

PRATLEY, Jim FS 1944 to 1972  
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03\_\_Corrected

**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service  
Region Five History Project**

**Interview with:** Jim Pratley  
**Interviewed by:** Gerald Gause  
**Location:** San Diego  
**Date:** January 18, 2005  
**Transcribed by:** Christine Sinnott; February 2005

JIM PRATLEY: How many of these interviews have you done?

GERALD GAUSE: I've done about five of them. I did Jim James.

PRATLEY: Jim James?

GAUSE: Yeah.

PRATLEY: Oh, he's still around?

GAUSE: Yeah, he's 86 or 87.

PRATLEY: I'm 86.

GAUSE: Are you? Well, you guys are the same age.

PRATLEY: Jim James!

GAUSE: Yeah. He's up in Fortuna, up on the north coast. Spike Slattery.

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Yeah, Spike's up –

PRATLEY: He went to R3, did he not? New Mexico?

GAUSE: He might have at one time.

PRATLEY: Yeah. Yeah, he and I used to work together. He was on the Klamath the same time I was.

GAUSE: Yeah. Who else...Gee whiz, it slips me. Jim, Spike – oh, Jack Prevey.

PRATLEY: I recognize the name but I didn't know him.

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GAUSE: He was in private forestry.

PRATLEY: I didn't get too close to the foresters, to tell you the truth.

GAUSE: Well, you guys had your other work to do.

PRATLEY: What were you?

GAUSE: Oh, I had a minor in forestry, degree in geography and another in botany.

PRATLEY: Oh, botany, my wife would – no, my daughter would like to talk to you.

GAUSE: I really was into native plants.

PRATLEY: She's on the Miramar marine base.

GAUSE: Oh, is she?

PRATLEY: She keeps the Marines from doing things that they shouldn't be doing.

GAUSE: Didn't that used to be a Naval air station?

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Yeah, that was a busy place.

PRATLEY: And then they moved the damn thing clear up to Fallon, Nevada.

GAUSE: Oh, boy.

PRATLEY: Stupid.

GAUSE: Yeah.

PRATLEY: Right here next to the coast, air craft carriers for God's sake. What's the matter with them? Well, that's the way it is.

GAUSE: I know a lot of the carrier pilots, when the ships were coming back, they'd fly to Lemoore, which is in the San Joaquin Valley. That's a long trip.

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Out in the agriculture land.

PRATLEY: Yeah. Well, they've got a long trip now.

[Pause].

GAUSE: How'd you like that one? "Peoples, leaders, characters and goofballs." There were a lot of them in the outfit, but they were good people, funny people. Characters.

PRATLEY: There are some. There were some. Oh, Lordy, yes. I didn't put any of that down in writing.

GAUSE: Oh, yeah, recall. If we're drifting off, if you want to stop, let me know. We can shut it down, we can take a breather, we can get a glass of water. We can stop anytime.

PRATLEY: Well, we're going to go to lunch.

GAUSE: Okay, that would be fine. We'll have to hurry up.

PRATLEY: Yeah. I'm going to take you to a very lovely place.

GAUSE: I'll just follow you down there and just go from there on back north.

PRATLEY: Well, whatever.

GAUSE: And your directions were good, the written ones.

PRATLEY: Yeah?

GAUSE: The map is confusing.

PRATLEY: I can't help the map.

GAUSE: I know. But your directions were good. In fact, I bypassed this place and went back to Palmarado. [Inaudible] the whole loop, and I went, oh, I've gone too far. Actually you're just at the top of the hill.

PRATLEY: I did have a map that I had put together, but I couldn't find it. I would have sent you a copy of that one, which was detailed.

GAUSE: This was good. Okay. Today's the eighteenth.

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Okay, let's begin. I'm Gerry Gause. I'm here interviewing Jim Pratley, Forest Service retired engineer, and we're in beautiful San Diego, the city of San Diego, on the outskirts. Today is January 18<sup>th</sup> and it's a warm day, up to 85 degrees in this area today. And Jim is sitting right

here next to me, and I guess the first thing I'd like to ask you, Jim, is where you got your start in life.

PRATLEY: In Sierra Madre, California.

GAUSE: In Sierra Madre, California.

PRATLEY: In 1919.

GAUSE: 1919. My dad was born in '09 in Muscatine, Iowa.

PRATLEY: Okay.

GAUSE: So did you go to schools there in the Sierra Madre/ Pasadena area?

PRATLEY: I went to school to the sixth grade in Sierra Madre, which is as far as it went. And then I moved down to Woodrow Wilson Junior High, and from there I went to PCC, Pasadena City College.

GAUSE: I went there, too.

PRATLEY: And that's as far as I went.

GAUSE: How did you get interested in forestry?

PRATLEY: Sierra Madre will do that.

GAUSE: Yes, it will.

PRATLEY: It's right at the base of Mount Wilson, and the rangers of the day used to come into town on their horses, and I was just a kid, three, four, five, seven years old, and I knew immediately when I contacted the rangers in Sierra Madre, or in the mountains, as I would encounter them, that that's the job I wanted.

GAUSE: Great. So you were inspired by what you saw as a kid.

PRATLEY: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

GAUSE: So that was in the early '20s, then.

PRATLEY: Yes, probably '28.

GAUSE: Then you graduated from PCC in the late '20s?

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PRATLEY: When did I graduate from PCC?

GAUSE: Probably 21 years old, something like that.

PRATLEY: Yeah, yeah. I would say that.

GAUSE: How about military?

PRATLEY: No military.

GAUSE: Oh, how'd you luck out on that?

PRATLEY: Well, when I was six years old I had a mastoid operation, which eliminated me immediately from military service.

GAUSE: Well, that's good in a way. I had allergies and asthma, so I was 4F.

PRATLEY: Okay, well, that I didn't have, but I had my own problem.

GAUSE: Where did you get your start in the Forest Service?

PRATLEY: When?

GAUSE: Yeah, when and where?

PRATLEY: November 9, 1944.

GAUSE: '44.

PRATLEY: '44.

GAUSE: '44. And where was that?

PRATLEY: That was in the flood control program on the Angeles National Forest, basically on the L.A. – no.

GAUSE: The Arroyo Seco Ranger District?

PRATLEY: It was a flood control project out of Oak Grove Park.

GAUSE: That's the Arroyo Seko ranger district.

PRATLEY: That's right. The ranger district now, and it was then, but the headquarters now is at Oak Grove.

GAUSE: Yeah, in fact they moved that a couple of years ago to Little Tujunga.

PRATLEY: Oh, my.

GAUSE: In fact, we leased the land there at Oak Grove. I didn't know that until a couple of years ago.

PRATLEY: Oh, for heaven's sake.

GAUSE: We leased it from the county, and we moved to Little Tujunga, and there's a big training center there now.

PRATLEY: That made a lot of people unhappy, I'm sure.

GAUSE: It did. So how long did you work there at Oak Grove?

PRATLEY: Four years.

GAUSE: And you were survey?

PRATLEY: I was an engineer.

GAUSE: An engineer.

PRATLEY: Yes. I developed the system of field location, design and construction, eliminating the old contour strip maps, if you're acquainted with them.

GAUSE: Yeah. Those were hand-made.

PRATLEY: I said why do we try to duplicate the contour system? It's right there in front of us, full-scale. Let's use it full-scale. And so that's what I did.

GAUSE: I'll be darned. So you had a crew working with you too?

PRATLEY: Oh, yes.

GAUSE: Well, was Bill Kenworthy around there then?

PRATLEY: Bill Kenworthy, no, not then. We came together when I was in the R.O.

GAUSE: He was an engineer.

PRATLEY: On the San [inaudible]

GAUSE: Yes. So from there you moved to where? From Oak Grove? You moved four years later to?

PRATLEY: I moved '49 to the Klamath. I was supposed to go to Yreka as the assistant engineer. But went to Seiad to live and to Happy for my office.

[Whine.]

GAUSE: Maybe it's your hands doing that? Yeah. I'm sorry.

PRATLEY: But housing was impossible, so they moved me immediately to Seiad. Seiad was vacant at that time, so we lived in the A House from '49 to, well, four years later, when we moved to Yreka and built our home.

GAUSE: In Yreka?

PRATLEY: In Yreka, on top of the hill, within walking distance of the S.O. Lovely place. We had a great home up there. A contractor that I'd met before gave me the lot and said if you'll subdivide this large lot that I have into two parts, equal parts, I'll give you half of it.

GAUSE: Well, you can't beat that.

PRATLEY: No, absolutely not.

GAUSE: And this was in 1945?

PRATLEY: I went in '49 to Seiad for four years. It would be about 1953, somewhere in there. I did a lot survey and acquired half of it, and one of the conditions that he attached to giving me the lot was that he could build a house. So my wife, bless her soul, designed the house that she wanted. Oh, she was the greatest thing that ever happened to me.

GAUSE: What work were you doing at Seiad and Yreka? What work were you doing?

PRATLEY: Oh, I went to the Klamath to head up the timber access road system. Previous to my getting up there, a ranger sale was about 500 bucks, and you can't build a road for 500 bucks.

GAUSE: Ranger sale, that means the ranger authorizes it?

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Okay. That's before me.

PRATLEY: And oversees it, for what overseeing is necessary. So when I came along I recognized that we have to have larger sales. And so we got \$100,000 sales, from which we could actually build some good mileage. Previous to that it was just a little chunk here, a little chunk there, off the main road, which wasn't buying the Forest or the Forest Service anything until we got to the point to where we could build three, four mile roads on a timber sale. And it was up to the timber sale operator or the contractor to build the road in addition to selling the timber and hauling it away.

GAUSE: So he took the logs out from the road and he got credit for that?

PRATLEY: Oh, yes. It was all on a credit basis and it worked out very nicely. We built close to my recollection, about from San Francisco to New York. That's how many miles we built. We were building roads. I had in the summertime as many as ten crews, engineering crews, and in the wintertime we'd come down to about four or five winter crews. We were constantly building roads.

GAUSE: In the wintertime you worked the lower elevations, probably....In the wintertime you built in the lower elevations.

PRATLEY: Yes. Well, we tried.

GAUSE: Smaller crew.

PRATLEY: We were actually at the mercy of the rangers who would put up the sales, but then they were regulated by weather conditions, too. But you're right. We were in the lower elevations in the wintertime. Otherwise we'd get snowed out, frozen out. The Klamath is a cold place at times. You ever been on the Klamath?

GAUSE: Yes.

PRATLEY: You have.

GAUSE: I've been, well, I didn't work there but I did a lot of business trips up there, Happy Camp.



PRATLEY: Happy Camp. I ran into a [woman] last night at dinner whose mother had been to Happy Camp, and it was the first time I'd ever run into anybody that had ever been to Happy Camp. It was quite a place. Did you remember Sarah at Happy Camp? Ran a little café?

GAUSE: No.

PRATLEY: Okay. Maybe she was gone by then.

GAUSE: Probably, because this was '69 or '70, 1969 or '70.

PRATLEY: Oh, she was still there.

GAUSE: Was it on the corner near the ranger station? Was Sarah's on the corner near the ranger station?

PRATLEY: No. Sarah's was right at the bottom of the hill as you dropped into Happy Camp, a little shack of reclaimed lumber, and she was a great cook, a great cook. But it wasn't much to look at. In fact, there was a hitching rail out in front because a lot of her customers rode in on horses.

GAUSE: Well, the mail was there then and going full-bore.

PRATLEY: Yes. Yeah. When I first went to Happy Camp there was a water-powered mill. They hadn't brought in the electrical system yet.

GAUSE: They took a flume off the Klamath River and ran it to the mill.

PRATLEY: They took a flume – the miners had created the flume works when they had – I'm trying to think of what they call it, when they sluiced the gravel bar that ultimately made the airport, and they had created this hydraulic ditch. It was six feet wide at the bottom. It would accommodate a Jeep, all done by Chinese coolie labor, without benefit of anything but a water glass and a cup of water, and a three-foot straight stick, and it was amazing how accurate that ditch was, because when I ran levels down it, it was a perfect 1%. It was terrific.

GAUSE: Piece of art. And then Seiad is further down the river?

PRATLEY: No, Seiad is further up the river, twenty miles up the river from Happy Camp.

GAUSE: Okay, up the river. Towards Yreka.

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Okay.

PRATLEY: It's a light commute from Seiad to Happy Camp, where I had an office, every day for about four years. I enjoyed it. I had that much time to myself every day, which is really a delightful situation.

GAUSE: Were you involved with any fires on the Klamath?

PRATLEY: Fires? Whoa. I've been on over a hundred major fires, some of them on the Klamath.

GAUSE: What did you do on the fires on the Klamath?

PRATLEY: The grunt work.

GAUSE: [Inaudible].

PRATLEY: Ultimately I became, even on the Angeles, before I left the Angeles, I was records and reports.

GAUSE: Old bats [?] and records.

PRATLEY: Records, oh boy. You wanted to keep a good record on the hiring of tractors, number of hours that the tractors worked. That adds up after a while.

GAUSE: It does.

PRATLEY: Oh boy, does it. I got off the grunt work after a while. I don't know that I was any better off. I despised fires to start with. It felt devastating. When I first went to the Klamath it was nice and green. Several years later there were large areas that had been burned. Terrible change. [Inaudible.] That's the way it is.

GAUSE: That's nature's process.

PRATLEY: That's right.

GAUSE: Any key people that you recall that you worked with there?

PRATLEY: Well, Jim James – no, George James.

GAUSE: George James.

PRATLEY: Was the supervisor when I went there.

GAUSE: Really?

PRATLEY: Yep. He was a hell of a nice guy, and Russ Bower was ultimately there. But I can't say too much for him.

GAUSE: Yeah, he's gone.

PRATLEY: Russ is gone.

GAUSE: Oh, yeah. He was up there in the years.

PRATLEY: Well, hey. Aren't we all?

GAUSE: Yeah. It goes quick.

PRATLEY: Yes!

GAUSE: So from the Klamath you moved on?

PRATLEY: I went from the Klamath to the Eldorado.

GAUSE: Oh, okay. What did you do on the Eldorado?

PRATLEY: Basically the same thing. Don't remember – short detail.

GAUSE: Same thing. What year was that?

PRATLEY: Timber access roads.

GAUSE: Timber access roads.

PRATLEY: Yeah.

GAUSE: Any key drainages that you worked in? Any drainages, major drainages that you worked in?

PRATLEY: Dodge Mdw.

GAUSE: Well, that's all right.

PRATLEY: I'm sorry. You know, I don't necessarily remember those. But then I was on the Stanislaus for about a year.

GAUSE: What years were you on the Eldorado?

PRATLEY: Oh, Lordy. You would ask me that question. [Short detail.]

GAUSE: Must have been late '50s?

PRATLEY: I left the Klamath in 1960, and I went to the Stanislaus. I think it was the Stanislaus that I went to.

GAUSE: Not the Eldorado.

PRATLEY: No. My mind is not what it used to be. But somewhere there's a record of where I went. I don't know if you have access to those records or not.

GAUSE: No.

PRATLEY: No, okay. It's not that important, I don't think. But it was from the Stanislaus that I went into the R.O. I had gone to the El Dorado first.

GAUSE: Okay. And then you went to the Stanislaus in the '60s.

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: And what did you do on the Stanislaus? Did you work out of the Sonora office?

PRATLEY: Same thing. Sonora. Yeah, the old office. Remember that?

GAUSE: No.

PRATLEY: You don't remember that, okay. Well, it wasn't much of anything.

GAUSE: It was probably a post office?

PRATLEY: Could have been. But it was enjoyable. I enjoyed the various forests that I worked on. I enjoyed the people that I worked with or for, for the most part. Not all of them, no.

Regardless of what you may hear or may have read, Tom Bigelow – you remember Tom Bigelow?

GAUSE: No.

PRATLEY: He was forest engineer on the Klamath for thirty years. His background was as a ranger. He had very little engineering capability. So if you read that he built the Happy Camp airport, it's wrong. And it will tell you [indicating] in here.

GAUSE: Okay. Who'd you work for on the Eldorado? [Jim Usher] Do you remember? Or on the Stanislaus? [Jon Kennedy.] Probably the forest engineer.

PRATLEY: Yes, whoever they were. Jim Usher – he went to Ogden as regional engineer. But before then I worked for him when he was on the Eldorado, perhaps. I don't recall which one. I didn't know you were going to ask me all these little questions.

GAUSE: Oh, I had all these in here.

PRATLEY: He was a great – Jim Usher was a great guy. Lovely guy to work for.

GAUSE: There were a lot of Usher brothers, Jack and there was one in lands that retired years and years ago, [inaudible] or something like that.

PRATLEY: He was there when I was there.

GAUSE: He was there 25 years. And Jack, I knew him in Region VI. A character.

PRATLEY: Well, there are a few characters in the Forest Service.

GAUSE: So when you left the Stanislaus, you got promoted to the Regional Office?

PRATLEY: [Laughs.] Are you kidding? I didn't get promoted when I went from the Angeles to the Klamath. No.

GAUSE: Those were tough days.

PRATLEY: I didn't get promoted until something like two or three years before I retired.

GAUSE: So what kind of work did you do in the Regional Office?

PRATLEY: Records and reports.

GAUSE: Of accomplishments?

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Region-wide tallies?

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: That type of thing?

PRATLEY: Yep. I spent some of my time teaching my system of road location, design and construction that I had developed directly in the field. I spent time teaching that. It was an enjoyable time for me.

GAUSE: So you had taught in the R.O. and had classes where people came in from the field to the office?

PRATLEY: I generally went out to the field.

GAUSE: That's really great.

PRATLEY: If I had any choice, I would go out. I did not enjoy the R.O.

GAUSE: Why was that?

PRATLEY: It was too far away from the work. In fact, I always thought the Washington office was far, too far away, much too far away. They never knew what was really going on in the field, and they came up with some of the weirdest ideas of what we should be doing. They had lost track, just as I've lost track, having been retired for 32 years.

GAUSE: So you worked 30 years?

PRATLEY: No, I worked 28 years. And then it got to the point where I couldn't take it any longer, and they wanted to send me to Washington. I said, no way. I'm not going to Washington.

GAUSE: You probably would have done training manuals.

PRATLEY: Probably. That is not my idea of a fun job. No. Being in Washington is not my idea of a place to live. No. I had four details back there, and they taught me don't ever move back there.

GAUSE: Was the Washington office in the south building then, on Independence?

PRATLEY: Yeah.

GAUSE: So who was regional forester, do you recall, when you were in the Regional Office?

PRATLEY: Doug Leisz?

GAUSE: Either that or Charlie? Charlie Connaughton? Then Doug Leisz?

PRATLEY: Charlie Connaughton was not in the Regional Office when I was there. He'd gone to Washington, the state of Washington, Portland, I guess.

GAUSE: Oh, he did. So that was Doug Leisz that came behind Charlie.

PRATLEY: Then Doug Leisz came in. Very nice guy. Still around.

GAUSE: Oh yes.

PRATLEY: Good.

GAUSE: Active, very active.

PRATLEY: That's good.

GAUSE: Take a little break?

PRATLEY: Yeah.

[Pause. End WAV file I. Begin WAV file II.]

GAUSE: You retired from the R.O.?

PRATLEY: Yep.

GAUSE: You did.

PRATLEY: Yep.

GAUSE: What year?

PRATLEY: 1972.

GAUSE: '72. Okay. That's where we met, because I was in there then. I was there from '69 to '74. I worked for Grant Morris in I&E.

PRATLEY: Oh, yes. Yeah, I liked Grant. Good guy.

GAUSE: He's retired and moved to Albuquerque.

PRATLEY: Well. Being in the R.O. is enough to make anybody retire, I think.

GAUSE: You just weren't happy there, were you? You weren't happy in the R.O.?

PRATLEY: No, I was not very happy there. I wasn't doing what I loved to do, that was be in the field laying out roads. Not doing anything in the R.O. but paperwork.

GAUSE: Who was your favorite leader that you worked around or worked for? There were probably a lot of them.

PRATLEY: Well, I guess I would have to say either George James or Jim Usher. Jim Usher was actually a friend. We got along fine as two families. George James was really good. I liked the man.

GAUSE: How about any – do you have any funny stories of things that happened in logging camp or camping for engineers that you recall?

PRATLEY: If you want stories, my friend, I have 130 short stories of my experiences in the Forest Service, so I can –

GAUSE: What's your most favorite one?

PRATLEY: I can answer that. On the Klamath, when I was there, I was going to take over as forest engineer, and so Tom Bigelow, who was forest engineer at the time, decided that he and I should go out in the Goose Nest district and take a look at the road system out there. That area was logged by rail and they'd pull the rails, of course, most of the good ties and it would be a way for me to get out there and see what I was facing. Well, when we got out there, we accidentally encountered a gal and a baby that had been stranded for a week. She had run off the roads, [which,] of course, being railroad, were composed of cinder. And if you got off the beaten path right off the middle, you're done, finished, kaput. And it was this automobile that I discovered with a note on the passenger side window that said, "Help. I am walking back to Tennant with my baby."

GAUSE: Tennant's in Oregon.

PRATLEY: No, Tenant on the Goose Nest district.

GAUSE: Oh, okay.



PRATLEY: She'd driven through there when she set out to see some of the country. She had a habit of just going out on her own before she had a baby, never telling anybody, not even her husband, where she was going or when she was coming back. So when I read the note stuck to the window on the inside, I knew we were in trouble. I thought, oh boy. If she didn't make Tennant, if it was last Monday that she left – because the note said “Monday,” no date, and she said “walking back to Tennant with my baby,” and that was Monday, but what Monday was it? Today was Monday. Did she take off last week? If she did then we were going to look for bodies, because it was bitterly cold at night. And if she didn't make Tennant and be able to get in one of the old houses, railroad houses, she was going to have a difficult time. And she did all of this, a week, on three candy bars, nursing her baby.

GAUSE: Oh boy.

PRATLEY: Yeah. I've got that story all written up for you, if you want it. You read the FSX newsletter?

GAUSE: Yes.

PRATLEY: The story's in there.

GAUSE: Okay.

PRATLEY: That's your best source of stories from me. Unless I give you the 100 of them that are still here and haven't been sent into the FSX yet.

GAUSE: So you found her, she was okay?

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: On candy bars.

PRATLEY: When she – when we finally – I ran back to the car that had my new boss in it and told him what I had found, I told him, you drive the car and I'll run down and see if I can follow her footsteps, and I had my dog with me and she can help me keep online. And about two hours later, we came around a bend facing a long, straight stretch of road and way at the far end was a

human being. So we honked the horn and I screamed. She spun around and began to run toward us. The first thing she said, “Do you have anything to eat?” Tom had a lunch and I had a lunch and they both disappeared very quickly. So we took her into the Mount Hebron Ranger Station to clean her up, let her make a phone call to her husband that she was A-Okay, and the ladies on the station, one of them took the baby, cleaned the baby, and another one took her in to where she could get a shower and get herself cleaned up. A week tending fires, railroad ties that she’d stacked up and set ablaze, thinking that the lookouts would discover the blaze. But the lookouts weren’t up.

GAUSE: That’s right.

PRATLEY: No, it was winter time. She was a hearty gal. I’m telling you, I don’t know many people that could have done what she did.

GAUSE: Are there any characters that made you laugh or that were different from other people that you could recall?

PRATLEY: There wasn’t an awful lot of laughter, I don’t think, no. No. I really hadn’t thought about that. We had good times. I had some good people working for me. Did you know – oh, Lord. Bill Morgan?

GAUSE: Hmm-hmm.

PRATLEY: You knew Bill Morgan, and Bruce Minders?

GAUSE: Know the name.

PRATLEY: Yeah. They worked for me. They were civil engineers, graduate GS-11 civil engineers, and were good people and Bill – who was the first one I mentioned?

GAUSE: Bill Morgan.

PRATLEY: Yes! He went on to the state division of engineering. He left the Forest Service after a while. He had been an engineer in the Tahoe Basin Project when they built the sewer lines. I

did get some good engineers, and I also got a few that weren't so good. But I don't know if we want to mention their names.

GAUSE: Oh, it's not necessary. How was the camaraderie then on the Forest Service? Was it pretty good?

PRATLEY: Oh, it was excellent.

GAUSE: By excellent, you mean?

PRATLEY: Oh, we had a good group of people either on the job, engineering, or on fires. We came to Southern California several times fighting their fires on the Los Padres – no – yeah, we were on the Los Padres and we were on the Angeles, the San Bernardino [?] and the Cleveland. Yeah, okay. We had a strange experience. We landed – I had 100 fire fighters with me.

GAUSE: Wow.

PRATLEY: We landed at Burbank and we were supposed to be met by some stake-side trucks to take us into camp so that we could have lunch. No stake-sides, so I had 100 people that would have revolted quite quickly if we hadn't figured out some way to feed them. They had left home, Montague, without breakfast. It was very early in the morning and we had to catch those planes. So I took them to a restaurant at Burbank. You ever been there?

GAUSE: Yeah.

PRATLEY: Okay. So I went to the assistant manager, a gal, and I told her that we needed lunch for a hundred fire fighters, hungry ones. I said, "Can you handle this for us?" She said, "Yeah, we can take care of you." It was a little past the lunch hour. She had agreed to us. I said, "The only way I can pay you is with a government voucher. She said, "That's fine." Well, the boys were all sitting down and eating and the manager came. The assistant manager told the manager what she had done and he blew his top. He said, "I won't take a government voucher. I'm not going to wait weeks to get the money." I couldn't blame him for that. So I said, "Okay, we'll see what we can do. We'll collect all the money that we have in our pockets." I went to the fellows

and I said, “Okay, look. They’re not going to take a government voucher. We’re going to have to pay for this ourselves. You’re on the honor system to put on the table that which you have, because we’re going to have a difficult time paying for a hundred meals.” Unfortunately I had \$50.00 with me. Know what happened to the 50 bucks? Yes. Under the honor system. We never did get our money, because when we went back to the Forest, I went to Glenn Fustill [?] –

GAUSE: I’ve heard the name.

PRATLEY: He was a –

GAUSE: Fiscal agent?

PRATLEY: What the hell did they call them? He ran the office, the Forest Service office in Yreka, the S.O.

GAUSE: Oh, okay.

PRATLEY: Nice guy. And I said, “Can you get our money for us?” And he said, “Not without a check from the restaurant.” We didn’t collect any receipts. We didn’t figure we would need them. We figured we were going to use a government voucher.

GAUSE: Yeah.

PRATLEY: Yes! Well, that didn’t work out because the manager just refused to take it. So we had to pony up everything we had and we didn’t ask for separate sales slips that we could take back to Glenn and collect some money. So everybody that kicked in money of any amount was just out. Oh, yeah.

GAUSE: Was there anything in your biography that you worked up there that you would like to mention?

PRATLEY: Well, take a look at it.

GAUSE: I’ll leave that up to you.

PRATLEY: Take a moment and read.

[Pause.]

PRATLEY: You can take that home with you.

GAUSE: You know, one of the things that comes to mind in doing road construction, what did you do when you had to run a road across a private land?

PRATLEY: Well, we ran across the private land, if we were going to run a road across a private land, we had to acquire an easement. And sometimes we had a little trouble and sometimes we didn't have a little trouble. I tried to convince the landowners that [inaudible] that the road would be of enormous value to the guy that owned the land. He'd have access to what he owned which he didn't have to start with. I was very successful in acquiring rights of ways.

GAUSE: You mention some of your work about a truss bridge, at the mouth of Indian, I imagine that's Indian Creek, Happy Camp. That's north of Happy Camp. Was there something special about that bridge?

PRATLEY: No, it just replaced an old cable suspension bridge, and you couldn't haul trucks across it. It would have collapsed immediately. In fact, it was risky business just to drive a Model T over it.

GAUSE: Was this a pre-fab frame or did you build the truss as you went?

PRATLEY: Well, parts of it were pre-fab, yes, but parts of it were assembled right on the site. It was a through-truss, where you drove through the bridge. That's why it had that name. It was the only way we could get across to Elk Creek and the timber on the south side of Happy Camp. So it came in very handy. In fact, it's still there.

GAUSE: Is that right?

PRATLEY: Yeah. It was there when you were there.

GAUSE: Yeah. I've probably been across it. Elk Creek was a drainage that had a lot of Doug Fir in it.

PRATLEY: Yeah.

GAUSE: Big volume of Douglass Fir out of there, I'm sure.

PRATLEY: Yeah. Well, there was a lot of good timber in and around Happy Camp when I was there. And I hated to see most of it go. It certainly looks different once it's logged.

GAUSE: Yeah, it does, but Douglass Fir comes back awful quick.

PRATLEY: Yes, it does.

GAUSE: In ten, fifteen years.

PRATLEY: Yeah, you've got that right.

GAUSE: But the first two or three years, it doesn't look good.

PRATLEY: Very discouraging. And the slash that they left on the ground – oh, brother.

GAUSE: So they weren't burning slash when you were there? They weren't burning slash piles or broadcast burning?

PRATLEY: Well, they did, but the cleanup was not that good. They burned a lot of it, which was really a waste. But what else could you do with it?

GAUSE: Well, some of it wasn't merchantable either, I guess.

PRATLEY: I built the airport, contrary to what you may read or be told, I built the airport.

GAUSE: At Happy Camp. Did you have a crew to do that and everything, huh?

PRATLEY: Oh, yeah. We had the equipment, dozers and carry-alls and graders, the whole ball of wax.

GAUSE: We needed the airport for a combination of things, I guess, with emergencies and fire.

PRATLEY: Oh yes, yeah, absolutely. That's the reason the FAA was involved, as well as the county and –

GAUSE: That's Siskiyou County.

PRATLEY: Yes. Siskiyou County. It came in very handy very shortly after it was built.

GAUSE: Is that right?

PRATLEY: Yes. Doing air drops from Happy Camp where they'd previously been made from Montague. We cut off that flying time. The old Ford motor, [inaudible.]

GAUSE: [Inaudible.]

PRATLEY: Do you remember that one?

GAUSE: I've seen pictures of it.

PRATLEY: Yeah. It didn't fly very fast, but it got you there.

GAUSE: Your friend Jim James did a lot of flying and air attack.

PRATLEY: Yes, he did.

GAUSE: He was one of the forefathers of [inaudible].

PRATLEY: One of the guys that got airplanes into practical use. Oh, yeah.

GAUSE: What are your good points and bad points about the Forest Service as you knew it when you were working?

PRATLEY: You know, I hate to talk about the bad points.

GAUSE: Well, do.

PRATLEY: It did exist.

GAUSE: It does everywhere, in every business.

PRATLEY: One of the worst that I encountered was when I was on the Stanislaus. They built the campground at Pine Crest. The contract for the Pine Crest water and sewer system stipulated that the water line and the sewer line would be separate by a minimum of three horizontal feet. Now, it didn't happen. The guy that was sitting on the contract let the contractor put the sewer line and the water line in the same trench.

GAUSE: Next to each other.

PRATLEY: Yes!

GAUSE: Not three feet apart.

PRATLEY: No! Not two trenches, one trench. And I called that to the attention of the Regional Office and that was the end of my career, right there. Charlie Connaughton made the statement that I would not be promoted while I was in the region.

GAUSE: That's tough.

PRATLEY: But I did it. I don't regret it. In fact, they're probably still side by side and someday something drastic will happen. The sewer line ever breaks and the water line ever breaks, you're going to have contamination.

GAUSE: I wonder why they wouldn't support the specs that you were supporting.

PRATLEY: No. No. No. And yet it's their own people. The Regional forester's own people in the R.O. that set them up. Yes.

GAUSE: Well, how about some of the good points?

PRATLEY: Oh, the good points, hey, they happened every day, like rescuing that lady with her baby. I rescued also on the Angeles a guy in the Army that was a trainer. They had a survival camp on the Angeles. It was intended to teach the Army people how to survive in the wild. Well, this so-called teacher, a captain, no less, took his mother one day for a ride up to Mount Gleason. But along the way he got deterred and ran off the road. Stuck with his mother. So this idiot – and he has to be an idiot – decided that he would walk and get help. But he'd only driven maybe 200 yards off the main highway. And yet he took off down the same road that he was going to drive down, not knowing where it went or how far it went, and he had low-cut shoes and civilian dress. And we just happened to be working at the end of the road that he was walking, and it was about 5:30 that night, and we had stayed longer than we should had because we didn't want to go back in the morning. So just as we were packing up, he comes over the ridge, and he sees us and he screams and hollers and so we took him and instead of going home we took him back to his stalled automobile, and his mother. And she gave him the riot act right then and there in front of God and man. She was furious with him because she'd been there most of the day. She was an elderly lady so you can imagine the problem that she's had. So he got it and then I gave it to him. I read him the riot act. I said, for heaven's sakes, don't you know better than to walk down a strange road not knowing where it is, where it's going or what you'll find at the end, in low-cut



shoes, snow? He had to climb over several snow banks. He couldn't have driven the road to start with. But he was a full-blown idiot. But I got a very nice letter from him.

But you know, those letters that I had gotten, I didn't get a copy of them. I assumed that when I asked for the certain material out of – where did he send that material to? – It goes into storage somewhere.

GAUSE: Oh, the archives.

PRATLEY: Okay. But they didn't send me the letters that I had acquired, the good stuff. No. Didn't get that. So I'm assuming that they culled most of that out. Well, it's neither here nor there.

GAUSE: Well, in wrapping this up, if you had to do it over again, would you do it?

PRATLEY: Yes.

GAUSE: Great.

PRATLEY: Absolutely. Oh, I would be most delighted. In fact, I'm 85 years old right now and I would go back in an instant, yes! Because I'm still physically able.

GAUSE: Good.

PRATLEY: Yeah. It's such a delightful way of earning a living.

GAUSE: And you enjoyed the field more than you did the big city.

PRATLEY: Oh, yes! Absolutely.

GAUSE: So you would stay in the field if you did it again.

PRATLEY: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, that's where the action is.

GAUSE: And you worked most of your career out of the supervisor's office rather than assigned to the districts, because you were providing a service to the districts.

PRATLEY: Yes, that's what we did.

GAUSE: Anything else you'd like to add, Jim?

PRATLEY: Hmm. Anything else. Well, if you find in my write-up that my two best assignments were on the Angeles and on the Klamath. Delightful assignments. I had good people and I was working for good people, so yes.

GAUSE: Okay.

PRATLEY: Good heavens.

GAUSE: Goes quick.

PRATLEY: I thought it would take longer than this.

GAUSE: Surprise you. Was Nappy Martin on the Angeles when you were there?

PRATLEY: Who?

GAUSE: Nap Martin in engineering? In the '50s there was a guy that ran the – you know, Ken Worthy had the cribbing crew. They made the cement cribs that take up to the Arroyo Seco Canyon and Sierra Madre canyon and they made dams to catch debris. This was after you left.

PRATLEY: Must have been after I left.

GAUSE: They were long cement blocks and they locked together, you know, sitting one on the other, this way and that way. Anyway, there was a colorful guy from Arkansas named Nap Martin. Always wore a uniform and a velvet hat.

PRATLEY: No, can't say that I knew him.

GAUSE: And they later had a nursery there for reforestation for not trees but brush and stuff like that. Lee Berryman ran that. Well, we got a lot. I think it went quicker.

PRATLEY: I hope I have been of some benefit. You'll find a lot in the write-up.

[End of interview.]