gym. I mean, it could be running, biking, swimming.

TM: Roller skating.

BF: Well, yeah. I think so, although that probably wasn't too big a thing at the time, but—

TM: No, but just, you know, working out.

BF: Yeah.

TM: And, you know, when I think of health and fitness and I think of the Park Service, I think of office staff, payroll administration. I think of maintenance employees. I think of interpretive people, plus law enforcement. And the needs of those different people are huge. How did you tackle this?

BF: Well, we started off with the emergency aspect of it. You know, the divers, people who were diving, the people who were in emergency response, search and rescue, EMS, fire. Now, you know, I didn't invent this program. The Forest Service had a mandatory program of fitness for people that were going out on these fires. You did not go out on a fire unless you had demonstrated a certain level of fitness. There was a—I don't know if he's still alive, probably not—a man by the name of Sharkey, Dr. Sharkey. He's a PhD. And the truth is I'm not exactly sure what he was a PhD in. That would be a good question for me to resolve, but probably in some sort of fitness-related physiology kind of discipline. But he developed what they called the Step Test. And anybody that was a firefighter that was going out on these fires, even at the smallest of fires, for the Forest Service, had to demonstrate a certain level of, not so much competence, but proficiency or level of fitness. He had to go up, you know, there was a step, whatever it is, 8 or 9 inches high. It was a bench, really. And you would go up and down up and down up and down on this bench. At the end of a certain period of time, I think maybe 10

minutes to 12 minutes, someplace, your pulse had to be at a certain level. So, this is what the Forest Service started out with, and the Park Service really didn't have any of that. If you went on a forest fire, Forest Service fire, then you had to have this level of, this standard, you know, you had to meet that standard as well. But within the park, for park fires, park emergencies, we didn't have anything like that. At least nothing that was mandated.

TM: I mean, I think of the Pack Test.

BF: Yeah. Well, the Pack Test— You know, it has evolved into the Pack Test. But, you know, you start off someplace. We started off with the Step Test, and we did Step Test when I was in Yosemite. And you had to, within the park itself, within Yosemite itself, not nationally, but within the park itself, the chief ranger said that if you're going to be involved in fires, you have to do this Step Test and come up at a certain level. He made it required for anybody now who had to go out on search and rescue events. So, we had this background of what we used to do, demonstrated when I went to Washington, D.C. I just didn't walk in there with pulling some idea right out of the clear blue sky. There was always a precedent out there for me to follow.

But my job was to evolve it into a much more professional way to do business for the park rangers, for Park Service people. And we always thought, well, we wanted to get the maintenance people and all the other staffs that are within parks, try to help them maintain some levels of fitness for themselves and for their families. And that was the overall agenda, but we didn't start out that way. We started out trying to get just those that had some emergency aspect, protection aspect, in their jobs. And that's how I started out. It evolved to the point where, you know, trying to identify, well, okay, so, what does the Park Ranger do? What are some of the things they would do, say, in law enforcement? Well, one of the things, and this is one that pops into my mind, is being able to run a certain distance. Another might be scaling a wall, a 6-foot wall in a law enforcement situation. So, we went out and we met with Rangers from around the parks. So, what do you do? What do you think that needs to be done? What kind of standard would you see us developing? We tried to get as much input from the parks as we could, as well. So, I would take all of this thought, these ideas and things that people would give us, and look at other agencies. I got involved with the Navy and what kind of standard did they have. I probably got involved with some of the other military units as well. But what do they require? And one of the things that comes to mind is chin-ups.

And the truth is that there is sort of the stereotypical park ranger poster boy on the wall, you know, clean cut and fit, looking good. You know, I don't know if that was a total myth, but there was a lot to that. And there are rangers who did a lot of fitness, and they were good looking and strong and capable of doing certain things. But there were a lot of overweight, and there probably still are, actually, overweight rangers who, in theory, are supposed to be law enforcement, and they're involved in fires and other emergencies that really weren't up to the job. They couldn't do what we hoped they could do, anyway.

So, I was developing standards, but initially we were starting out this was going to be a voluntary program. You had to participate, but you did not have to pass the levels that we were trying to identify.

TM: And was this just for a certain class of Park Service employees? Because I would think that everybody can use three hours a week paid exercise time, no matter who they are in the Park Service.

BF: Yeah, but— You know, that sounds good, and in retrospect and hindsight, it's probably easier to sell, but back in that day, back in the '80s, to get the operation, people that were in administration, maintenance, or whatever, to buy into this need was much harder. So, we didn't try to do that. I mean, in the back of my mind, back of our minds, that's what we would like to have done. But in order to get our foot in the door, so to speak, it was those people who were involved in protection. If you're a diver, you have to have a certain level of health and strength. If you're involved in climbing on Mount Rainier, you have to have a certain level of health. So, that was the easiest way to get our foot in the door was to start working with the rangers. And the job I was in was emergency operations for protection anyway. I mean, I had absolutely no control or real input with all the other disciplines, maintenance and administrative people. But in the back of my mind, we thought we would like to develop it for the whole agency.

To get our foot in the door, it was really just those people who were involved in protection. If you're going to go out on a Park Service fire, you know, a wildland fire and structural fire, then you had to have this certain level, and we could mandate that. If you were a diver, you had to have a certain level of training and refresher dives, you know, so many per year kinds of stuff. But you also had to have a level of health. And so that was the sort of the low-hanging fruit of our efforts was aimed at this group. And even that was very hard, and I never was totally successful in getting any of this off because one of the things we tried to do and, you know, there were women rangers, and this is where it got to be tricky for us, one of the ways. And there were also a lot of fat rangers, and as I said, there probably still are, but there was a group, particularly the rangers who were way out of shape, who really did not want to buy into this concept. They wanted to go out on these events and do these things within the parks, and their job descriptions said they were supposed to. Not supposed to, you know, had to, but that wasn't as clean cut, clear cut as you would hope. So, I don't know if I'm rambling with your thought, but it just— It wasn't as easy as saying you guys will all do this.

TM: It was targeted right from the start.

BF: Well, yeah. We could sort of mandate for fire and for diving.

TM: Okay. And rangers, it sounds like, you know, law enforcement.

BF: Well, but then law enforcement, that was the real tricky one.

TM: Why?

BF: Well, because, one, the standard didn't really exist. Other police agencies, which I talked to, either talked or I'd call somebody and say how about sending me your standards for fitness from the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office or something. So, as I say, I was not necessarily hunched over a keyboard all the time, but I was trying to get ideas and facts and what are other agencies doing and other entities out there doing. And did they mandate it? Is it voluntary kinds of stuff?

TM: I see.

BF: And for rangers within the NPS, protection-wise, law enforcement, guys involved in law enforcement, over time, a lot of these people ended up going through schools, training places. Now every ranger goes through the federal law enforcement training center in Georgia, and that's a long— It's like 6- to 8-months' worth. I mean, it's not an easy operation. It's the same school that all the other law enforcement entities go through. But not all the rangers back in the '60s were at that level. Some of them had been trained by sheriff's offices. In my case, I was grandfathered in because of my training at the Tucson Police Department. And comparatively speaking, my training on a Tucson PD was much more simple and not nearly as involved and as comprehensive and total as they are doing today.

TM: Right. But at the time, sounds like you were light years ahead of the rangers that were assigned weapons in the Park Service in a briefcase, so, you know, all things are relative here.

BF: Well, in Yosemite, you know, particularly in Yosemite, we were pretty far ahead of the pack.

TM: Okay.

BF: And we set standards for ourselves. The rangers had to do certain things. Now, they didn't necessarily— I mean, there was no law that said they had to have a certain level of health or fitness, rather not so much health, but fitness. But if you didn't have this level of fitness, then you didn't participate in certain things either. And that would reflect on your job. And we— I say "we," I mean the chief ranger, mostly, could get away with this and have that. And the rangers in Yosemite mostly bought into it. I mean, they were willing and interested in trying to develop a certain, you know, bring all the people up to a certain level. But when you go to a national level where all the rangers throughout the entire National Park system have to do these things, that was much more difficult. And so, you asked about Human Resources, which in my day it was really called Personnel, but I guess the term today is Human Resources, and I think that's a better term probably. But we had some women that were saying, "Well, no, we don't have the upper body strength to do certain things." And in this case, it was do a certain number of chin-ups or push-ups.

And I'm trying to avoid the specifics because I actually don't remember all the specifics. But, you know, it was easier to tell some male ranger that he had to, if you're going to be a law enforcement ranger, you had to be able to do this and that and whatever, including demonstration of upper body strength. And we had— I'm not going to name any names, but we had a couple of people—one Ranger was way overweight but was far enough up in the level of Rangers around the country.

TM: A seniority.

BF: Well, yeah, but he also had a lot of visibility and a lot of friends that he could sort of complained to. And, as I said, this was not a mandatory program. The program was mandatory, but you did not have to actually achieve a certain level of fitness. You had to just participate.

TM: Just be there. Okay.

BF: You had to take the test, and if you failed, that was a way of knowing what you needed to improve on.

TM: Right.

BF: And even that was very difficult to try to get. Now, I think the system is evolved to a point where we got beyond that. But one woman and one guy, in particular, they both went to the national head of the human resources programs for the Park Service and were able to derail this mandatory testing. And it's also about the same time that I ended up transferring out anyway, and I didn't have any further responsibility in that regard. But it was really very disappointing that we were set back. Now, there was a lot of stuff I had done. There were a lot of standards I had identified. When I say "I," it just means that I was able to get ideas and documents and things from elsewhere that I could incorporate into something. So, it wasn't like I had this real brainstorm on identifying everything that needed to be done. I was plagiarizing everybody else's stuff. But I was able to put it in one spot, and that was the program we were starting to work towards. So, these two people derailed part of that program. I mean, there was still stuff that we were mandating for divers and trying to do it for law enforcement, although that was tricky.

TM: But it does, you know, in their defense and kind of just wandering both sides of the argument here, females typically do not have the same muscle mass or the same lever-arm length. And if the standard is written for one—

BF: Well, but it was age and sex— We took that into consideration too. I mean, that was written into the—

TM: Right. And that makes sense. If it's age, and I hadn't thought about age, because, again, you start getting close to retiring, you know, you're just not going to get a job for Cirque de Soleil.

BF: Well, and that was the, I guess, one of the beauties of Walter, myself, and a couple other rangers that were stationed there in D.C. at the same time that we worked with. I was in, it's called the Division of Ranger Activities. I mean, that was the title: Ranger Activities. And so, there were several other rangers that had other responsibilities, you know, resources, legislation. But a lot of these people, and certainly myself, had come up through the ranks. We had a pretty good empathy and understanding of what rangers did around the country. And Walt and I, and Walt was my immediate supervisor—Walt and I outrightly agreed, I mean, this wasn't something we just were thinking about this. We talked about this, and we agreed that we wanted to— We were trying to work for the mid-level rangers that were in the field. I mean, that's who we thought our boss was. Now, technically, that wasn't true, but empathetically we wanted to take care of and help and promote and refine what rangers did. You know, try to bring some standards around to the entire agency. So having said that, the directives that I was writing—in this case we're talking about health and fitness—the beauty of what Walt and I brought to the field was we came up through the ranks. We knew what these guys did. And we knew enough people around the system, and we were in such a job where we could go out and ask Joe Blow Ranger in Grand Tetons, "So, what do you think you need? What do you need? What could we do to help you?" That sort of thing. And that's why I felt that my time there in D.C. was the most rewarding of any of my Park Service jobs, which

was, like, 12 different parks, and I don't know how many different positions. So, you know, it was very rewarding, but it was terribly involved.

TM: Yeah.

BF: When you try to tell people they've got to do certain things, like today wearing masks. It becomes tricky. Even though you're part of an agency, you're getting paid, and you're supposed to do performance certain levels, well, you know, sometimes that doesn't really work quite as smoothly as you like.

TM: Right. One size does not fit all in many cases.

BF: Well, with women, I actually got involved with, I say the Navy for sure, and I think another military unit or two. But they found out that women could do a lot of things that the men could do just as well, if not better. It's just that they hadn't developed certain muscles.

TM: Right. That's right.

BF: They weren't required to have certain muscles. We were sort of hanging our hat on the fact that other agencies can do this. Why can't we? But we got torpedoed a little bit, anyway, by this one guy, this one man, and this one woman. And then, you know, they teamed up and they got to the personnel people, the human resource people, and were able to set us back a little bit. And as I said, right about that time I ended up transferring out anyway.

But I had a good time when I was stationed in Washington, D.C. I put together the first national training, a week-long training, and it was not so much training. It's just sort of coordination-group gathering for all the people that had some aviation responsibility in their particular parks. Grand Canyon— Well, Grand Canyon's a little different, I suppose. But Yellowstone—if you were in Yellowstone, there were times when there was a requirement for using a helicopter or fixed-wing. And what were the standards? So, the guy that, the person that oversaw that, which was usually somebody in fire, somebody who was mostly in fire. So, I put together in Boise, where we brought together about 25 or 30 of mostly Rangers who had responsibility for aviation within their parks. And the Grand Canyon is a little bit of an exception because of that sort of 24/7 contract we had.

TM: No, but the Grand Canyon has aviation, they have a helicopter, and they need it. And Yellowstone. You know, Yosemite.

BF: Well, but, you know, those are more sort of ancillary. You had fire, and maybe search and rescue in Yosemite, but you didn't have a helicopter year-round. Now, you had it in the summertime.

TM: Right. I imagine very few parks did, but I can also imagine a lot of parks can use that type of tool for search and rescue. They can use it for resource monitoring. I mean, just think of all kinds of reasons to use that type of machinery as tools. So, I would think that certainly the big land parks would show up. Yeah, you probably aren't going to get the smaller birthplace of President X kind of parks. They're not going to show up, but—

BF: Well, yeah. So, I put together that— Again, I keep saying I, but I mean I facilitated— I'm the one that probably put the energy to initiate it, at least, and see it through. For aviation, did that for diving. I did it for EMS. I don't think I did it for health and fitness. That ultimately came about. The Park Service really has evolved pretty well in a lot of these disciplines. You know, they refined the standards. These things are written down and people that participate in all these different kinds of aspects of the Park Service. They sort of know what they're required and what's expected of them and whatever. But a lot of that didn't exist. Most of that didn't exist when I was starting out in D.C.

TM: Well, you mentioned working with the aircraft services folks out of Boise. Is this when you did that work, you know, knowing, understanding the short haul needs and were able to go ahead and make that work in D.C.? Is that when that happened?

BF: Well, yeah. Basically, the guy that was the head of the Office of Aircraft Services, OAS, for the Department of the Interior at the time was Bob Peterson, and his background was as a park ranger, but he was also a personal pilot. That was one of his passions. And he had a plane, and over the years probably had several different planes. But he ended up, because of his background and the way he came up, he left the National Park Service and worked for the Department of the Interior as head of the Office of Aircraft Services. So, that was one of the beauties of my trying to get the short-haul program off the ground. You know, I wasn't the one that developed the standards and the criteria for the short-haul programs that now exist in the Park Service. It was just that I sort of broke it loose so that we could actually have it developed. I don't know if that makes sense or not.

TM: Yeah. You saw need, so somebody's got to start to bell the cat here.

BF: Yeah. You have a way of synthesizing everything I've been talking about for a couple of minutes down to about two sentences.

TM: Well, no. It's just you led me there, so that makes sense. And I was thinking about search and rescue, as well, in all this, sort of, looking at directives on how that would work.

BF: Now, I never did— As much as I love search and rescue, and as much as I was involved with it over the years, you know, we thought about developing directives, which I think now exists pretty intensely. I mean, it's pretty well refined. What you can do. What you can't do. What you're supposed to do, and how you do it, and whatever. But that was one of the disciplines that I had oversight on that I didn't get my fingers that much into the pie. I did start a system or at least refined a system of reporting, because at the time, we didn't know how many people were we rescuing. There was really no way of tracking how many people were killed or died within the parks. And I don't necessarily think that I was the very first person that started that, but I certainly pushed it along. I developed reporting systems, try to get the parks to report to their regional offices, and their regions would give me the information. Over time, it becomes valuable.

There's lots of reasons to know how many people were killed or how many rescues were there, and how much money did we spend, and, you know, sort of an overall look at the programs, which is what I did for all those other entities as well, EMS, diving, or whatever. So, as I said, I enjoyed it. Every day was a little bit different, mostly. Some days I would devote to actually sitting over the keyboard and writing stuff, but I got

involved in a lot of different parts of the operation and at a level where I could actually make some difference for the rangers in the field, the agency in general.

TM: Right. Which is great to have that knowledge set and then to be able to put it to work in the policy arena. It just makes perfect sense.

BF: Well, I brought a lot of experience. I didn't necessarily bring any, you know, the real brain power to it. But I did have an interest and helped push these programs along and refine them and try to develop standards.

TM: Right. You know, today when I think of Washington, D.C., I think of a place with a high level of political heat, if you will. In the '80s there, for the four years that you were at D.C., '87 to '90, was it a political place? Were you aware of politics impacting the agency and agency operations or not?

BF: Well, you know, now remember, the fact that I was stationed in Washington, D.C., does not mean I knew everything that was taking place.

TM: Sure, of course.

BF: But we had employees, and this still might be the term, they called Schedule C with the letter C, which I don't know what any of that means. I just know that that's what they were referred to, but they were political appointees. They could be somebody that was, you know, had a certain expertise or had participated in somebody's campaign perhaps, and they would end up being in positions around the agency. It wasn't like there were that many, but in Washington, D.C., of course, you got to see more than— I mean, that's where most of them were stationed anyway. Probably almost all of them, I suspect, and I worked with a couple of them. And the ones that I worked with seems to be pretty competent and were interested. They just did not come up through the agency like I did.

TM: Right.

BF: So, to compare them to what's taking place today in 2020, I don't know that there's a lot of comparability. I think it's gotten much worse today, it seems. But again, you know, I've been out of that. I've been retired for 20 years, and I've been away from that kind of level of involvement for 25 or more years.

TM: Right. This is a 30- to 35-year-old stale question, so—

BF: But I don't think it was nearly as politically driven, at least sort of subversive now, I think, almost, as it is today. Back then, it was people that, you know, and only not that many. But I only worked with a few, but I think there are others, as well. But there might have been 20 or 30 of these Schedule C's throughout the entire agency. But I don't think that they were the same as what is being done today.

TM: Right. Okay.

BF: And I don't have any real good way of making that comparison, I don't think.

TM: Is there anything else about your time in D.C. that when you think back on that—

BF: I'm sure there will be. Well, you know living in D.C.— Just living in D.C. is hard for me.

TM: You mean just because of the traffic, or—

BF: Yeah. Well, traffic was terrible. When you did something, when you went to work, and when you came home, or if you were on a weekend, you were going to go across to the other side of Washington, D.C., it was like a military operation. You had to plan it down to sometimes a five-minute window.

TM: I'm laughing because I don't think that's changed in 35 years.

BF: No. I don't think that's— It's probably gotten even much worse.

TM: It has, yeah.

BF: In my case, with two little boys and I was single, and I was trying to have a social life as well. So, just living in D.C., it was expensive. I was a GS-13, which is basically a major in sort of a comparability sense, and I was slowly going broke.

TM: Wow.

BF: I mean, I could keep my head above water because I was making a pretty decent living, but, you know, the house that I bought, the townhouse I bought, was small. It wasn't any great shakes by any stretch.

TM: Yeah, you said it was 900-square feet.

BF: It was 900-square feet. You have a good memory.

TM: For three people.

BF: Yeah, for three people. And I was a 45-minute drive on a good day from my office, from work. So, it wasn't as easy living there as you might think. But once you're at home, it was it was good. It was, you know, decent neighborhoods, and my kids went to good schools. So, I liked it from that perspective. One of the interesting things about Washington, D.C., is because of the traffic. It's almost like—and I'm going to be a little hyperbolic, if that's the right term—when the first snowflake would fall, you could almost visualize the air-raid sirens going off. And people were dashing for their cars because you did not want to be trapped or caught on the roads during a snowstorm. It became funny in some ways, having worked in parks where there'd be, you know, a snowstorm might dump five or six feet of snow, and then you just go out to put chains on. You do what you needed to do. But to watch this all taking place, and I'm sure they still do this today where they would have these snow days where if there was a forecast for a storm coming in, and it was supposed to hit at 6 o'clock the next morning, that time period, there were times when you did not have to go to work. And this is sort of pre-computer, pre the way they do things today. But there were times when, you know, the entire federal workforce in D.C.—I say the entire but a lot of the workforce—would not go to work, but yet the road would be fine because the storm only laid down half an inch or it sort of missed the Washington, D.C. area. And there were times when I would go into work and I'd be the only one, almost the only one in the entire interior building.

I'm being a little exaggerating, I think. There were probably others, as well. But it would be like a ghost town. So, it was an interesting phenomenon. And then the same thing with carpools. Carpools reigned. If you were in a carpool, everybody knew you had to get to that carpool so you could get home. And, you know, people would leave in the middle of meetings and stuff.

TM: You know, I don't know quite how to frame this into a question. Your kids were growing up in Yosemite: pretty rural, pretty scenically stunning. And then they were in Grand Canyon: pretty rural, pretty scenically stunning. You were working in Death Valley before Yosemite and Lake Mead before then. Rural, stunningly beautiful scenery country. To be uprooted out of there and put in a major city center, again, with carpooling and people terrified about the commute and, you know, you were overseeing dozens of people and then you weren't. It just seems like quite, I don't know how to word it except to say quite a jerk on the dog collar.

BF: Yeah. I mean, I know what you're saying, and I—

TM: How did you handle that?

BF: Well, I knew that I applied for that job. If I didn't want to go there, I wouldn't have applied for the job. But I also knew that there was a risk. I think I mentioned this before, but most of my peers throughout the agency, other rangers that were in field, there was a real fear of going to a central office, either Washington, D.C., or one of the regional offices, which while I was in the agency, there were ten regional offices. There was a fear of going to do, you know, to bring their expertise and their experiences and whatever to a regional office to oversee a program, you know, various programs because the fear was that they would be trapped there. They couldn't get out. You know, they might be willing to actually spend three or four or five years doing certain things, but they didn't necessarily want to be stuck in San Francisco, which is the regional office, one of the regional offices. They didn't want to be stuck there.

TM: But I can appreciate the lure of a big city for schooling, and for college for the kids, and a place to retire versus back at a park like Grand Canyon where you talked about essential housing, essential positions, where you have to be housed in the park. You know, you can't establish a home somewhere until you retire. And then you've got a scramble to try to buy a house and make new friends with your neighbors. And so, in a way, I can see the lure of moving into a regional offices or central offices somehow and retiring there, because you're set in a way.

BF: Well, I can't speak for everybody. I don't get that sense, Tom, that there was kind of that lure. I think that if you lived at the Grand Canyon, you knew that you couldn't retire there. Now, you might be able to retire in Flagstaff or Williams or perhaps even someplace maybe even, like, in Tusayan, but—

TM: I mean, if you worked in Saguaro, East or West, in Tucson, just because you live in Tucson, your chances of retiring out of that park or those parks and just going back home are pretty good. But Grand Canyon is not an option.

BF: No. And it depends on where you are in your career, too. If you're close enough, if you've been working for 25 or 30 years, and you're nearing a retirement age, at least, then you might end up staying in one spot, like you use Saguaro as an example. There

actually is park housing. There are rangers that live in the park itself. But because Tucson has grown up around these places, you know, Saguaro. In the earlier days, in the '40s and '50s and the '60s, there was still a big buffer. There are still a lot of, not wilderness, but a lot of undeveloped land between the park and, say, the borders of Tucson.

TM: Right. I was just thinking of for Grand Canyon, the nearest place anyone can buy land is like 30 miles south. And in Tucson, it's three miles east or west outside of the park where you can buy a house and possibly rent it out and keep an eye on it. If you're living in-park in designated housing, you have to pay rent on, so now you're paying two mortgages or two rents, if you will. Yeah, so—

BF: Well, you weren't paying two mortgages, but you were paying two rents.

TM: Right. Well, you could be paying a mortgage and a rent.

BF: Correct. Yeah.

TM: But just thinking about the lure of why it might be attractive to get anchored in at the region or at Washington, I can understand that.

BF: Well, that might be true for some people. In my case, though, I had absolutely no thought about retiring in Washington, D.C. Before, when I was at the Grand Canyon and applied for the job in Washington, D.C., it really was to go back and try to work on these programs and see if I could do stuff that would be beneficial to the rangers in the field in other parks.

TM: But I would think, you know, I'm going to kind of play a little devil's advocate here. I would think that that would be something you could do till you retired.

BF: Yeah, for sure. I could have.

TM: And so, how was it that you sort of said, "Okay, well. I've done this for four years, and that's enough, and now I'm going to move on"?

BF: Well, a couple of things happened. One, as you know, after about four years and when I moved from Washington, D.C. to Padre Island, my oldest son was finishing up his sophomore year in high school. And I thought, well, if I'm going to make the move, I need to do it now. I do not want to have him be a junior in high school and then uproot him and take him someplace else for his last year. That was not fair to him. And my youngest son, Adam, who was three years younger and, I think, it's three grades, perhaps, behind him, you know, wasn't quite as much importance because he wasn't yet in high school. So that was in the back of my mind. But I was asked— In my era in Washington, D.C., the Secretary of the Interior oversaw trust territories. Guam would be a good example. The Commonwealth of Northern Marianas, Saipan, Chuuk would be other examples, the Virgin Islands. That was part of the Secretary of the Interior's responsibility, or the Department of the Interior.

And there was an assistant secretary that that was that person's responsibility, was all those trust territories. And that person had some staff, and I got to know the staff, two men, in particular, that oversaw the law enforcement and protection parts of these trust

territories. I was asked, initially informally, then I was asked formally later on, like, a month later, but initially to go and be the chief of the fire and police departments in Palau, which is this spectacularly beautiful little island way in the South Pacific, way west of Hawaii. But it also had a king, and it was a pretty poor island. Or there's a bunch of islands, but Palau was the biggest one. That's where the capital is. But it's a little, tiny island, and I've been there diving, just spectacular diving, and I was asked to be the chief of the fire department and the police department for this little country, this little thing. And I tentatively agreed to it. I talked to my boys' mother about taking the kids down there. She thought that was a good idea. She didn't have any real squawks with it. She thought it would be a good thing, you know, broaden the kids' perspective and outlook and stuff. So, I looked into the school, and I think— There was like a public high school, but there's also, I think it was a Catholic school that had better credentials, had better teaching. And a few people I talked to that knew anything about this said if I wanted to take my kids, I needed to put them in that school. So, that was okay. And I went down to the local library there in Herndon, Virginia, and my sons and I rented a couple of little documentary videos on Palau. So, the kids were all excited about it. And even to this day, 2020— I mean, neither one of them have mentioned it in the last couple of years. But, you know, 20 years or more years after I ended up not going there, you know, my sons would say “Geez, I wish we'd always gone to Palau.”

But anyway, I agreed to going there, but in the interim after I agreed to this informally. It was just like, well, would you be interested in going? Well, yeah. I'd be interested in going. I thought, you know, the position sort of shifted. It was no longer was I—I was a, became an advisor, but it was still okay. And then the King of Palau, and this is sort of a more traditional kind of a king, ended up hiring a couple of his relatives and put them into the police department, in the police force, which probably didn't have more than maybe 40 or 50 people total.

But put them in there, and they were felons in the police department. And so, there was this shifting. The job demand and my responsibilities kept shifting around. And then there was what the king did. I was interviewed by what would basically be an ambassador from Palau that was, that person was a representative to the trust territories within the Department of the Interior. And I was interviewed by him, and he thought I'd be a good fit for going to Palau, and he was happy with it. So, you know, during this month or so where we got all excited about us moving to Palau, I talked to a couple of other peer rangers who had done assignments overseas, because I was a little worried about after I spend X number of years in Palau—well, it was only— It started out as a two-year commitment—how do I fit back into the operation once we come back? So, I had sort of these overriding fears and concerns—not so much fears but concerns— But during this month, Walt had also, my boss Walter, had also been negotiating with Lake Mead because the chief ranger at Lake Mead was getting ready to retire, and they thought that I could go to Lake Mead as chief ranger.

So, that was on the horizon. And then I'm sitting in my little office, doing whatever, and the regional director for the Southwest Region, a man by the name of John Cook, who was really quite a powerful force. Somebody you did not want to cross very much. I mean, a nice person but he also had this “We're going to do it my way” kind of thing. And John came in one day and asked, “Would you be interested in going to Padre Island National Seashore as the superintendent?” I said, well, I would be interested. See, for me, the word “interest” had a little bit different understanding or connotation than it did for him. For me, interest was interest. It wasn't a commitment, but it was just interest.

TM: Like, tell me more. It wasn't a no. You're interested. It's not like, oh, no, there's no way I'm going to go over there.

BF: Well, that's correct. That's right. And so, I said, "Well, yeah, I'd be interested." And I don't know, a week or two later, he came in and basically asks the same question again. And so, I went and talked to Walter. I said, "Walter, there's something going on here that I don't know about." And as it turns out, and I did go to Padre Island. I did not go to Palau. I did not go to Lake Mead. I went to Padre Island as the superintendent. As it turns out, John Cook, the regional director, had already gotten it approved by the Secretary of the Interior.

TM: [Laughs]

BF: It was already a done deal. I just did not know it. Now, I did not learn about this until, you know, sometime later. You know, a couple years later, probably. But I don't know exactly why I was telling you all this, except that I guess it was just part of my time back there.

TM: No, this is good. I think we've been at this almost an hour and a half. And this is a perfect place to wrap this up because we'll pick it up on your way to Padre Island. And, of course, I want to know a little bit more about John Cook. And questions about the Secretary of the Interior, and then what is it like to arrive at a National Park as the superintendent and know very little about the park.

BF: Yeah, right. That's right.

TM: So, unless there's something else you want to add to or put the exclamation mark on the sentence—

BF: Well, no. You know, there were so many things that I did at D.C., but none of them jump out at me as being real noteworthy. Now, I suspect that after you turn this thing off, and I think about it tomorrow, I will remember something I would like to insert, which, of course, I know that I can.

TM: And we did that with Grand Canyon. We were all ready to go to Washington, D.C., and then we spent another interview on talking about some really neat things of Grand Canyon, which I was very grateful that you did, so—

BF: Yeah, and I understand that. But for the time being, I can't think of anything in Washington, D.C. I mean, if you want me to transition the Padre Island, we can do that.

TM: But when we start next time, if there's some things you want to mention about D.C., then I'll want to capture that.

BF: Yeah. Okay.

TM: Great.

BF: And I might actually look up, try to find out who was the Secretary of the Interior.

TM: Well, with that, this will conclude Part 18 oral history interview with Butch Farabee. Today's Friday, July 10, 2020. My name is Tom Martin. And Butch, thank you so much.

BF: My pleasure, Tom.