

Interviewee: Robert “Bob” Cornelius (BC)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Working as a Park Ranger in the Grand Canyon in 1969-1970

Date of Interview: 6/2/18, Part 3

Method of Interview: Phone interview

Transcriber: Amy Bayer

Date of Transcription: 11/14/18 – 11/19/18

Transcription Reviewers: Sue Priest, Tom Martin

Keys: Roy Starkey, Nick Nicholson, Bob Yearout, Jim Vuconich, Supai Tour in 1970, life at Phantom Ranch

TM: Good morning. This is Part 3 of a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Robert “Bob” Cornelius. C-O-R-N-E-L-I-U-S. Again this is Part 3 of this oral history interview. My name is Tom Martin. Today is the 2nd of June, 2018. Good morning, Bob. How are you?

BC: I’m doing well, thank you.

TM: Good. You know, in the end of Part 2, we were talking about commissioner McKay was his name. I think the nickname you used was Mumbles.

BC: That’s correct, yes.

TM: I looked him up online between last time we talked and this time. Thomas H. McKay was a commissioner and then right about ’70, ’71, ’72, the commissioners were retitled and their names...they became judges.

BC: Magistrate judges.

TM: Magistrate judges, okay. Could you recount some more about Commissioner McKay?

BC: Right, well he helped cordon the old, what was called the South Rim District Ranger Office. I think you mentioned at one time it was park headquarters. It was across the street from the old Babbitt store and post office and then it was across the railroad tracks kind of from the El Tovar and the Bright Angel Lodge there. Commissioner McKay was pretty much a kindly sort. He was accused of being...hitting the bottle a little bit too much by some people. But I never saw him where I could say he was inebriated or anything like that. That was always a rumor. But, off course sometimes rumors are bad.

TM: Right.

BC: Some of his rulings people disagreed with, including myself at times, because you always have the prosecutor that wants to see what he think, how justice should be administered. Then you have the defendant and the defense and they look at the other way. I guess that’s the great thing about our country. We have checks and balances in the courtroom, too. But Judge McKay...a couple things he did was... I remember the first summer we were in the campground and this guy had called us over there. There’d been a dispute over a campsite. It was late at night, fairly late at night, and guy went up to the guy’s trailer and he knocked on the door and he said, “You’ve taken my campsite.” The guy pulled a gun out and put it in the guy’s face. So we ended up going over there and citing the fella in the trailer for display of a firearm, basically assault. This went before Judge McKay and Judge McKay ruled that he was

justified in pulling the firearm on the man because that was his domicile and he was allowed to protect his domicile.

TM: Oh, interesting.

BC: You know, in retrospective, it was probably an okay ruling but I think everybody, because of words that were exchanged and everything else, they thought that maybe it should've gone the other way. So that was an example.

Another time, this was when I was at Phantom Ranch, I had a case before Judge McKay, and I went up... What had happened is one of the workers at Phantom Ranch and a couple of Fred Harvey cowboys came down and they all got drunk. They saddled up some mules and they took the mules and went over into the campground with the mules and they lassoed this guy. They came over... There was a guy and his girlfriend and then there was this man from Texas was there. He had spent time cowboying and stuff himself. The Fred Harvey cowboys came over and said, "Well, where are all the dancing girls?" He knew that that meant there was going to be some trouble and so he sort of intervened. He got between them and the guy and his girlfriend. One of the guys lassoed him and drug him around the campground by a rope.

TM: Wow.

BC: So this wide-eyed guy... I was sitting in the ranger station and I hear all this pounding and screaming at the front door. I open the front door and this young man says that these cowboys have come in the campground and they're assaulting people and I need to get up there. So I headed up into the campground. When I got up there, the 3 mules were quite obvious there so I just yelled some profanity at these guys and they took off across the creek on their mules. I took off after them on foot. Eventually I was able to... I knew who they were because I had a flashlight and I shined... I saw their faces, so I knew who the perpetrators were in this case.

One of them I remember, I was walking up toward the ranch and I saw this guy jump down into the irrigation ditch. He got right down in the water, you know. His name was Rusty. I came along I said, "Hey, Rusty, what are you doing? Taking a bath?" Later I found his cowboy hat. He was hatless. He'd taken his cowboy hat off to kind of disguise himself so I wouldn't be able to see his shadow or his silhouette. He'd left his cowboy hat up by an old generator house that was above the pool house there. I found that hat and I took it. The other two guys I couldn't locate. So I went back to the ranger station and I basically told these guys, "Well, I'll see you in the morning." So I went back to the ranger station and took the cowboy hat with me. The next morning I went up and I cited the...guy's last name was Bahgus, I don't remember his first name. Cited him in the dining hall and then I went and found one of the cowboys. I cited him in the dining hall. Then the third one, this Rusty, was down at the corral where the tourists...you saddle up the tourists, in a little place there. So I told him, I said, "Where's your hat?"

TM: [laughter]

BC: First thing I asked him was, "Where's your cowboy hat?" Of course, poor guy he had...just white as a sheet from his eyebrows up. He said, "Where's my...do you have my hat?" I said, "Yeah, I've got your hat." I said, "Its evidence." He wanted that hat back. Oh, he was mad. Then there were several of the dudes getting ready to get on and they kind of took his side of the whole thing. I told them what had happened and relayed it to everybody so everybody knew he wasn't as innocent as he was putting on.

So away they all went. When we got to court, this Rusty had left the country and the other... One of the things that they talked about, I'm kind of getting ahead of myself here, was they called it "dude-itis" that these wranglers would have enough of the tourists. They liked the mules, they liked the riding, but not all of them liked the tourists. So they'd get what they called "dude-itis" and they would do something outrageous to get fired and then they'd go down to southern Arizona or New Mexico or Texas. They'd work and then at some point they might come back to the canyon and get a job again, because it's a skillset that not everybody has. Saddling mules and that sort of thing. So some of them were kind of rough round the edges so to speak. So when we got to court, Rusty wasn't there. Only one of the guys showed up. So Judge McKay, that's who we were talking about to begin with, he dismissed the charges because he said he didn't want this one person to have to pay the penalty for the other two. So he just dismissed the charges and it all went away. Of course, I didn't have a witness, it was just my kind of hearsay. They said he'd been lassoed and tied up. When I got up to the campground, he'd managed to get free. And the original complainant, he was gone. That's always a problem with court in an isolated area like the Grand Canyon. It's hard to get everybody back together. I wasn't happy with his ruling anyway.

TM: So let's back up a little bit. Did you ever feel like you were outnumbered there at Phantom Ranch?

BC: Absolutely. Oh absolutely.

TM: How did you deal with that?

BC: Well, law enforcement works a lot through intimidation. People know that if they do something bad, they might get in trouble, especially if there's a cop on the corner sitting in his patrol car or something. So you use that to your advantage a little bit. I had an incident one time where I went up in the campground and there were 17 people in the Bright Angel campground. None of them had any clothes on. So I decided, "What am I going to do with this?" I came in the upper end of the campground and the first I guy I met, I pulled my ticket book out of my back pocket kind of with a flourish and I wrote him a ticket. Everybody else saw that I was writing somebody a ticket...

TM: [laughter]

BC: ...and they all put their clothes on. Of course, through the whole thing I thought they're liable to strip my clothes off and make me one of them. So that was how you dealt with stuff basically.

TM: That's brilliant.

BC: Really in Phantom Ranch you really were on your own, so you had to be pretty head's up as far as dealing with violations. I had a case up Phantom Creek one time where I hiked up, way up Phantom Creek. As you go up the lower part of the canyon there, you come to a waterfall and it's about 12-14 feet high, something like that. There is a way to climb up and over that waterfall on the left-hand side at that time if you were pretty agile or you could climb way up and around and that worked also. But I climbed up and over the waterfall and then there's a long undercut cliff on the right-hand side as you're going upstream. Here all along this ledge is all this camping gear. I found a guy there and he even had a cat with him, a domestic cat. I told him he had to break camp and move down to Phantom Ranch. As I was leaving, I found a little area that had been turned into a garden. Had something growing in it. I looked down, of course it was marijuana. I told the guy, I said, "What is this here?" He says, "Its peas and carrots."

TM: [laughter]

BC: I said, "Well, it doesn't look like peas and carrots to me," so I picked all of the plants. They were small, a few inches high. I picked all the plants and put them in my backpack, told him I'd see him back at Phantom Ranch in the morning or later in the day. And he did. He packed everything up. He had another guy that was with him, but he had gone out for groceries or something, I don't know. We did have a problem with long-term camping, they probably still do down there.

TM: Right. Well, let's cycle back to McKay here, because I digressed by asking you, "Did you feel kind of outnumbered down there at Phantom at times?"

BC: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

TM: So clearly you did. Let's kind of head back to the rim there with McKay. You mentioned a couple of events where you thought his decisions weren't quite the way you had hoped they might go.

BC: Right and that was what we were talking about, sure. The lassoing the individual, the firearms threat. Those are two I remember. I think there were others that other rangers were grousing about, but I don't remember specifics on any of them.

TM: You'd mentioned in Part 2, that Commissioner McKay had a nickname, Mumbles.

BC: Right.

TM: I was like...did he mumble? Did you hear him mumble? How did he get that nickname?

BC: [chuckle] I don't know. I have no idea. All I know is that's what they called him. When someone said "Mumbles did this" or "Mumbles did that," you knew who they were talking about. [laughter]

TM: Okay. Okay. Nice. Anything else you remember about him?

BC: No, not really.

TM: Okay. You know what? Backing up a little bit, before we started this interview this morning, you went through a list of employees and we were cross-checking who they did and who they knew and what was going on. At about 2/3rds of the way through that I list I sat up and thought, "Oh my gosh, we should be recording this." So you kindly agreed to run through that list again.

BC: Sure, we'll go through the list again here.

TM: That'd be great. So this list is a list of people that you worked with, that you knew that were in the ranger pool or maintenance or trails in that arena, is that right?

BC: That's correct. Yeah.

TM: Okay, who's at the start of the list?

BC: Well, the first was, of course, the District Ranger. Vernon Ruesch was his name. R-U-E-S-C-H. He was the... Well, just to give you an idea... One reason I knew some of these people is that our first week at the Canyon as a new seasonal ranger, probably late June of '69, they had an orientation. It was kind of a meet-n-greet type of thing where you got to at least see who the District Ranger was, see who the Chief Ranger was, Chief of Interp, so on and so forth. So some of the people you got to know that way.

TM: Okay.

BC: It was probably pretty early, within a day or two of my getting there... I think I got there on the 15th of June. So probably the 17th, 18th, 19th of June somewhere, they had this thing and this Vernon Ruesch, I remember him being introduced. I was told that he had worked there for like 20 years he had been at the Canyon. I don't know if that's true or not, but he'd been there a long time. He got a transfer then to Alaska and there was a little shuffling around of positions. One thing I remember about him is my first job at the Canyon was the...I think I said it was rim patrol...in an earlier conversation, but I really think I worked midnight-to-8:00 for about a week before I got the pleasure of going on rim patrol. I remember in the morning, it was early, the sun was up though, it was before 8:00, and I stepped out onto the porch of the District Ranger office and I saw this sea mist green station wagon pull in up above the ranger station. This Vernon Ruesch walks down the sidewalk and steps up onto the steps next to me and instead of saying, "Hi, how you doing? How'd your first night go?" blah, blah, blah. He said, "Why isn't the flag up?" Very gruff manner. I didn't say anything, I just said, "I'll get it up right away." Went in, got the flag, ran it up the flag pole. There wasn't actually a list of jobs to do. I guess they were expecting you just to figure 'em out. Well, you get the flag up. [laughing] I had received very minimal information as far as what my duties were other than if the fire phone rings, answer it and then start calling this list of names. That was basically it. The next person was Nick Nicholson.

TM: So I'm going to jump in here, Bob. I'm going to ask you you've got a list of a bunch of people. Should we run through the list and then come back and pick them up one by one or should I ask you, "Is that everything you remember about Vern?" How would you like to do this?

BC: Well, whatever way pleases you.

TM: I'm following your lead here. Why don't we...maybe we should...let's just run name by name by name through the list and then we'll come back to Vern.

BC: Okay. Let's do that. Okay the next person on the list is Nick Nicholson, N-I-C-H-O-L-S-O-N. He was the Assistant District ranger. This is as of June of '69 or so.

TM: Okay.

BC: Then there was another man, Jim Vukonich, V-U-C-O-N-I-C-H, I believe. He was to my recollection the Supai ranger.

TM: Okay.

BC: He also worked in the South Rim. Next one was Jack Fields, an area ranger, and Lester Womack, another area ranger. W-O-M-A-C-K was his name spelled. Bob Scott. He was at Desert View.

TM: So he was Desert View ranger?

BC: He was either Desert View ranger or district ranger. I think he was listed as district ranger, but...

TM: So he was probably the only ranger out there and he had that district, would that be right?

BC: Could be.

TM: All right, thank you.

BC: District came to...like I told you earlier...Duck on the Rock was where we stopped our patrol if you worked on the South Rim District and then that's where they came to if they were with Desert View.

TM: Okay.

BC: There was a Dave Strobe, S-T-R-O-P-E. I think he might have come a little later on like in the winter or something. Ken Hulick, he was Inner Canyon. He had a seasonal ranger down there with him by the name of Ron Lucas. There was Glade Ross, river ranger. He later was replaced by Tom Doerr, D-O-E-H-R. Then there were the three intake rangers: Jim Cutler, Carl Douhan, D-O-U-H-A-N, Phil McComb, M-C-C-O-M-B. There was Lloyd Horner, law enforcement specialist. There was Keith Trexler. He was the chief of interpretation. One person I mentioned earlier was a Nikki Williams, who worked as an interpreter under Keith Trexler. There were several seasonal rangers. Myself of course, Ernie Padilla, P-A-D-I-L-L-A, John Sheek, S-H-E-E-K. Then there was someone by the name of Gary and I can't remember his last name for some reason. Then there were... Chief ranger at that time was Dick McLaren. I think he was replaced later by George Von der Lippe.

TM: V-O-N D-E-R L-I-P-P-E, Von der Lippe.

BC: Right. Then there was Gary Howe, H-O-W-E. He was the chief of maintenance, as I recall. And then Ed Carlson. Ed Carlson was the safety officer. Then there were some trail crew guys. Jack Watson, he was the trail crew leader. Flor Estrada and Ralph Wass, W-A-S-S, were the packers. Ralph was also the park farrier. There was a Fred Carver, who had been there a long time on the trail crew. There was a fellow who I think in '69 was probably a contractor but later became Park Service, like a bulldozer operator. Howard Lapp, L-A-P-P. There was a Charlie Horning, maintenance man down in the canyon. Victor Watahomogie, was also a maintenance man, I believe, down in the canyon. Another guy, didn't mention...wasn't Park Service, USGS named Roy Starkey.

TM: Ah, yes.

BC: S-T-A-R-K-E-Y. He was down at Phantom Ranch. There was a guy named Bob Yearout who came. He came after '69 though. Then the superintendents while I was there at the Canyon: Bob Lovegren was there in '69, and later Merle Stitt, S-T-I-double T, replaced him. Of course, there's a lot of other people, too. We also talked a little bit about John Riffey who was over at what at that time was Grand Canyon National Monument.

TM: Right. Then Bob Yearout...

BC: And then there were some other...go ahead.

TM: I'm sorry, it was Bob Yearout?

BC: Yearout. He was later on. He was the... I think he came in the spring of '70, I believe. A couple other names: Carl Christenson, Bruce Shaw and Max Hancock. Christenson and Hancock were kind of the managers, ranger managers. Bruce Shaw was their chief of operations. That was a little bit later...just slightly later on because the park underwent this organizational change and a lot of names and positions and things changed.

TM: You know, maybe where we should...this is a wonderful list. I got to tell you. This is a great kind of who's who in Grand Canyon 1969-1970 snapshot. It's wonderful. Maybe we should start with Roy Starkey, because he's the only guy out here that is working for USGS. He's down at Phantom Ranch running that stage operation down there and then we could kind of pickup with Vernon.

BC: Okay. Sure

TM: Would that make sense?

BC: Yeah. Well Roy lived in what is now the, I guess, Inner Canyon Ranger Station/Phantom Ranch Ranger Station down there. It was a large kind of a pinkish, horrible pinkish colored building.

TM: [chuckle]

BC: One of the things about it is it was really big. It had a large living room, kitchen and a couple of bedrooms that went from the... Well, the living room was in the kind of the center of the building and then to the east were some bedrooms and bathroom and stuff, as I recall. Then the other direction was what he called his lab. There really wasn't much in there. I think there were like two rooms. When I went in there, I don't remember even seeing anything in there. It was a lot of wasted space. One of the things that was kind of awful about the building is it sat perpendicular to the canyon so you saw it from the South Rim. It wasn't built with much finesse and it certainly was kind of a modernistic, sort of an ugly building. It didn't really fit it, as I always felt. Roy, every day, he had...well, he had two areas that he worked and this was before they mechanized the river flow. Have satellite stuff now that tells them the flow of the river. But in those days they didn't, it had to be done by hand or by visual look. Right above the campground he had a little area that he kind of had sort of developed a little bit. If you threw a rock in where his gaging station was, it threw off his records or his instrument, his gage that he had there, and he'd get all mad. So we had a "no trespassing" sign up at the end of the campground to try to keep people from walking... They would walk along the edge of the cliff above his gage and they would kick rocks down into the creek, and of course, Roy would then go crazy. So we tried to keep them from getting out there.

Now, I guess there's a little bridge across. Just from looking at YouTube and stuff, there's a little bridge across that part of the campground. But he would go over every day and he would read that gage there. And then the other thing he'd do, in the afternoon usually, he'd stroll down to the cable across the river that was upstream of the Kaibab suspension bridge and he would spend several hours out there. He'd go out on the cable car and then send these instruments down to figure out the volume of flow. Then he'd also take sediment samples, figure out what the load was of the river and did this every day. He always wore [chuckle] a pair of blue Levi shorts and usually no shirt hardly. He was just baked like a biscuit. He was really brown. Several times, I remember when I was down there, he would call me. For example, he called me like at 4:30 in the morning one time or 5:00 in the morning in the winter and he

said, "Look outside! Look outside!" So I dutifully opened the curtain and peaked out and we had about five inches of snow at Phantom there. It was really remarkable. I mean, there was snow everywhere in the inner gorge. I've got some amazing pictures of that.

TM: Nice.

BC: I've got a picture of us. Roy Starkey and the workers from Phantom Ranch, we all hiked up the Clear Creek trail and we sat on the bench up on the Clear Creek trail. Of course everybody's sitting in 4-5-6 inches of snow. Then we went back down. We had a big breakfast down at Phantom Ranch. It was like a celebration.

TM: Nice.

BC: Snow at the bottom of the canyon!

TM: Yeah!

BC: Of course, by noon it was all gone. It was really an unusual event. But he would call me up about things, particularly if somebody was up messing with his gage there on the Bright Angel Creek. He would get all upset about that.

Then the other thing that he and I would do is... Phantom Ranch had like a... It was like a revolving door up there as far as help. The people would come down there all starry eyed thinking they were going to be able to hike in the canyon and camp out and do this and do that and all they were able to do was work and the work was hard. They had to clean the cabins and they had to clean the dining room. Then they probably had to do prep for dinners and stuff like that. So they were working constantly and they didn't get paid very much and they didn't get any days off to speak of. They had trouble keeping people so they would get short-handed. So what they would do is call Roy and myself and have us come up to the ranch and for a steak and potato dinner and pie, I remember the pie, and we would then do the dishes.

TM: That's a fair trade.

BC: We would sit there and do the dishes after we'd had our meal and everything. It was a pretty good arrangement.

TM: I was going to say, did you see that as a fair trade?

BC: Oh, yeah! 'Cause their meals were always good. The pies in particular, I remember were good. They were actually frozen pies. They would bring them down from... They weren't homemade, they weren't made down there at Phantom, but they were very high quality. They would bring them down on the mules, I guess. There was this cook there, his name was John Baugus. At some point during the meal, he would go out into the dining hall, because in those days the only people that ate in that dining hall were the mule riders. They would have the dinner and the rest of the time there was no food service other than... Later they had a window where people would come up and buy stuff. But he would go out in the dining room. We would be sitting in the back eating our meal or something before we did the dishes and we'd hear this big roar of laughter and it was always John. Someone would always ask him, "Are these pies homemade?" and his reply was, "Oh yes, they're Mother John's."

TM: [chuckle]

BC: He always got a big laugh out of everybody. So other than that, I don't know a lot about Roy. He had a beautiful view from his front window, I know that. He had that big picture window and you could look right up at the South Rim there at Mather Point and all. I don't know how many years he stayed down there. Probably a few more years and he probably... Maybe when he retired they automated the system, I think they put satellite down there. I talked to someone from the USGS in Flagstaff just recently, I met at a wedding, I was asking them about that. They said most everything now is satellite. When they do need to do sentiment studies it's a special deal, someone'll go down and do it. But it's not regularly staffed anymore.

TM: Right, right. That happened all across the country.

BC: Yeah.

TM: Transitioning to...

BC: We had it happen here at Black Canyon, too.

TM: ...telemetry, yeah. The radio telemetry. So Roy got on the cable back and forth. Did you ever ride the cable out with him and just watch him collect?

BC: I never went out with him. I never did go out there. I know Ron Lucas did that. He was the seasonal that was down there with Ken Hulick, but then also with myself, when I went down to Phantom. He went out there one time with him. I guess it was a lot of fun going out over the river.

TM: All right. Anything else you remember about Roy?

BC: No, that's about it. He was a buddy. He was an unusual character I'll say that... [laughter]

TM: How so? I mean...

BC: ...without going into a lot of detail.

TM: Okay. I was just going to say how so? But if that's that, that's that. Okay, moving right along here. Vernon, Vernon Ruesch.

BC: I mentioned about him showing up and my not having the flag up the first morning. About the only other thing I remember about him is that they had a going away party at the maintenance yard. Everybody from the park showed up because he'd been there for a very long time and it was quite a transition. The next person we were going to talk about was Nick Nicholson. I know he was happy about it, because he was the beneficiary of Vernon's leaving, Ruesch's leaving. He went from Assistant District Ranger, he became the District Ranger. Nick was a...had a... The thing I always remember about him is his haircut. He was just buzzed right real short and he was... People would always talk about... One of his favorite expressions was, "If that happens again, you'll have just enough time to pack your bags." So he was very intimidating in his management style. [laughter] I had that happen to me once later in the summer. I was on campground patrol and I'd spent all day at the campground. They had this little

Cushman cycle out there, 3-wheeled scooter. It had the canvas sides on it and it had an engine that was just oh...you really needed earmuffs...

TM: [laughter]

BC: ...to operate the thing. It was just like riding a lawn mower or a chainsaw or something. It just really made a racket. So you couldn't hear anything when you're in this Cushman cycle. You could turn your radio up full blast, but if you didn't put it right up next your ear, you couldn't hear anything. Well, Nick came over to the little fee office there that they had at the entrance to the Mather campground in his patrol car. I saw him, I was up in one of the loops and I saw his car come, so I headed down the hill in my little Cushman cycle and I got out. Big smile and, "Hi, how are you doing?" type of thing. He says, "Do you have your radio on?" I said, "Yes, of course" as I handed it to him. I guess I checked to be sure or something and that made him mad. He thought I'd just turned it on, that I had the radio off. So he told me that I better have that radio on and I better answer the radio and if I didn't I'd have enough time to pack my bags. So it was kind of scary.

But then later on in the summer, I did a pretty good job in the campground and he was very complimentary in the job that I did out in the campground. Of course, he was the person that re-hired me to come back in the winter, in February, after I graduated college to work at the Canyon. So I can't be too hard on the guy. I do remember one night [chuckle], Ken Hulick and I... Ken was working on the South Rim during the winter and I used to go out and ride with the permanent rangers for experience and just to have something to do. So I was actually off duty, but we were driving around and it was snowing. There was a lot of snow on the road and we approached the Bright Angel Lodge. Out of the parking lot comes this sedan and it does a 360 [chuckle] on the road there and then keeps going on down the road. So Ken put the red lights on, stopped the vehicle and who would it be but Nick Nicholson.

TM: Uh oh!

BC: And he's had a little bit to drink. So Ken went ahead and let him, I guess, just let him drive home, as I recall. I remember him getting back into the patrol car and he said, "It's Nick." [laughter]. I guess he kind of felt obligated to let his boss get home. Nick was kind of a confirmed bachelor, but he met somebody there in the park. He eventually got married and then he moved on to Bullfrog at Glen Canyon. Was the District Ranger there. I kind of lost track of him after that.

He was a pretty intense guy. I remember a couple of... I think the first rescue I ever witnessed was with him and he came... A woman had passed out on the Bright Angel trail. They had a little rescue cache in the South Rim District ranger office. Kind of a big, long closet right off the lobby there. They put a lot of rescue gear where you could do like a hasty search or a quick in-an-out. Anybody could grab the stuff. Then they had a more extensive rescue cache up at the firehouse up in the maintenance yard. So he comes screaming up, red lights going and siren, and pulls up to the front of the ranger office, runs in. I help him get a litter and a bunch of other stuff. They had a wheel that you attached to the bottom of the Stokes litter. I don't know if they still do that sort of thing. So we got that and down the trail we all go. I think 4-5 of us haul this woman out. I'm thinking she was somebody who had been drinking at the lodge extensively the night before and was dehydrated from alcohol, because that's what it does to you. She got down about half way, to Mile-and-a-Half House, and had heat exhaustion. So that's was the first. I just remember sort of the intensity of everything racing and things got real exciting all of a sudden.

Everybody seemed to know what they were doing. I was doing a lot of watching [laughing] more than doing anything else.

TM: Let's back up a little bit, because I want to come back to this event with... What happens when you do pull someone over and they do happen to be your boss and they are inebriated? I mean...

BC: [laughter]

TM: ...what do you do? It's not quite in the book.

BC: No, no, no. That's a difficult one. The Park Service in those days, had a way of punishing its employees. This actually happened, this scenario you just told me.

Ed Carlson was not quite my supervisor yet. He had come to me and said, "Bob, would you like to work down at Phantom Ranch?" I owe Ed everything, but Ed was having a lot of issues with his wife. He had 4 or 5 kids. He accused one of the maintenance men of trying to break up his marriage and everything. His wife and he had had a fight. He went out to Tusayan and decided to do a little bit of drinking. When he came back in...he had this big ole station wagon, was like a Ford Torino or something like that...he came in the Service Road and he lost control of the vehicle going around a curb and smashed his station wagon into a Pinyon pine tree. It was just wrapped...the front of that car was just wrapped around that tree and steaming car and everything. Jim Cutler and I went out there to investigate this accident we had heard that had happened. We pulled over and Cutler says, "That's Carlson's car." So we're looking all through the woods, there was nobody in the driver seat, we're looking all through the woods. We can't find Ed anywhere so we go over to his house and [chuckle] there we knock on the door. Ed casually comes to the front door and opens the door and we go in. He sits down in his lazy-boy chair so to speak. Cutler talks to him for a while and Ed says, "Oh, no, I don't know anything about that wreck." He knew nothing about it or anything. Well, Jim Cutler ended up writing him a ticket for... I don't know what the ticket was for. It could've been for leaving the scene of an accident or it could've been... He didn't do any roadside sobriety maneuvers or anything like that on Ed, so I think they may have just assumed the drunk driving aspect of it or put it in there just to have an extra charge. Anyway, Ed ended up going to court, paying a fine. It was a little uncomfortable for me initially. I thought, "Geez, this guy I'm going to be working for, I'm having to go over and have these confrontations with him." There was another incident, too, involving him I won't go into right now.

TM: Hey, Bob, let me stop there for a minute. I mean, it's uncomfortable for you, it must've been very uncomfortable for Jim, who wrote the citation.

BC: Well, I'm sure it was, but you know, you gotta do what you gotta do. I always remember this guy here, actually in Montrose, that worked for the Colorado Division of Wildlife. He would always say, "I don't play with my job. I don't...That's a different... I just don't play with my job."

TM: Right.

BC: And that's the way you have to approach it. You have to say, well, they've done the bad deed, they've got to pay the piper now...

TM: Right, except that...

BC: ...and that's what you have to do, and it is uncomfortable.

TM: ...the NPS does have a way...

BC: The National Park Service...

TM: Yeah...

BC: What's that?

TM: You'd mentioned the NPS does have a way of punishing its employees.

BC: What they would do, particularly in those days, well they'd say, "If you want to advance, screw up," but also they would transfer people. If someone embarrassed the Park Service in something that they did or even let's say you stopped a politician or something, maybe, somebody with a little bit of pull, they might transfer you. So people kind of walked on eggshells a lot. They really were running scared a lot of the times because they didn't want to offend the wrong person and end up going to Tuzigoot or something. It's kind of a very, very poor way to manage an organization, but that's what they were doing.

TM: Well, it's interesting, 'cause we can take a little sidebar rest stop here for a minute and just ponder the sexual harassment on the river, which has been in the news over the last few years...

BC: Yeah.

TM: ...which really points to a larger systemic problem of bullying, if you will.

BC: Yes. Oh, absolutely.

TM: Which you're talking about right here in 1969, 1970. So yeah this has been problematic for generations of Park Service employees.

BC: That's right.

TM: And I don't know if that's something you want to speak to now or later.

BC: Well, sure we can. I was insulated from a lot of things, I think, by being at Phantom Ranch. I was pretty much the lone ranger down there, so there really... A lot of stuff that was going on on the South Rim, I either didn't know about or... That's generally what it was. I just didn't know about it. There were things like they used to have these baseball parties up there. There was wife swapping. I think George Von der Lippe, I think, he got involved in hanky panky with his secretary. Just a lot of stuff going on.

I mentioned this one woman earlier, when we were talking before the tape started, by the name of Nikki Williams. She was the only really uniformed ranger in the park. She was a seasonal interpreter. Her dad/ her father, was Jack Williams, who was the Governor of Arizona at the time.

TM: Right.

BC: So she had some political pull. But I remember people talking about “Rangerettes”. Then there was the business, too, about the uniform. Even the uniform the women wore was kind of crazy. They tried several different types of uniforms, where they looked like airline stewardesses or something. I mentioned the name Bob Yearout earlier. I think Bob was brought to the Canyon. He was brought there by Bob Lovegren and one of his jobs was to try to level the playing field as far as bringing women and minorities into the Park Service. The Park Service was really getting hammered about the inequality of their workforce. It was an all-male organization. He was sent up to the training center and they had a whole group of intakes there. They brought people in and vetted every one of those employees, excuse me...yeah employees and trainees, with the intent really of bringing more women into the service. Men that were scheduled to go through the training session, this was in about 1970, were sent down the road and then they were replaced with a woman or a minority. It was really hardball they were playing. One of the guys I worked with, he was a seasonal ranger that I worked with down in the canyon, he actually came down in the canyon and worked for a while, and then all of a sudden... Well then he went up to the training center and then he was let go. He was a real competent guy, but they were playing hardball. I guess somebody had to be the bad guy and it ended up being Bob Yearout was sending people down the road, or at least that’s what I’ve heard.

TM: Well, it’s interesting because it was a step, if you will, in the right direction to sort of get out of the good ol’ boy club and yet the bullying issue, whether it was a white male on a white male, or in the future it was a white male on a minority or a female, or it was a minority on a white male, or a minority on a female, or was a female on a female, or a female on a white male, or female on minority...that bullying culture seemed to continue.

BC: Yeah, I’m not aware of it in as far as... Later in my career I didn’t see that and I didn’t participate in it.

TM: Okay.

BC: And we’re not talking about Grand Canyon anymore, because, of course, I left Grand Canyon. Some of the most competent, least seasonal rangers that I hired were women. I think I probably had a difficulty getting over that hurdle myself initially. I ended up hiring a gal by the name of Vicky Zarlingo and she was really, really a hard working gal. She had been... I hired her to be a boat operator basically up at Curecanti. She had worked like on a salmon boat or something as a captain.

TM: Wow.

BC: She was really a good boat operator and she was a hard working person. She was a school teacher and so she was a pretty smart gal. If I ever had any doubts about the quality of the work of a woman, she put those to rest because she did such a great job. She worked for me for about 4 years, I think. Came back every season. I really got so I depended on her because she would help train all the new seasonals.

TM: I’m not questioning competency, but it’s more that structure of punishment. That sort of structure and...

BC: I suspect it went on throughout my career at some level. Like I say, I never really experienced it too much in the parks where I was.

TM: Great, great.

BC: I never felt like I was... There was some intimidation. I had one superintendent in particular, I remember, who was very, very intimidating and did make it difficult for everybody. So I guess it probably was going on right up into the '80s and '90s.

TM: Yeah, if not later.

BC: Oh, it's here right now. I've read some of the articles you're probably referring to with both the river runners and also like fire and trail crews and things like that. To me it just seems crazy, but I guess [chuckle] some people just don't know better or something or take advantage of their position, I guess.

TM: To the agency's credit, I think that they're really trying to, now, move forward on that. You mentioned Roy Starkey in the USGS. GS has a pretty good policy on bullying, so I think the agency has potential here to sort that out. So we live and hope.

BC: Yeah.

TM: All right, so we were talking about Nick Nicholson. Kind of cycling back around here. Was a tense kind of guy, he's a flag-up-on-the-flag-pole, and is-your-radio-turned-on, and yet, it seemed as though if he saw a hard worker that was trying, he recognized that.

BC: I think so, yeah, I think so. I think he was fair from that standpoint. When I came back in the winter, as I recall Nick had transferred or he was about to transfer and then we ended up with some new leadership. Carl Christiansen was the district ranger.

TM: Okay. All right, so then looking at the list, scrambling here, next after Nick would've been Jim Vukonich, the Supai ranger.

BC: Jim Vukonich, as I understood, worked Supai. In those days the campground between Havasu Falls and Mooney Falls down at Havasu was National Park Service operated. The National Park actually surrounded the Indian Reservation, the Supai Indian Reservation. The park was responsible for everything that went on down in... That first summer there was a Boy Scout troop down at Supai. They all got really sick and they attributed it to the water down there. Now, whether they had drank Supai Creek water or whether they had drank water from the spring, they decided that they needed to check the spring. I think they found some issues with the spring where people got water, so they put an iodinator there on the spring to be sure the water would be good. Or a chlorinator, I think it was a chlorinator. But to get back, Vukonich was in charge of all that sort of thing. He was a great big guy. We called him Big Jim, he was like six-six or six-seven. He was kind of intimidating when he'd come in. You were talking earlier about how do you deal with situations, well, he had a very gruff manner about him. He could be very gruff. I think some of it, maybe he just got tired of answering the same questions over and over and over.

TM: Dude-itis, yeah!

BC: Yeah, the old dude-itis, stuff. I remember one time Harvey Butchart came in to get a permit in the South Rim district ranger office there. He came up to the desk and I was asking him all kinds of questions. I didn't know who he was. Vukonich came out and said, "Give him his permit!"

BC & TM: [laughter]

BC: Another thing I remember, one night I was dispatching. I was on this midnight-to-8:00 shift and there was a skunk had got hit by a car out in the intersection just to the north of the District Ranger office. We could smell it even in the office there.

TM: I bet.

BC: So I waited until Vukonich was coming on duty at 11:00. I gave the radio a call, "Jim, could you go by, there's a dead skunk in the intersection near the ranger station. Would you go pick that up, get that out of there?" I remember the radio call coming back something like, "10-4 [gruffly]."

TM: [laughter]

BC: You can tell he was really PO'd at me for giving him that assignment. Later in the summer, or in the fall, they had this chlorinator and stuff on the spring at Supai, he came to me and asked if I'd like to go down to Supai for a week. I ended up going down there for I guess it must have been a 10-day tour. That was either in the fall, or it might have been in the spring. I think it was actually in the spring when I had come back from my college.

TM: Spring of 1970?

BC: Yeah, I think it was spring of '70, come to think of it. I went down and there was a big tent down there, that was my quarters. My job was to...he assigned me a couple of things. One was to monitor the chlorine level in the spring. Had to keep a running count on that, getting the water samples, taking them up to the village and having them mailed out. Then I had to relocate an outhouse down there, dig a big pit and move the outhouse over. I did that. Pick up all the trash. The trash was unbelievable down there at Supai.

TM: Bob?

BC: Yeah.

TM: Bob, I'm going to jump in here and mention that George Billingsley had spent some time there as well, as the Supai ranger, and he had trouble with trash. So...

BC: No doubt.

TM: ...can you tell me how you dealt with that trash?

BC: Yeah, I met George Billingsley a long time ago. I remember him from the Canyon. He was working with like NAU or something at the time doing research or something.

TM: USGS, yeah.

BC: Was that who he was with? Anyhow, as I recall what we were doing was taking the trash up one of the side canyons there above...kind of to the other side of the falls there or something. I don't think we packed it out. I'm having a hard time remembering exactly what we did.

TM: What George said was that there were some mine works up Carbonate Canyon, up past the Supai cemetery there, and he was instructed to dump the trash in the mine works.

BC: You're probably right.

TM: I don't know if that rings a bell with you or not.

BC: We were looking for places to put it, I know, 'cause it was everywhere.

TM: Okay. Yeah, 'cause there was no trash removal to any kind of landfill.

BC: Yeah, that's probably true. We might have... I was thinking, at Phantom, of course we sent it out on mules.

TM: Right.

BC: But here you're dealing with the tribe and they didn't want anything to do with it. So we were probably putting it in gunny sacks and taking it someplace. It's interesting that I can't remember that. [chuckle] Maybe I blocked that out of my memory. All I remember is that the trash was terrible down there. I don't remember having a burner. We may have had a burner down there that we were burning the stuff. But I just don't remember.

TM: I think Billingsley had said that they were putting it in this mineshaft. He came in after you I think. He was between '70 and '75 when he was in there, so that would've been happening. I did want to swing off on another tangent here for a minute and talk about trash at Phantom, because in the 1950s the Phantom Ranch trash was just dumped in the river. At one point that changed. So by the time you got there in '70, '69/'70, the trash was going on the mules and up the trail.

BC: That's right.

TM: So that narrows it down a little bit to figure out that change would've been implemented already before you. Just to make a note of that. Thank you.

BC: Right, right.

TM: Okay. So Jim... Jim sends you out to Supai for a week. Now, you have been to Supai already as a California Sierra Clubbing David-Brower-hanging-out-with kind of kid and here you are in Supai now working for the Park Service. Did you see that area, Supai, differently as a Park Service employee than you had as a private citizen?

BC: Well sure. Now you've got responsibility. When you visit a place you don't have any responsibility. If you don't want to pick the can up you don't have to, or the cigarette butt or whatever. But as an employee you have responsibility. So the trash and cleaning the restrooms and putting the TP in the restrooms and keeping people from tearing vegetation up and trying to, you know, so they can have a campfire, busting up fire pits... Just all these different things that you had to do. It was a job now, it wasn't something that was all pleasure. And trying to figure out ways of getting people to comply. One

of the things I noticed about Supai was that people did not recognize that they were in the National Park there.

TM: Oh, interesting.

BC: Yeah, they really didn't know where they were I don't think. They were down there, probably thought they were on the Indian reservation. Most of them were down there just to have fun. Some of them were down there and didn't care whether they took the trash out or not.

TM: Yeah.

BC: That's pretty common all over, I guess.

TM: One of the other things that Billingsley mentioned was that the wind would cause havoc with the Cottonwood trees and drop big branches down on the ground at inopportune times.

BC: Oh, yeah. They had a Boy Scout or a kid killed down there when I was at the Canyon. A branch fell out of a tree and right on the sleeping bag and killed this kid.

TM: Oh my.

BC: Those were always issues in Grand Canyon campgrounds. We had the same concerns at Phantom Ranch. They had a western tree crew group that would come in and try to trim up all the trees and stuff, the bigger ones, to keep them at least more safe. We knew that these Fremont cottonwoods, they get rotten inside, inside the branches, and you can't tell from the exterior if the limbs are weak or not. Then when the wind comes they self-prune. If you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you're in trouble. I used to go up into the campground at Phantom, in particular, and if it was real windy there I would tell people not to camp underneath the Cottonwood trees, to get out in the open there. I don't know what the situation is down there now as far as number of trees, but we only had a few really, really big trees when I was there. Most of the trees were plantings that were still growing in the upper part of the campground. There were a couple of big trees down in the lower part of the campground.

TM: Okay, so that was a 10-day detail that Jim had sent you out to.

BC: Right.

TM: What else do you remember about Jim?

BC: Well, Jim... At Grand Canyon, they may still have the same system, they had a system of trying to be as equitable as they could with housing. So they had a point system. You got points for what your grade was, you got points for how many children you had, you got points I think actually for how long you'd worked. I remember Jim grousing and carrying on because Fred Carter, who was with the trail crew, I can remember Jim saying, "That guy's got a hundred kids."

BC & TM: [laughter]

BC: He was upset because he had lost out on a Mission 66 house and he was in one of the older Park Service houses. Jim went on... After he left the Canyon he became I think it was superintendent at

Capulin Mountain which is near Raton Pass in New Mexico. Then later, he went on to, I'm not quite sure what his position was, but he was at Bandelier National Monument. I actually went and visited him at Bandelier. Had dinner with him. I remember he told us about a bunch of extra cool places to go that people didn't know about in the area and stuff like that. After that, I kind of lost track of him and don't remember much else.

TM: Okay. Well, all right, so that's Vern Ruesch and Nick Nicholson and Jim. Is now a good time to say we'll wrap it up with Part 3 and we'll pick this up again with Jack Fields in Part 4?

BC: We can do that. That would work for me.

TM: Okay, let's do that. I'll wrap this up. Please hold the line and then we'll do some scheduling.

BC: Okay, thanks.

TM: Thank you. So this is the end of Part 3 Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Bob Cornelius. Today is the 2nd of June, 2018. My name is Tom Martin and thank you so much.

BC: You're welcome.