

Michael Kline: Plenty of interesting material to talk about. Let us see. Today is the 27th, is it not?

Forest Blume: [affirmative]

MK: March 27th. What is your full name?

FB: Forest Blume.

MK: I understand you are not a native of Tucker County. You are from –

FB: No. Fayette County.

MK: Fayette County. Fayette is an interesting county. Where from down there?

FB: Lookout, on just a wide spot on in the road on Route 60, about 12 miles above Hawks Nest towards Virginia line, towards Rainelle, in that area.

MK: Tell me something about your people that were in there.

FB: My people?

MK: Yes.

FB: Well, my granddad was one of the very first settlers there on Midland Trail. The old home place is still standing. He had a 180-acre farm to start out with. It ended up split between about five of his kids. Each one of them, he'd given 10-, 12-acre plots of property. He or his old home place and two old maid aunts and one other aunt that married is – only two still living on the farm today.

MK: They are still there, are they?

FB: Old home place is still there with the two aunts. One of them must be close to – oh, she has to be in her nineties. My granddad was lived to be ninety-eight. Of course, he was about dead three or four times. He told them, he said, "Don't worry about me. Will live to be ninety-eight." Well, he lived ten, twelve days making it. But –

MK: What was his name?

FB: Oscar Blume. My dad's name was George Oscar, and he lived to be fifty-three. [laughter] But about all the boys died young, all but one. He died shortly after I came up here. He was seventy-six, I believe, when he died. But the old man lived to be ninety-eight. Their mother died quite young. I think –

MK: Where was Oscar Blume born?

FB: He was –

MK: You say he was one of the first settlers in that county?

FB: They were born over around – it was over in Virginia, but I can't think right now, the name of the place. They came into here, walked in a wagon to Lewisburg, what little bit's been run back on them. Then they made it on into Lookout. The first jail in Fayette County was on his farm. It was just a small log jail. As matter of fact, in my times, I can remember part of the foundation standing for the thing. It had a big, two-high pole fence with a big rail across the top of it, going into the entrance of it, which is now close to – the cemetery is the next entrance.

MK: Were you in a great big family of kids then?

FB: No. There were only five in my family. But in my granddad's or my grandmother's – my mother's family, there were twenty-four.

MK: What?

FB: My grandpa was married three different times, but he's 13 in my mother's immediate family. She was the first one to pass away. She passed away in 1970. Since then, there've been a couple more of them passed away. But –

MK: Who were they?

FB: Beavers. They were Beavers. Some of the older ones was fought in the Civil War even, on the thing. My oldest uncle, he still lives in California. He tells about going to work. He was a trap door boy in the coal mines. He went to work when he was 13 years old in the coal mines, and worked for many, many years. When they take them into service, they settled out in California. They were in the Air Force as firemen. They stayed on as firemen in a private life out there. Two or three of them did. So, they were a rather large family. Matter of fact, there are some of them that I never even met – some of my granddad's first people that I never even met, out from his first wife. I think she had three or four from them, and the rest of them next to –

MK: What was his name?

FB: John William Beaver.

MK: Was he in the Civil War?

FB: No. He was – that was before his time [laughter].

MK: Before?

FB: Yes. I'm wrong about the Civil War. I'm mistaken about that. These boys were all in the Second World War. I don't know where I got Civil War. Now, granddad was during the Civil

War time. But I don't think he ever served in it. I don't know where I come up with that part of it. Now, my grandmother used to tell a pretty interesting story about how she ended up in West Virginia. She was somewhere in Kentucky. She didn't even know really where. She had a stepfather when she was about 11 or 12 years old. Well, she ran to keep him from molesting her. She ended up with some politician in Charleston, tucked her in and kept her for – she stayed there, went through part of her grade school. I believe she said she stayed there around three or four years. Then somehow or other, she ended up 60 miles on up the road from Charleston. She married my granddad when she was very young. He was considerably older than her. Matter of fact, he passed away a couple years before I was born. I'm fifty-four years old. So, he passed away just about the time my brother who's older than me was born. My grandmother, well, she didn't pass away until somewhere around sixty-six, I believe, when she passed away, 1966. She lived to be eighty-eight also. But she tells how he mistreated her, how she got across the river – Ohio River, and all this stuff. She really sat down and talked to my brother in Ohio before she died. One time, he sat and talked with her a good bit. She told a very interesting story, which I never got to really hear from her, which I'd loved to have heard, but I didn't.

MK: Did you go to school right around Lookout?

FB: Went to Divide, they called it. It's a school. It's still there, but then Nuttall High School, which is Midland Trail now since it combined the school. They moved it to the Hico area about halfway between Lookout and Hampstead, is where it's at now. But, yes, we went to school there. Winona, [inaudible], Clifftop, and all of them ended up at the Nuttall High School. But the grade schools were pretty well separate. They were pretty well into the – smaller towns each had a grade school. But when it to come high school, they come from over on Meadow River and all over the place to the high school. The old school is still standing and everything, but I don't think they use it for anything now. They did use the gym up there for a while. But I think they finally got one built at that place.

MK: So, you finished high school there then?

FB: I finished high school in the service. I finished – no, I quit. I went to work when I was 16 years old at the – had the misfortune of – I guess it's a misfortune looking back on it now. My granddad's – the three old maids at the time that were staying there and never married at the time, they kept boarders. I had the misfortune to work the tree experts of working there and staying there. I got to know some of them and got to work in mill and summer jobs. Then my dad got down his back and nobody was working. So, I just worked on too there after that. While I was in Korea, we went to school over on the pier to finish our education. Just right before we were to take the test, the pier burnt down. So, I didn't get to finish up there. So, after I came back and worked all two or three years, I went to West Virginia Tech and went ahead and finished up my education down there – always there.

MK: That is where you took up forest –

FB: No, I worked for – my wife's brother went to work in 1955. He came back out of the service about eight or ten months before I did. He tried to talk me into coming. At that time, it was paying something like \$195 a month. I didn't think I could take care of a wife and kid on

\$195 a month. So, I elected to go to work at the factory. I always sort of had a – after knowing what he'd done and everything, I sort of had a hankering for the job, but this never did have the time. So, I was off with a – I had a double hernia operation. So, while I was off, I went down to take a test and everything. Got time. I got time to go take the civil service test and so on and so forth. That's when I ended up getting into it. Well, about a year later really before I went to work for them. So –

MK: Were you in Tucker County by that time?

FB: No, I'd never even heard – well, I knew there was a Tucker County, but I didn't know where it was at. When I went down to apply for the job, there was one opening in Tucker County and one (milestone?) in Grant County up and down below Charleston, on the river. So, we looked at the map and found out where Tucker County was. I said, "Well, right there is probably where I'll end up." That was where I ended up. So, no, I'd never been to Tucker County in my life, never been to Randolph County, never been up in this part of the country at all at that time. So –

MK: So, what year was it?

FB: [19]68. In [19]68 when I came up here and been here ever since.

MK: How did you like it?

FB: In my type of work, I love it. But there are a lot of things we had to do, a lot of getting used to, to start out with. It snowed, I think, ever started early that winter.

MK: How do you describe your job? What do you do exactly?

FB: Well, you've been here about fifteen [laughter] minutes. I think you can see what we do a good bit. In a rural county like this, about everything, just to be truthful with you, from dog catcher – I had a woman call me today on bulldozers running up and down the road, cutting the roads up and tracks and stuff. But really our main job is game and fish and highway litter and litter on private lands, which is all the officers' jobs, but we ended up with a bigger part of the – rest of them won't hardly mess with the litter. We take care of all the DNR warrants. Reclamation or water resources or anybody like this makes the investigation and finds reasons for the right citation or get warrants. Well, we end up serving the warrants on them. So, they've got us loaded up pretty heavily really for as few of us as are. We're about 116 or something like that.

MK: So, you are with the Department of Natural Resources?

FB: Right. We're law –

MK: Through fish or game?

FB: Law enforcement –

MK: Law?

FB: – section. Yes. Now, I understand that the legislature has seen it in their heart to add air pollution and – there was another one – energy enforcement on to us. So, I don't know what that's going to consist of, but they load us down with everything but money. [laughter] They forget us when it comes time for the money, but they like to put – it seems like when they get down there and something new comes up and nobody else knows what to do with this, they give it to conservation officers. But when it comes time for money, they don't know we exist really. But, oh, it's a lot better. It used to be – like I said, in 1955, it paid \$195 a month, is what the going rate was. We've stayed just about on even [inaudible] up until 1968. It did pick up a little bit. Then we started to fade out again here in the last four or five years. We started losing ground again, the last four or five years of it. But –

MK: Yes, it has been a rough time. Have you ever run up against any pretty tough customers in the woods?

FB: Not really that bad. You just don't know which one's going to be a rough customer, which is now, I found, if you ever stop a young man in the woods unexpectedly, first thing he does, he'll point a gun right in your stomach every time. Reflexes. Not he is going to shoot you, but you don't know this. But anytime – I mean, it's preseason squirrel hunting, which we don't have much of up here. Well, you step out behind a tree on him, he'll throw that gun at you every time. But other than that, of course, when you're after a spotlight or you don't know what he's got behind. But you always try to keep him between you and the lights if you can after you get started. But when you walk up to the car, have him get out of the car. You hope he's not going to do nothing. So far, I've been awful lucky. Nobody's ever tried anything at all on me. So, I've been awful lucky with that.

MK: Well, you have got a reasonable sort of a feeling about you. I do not know. I do not think anybody ever would probably.

FB: [laughter]

MK: We get real jumpy around you.

FB: No. When you go out there, you have to go out there with attitude, or I do, that you're going to be careful. You're not going to let him get the jump on you. It doesn't bother me. Maybe I'm a fool for not letting it bother me. But it don't bother me because I always try to go prepared when I go on something like that. A lot of times, we'll get called 3:00 a.m. on a spotlight case. Well, you don't get someone else to go with you in a rural county at 3:00 a.m. So, you go. You do whatever you have to do. So far, we've been very fortunate. I think in the history of the conservation officers, we had two men killed in the whole history of the law enforcement section of it. The last one was killed, was killed over a letter. It was a letter deal. He was being – the magistrate was going to allow the fire to pick up. So, he was being the good guy and take him to his house to change clothes. He went in the house. When he didn't come back out as soon as this boy thought he should, he went to see why. He pulled a rifle on him, shot him right in the eye with, I believe, thirty-odd six rifle. So, you don't know which ones

could –

MK: Was that in Paw Paw? Was that in Paw Paw that that happened?

FB: That was down at –

MK: I am thinking of another case.

FB: – down on the Virginia line, Peterstown, in that area. Yes.

MK: Monroe County.

FB: Monroe County is where it's at, yes, right. This hadn't been so many years ago, five, six, seven maybe. Time gets away from you after a while. It's probably been seven or eight years ago this happened. We thought he was the first, but then somebody come up at – one was killed back in the early years by a moonshiner or something that they went in knowing. But we've been awful forcing it, inner job because statistics show that it is a much more dangerous job that most law enforcement does have. Because you're out away from the general public most of the time and so on and so forth. But you've got to let them think you're in command, whether you are or not. I think that helps. I really do. I think if you back up a drop from them, I think they'd take advantage of you, a lot of them. Of course, you run into people you don't know them. With today's thing with drugs and all this, you don't know what you're running up against when you have to stop somebody or something. But, like I said, it doesn't bother me. I don't know whether that's good or bad. Really, I don't that it doesn't bother me.

MK: Well, the nice part of your job is that you have a chance to observe nature real –

FB: A whole lot of getting out and not working in a – looking at four walls all day or a punch hole in the mines, which I have done. Yes, there are a lot of good points in it. My wife's got a saying – I think she's about half right. "I think a conservation officer is born and not made." I actually believe that. I think you have to have it in your heart that you want to protect the environment and the game and so on and so forth. It's just almost – which is a sad thing, but this has almost made a non-hunter out of me. I've seen so much people killing just to be killing, not for the meat or anything. I've seen people hog fish up behind the fish truck. I loved the fish before I came here. I could certainly [inaudible] don't hardly eat fish [inaudible]. They take the sport out of something like that, well, to me, that kills it. They really do. Up here, that trout truck means more to them running, whether they're going to get to work next week or not. But I mean, this, now really, this is a small percentage of them, but it sticks out like a sore thumb when you got something –

MK: It must be the same everywhere. Because before I lived here, I came from Hampshire County. That was the way it was over there.

FB: Yes. Fayette's –

MK: We lived right on a little trout stream and [inaudible]. Boy, there was the same crowd.

There was always a following [laughter] [inaudible].

FB: Same people over and over and over, or year after year after year. I've seen them raise their kids now. They're taking over.

MK: [laughter]

FB: I've been here that long at –

MK: You even getting to see a second generation.

FB: Second generation and some –

MK: Stop truck followers.

FB: – in a couple cases, third generation has got started now [laughter]. But, yes, the truck followers, especially. Now, the hunting up here, I don't think they're quite that greedy on it. A lot of the violations that we get in hunting are few young fellows just – I don't know what they're calling. But it seems like if you get a little older, people, I guess, they're looking at it and saying, "Well, if I don't stop, they're not going to be nothing left for my children," and so on and so forth. Some of the biggest violators we got, after a few years, they're the ones that helps us out the most.

FB: So, it seems like they see the light after a while. I'm still waiting for Hank to see it, but he hasn't seen it yet.

MK: He is still spotlighting a lot, is he? Carrying on?

FB: That's watching behind the fish truck. [laughter]

Now, Hank does pretty good.

MK: [laughter] Have you noticed any changes in the eighteen years in the ecology in terms of timbering or mining? Or has any of the extractive industries had any effect on wildlife, do you feel, or –

FB: Right.

MK: – watersheds?

FB: We've seen a big change. We have this experimental forest up here, inferno forest. They've done a lot of clear cutting, which over the years, has made it good for the deer cover. Now, they claim deer – it would help all of it, but I can't really see nothing but deer. Maybe a little better on the turkey. Now, we've come up a good bit on the turkey in the eighteen years I've been here. We got a pretty good flock in here. Then all of a sudden, they got the – in a big way of trapping and moved them to the other parts of the state. Being the wildlife man just about to fight over

that, he would catch a flock of twenty. He would take twenty. I argued with him. Now, you could throw out an old hen or a couple of old hens and a rooster, all that, and you haven't ruined the flock of turkeys. But they were going for numbers, I think, more than anything else. I think, possibly, this was wrong, but they seemed to come right back. It didn't seem to hurt them all that bad over the years. Of course, then this doe season came in. This really shook up the population around here because – well, did me too. I'll have to admit, I thought it was a growing nation of deer herds. Because I felt, being raised on a farm, if you kill the cows, your calf's gone. But it hasn't proved out that way, hardly at all. You take somebody that when they're as young and then clear cut of this being cut. I know I've got a couple friends that think the deer herd is completely gone because their favorite hunting spot is no longer loaded down with deer. But if they go down the road 10 miles or 5 miles, they're going to find this as many deer or more. But the biggest change I've seen in Tucker County – and when I first came here in [19]68, there were no young people at all. It was either school age or older people. There was nobody in between. Everybody was away, trying to make a living somewhere. Then the mines got opened up on the mountain. They got the dwindling back. Matter of fact, I was thirty-eight years old when I came here. It was a pretty lonely place because there weren't very many people my wife and my age group around any place at the time. We found it a little hard to adjust. The people were different up here from what it was in Fayette County, just a lot of difference. Well, matter of fact, she worked –

MK: You were talking about the difference of people when the –

FB: They were what we always considered new English type. They didn't welcome me in. Two or three people did. But the rest of them, they sort of, "Here, you're the damn old mean game warden. We're staying brackish people." Now, I don't know whether it's the same if you'd been in another form of work. My wife worked for City Hall. She started probably a year after we came up here. The mayor told her they'd accept us within five years. Of course, she advised them real quick that we didn't need them after five years. If we can make it five years out of them, we don't need them. But we found this – where I lived then, Fayette County before we came up here was a small – this was small company. Company houses had been sold to public – it was a boomer below the [inaudible] plant. There were ten houses on each side of the street. You didn't know what it was if somebody wasn't coming or going in and out of your house at all times. I mean, everybody was neighbors. You came and went as you see fit down there. If you went out to work on a car, you just, well, figure there's going to be five or six men out talking to you even and [laughter] keeping you from working on your car and so on and so forth. But up here, it was quite a different thing. It –

MK: Not nearly so sociable?

FB: Oh, not nearly, but I contributed to part of that to the type of job I was doing. Because the people up here at that time still thought if a deer came on their land that belonged to them, was coming on their land, they didn't like and still don't – I can't say that they're all wrong in it. Don't like anybody telling them what they could do on a piece of land they buy, pay for, and pay taxes on. You feel if they want to hunt all year round, well, that should be their privilege. It belongs to them. It seemed like when I came here, people had an awful bad taste in their mouth for the game warden. It was a bad deal. They'd had a couple experiences up here before I came. That



one officer ended up shot in the arm. It's still unknown whether he shot himself or what happened on the thing. I've heard different stories, but never have heard the straight of it. Had another officer come in here and he tried to play state police and stopped the judge's daughter from over at Elkins and told her he was one of the state police over here. Indeed, he didn't last too long. So, he either was fired or asked to quit. I don't know what did happen to him. But when I came here, they were very gun shy. When they put me over here, they told me, the day I came from Fairmont – (Twitch?) was my district officer on over here – to not to do a thing unless the other officer was with me. He even got as strict on the thing, is, "If you see a man walking down the road with a deer on his back and it's not deer season, you leave him alone until you get with the other officer." Of course, the captain was on vacation. This was second in command. So, after I'd done this for about eight months, well, they were evaluating this. They went in. They were about ready to let me go. The captain wanted to know why I wasn't working by myself. I told him I had orders not to work by myself. The very man who gave me the orders jumped up and said, "Well, who in the damn hell give you an order like that?" I said, "You did, sir." He sat down real quick. I think wheels got turning. So, at this point, the captain asked me if I was afraid of the job. I said, "No, sir." "Are you afraid of me?" I said, "No, sir. I'm not afraid of no man. I might be a fool, but I'm not, if that's what you're trying to put out that I'm afraid to go out there and work by myself. But I was given an order. I was always taught, when you're given an order, you try to obey." I said that. I had it made really – I mean, I didn't make no decisions at all the first eight or nine months. Everything was on the other officer's back. But the lieutenant, the other officer, and I were the only three people that knew this. The rest of them thought, "Well, he's not catching on at all. He's not taking his job seriously. He's sitting back." But after we got that straightened out, well, I had no more problems whatsoever. But I told him it's hell to get fired for following orders. But the captain agreed with me after that.

MK: It would not be the first time.

FB: No. That's for sure. [laughter] That is for sure. But since then, I have had no problem. Well, I didn't have any then, no doubt until that day, but no problems at all with the job. Of course, our job ends at – we can go to work 9:00 a.m. and quit at 6:00 p.m. and it ends. You can see that already, can't you?

MK: [affirmative]

FB: That's what they think at the district office here. They think when we're off, we're off. They don't think we're doing the same thing all evening long that they do and get paid for all day long. They cannot believe that they'll come over here for deer season. One of them would work with you. They'll get the idea of what's going on. But fifteen minutes later, they forget it. My wife kept a log, one year, of the calls. I believe in three days before deer season, she had four pages of names on a yellow legal pad. I believe it was four pages she had of calls about different things. A lot of them actually wants to know about the laws and want to know what to do to keep from breaking laws or whether they'd be safe out there. A lot of them just – after you get to know them, I get calls sometimes from the old farmer out here that I've known since I've been in the job. It'd be a bad day. He just wants somebody to talk to for. Of course, it's all part of the job. You've got to have it. I guess they tried to tell us we don't. But I think to operate fishing in a county, you have to have this kind of relationship with the people. If you don't, I feel when

you go to court with a case, your chances of winning are pretty thin. If you've got good relation with the people and they know that you don't go out and drink and this and that and the other thing, I think they'll take you for what you are. I think your case is a lot easier to win and everything due to this. Of course, we get into times that you couldn't win a case if your life depended on it, but Hank can verify that, I think. But there's a lot more to it than just putting the gun on and coming out here, I'll tell you.

MK: In the case of a natural disaster then, you would probably feel responsible to the community on two levels, both a personal level and a professional level.

FB: Very much so, yes.

MK: In case of a forest fire or a flood or what have you, you would want to be out there.

FB: Right. We're in a hassle now – I guess you'd call it a hassle – with the state over hours worked. The eighteen years I've been here up until a year ago, we worked all the hours it was necessary. Well, you worked all you could stand, put it that way. When you had to come in and rest, you come in and rest. But especially in occasions such as a flood or a deer season or busy times, you just worked. That was it. You worked seven days a week. You changed your days for – well, you didn't take nothing off during deer season. But for years and years and years, I changed my days to fit the stocking schedule. You never knew when you were going to be off or nothing like this. So, the night of the flood, I heard dispatch and some of the EMT people out evacuating people. So, knowing what a hassle is in and everything, I called my captain. I told him it sounded like we were getting some high water here. It sounded to me like it's going to be necessary to hit the road and see what could be done and everything like this. All I could get him to tell me, "Well, if they need you, work. If they call on you, work." So, I didn't know it was getting near as serious as it was at this time. Because a lot of times, they've hollered wolf before that didn't amount to anything. The biggest we've ever seen, it used to be when she worked city hall. It was on the river down there. We'd go down and carry the records upstairs, and go down the next morning, put them back down, and everything was all right. But after calling him, then I sat around here probably another forty, forty-five minutes, at least, with a scanner. Ms. Barb called me – one of our magistrates – and she wanted to know if I would try to go down and go in her drugstore and turn the computer off. She had a brand-new computer. They thought the water was going to get up that high. So, I advised her, yes, I'd go do it. She said, "You might not be able to get down there." Of course, I made a promise I haven't kept yet. I hope I don't have to. But I told her I could get there, but I never did. Anyway, by the time I got down there, there was 3-foot of water up on the drugstore already. That's how fast it had come up. So, I went up to get the key from Bob Keller, who is one of the druggists down there and get a pair of wading boots. I was still going to try to make it. By the time we got back down there, it was up better than half on her door. So, at this point, I asked him if he had insurance. He said, "Yes, that's one thing we've got plenty of." I said, "Well, if we open that door, we're going to do more damage than we would otherwise." So, we decided we wouldn't. So, I took him back to the house. He had had a bad heart attack here less than a year ago. I didn't see any sense of having him out there and that. So, I took him back on the hill to his house. By this time, they got the call in. The word came that a fire truck had washed away down Holly Meadows. They brought the firemen in. There's a bunch more firemen on the other side of the river that they had

no contact with. They couldn't get back. The bridge had washed out and so on and so forth. That was Hank up there in that house, I think, at the time. So, this one thing led to another there. Then some of them tried to see if Hank's family was out of the jail. So, we checked on that and found out that they had just taken them out of the jail and that the chief of police, the ex-sheriff, and the city police, which is ex-sheriff's son, was going to take a boat and go in and get the people out of jail. Well, the firemen come out there and wanted me to help them with some – one of the firemen, he wanted me to help him with some stuff around the fire hall there since he had all the men in the hospital. So, I started helping him a little bit there. Then next thing I know, here comes some boys are running up. They said that the boat broke loose. The sheriff – or ex-sheriff and the chief of police and his son had gone after them. The rope broke, and the boat got away from them. I said, "Well, where are they at now?" He said, "The last time I'd seen it, it was bouncing around off in that big high fence around there." I said, "The boat's all right then. The boats still floating?" "Yes, the boat's still floating." So, we started running like chicken – or I did – chicken head cut off, trying to get enough rope to try to get it tied off and get – but this time, the water had done hit Main Street and was up probably 2-foot in the upper street already. We started trying to get around to them. About this time, the power goes off. Here are a couple of big booms and no more power. So, it was probably a good thing it did because a bunch of us would've got electrocuted probably. We had all that water around the red light and everything up there. So, we sent some boys to try to get a boat motor. We had a little old boat there, but we didn't have no motor for it. No, we didn't have a boat. Wrong. They knew where a boat was at that we could get, but there wasn't any motor for it. So, they started after a motor one way. We started looking for a motor back on the hill. Some people I noted had had motors. Anyway, this went on probably for an hour, running around there like a chicken with its head cut off, trying to get some way to get them forward before they went to Pennsylvania. One of the EMTs come out the senior citizens' home up there, the new home they built down here. She had a walkie talkie. I asked her, I said, "Do you have contact with anybody in the jail?" She said, "Yes. The EMTs upstairs. I've still got contact with them." I said, "Well, ask them if they can see or know what happened to the chief of police then." So, she did. They said, "Oh, they're up here with us." What had happened all this time, they tied the boat when they went in to get the prisoners out. They tied it. The water came up so fast, it raised the boat and broke the rope. The boat was floating around, but the people thought – they'd seen the boat. They thought the men were still in it at the time. But they were actually out of the boat. So, about this time, I came back out and was coming up the top of the hill to contact somebody – anyway, before this happened, well, Elkins Operation Center come on the radio. After the power went off and the phone went out, that was the only contact in and out of Parsons was what I had there, talking to her. She was getting questions from Charleston. These are two disasters I went through. The same thing happened the other time. The people at Charleston want blow by blow description of everything that's going on. So, I spent about the next hour trying to tell her what had went on to the point and this and that. She kept shooting questions at me if we survived. I just told her, "Lady, if I don't get out of this car. I can't tell you nothing else. If I don't get away from this radio – because I'm sitting here talking to you and that's all I'm getting done." So, with that, I just proceeded to hang the mic up and get out of the car and go to see what I could do. Someone was needing something. I came back up the hill. I met this – I'd heard that Bob Moore had got washed away at Holly Meadows. So, as I started up hill, I met him coming. So, I stopped to talked to him. I said, "Bob, I'm glad to see you because I'd heard you got washed away." He said, "No. My daughter, Amy." I said, "Amy?" He said, "Yes. You know Amy who worked

down the news knob there?" I said, "Yes." But I didn't know she was his daughter. I knew she was a Moore, but I didn't know whose daughter she was. So, about that time, his wife started screaming, "Where's the firemen at?" I said, "Well, the last count I had, it was all in the hospital. It was down there. The fire truck upset and then they're all in the hospital down here." She said, "Well, who's going to look for my daughter?" I said, "Lady, until now, I didn't know you had a daughter lost." I mean, with that, she went into hysterics. Couldn't get no help. Couldn't do this. Couldn't do that. So, finally, I told her – I said, "Now, just settle down and tell me what happened and so on, and so forth. Maybe we can get some help down there." Of course, at that point, who do you get? So, her husband went ahead and told me what happened then that they were on the Jeep. The Jeep had turned over. They were hanging onto the roll bar on it. She couldn't swim. They told her to hold on. About that time, the water picked the thing up and flipped it again and flipped them out toward shore and didn't know where she went. So, with that, of course, first thing that went through my mind – and she couldn't swim, so they said. So, the first thing that went through my mind, she didn't have a prayer. But there are two or three people there with them. So, we sort of more or less organized them to walk along the shoreline down there and just look. Because we figured, the water's thrown them into shore, there might be a chance it threw her into shore and knocked her cuckoo or something. She could possibly be all right. But truthfully, down deep, I didn't feel that there's any chance we'd ever see the girl alive again with the way the water was rolling down through there. The fact that she couldn't swim, I thought it would be impossible to ever see her alive. So, we went ahead. We took them down there, went down, and let them have what lights we had and so on and so forth. At this time, see, the firehouse was plum out of it because they had men, all of them gone but one fellow. I don't think he was too familiar with the firehouse. What wasn't in the hospital was on the other side of the river. So, we couldn't gather up any equipment. This was where we've always depended on for equipment, the fire hall, really. So, about this time, someone came up that there was a bunch of people at St. George trapped in a house, elderly people in a rest home down there trapped in the house. Mr. Galls was going down in his boat and tried to get them out. So, we proceeded to go down there to see if we could be of any help down there. At this time, the water was up probably 6 inches on the second story window. When they broke the upstairs window, the water went in instead of out in the second story window, that thing. So, we stayed there probably fifteen, twenty minutes and seen that they were getting them out all right. There was nothing we could do. So, we proceeded – at this time, the water broke over twice, broke over the new bridge down there at St. George. That's how high it was. It broke from the back end and came up over in a big wave across the thing. So, we left out there and came back to Parsons then. In the meantime, I was trying to keep the people in Elkins up on what was going on and so forth. But I'm getting a little ahead of my story. I started telling them that we needed the National Guard or somebody in there to help us, that we had no facilities to do anything. We needed lights. We needed boats. We needed a pretty good-sized motor. So, at this time, they just started calling for the National Guards. About a half hour later, she called back. She told me this time the water was getting really high. She told me the National Guards couldn't start until in the morning. So, I just said it the way I thought it. I just told her straight over the radio, "There's no damn use to send them in the morning. We won't need them. There won't be nothing left here to use them for in the morning." So, we had a little radio silence there. She came back. She said, "Well, some of the men are going to start here from Elkins. They've got a couple of boats. Some DNR people are going to start." But they already know they couldn't get into 19. They knew they couldn't go to Davis Canaan or Canaan into – so, they started down

from Billington. So, a half hour to forty-five minutes later, they called back and said they can't get there either because the bridge is out of Billington. They can't get across it. Well, unbeknownst to me, over Fairmont, they had been monitoring everything that was going on. The captain had started three conservation officers and a wildlife man over this way. They started two from Fairmont and – let's see, Fairmont and Morgantown. Officer in Barbour County had heard that they were on their way over here then. We then talked about how bad things were. But about this time, my buddy on the mountain got the word that the sheriff and one of the state police had washed off in the St. George Bridge in the Ramcharger. Well, of course, I was the one that had called in the complainant and sent them down there to check on a little stream. So, they went across, checked on it, and coming back, the culvert gave away or whatever and washed them downstream and that thing. So, Officer Spencer on the mountain, he started around to try to get to them. He was in the house. They were safe and everything at this time – to try to pick them up and get them out of there. So, he finally came down the location side. He couldn't make it to the location side. So, he had to come back around 18 miles and come out right within what is a 100 yards between the two roads of where he was to pick them up. He got them out. They wanted me to go up and tell the corporal up here what had happened, that they were safe, that the Ramcharger washed away. Well, I started up the smokey holler here at his house and got up here. Oh, about five hundred yards more, you turn into my house, and here comes the stream right across the road and big holes washed out already on this little stream. So, we had to abandon the vehicle and walk up. I picked up a boy from here in town, half a mile next. He was riding with me. So, we walked up and advised him and of course, got back on the radio telling them what shape this road was in. But this time, they told me the group was coming from Fairmont. I told them I didn't know how to route them in here. So, the boy from Barbour County heard me. He's familiar with this county. So, he got in his car. He started over here to pick them a road to come. He made it through two or three of the places over here. He said he hated to turn around and go back through them. It was that treacherous coming through where the strings were coming over the bank and so on and so forth. But he'd made a dry run into Clover Run there and turned around and went back to the top of the mountain to pick them up to lead them through. So, at this time, by the time we come back from down there, well, here comes these people back. They'd heard somebody hollering down Holly Meadows. Somebody was stranded down there in a house. They didn't know what. It was still very dark, but said they holler, and they'd answer them. But they were over next to the river. So, we started scurrying again for a boat. So, we walked up the street there. There sits Mr. Galls, sitting there in his van asleep with a big boat hooked on the back of his vehicle. He'd done been there and taken the people out of this house. So, at this time, well, we tried to get him roused up a little bit there and see if he could take his boat in there and tried to get these people out. Well, he'd got his boats wet out down, but he blew all his fuses. He didn't have any lights whatsoever. He's just a little bit afraid to try. Well, I had a big Q-beam light. So, we tried it. Of course, his fuse is gone. It wouldn't work any cigarette lighter or anything. So, we decided we'd go down and try it anyway. So, we got about halfway down to the river after we turned off 72 at Holly Meadows Road. Well, the river was up just about halfway to 72 there. So, we lost his boat right there about halfway in the field. Finally, got it pushed out there far enough it would float on its own. I had to push it out over a ditch. We were doing good in the ditch, but we couldn't get it out of the ditch then. So, finally, we got the thing out of the ditch and got it across there to float. You could still hear this person every once in a while holler over there, but you couldn't tell whether it was a man, boy, girl. Then way on across the river in a little house, there was a whole family

down there screaming and hollering. You could tell they were farther away. So, they were debating on what to do there and who to go and this and that and the other thing. Well, I've been having back trouble. I hated to crawl in that boat and not be a whole lot of help after I got there. So, we got a far here, we call shitty boots Humphrey. It's all I've ever known him by. He's worthless, but shitty boots said, "I'll go." So, he crawls in the boat and goes with this fellow. So, we put the long – we must have had a 600- or a 700-foot rope. So, we tied it to the boat. So, we're going to try to wade out with him. So, if he got down that swift water, we could help him control that boat even though it was a pretty good-sized boat and a pretty good-sized motor, probably a seventy-five-horsepower motor on that thing. We didn't know whether he could take that swift water or not with all that debris and stuff going down. So, we got out there a little piece. We got getting that pretty well to where we couldn't go much further. So, he said, well, he had the rope there. He could always throw it around something if things got away. So, he goes on down. He goes to this house trailer. Well, they had hand lights. You could hear her hollering then. Then the boat comes back out. We thought, "Well, good gracious, if he gets any further over to the right, he's gone." Because if he ever got in that swift current, I don't believe he could've held it at all. So, after a while, we see the boat stop and see him fumble around and probably took him another half hour here to come out there with that little girl. They ran it up as far as they could. The water started dropping by that time because they couldn't get the boat back in as near to where the trailer was. So, they had to wade and carry her out there. So, Shitty Boots had taken his coat off and wrapped it around that little girl. Well, I never thought I'd ever see the day it ever happened, but I took my coat off and gave it to Shitty Boots because he's there in short sleeve. I had a rain jacket and a coat on. I took it off and was proud to give it to the old boy now, I'll just tell you. Because in times like that, he showed up at the right time. He really did his fair share to try to get – he would come up through there carrying that little girl. You could just – he was in water up to his waist and mud and everything, He came up through there carrying her on his back. One of the EMTs from the mountain – little gung-ho, I always thought anyway. He'd come running out there and stopped him dead in the tracks, wouldn't even wait until he got out of the water. He started questioning her to see if she was still at herself and everything. So, I see this is going forever now that – up there. I said, "Amy, what'd I buy in the store on Sunday morning?" She said, "You bought two packs of bourbon blend tobacco and a Charleston City Paper. It was \$2.86." I said, "Hell, I'll take her to the hospital. Nothing wrong with her mind." I mean, she remembered that. Just grinning from ear to ear all the time, she was. Everybody's just overwhelmed to see her because I know down deep, I thought she was dead. I didn't think that she had a prayer. So, after that, we got back in there. The water had started to recede a little bit. But all night long, one block down across the street, people kept running down on a little overhang with a porch on it up there, hollering and shining their light. Well, there wasn't a thing in the world we could do to help them. We sit there and watch trucks wash in there and slam up against the bank, cars wash away right in front of our eyes. So, somebody got the wise eye. They had a great, big, end-loader over at Dewey's. They'd get that end loader and go in and get the prisoners out. They could get this and that and the other thing. So, he comes out through there and on Main Street – on 72 coming up through here. It actually floated that big machine. There was that much water. He came through there. The wheels on the lower side of this, all he was doing, pedaling with them. It was sitting there flopping up and down like that. But anyway, these people kept hollering and hollering. Of course, all this time, I was trying to relay all this to Charleston and do whatever I could here or there and yonder. Of course, everybody else there was too. But there wasn't a thing we could do for the people. We

couldn't get to them in no way and just hoped and prayed that the building – we'd done seen part of the building go away that night. We'd seen part of it wash away off from under. Of course, they were to the back of it. I believe if they'd been up in the front of it, their weight would've probably helped brought it on down. But –

MK: Now, where was this building?

FB: It was the Firestone building down there, the hardware down below city hall across the street. City hall went on the corner. Of course, it runs about half the block down there. They were on the backside of this. Ken Teagarden had been over to his store. He had ended up over somehow and got stranded. He'd kicked some doors in and got them all together at one place there. There's a couple of apartments up there. He'd kicked the doors in between them and got them all together. But every once in a while, they'd run out there and shine their light and holler. They had a little flashlight and holler all night long. So, we hadn't heard nothing from on down the river. Nobody hollered or anything. So, anyway, this daybreak, here, the boys from DNR made it. They made it through. I didn't know whether they could get through up here because I couldn't get up. But they made it through. They came in with two boats. But this time, the water was down to – oh, we were down probably 10, 15-foot on the second street there off in 72 before we could float the boat. At 3:00 a.m., we could float them up the upper end of 72. But it'd dropped that far by that time. So, the first thing we'd done, we got the biggest boat we had and the biggest motor we had. We backed it down there on the trailer and proceeded to try to get the people out down there. Because nobody was scared to death and didn't know what was what. So, we made it down pretty good through the first and went and hit Morning Street there. The current was so heavy that we started pumping on the right-hand side going down. It took us right hand to the left-hand part of the street. This very made it with the motor wide open to keep them slamming into the building. So, we made it down there. So, here comes a bunch of little kids. Well, I'd say the smallest kid was probably seven or eight. There's a couple older girls and a woman. So, we told them, "We'll take about three of you at the time, or four. We're going to start with the kid and women on." Of course, Ken Teagarden wouldn't have it any other way. He started pushing them in there. So, we got about what we could get out of there and what we thought we'd get out of there. So, we started back up. We took a run at it and put them over on the side again. I thought the shore was going to slap us right into the stop sign there at the corner of city hall. But we made it. I mean, [laughter] we missed it about that far. Of course, I had the oar out in case to sort of try to pock us if we did. Well, once we got through that, it was easy boating on up. So, we took them up there. A bunch of them met them and carried them out there. So, when we start back down, we hear some woman down the end of the street, "Please, get me next." There is screaming, "Please, please, get me next." Well, we still had another woman and another girl to go. It was small. I figured, "Well, whoever that is down there has waited this long. We'll get them out of there. Then we'll go get them for we take come in now." So, we started back up to her. Everybody was hollering about Hank's dog. Well, at this time, I never knew the dog was there. I hadn't left up. Looked over on the entrance going into the sheriff's office and there that dog was on little metal awning about that wide. Now, the metal awning was broken, all the pieces. There were about four slats of it, about that wide. Then the rest of it had been torn off there. There stood that little old mutt right on top of that thing, just shaking up a storm. So, it was going up. I told the boy who's running the boat, Gary (Strong?) from Barbour County, and I said, "Pull in here. Let's get that dog." He said, "No, let's take –" I

said, "No, let's get him now. He's suffered enough." So, the railing from a fence had washed around. Part of the steps that went up to the EMTs had washed around. There was a small hole there that looked like it was big enough to get that bowed in. He said, "I don't know where –" I said, "Put her in there. Let's see if it'll go." So, we slapped it in there. I just know that dog was going to eat me up when I reached up there and got him because he's scared probably to death. I reached up and got a hold of the dog and tried to pull him off. He actually had his toenail somehow locked in that thing. I had to get under that dog and raise him straight up to get him out and expecting to be [inaudible] up. But he never offered. I put him down. One of the little girls in there noted him. She called him Buddy. When she called him Buddy, now you talk about a happy dog. Right in her lap, he went and licked and carrying on all the way out of there. Then that was the last time I seen the dog until deer season. Hank was up at his mother's. I stopped. We were talking. We went down to the house for something. The dog was tied there beside the building. That dog was just raising the devil. But he seen me, that little old tail started going 100 mile an hour. He remembered who got him out of there. Anyway, we went back down then. In the meantime, we had these men that were left in this one building on the left to try to holler down while we were going with this load and find out who was down there, what was going on down there and so on and so forth. So, we came back. Ken said, "There's some woman down there. She's up over Christian Channel Six." So, we proceeded to go down. The water was still just about two-thirds way up on the door, went in and upstairs to Christian Channel Six. So, we pulled up there. I rushed down the water and finally found the door handle. It was locked. So, got on in the boat and I told him about – I said, "Pull the boat up just as close to that door as you can." When he pulled up, I took both feet. I kicked it open. Well, the first time I kicked the door came open. But there's more water behind it than there was in front of it. So, it slammed back. So, I thought, "Well, Lord, how are we going to get her out of there?" So, we bounced back there one time. I looked up in between the buildings. There went a set of stairways right up beside the wall to a window. So, I told Gary, "Let's pull in there and see if I can get up the stairways and get her out." Well, they took it right to her steps, but it's just about this much distance between the end of the steps and the window. Where the steps – it was a fire escape is what the steps is there for, I reckon. Because I didn't see any place it went except to that window and a window in another building there. So, I banged around on the window. She's in there hollering, "Oh please. Please take me out of here. Take me next." She was still on that, "Take me next." She hadn't even seen us come in there. So, I banged on the window. It was locked. She finally came over. I said, "Unlock the window, Helen." Helen Virginia Smith is who it was. She's an elderly woman. She does clean for a lot of people – a big woman. I mean, she's a good-sized woman. So, finally got her down to unlock the window and get it up. I told her, "We can't get out the door. We're going to have to go out the window." "Well, yes, all right," she said. She started out there. She turned. She said, "Now, let me lock the door." So, she runs over to the stairway and locks the door going downstairs. She came back and this about had her head out the window. "Well, now, wait a minute." She runs back in. She gets a big, old pocketbook about that big. She hands it to me. Well, I throw it down the boat. I said, "Come on, Helen." The stairs are just reeling back and forth all the time where the water is washing on them. I said, "Come on. These stairs will about go anytime. That's the only way out here." [laughter] So, finally, I got her head out. She was so big that her shoulders is hitting on both sides. It went. I thought, "Oh, my God. I'll never get her out there." Well, I forgot about having a backache. I reached and got her under the arm and my hand on the back of her neck there. I brought her out the window. I brought her plum all across there. But that didn't end there. She



had to turn around. "Now, you just hold on here, young man. You just hold on." She had to turn around, reach in, and straighten the curtains up and put the window down before we went [laughter] to the boat. So, when she sees she's going to the boat then, evidently, she's definitely scared of water. She got a death hold on me with both hands on my arm and said, "Don't let me go." I said, "Well, I'm not going to let you –" Well, I couldn't let her go at all because she was holding me. So, we got up in front of the boat. Well, this time, the water dropped probably another foot. Like I said, she's a heavy woman. So, we started out there. All the clothes were washed out of Ken Teagarden's store. Well, we were trying to take a run for that swift water up there. We got to get the propeller hooked up in them clothes. So, we had to back off, I believe, it was three times before we finally got her through there. Finally, we found a path there without any clothes. We made it. But it was still – we were going so slow. This time, we did go into the stop sign. We hit the stop sign this time. The swift water tucked us into the stop sign. We got her up there. I don't know who the boy was. I believe it was a little wildlife man from Fairmont. He met us on the boat. He probably would go 150, 155 pounds, short. He was going to carry Ms. Smith out of there. Well, he proceeded to get her on her back. It just looked exactly like a Volkswagen going up there with a semi-truck on the back. [laughter] You couldn't even see him. You couldn't see him at all. But he kept her out of the water. Somebody said, "Let her walk. It won't hurt to get wet." He said, "No, I'm going to carry her." He carried that woman out of there. So, we proceeded to go back down and get the men out. We still had a little problem on the path with the clothes. We got them out. By that time, they were hauling, "Go get the emergency squad people out there with dispatch." So, we started down where we went in to get Hank's dog. It was much debris and stuff, couldn't get through there, come back up and walk back around. By the time we got there, you could walk in. By the time we got there, of course, they were gone. They'd come out there while we were getting the other people out. But the water dropped that fast after we started on that. Of course, it would still been probably another five hours on before the people could go out without getting good and wet. About –

MK: You were just talking about getting the EMTs out of the jail area. Was that it?

FB: Right after that, everything got to be –

MK: The water was pretty well gone.

FB: It was starting to go down some. My wife had come down by that time and stood there. We were talking about – wondering how bad city hall got hurt. Well, I'd been tied to it one time there in a boat and everything, but I hadn't even looked up the windows. It started going down. So, I thought, "Well, I'm already wet up to my waist, I'll just wade down there and see what damage is done." So, down through where I went. She said she wondered where I was going because she could already see the windows is plum out of the side of it. So, I go down there where Mr. Cooper had built his new office. Oh, I was in water probably, at that time, 8 or 10 inches up on my boots. I had a big pair of waders on at that time. Of course, they were leaking. They were already full of water where it had been in over. But I stepped off the end of the sidewalk. They dug a hole there for some [laughter] reason rather. So, I went in, wrapped around my neck, diesel fuel and everything else in that water, and cold. I didn't think it was cold. I'd been out at it all night. I didn't think much about it. So, I came home and changed clothes and went back down. By that time, things really started getting confusing. People would get

back in. Everybody running here and there and yonder. Well, here came Ms. Smith. Have you talked to Ms. Smith yet, of the newspaper?

MK: No.

FB: Or here come Mr. Smith. By this time, a couple more biologists from Fairmont had made it over. This one's a kayaker. He kayaks [inaudible] in the new river and everything else. So, his wife had spent the night over in the house. He didn't know whether there was still a house there, whether they were there. Of course, the bridge was out over the building at the dairy queen there. Nobody could get across. So, Frankie told him, "Well, I can get over there. I will go over and see." There also were some old people over there in one of the apartment buildings that they didn't get out – wouldn't leave before the flood. So, they led out. Frankie takes his trusty little kayak. He just rode right on over across, right on up to the house, went in and see about him, see he was all right, and went over and checked on the older people and stayed in there. Of course, by this time, they were getting fairly confused and – well, he said this one fellow was just about out of it. He just went through so much and watched – the house is right away around him there and so on and so forth. But anyway, he came back and reported that everybody was safe. As far as he knew, everybody was dry and still, nobody washed away or anything, all that thing. So, we tried to get organized a little bit there and get some stuff going. About that time, here comes Hank. I don't know how he walked across the bridge. You all crossed that log?

MK: Down [inaudible].

FB: Oh, they had gone plum around [inaudible]. Here comes Hank. He was shaken up and wanted to know where his family was. Well, I'd heard some of them say that they'd got her out and tucked her to – I thought they said high school. So, I told him I thought she was at the high school, but I know she's out there and all right. Of course, he was a little shaken from his ordeal and not knowing where his family was. I'm sure he was very much so shook – several of them were. We spent the rest of the day just trying to do anything and everything we could to help the people. Still, I'm on the radio. We haven't got no phones. We haven't got nothing, trying to keep in touch with him in Charleston. So, about 4:30 p.m., well, they called. They instructed me that I would go to the fire hall. I would stand by at the fire hall. I would not leave my radio. So, at this time, I'd just about had it because I'd worked on a call all day that day before the flood. I was just about the end of my road. So, I told her, "Lady, I'm just going to tell you like it is, not trying to be smart or anything like that. If you want to talk to the damn officers that's asleep, you better get somebody the hell down here to relieve me. Because I'm not going to sit there all night and talk to you." So, in a few minutes, they got their heads together, I guess in Charleston. So, they started ordering me to go home right then. I said, "No. I've got some things I got to do. I'll go home whenever I get finished up here, but not before." So, anyway, they sent somebody down to run the radio from there out. They didn't realize that almost twenty hours it went by there without any sleep or very little to eat or couldn't eat. I went and tried to eat a time or two. It didn't take – I don't know why. I never had any trouble eating before. But you just didn't want nothing to eat. You'd eat just a few bites or something. That's all you wanted on it. Because all the time, we had the – or I did – I had the fear in the back of my mind that we were going to find 100 or two people in this thing. The good Lord was looking out after us because there was no way that we could have ever got out of anything like that with losing two people. That's what it

amounted to down; three people, one here and two from up the river. But in the county, we lost three people, of which –

MK: It is amazing, is it not?

FB: It is amazing. Really, it is amazing that that's all we were able to lose. I think it was the next day or the day – oh, it was a couple days later. I got up by Pennsylvania Avenue where I used to have a garden. Well, the lady I rented the farm's house was gone. The house below her was gone. There was nothing but a rock bed where my garden used to be. It was hard to believe. This looked like a river bottom down through there. Until I'd come home and try to get some rest, it didn't really dawn on me, I don't think, what took place. I hadn't had time to think about it. After I went to sleep and slept about an hour, I was wide awake. A thousand things trying to go through my mind at one time, just what had taken place. It just something, but – I mean, I've been through some pretty rough times on different occasions in my life, but never nothing like this. Never seen anything like this. We were in the mines one time. There were three of us working together. Two of us was young and training, one farmer that worked there for years working the mines. Smoke got coming in on us, and he told us – of course, he was over us. He was the one who was training. He told us, "Now, you all sit here. I'm going to crawl back there and see what's going on." When he got back there, the smoke was so thick and stuff that he didn't bother to come back for us. I guess he figured we had sense enough to come out of there. The smoke started coming green about that time. I told the other folks, "I don't know about you, I'm going to start for the outside." Three and a half miles back there, we knew we didn't have a prayer to get out, if that's what it was. But we carried the old big dinner buckets at this time with a gallon of water in the bottom of it. So, I just took my T-shirt off. I slapped it down that water and threw it over my face. I started out of there. Well, when we got to the belt line, you crawled back to the belt line and got the belt line was, it was coming out of the places everywhere just like rats [laughter]. Certain, the ship was trying to get out of there. But there's an old man, oh, he must have been sixty years old. He had silicosis and everything. He'd done went about half Berkshire out of it. So, we grabbed him and threw him on the belt. One jumped on the head and was straddling and grabbed him. I threw him and got him on the belt and got down there. He tried to stand up on that belt line. I had to get on top of him and lay – about every 10-foot, that slate was hitting my back just cut and going, but he's fighting all the time to stand up. If it stood up, it just broke him in two. We knew that. So, by the time we got to the end of the belt line, which was, oh probably three-quarters of a mile, we were too sick to get off. We just went right over the end, dumped right in the little coal car just like the coal was when we got out there. But what had happened, of course, not knowing the mines, not knowing that much about it, this fellow that went back there and seen what was going on – the old place we just worked off is [inaudible] off with the brownish cloth, which is a burlap type stuff. He just steps in behind that. Hell, he's in fresh air. So, he goes on to the head and crawls on out to the head, see. But of course, I didn't feel too bad after some of them worked there thirty, forty years in the mines, had done the same thing I'd done. But we rode that thing out there knowing, if that smoke was anywhere at all near the outside, that we had no way of getting out of that mine. Amazingly enough, it didn't bother me. Only thing that bothered me was what my mother would think. I was single then. That was the only thing that went through my mind. Because I know we weren't going to get out of there. But that was the only thing in the world that bothered me. What's the family going to think when they [laughter] come in and drag me out of here whenever

the smoke gets gone? But what happened is, the mines are laid off in air cores. We were driving up five rooms at this time, the one where the air comes up through the first room, then it goes through a hole into [inaudible] and into the second room and so on and so on. The man over in the first room had backed this cut machine over a mine cable about that big around and caught it on fire. It was that old green smoke. It burnt about 70-foot of the cable. Of course, the smoke was going right from place to place on the thing. But like I said, even with that, that was nothing compared to what –

MK: I bet you saw some rough stuff in Korea too.

FB: Well, no. I was lucky the war ended while I was on the ship going over there. Of course, they still did the fighting. We had snipers over – well, I was over seventeen months. There were still some snipers who were fighting when I left there. About the roughest thing I believe I've ever seen over there was – I'd been there some considerable time. We got hooked up in the prison camps after we got over it. I took medical training. They threw me in the MP's escort guard. The prisoners had been trying to break out and everything. So, we guarded prisoners there until they could work out exchange – changing American prisoners for the Korean and Chinese prisoners. We tucked them back on trains and turned them over to the Turks. The Korean people are scared to death of the Turkish people. The Turkish people made these exchanges. Their MPs, you had –

[end of transcript]