

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Charles "Butch" Farabee (BF)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Butch describes his time working in Washington, DC and at Padre Island National Seashore

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TM: Today is Monday, July 13, 2020, and this is Part 19 Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Charles "Butch" Farabee. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Butch, how are you today?

BF: Good, thanks Tom.

TM: Great. May we have your permission to record this oral history interview over the phone?

BF: Yes, you may.

TM: Thank you very much. Last time we were talking about your varied projects that you were working on in Washington, DC, and I wondered if there were a couple more things that you recall that you might want to talk about, about your time in DC.

BF: Yeah. There's a couple. Two, at least, and I'm sure I'll think of more after we hang up. The first one is, I think I mentioned a little bit about the hurricane coming up the coast. I don't recall which hurricane, after a while they blend in so much together, but the night before Jack Moorhead had called us, a guy by the name of Jim Loach, another ranger that worked with me there. Jim Loach and I called him on the phone at home and said, "Tomorrow morning, you guys need to give a presentation/a briefing to the Secretary of the Interior on what, at least, the Park Service will be doing to respond to this hurricane which is imminent and will be going up the coast." I think some of this I've already related it to you, but it had to do with the bells and whistles. Well, the Secretary was either Don Hodel or Manuel "Manny" Lujan Jr, who was from New Mexico. I actually don't know Hodel's background; I can't remember it. The directors at the time were either William Penn Mott, who had been, when he was picked to come to Washington for the NPS, had been the director of the California State Park system and James Ridenour, who was from the University of Indiana, and he had something to do with Indiana. And, again, frankly don't remember his background. So we gave this dog and pony show/this briefing to the secretary, and it turns out pretty much all of the agency heads, probably of the ten agencies, there were probably eight or so agency directors, or heads, whatever they were called, plus probably a bunch of their deputies and others, and we gave this dog and pony show. Anything that even looked like it had to do with incident command programs we stuck up on the walls of the Secretary's briefing room. Maps and photos and lists and things that probably Jim nor I even really knew what we were talking about—but they looked good, so we stuck them on the wall, and so we gave that briefing. I think I sort of said what I needed to do about it last time, didn't I, Tom?

TM: Well, you and I were talking about it. I think we talked about it off the tape.

BF: Okay. So, the Associate Director, Jack Moorhead, asked us to do this; Jim and I responded next morning. We're giving this briefing to the Secretary, as well as a bunch of other upper-management people, and we had a whole room full of these people. It's the only time when I've ever heard of, and frankly I'm sure it's happened other times, but the only time I was ever involved with that kind of firepower in one spot at one time. For me, and I think for Jim and maybe the Park Service, it was sort of unprecedented, actually, because normally we would not be dealing with most of the other agencies, and certainly not collectively. So, we spent several hours. It started out to be an hour or so, just a briefing, but it turns out it turned into several hours and it was all brand new information for most of them. None of them had ever heard of ICS, incident command system. So we tried to give them a decent—which I think we did—a decent explanation of the process and how it will apply not only to the Park Service parts of the country but others that these other agencies had responsibility for as well. I think it came off very well. As far as I know, we did a good job. I think probably Jack thanked us, and said that everybody appreciated it, et-cetera. I think that part was good.

TM: So, it was a great way to introduce the incident command structure and system to multiple agencies all at once.

BF: Well, yes. I mean, we would be naïve to think that it got any further than just those people, but it served the purpose for the day, which was that's what we were supposed to do. It was our job for the day was to do this. You know, we're in full uniform, which is something I might mention. I don't think I've mentioned this before is that when I work in Main Interior, which was the headquarters for the National Park Service, most of the third floor of Main Interior. That's how it was referred to was Main Interior because, you know, there are satellite buildings around the city that're ancillary parts of the Interior Department. We worked in the main office, which is my office in the Park Service. Most of the Park Service offices are on the third floor, and the Secretary was on the top floor, which I think was the fifth floor. But one thing that we did, which I think everybody that worked with me there in the Park Service part of the operation, wore our uniforms every day, five days a week. It would be the exception when we didn't wear the uniform. You pretty much professionally...if you weren't in uniform, you showed up in coat and tie. So, I had a coat and tie hanging in my office just as a backup for whatever reason. Pretty much no other agency there... First of all, let me say that not every person in the Park Service was wearing a uniform. One, many of them weren't supposed to, but two, even if they in theory were supposed to, they didn't. But, in ranger activities Paul Dabney, and Jim Loach, and myself, and Bill Halainen, and others, we wore our uniform on a daily basis. We took great pride in that. People knew who we were; and I think we looked good; and we knew that we represented the agency. And as I say, almost no other person in that whole building, except for perhaps the people checking you through the metal detector, were in uniform. The only drawback—and I've always joked about this—was if I was going walking around town for some reason, perhaps to go out of the building to get lunch or on some sort of a mission to buy something or whatever, and I was in uniform, I was always afraid that one of these people—and there were a lot of homeless people living on the grates, you know, the hot air grates coming out of the sidewalk—I was always afraid that I would walk by and all of a sudden there would be somebody going down and everybody would be looking to me to give him mouth-to-mouth and CPR, which I suspect I would have done. I've given CPR ten different times in my career, but it's not something I particularly wanted to do on a street in downtown Washington, DC, with somebody that's homeless, with the HIV situation in those days being a big deal. But I did think I wanted to mention the fact that we did wear our uniforms which I think was pretty neat, personally.

And then I was going to mention about Manny Lujan... When we were working on this health and fitness program, down in the basement of the Main Interior was a half-court basketball court. There was not a

super well-equipped, but there was well equipped gym with weights and a few things that would be helpful. I suspect today that there's probably a much bigger and better equipped facility than there was during my day, because there weren't that many people interested. But on a daily basis, they would have, not yoga, but where everybody gets together and does exercises together.

TM: Yeah, like an organized fitness class type thing.

BF: Yeah, and there's actually a word for it. There are lots and lots of places around every city that has these. I just forgot the name of it. They had these classes, and generally there'd only be two men, myself and this other guy that was actually in the Park Service, and there'd be twenty-five women, which I thought was kind of neat since I was single in those days. Also, on occasion, I would be down there, and I'd be playing basketball with the Secretary of the Interior.

TM: Oh, fun!

BF: It wasn't like I was in any great shakes basketball player because I was probably pretty pathetic, but he wasn't any better. So, there'd be he and I, and one of his protection detail, which was US Park Police, down there. Usually the park policeman would be sitting on the side because he was way out of shape, and I was actually in pretty good shape. So, there'd be Manny and I, although I don't think I ever called him Manny, he'd be the Secretary. There aren't many places where... There'd be times not only there, but when I'd be on the fifth floor or something, and I'd be standing at the urinal and next to me would be the Secretary of the Interior. I guess that was all I really wanted to say at this moment.

TM: Were you ever able to leverage that proximity in a way, sort of an elevator speech about a problem that the Park Service had that you thought the Secretary should be aware of, and could possibly take beneficial action for? I hear these stories on occasion: I was in the elevator, and in stepped the Secretary. The Secretary said, "Oh, you're such-and-such," and the guy said, "yes." "Do you need anything from me?" And the guy in the elevator said, "Well yeah, we're about to lose our such-and-such and so-and-so protection of this and that." And the Secretary said, "Oh, I'll look into it." And *did*.

BF: I think I probably did, but frankly I can't remember any specifics. My relationship to Secretary Lujan was casual enough in many ways, that I could actually do that without feeling like I was overstepping any boundaries or anything. He knew me in uniform as well, so he knew who I was—or not so much who I was, but what I represented, anyway. I think the answer to your question is yes, although I do not remember any specifics. Now, one thing I probably forgot to mention while talking about Washington DC... There's probably a lot of things, right? But one thing I do remember is that I actually was on a detail for the deputy secretary of the interior, whose name I would have to dredge back up a little bit. I stayed with the Park Service, I was on a detail, but I actually was doing two jobs at one time. I was still holding down all of the stuff I was doing with the Park Service—the health and fitness, the EMS and diving, and all the other stuff—but, I was also working full time, pretty much, for the deputy secretary on about a 6 month detail where I started out—this is actually kind of important, I guess—I was the Department of the Interior's first drug czar, which meant that my principle purpose, for a while anyway, was to sort of get the foot in the door in terms of the war on drugs, which was a new thing that was taking place. I guess I could probably go back into Google and figure out exactly what dates we're talking about, because that was a presidential announcement, "we're going to do a war on drugs." So, I was the Department of the Interior's initial drug czar. Now that did not mean that I had any kind of influence. I did get a top secret clearance that, in theory, I could participate in various meetings and things, which I don't think I did very much of. It mostly meant that I was trying to establish contacts and phone

numbers and relationships, and identify what needed to be done in the future, and “what does this war on drugs mean to us?” kinds of stuff. I don’t remember all the real detail. Much of the Mexican-United States border is Department of the Interior, either Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife, Park Service. It’s something like 50% of that border is actually Department of the Interior. It’s a significant amount. Whatever that amount is, it’s a lot.

TM: Right. There’s Organ Pipe and Big Bend; I’m just thinking about some of the National Parks.

BF: Well yes. Bureau of Indian Affairs has got the Tohono O’odham or Papago reservation, Big Bend...

TM: Just simple BLM land.

BF: Yeah, and BLM land. There’s a lot of it down there. In Texas a lot of it’s private, but New Mexico and Arizona in particular, there’s a lot of federal land right on the border.

TM: California as well.

BF: So, the Department of the Interior was kind of a big player in those days, but the entire effort was in its infancy on getting off the ground. So I did that. That was part of my detail. Then, I was sort of a gofer for the deputy secretary. I can see his face. He’s a nice person, he’s a political appointee, obviously, but very nice person. I worked for somebody that actually worked for him; he wasn’t my immediate supervisor. I did other kinds of missions working for this deputy secretary. I ended up getting a commendation out of it. It was a special achievement award or something. So, I did that. I guess that I must have transferred, or somebody else came in and was actually... Actually, what they were doing was recruiting for a “drug czar,” somebody that would be taking over this war on drugs from the Department of Interior’s perspective. They knew that I wasn’t doing that, it was just that they needed somebody that could hold the fort down for several months until they could find somebody that would do it full-time as they envisioned for years to come.

TM: Would that be a congressionally approved position?

BF: No, not even close. It might be eventually, I guess, I don’t really know that. At my level it was nothing more than just...I was a GS-13.

TM: Detail on assignment, and that’s that.

BF: Detail on assignment. It was really just to get our foot in the door in terms of this big agenda that the president had. It wasn’t that I didn’t get involved with other agencies and other parts of the government for that matter. It’s just that at this point it was so low-level in terms of getting off the ground that they didn’t need somebody that was a GS-17 or something. I think that’s all I can remember at this moment.

TM: Alright, well that’s pretty good.

BF: I did mention about going to Palau, or not going to Palau. I guess, officially, I told you on the tape, right?

TM: Right, and then John Cook came in and wanted to know if you wanted to go to Padre Island. What can you tell me about John Cook?

BF: Well, at that time he was third generation Park Service. His father and grandfather had been in the Park Service. His father was a superintendent along the way. His grandfather, I'm not so sure he'd been a superintendent. And then his daughter, John's daughter, Kayci Cook, is a fourth generation. So they have this whole dynasty going, right. John was old-school, traditional, very charismatic in many ways, but pretty hardcore. He was somebody you did not want to cross. He had pretty good definition on what he wanted to see done and how he wanted to see it done, in many ways. I still stay in touch with John, although we're not bosom buddies or anything. He was my immediate supervisor. Well, I guess that's not totally true. He was my regional director when I went to Padre Island as a superintendent, I actually answered to Dick Marks, he was the regional director.

TM: Okay, so this is kind of complicated, I want to make sure I understand it. When you were at Grand Canyon, Dick Marks was the superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park.

BF: Correct.

TM: So you're in DC in 1989, Marks leaves Grand Canyon in '89 as well as I believe and he goes to become the regional director, is that right?

BF: No, he goes to become the number two person in the Southwest Region.

TM: Okay, Southwest Region. Alright.

BF: The Southwest Region no longer exists; it's been absorbed into a larger...it was called the Rocky Mountain Region, I'm not so sure that its name hasn't changed again. At the time, it was the Southwest Region and Dick was the number two person and John was the regional director. I often interacted with John, it's just that technically Dick was my immediate supervisor. John came in a couple different times and sort of floated the question, would I be interested in going to Padre Island National Seashore, which is Corpus Christi, Texas, if I would be interested in going. In my mind, the word "interest" has nothing more than the word "interest." It doesn't mean obligation or commitment, it just means, "Yeah, I would think about it." John's definition was a little bit different than mine. He sort of thought that since I expressed an "interest", that I was tacitly saying, "Yeah, I'd go." I think I mentioned last time, he actually had gotten it approved, which had to be done at the Secretary's level, to go there without my even knowing about it. John was one of these guys that... I know I could have turned the job down once it was officially offered to me, but John is not somebody that you really wanted to cross, politically and professionally; not so much politically, but professionally politically. Once you did that, at least working for him, would not be...

TM: I'm a little confused, because if Dick Marks is the number two person for the Southwest Region and John Cook is the regional director, I'm confused between the Southwest Region, I'm assuming, that has a regional director.

BF: John Cook's the regional director.

TM: So Marks was working for Cook.

BF: Yes, right.

TM: So, the two of them were in the same office, whether it was in Denver or Santa Fe.

BF: In Santa Fe.

TM: Got it, thank you.

BF: It hadn't gone to Denver yet at that point. John would end up becoming... When they absorbed the Southwest with the Rocky Mountain Region, or the old Rocky Mountain Region, and they created a larger region, John became the regional director of it.

TM: Did you know where Padre Island was? Did you know anything about it?

BF: Not much. Yeah, I knew where Padre Island was, but just barely. I'd never been there. What I really knew about Padre Island was that there weren't any mountains there. But, I was at a point where time to move on. My oldest son was pretty much ending his sophomore year in high school. If I was going to move and move on—this was not a promotion at this point—this was the time to do it because otherwise, I would be there for another couple years. While I was in DC, actually right at the end of all of this, I was being considered for a promotion there in the Department of the Interior, which was outside the Park Service. I would have been leaving the Park Service and going to the Department as a GS-14, working for an associate secretary, whose name I have fortunately forgotten, because he was a snake oil salesman. I was told by somebody who would know, who was my senior in terms of levels of grade and what have you, that I had the job if I wanted it. But, I also knew that it would commit me to at least a couple more years in Washington, DC.

TM: And you would be working for an associate secretary, which is a political appointee. And so that person would be going through a revolving door and would leave you in a position ready to serve the next assistant secretary. And you'd be working for Interior, okay.

BF: Yeah. And I wouldn't have been in the Park Service. The fact is, I probably could have come back into the Park Service. I don't know that that would have been real hard because I was doing a good job there in Washington. They would've—I say "they,"—you know, collectively management would have seen to it that I got out okay. But it also committed me to staying in DC in that job for a couple more years. I guess, here was the thing, my oldest son would've graduated from high school there, and that would've been okay.

TM: In DC.

BF: In DC, you know, Virginia. But my youngest son would've been partway through high school at that time. That was one of the bigger decisions on my part for deciding not to stay. I was not formally offered that job, I know that within the hour, practically, I would've been. I made the decision, which was hard, to decide to leave, and it had a lot to do with my youngest son and his high school, his years in high school. I didn't want to screw him over because of the timing for high school for him. So, I go to Padre Island, this is in March, if I'm not mistaken. The school year has not ended for my sons in Virginia yet. It's probably roughly in March, which is when I'm supposed to enter on duty in Corpus Christi. So my sons go to the state of Washington and live with their mother, which was fine with everybody. It was fine with her, fine with me, fine with them, because at the end of that particular year in school, they would be then spending the summer with her in Washington anyway. So that was good, it gave me time to get oriented there in Corpus Christi and get my feet on the ground and find someplace to live, a house to buy because there was no park housing for me at that point. So, they move up there and I trundle off to Corpus Christi. I had two vehicles at the time so I drove my Volkswagen van down there, which at this point already had like sixteen years on it and 200,000 miles or something. I remember driving the very

first day without even finding a place to live or anything, although I think perhaps I'd actually located something by phone initially. I remember driving through the entrance station at Padre Island, which is right on the Gulf of Mexico, and going through the entrance station the seasonal ranger, who was an older guy, even older than me at that point, his name was Fred. I drove in there in my Volkswagen van and he was very polite, very professional. I asked him a couple of questions: How are things going here? I didn't introduce myself, he had no idea who I was initially. Pretty quickly, he recognized that I was the new superintendent. I kind of impressed him and we got to be pretty good associates, anyway, after that. I impressed him by the fact that I was so low-key. No kinds of fanfare or anything like that. Padre Island at the time, I think I had roughly 60 employees, which included seasonal employees as well. There might have been 30 to 35, perhaps, permanent employees. I went in, and the headquarters for the National Seashore is actually not in the park. It's actually about eight or ten miles away in a suburb, if you will, a little community next to Corpus Christi called Flour Bluff. That was where my secretary, my administrative officer, the chief of maintenance, the chief of resources—well, that's not true—the chief ranger, rather, and probably another five or six people, worked out of. And then there was the office out in the park itself, which housed much of the rest of the staff, including the chief of maintenance. If I misled this recording, the chief of maintenance's office actually was in the park, as was the chief of resources. But the chief of interp, the chief ranger, my administrative officer, and a few others, were actually in Flour Bluff. Is that clear enough? Did I screw that up?

TM: My question is, gee, that seems kind of odd to have two offices, eight miles apart, with people that need to talk to each other. You know, maintenance needs to talk to law enforcement, law enforcement needs to talk to resource management—but they're doing that by phone because they can't... Unless they hop in their car and drive over there, they're not going to be visiting with each other on a face-to-face. It seems kind of odd. I'm sure there's a reason for it, it probably has to do with...

BF: Well, there is. There wasn't any building space out in the park. We did some correcting on that, we actually were able to add on, and do some subdividing of a few rooms and things. We actually expanded the facilities out in the park a little bit better. So, we did that. The observation is right.

TM: Were you aware of the problems that Padre had? Maybe it had no problems when you showed up, which would be great, but I imagine that like every park, there are personnel problems, there are resource problems, there are law enforcement problems, trespass with neighbors... It just goes on and on and on, which could be issues. How did you get up to speed on those things?

BF: Well, first of all, I had some marching orders from John Cook.

TM: Oh, this is like Dick Marks. "I've got some marching orders for you. This is what I want you to take care of. Go do it."

BF: That's right. He had three or four things he wanted me to take care of while I was in the park. One of them, my immediate predecessor, whose name I won't mention, had been removed from that park because he had been drinking too much. He wasn't put totally out to pasture, but he was put in the regional office where somebody could watch over him directly. So, the health of the park staff was pretty much in the toilet. The morale was bad; there were just some things that had taken place, either directly or indirectly, by my predecessor that needed to be smoothed over. At least, people told that things are going to be better and we're going to work on this issue and that issue. That was one of the marching orders, which I was pretty successful in doing. Another marching order had to do with my chief of resource management, a guy by the name of John Miller, who I had worked with a number of years

before at the Grand Canyon on the aircraft overflight issue, who was a resource specialist, if you will, at Grand Canyon. I'm not exactly sure how this came about, but he ultimately ended up getting a law enforcement commission. He went from the Grand Canyon, I don't think there was anything in between, he ended up at Canyon de Chelly which is on the Navajo reservation.

TM: Outside of Kayenta.

BF: It's outside of Chinle, actually.

TM: Chinle, yeah. Thank you.

BF: Within the year before I got to Padre Island, he ended up carrying a Navajo hood; a guy who was an older, probably in his thirties or so, who had been out on the rim, and I think it was on the south rim of de Chelly, and had confronted some tourists at a overlook. I'm trying to remember... He got into a real confrontation with these people; and a seasonal ranger at Canyon de Chelly, who really had very little experience, went out to deal with this issue. John Miller, who was off duty, was at home but he lived in the park, had his radio on—which a lot of us did in those days—had his little handset radio on, heard this confrontation. He knew either this bad guy or knew of this bad guy, and he also knew the limitations on his employee/his seasonal ranger, knew this was not going to end well. He goes out there and gets involved, and very quickly the bad guy goes off the deep end and rushes John and takes him over the edge of the cliff. You know, it's like a 600-foot cliff. Well, as luck would have it, ten feet down, there was a ledge big enough that they both land on it. As this guy is rushing him, John has shot this guy but the guy has enough momentum and he's still alive enough that he takes John over this cliff with him. The guy's committing suicide in his mind, obviously, I think. But he's obviously very irritated, would be a subtle way to say this, I suppose. They both go to the cliff and John lives through this. The other guy dies, I think, just of the gunshot wounds. I don't think he falls any further either. John's given a Department of Interior valor award for this. He probably saved the life of this seasonal ranger. I don't know the outcome of the tourists. They didn't get hurt or anything. I don't know what their involvement was with any of this afterwards. John ends up getting this valor award, but he lives right next to Chinle. So, John Cook and his chief ranger for the region, a guy by the name of Bill Tanner, they decide they need to remove John from the park for his own safety and they move him to Padre Island. John Miller is much more interested in resources than he is in law enforcement, particularly, so he's made the chief of resources. But they also remove John Miller's law enforcement commission. It isn't any kind of real punitive thing, but John Miller believes it is.

TM: Yeah, I would think that Miller's got... To kill anyone it's got to be really, really hard, and to be killed, it's got to be really, really hard. And this is a tight community; everybody knows everybody else. And this sounds like it was in the days when the Park Service hadn't figured out the PTSD briefing/debriefing type things. And a commission, you work hard to get that commission. To have that taken away from you without understanding why, that'd be devastating on top of something else that's already devastating. When you kill somebody, it's just really...

BF: John Miller had been in Vietnam as a sniper. In talking to me on quite a few occasions, because we were pretty much the same age and had some similar backgrounds, John would confide in me about killing Vietnamese in Vietnam. That was his job.

TM: But his job at Canyon de Chelly is not to kill anybody, so I would think he would take that quite differently.

BF: I'm not necessarily equating the two, I'm just saying that John's background was...

TM: Very helpful to know.

BF: So, John Miller ends up suing John Cook, and Bill Tanner, I think, at the same time, because of what you just described; the fact that his commission was removed. John felt that it reflected on him as it related to his peers, and that he wasn't necessarily wanting to be a law enforcement ranger at Padre Island, but he didn't think he deserved to have his commission taken away like that. John Cook, and I think Bill Tanner, felt that... Well, actually, frankly, I don't know what they felt. But I suspect that they thought it needed to be done for some reason and I guess I don't know that reason.

TM: I'm sorry, who was Bill Tanner?

BF: Bill Tanner was the chief ranger for the region, which meant that he worked in Santa Fe and he had overview responsibility for law enforcement in all the parks within that region, which would be Texas, New Mexico, Arizona... I don't think it had anything to do with Utah... Oklahoma, for sure, I think. That was the region, and that's what Bill Tanner did was oversee that operation.

TM: What did Cook want you to do in the way of Miller because it sounds like John Miller took the issue in his own hands. He took recourse, which was litigation, to try to keep his commission, or get it back.

BF: Well, he wanted the lawsuit to go away. I eventually did that, but, I worked at it a lot. What I ended up doing on this particular aspect of what I was supposed to do when I got to Padre Island...one of the things I did over time, this wasn't like I snapped my fingers, this was over a couple of years, really, is one: I befriended John. I liked John. John and I got along. John had a huge ego, but we did fine.

TM: And you had known him, as you mention, from Grand Canyon.

BF: We weren't real friends then, just because we didn't go in the same circles or anything.

TM: Right, but you knew each other.

BF: Yeah, we worked together. But one thing I did is I ended up having John Cook agree... I said, if I get some—there's probably a real technical legal term for this, but—if I have some psychological analysis of John and his fitness for getting a law enforcement commission back, will you think about reinstating his commission. So John Cook thought about this. But in return—I'm talking to John Cook now, not John Miller—I would have to get John Miller to drop his lawsuit. Cook agreed to that. Over time I had John Miller go to a couple of law enforcement psychologists, for lack of a better term, who could assess his fitness for that job and fitness for having his commission reinstated. He passed. He did okay. I got these letters from these people/these different entities saying that he's fine. It took a long time to do this, so John had to go back to not so much remedial law enforcement training, but some refresher training, and I got him into that. Ultimately, I actually got John into a doctoral program with, I think, Texas A&M. He had a master's degree in resources or some aspect of resource management. I got him into a doctoral program along with another lady, who, they end up getting married, although they weren't married at the time. She's still there, actually, in Padre Island. She's the "turtle woman" for the Park Service. Very well respected and has done very well for herself. She ends up completing the doctorate, but he does not. But that's way at the end of my time there, which was five years.

TM: It sounds like Miller wanted to keep his commission, he was able to do that; Cook wanted the lawsuit to go away, that happened. Gosh, it seems like the best outcome that could've happened out of that.

BF: Well, pretty much. As I say, it wasn't something I snap my fingers and it happened. It was a long slog. Lots of talking to John after hours. I would go over to his home and vice versa on occasion for supper, trying to smooth the way to get into his confidence and to find out what the real issues were from his perspective. John had a healthy respect for himself. He did not like the way this all took place. He didn't like the way his Park Service friends, and others, probably around the country, would view this commission being taken away. That was a real down thing for him.

TM: In a way, and I'm talking way out of place here, but it sounded like a clash of personalities between Cook and Miller.

BF: Yeah, I think that's probably right. All through these sessions, you've been very insightful on a lot of things. Much more than I would've ever been. You're a hundred percent correct. There was a lot of that, yes.

TM: You're the perfect guy to step in there and kind of smooth things out. Yeah, it would take some time, but I'm glad it happened.

BF: Personally, I thought they did John Miller wrong. He had really gone way beyond the call of duty, taking care of his seasonal ranger at Canyon de Chelly. I don't think that John Cook or Bill Tanner had any issue with that; I think they respected him for that, and that's probably the reason he ended up getting a Department of Interior valor award, for one thing. So there wasn't any denigration on that, it's just that there were some hard feelings, there were some hurt egos, et cetera. I don't know that I was the perfect person to come and take care of that, but I ended up taking care of it. That was one of the issues that...

TM: That Cook wanted you to take care of, that you were not aware of when you said, "Oh, yeah, I'm interested in that job!"

BF: Oh, no, I didn't know any of that. There were, like, three or four total reasons, two of which I've mentioned, and two of them I can't frankly remember. I'm trying to think; maybe as I talk, they'll come back to me.

TM: What's it like as a Park Service employee to come in as a superintendent? You're trying to come in under the radar screen, but you really can't. You're there in your VW bug, you could be any visitor, and right away the guy wearing the flat hat at the entrance booth has sized you up as the new superintendent. I would imagine that the other thirty employees there were all doing the same, and were worried about the normal things that federal employees worry about, which is, you don't want to lose your job, and you want to do a good job, and here comes someone new, and the last guy left us in a mess. What did you do to try to rebuild the morale of that park?

BF: First of all, we need to understand here Tom that I did not have a Volkswagen bug.

TM: Sorry, a bus.

BF: I had a van.

TM: A van. Alright, there's a difference.

BF: My snobbishness is probably showing through here.

TM: Thank you.

BF: I must have said something along the way as I was talking to Fred going through the entrance station that either led him to believe I was the new superintendent. I don't think I actually admitted it to him, I didn't say, "Hey, here I am." Somehow I said something.

TM: He probably saw the decal on the van and saying, wait a minute, there's a parking sticker on this van from Washington, DC. I don't know I'm just guessing.

BF: That's not a bad observation. I probably did have one from the Grand Canyon before that. And the government paid for this, as they do for everybody that gets transferred in certain positions, anyway. For six weeks or so they paid my rental for a lodging. I rented an apartment in Flour Bluff, in an apartment complex. It was just a one-bedroom thing. My staff, which was half Hispanic, local hires, principally, from around the area... One thing that I did that I think everybody should do was one: you listen. So, what are the complaints? What's the problem? What is going on here? Why are you here? What's your long-term plan? All of that sort of thing, and I did a lot of that on a one-on-one basis. I'd go out and ride with various members of the staff, and not just at the upper level, not my key staff, but others. I'd go out and ride with them and work alongside them. I actually did a lot of things sort of hands-on. I have a great photo of me up to my chin in water pulling bulrushes out of this one freshwater pond; and there weren't many freshwater ponds in Padre Island. It was mostly salt water. So I was happy and willing to get out there and mix it up, just like I sort of hope that my entire career has been, which is I was a hands-on supervisor and a hands-on manager, as well as a hands-on ranger.

TM: That's pretty disarming right there, I think, for an employee if the superintendent's willing to roll up their sleeves and wade in. I would think any employee would respond to that, with senior management stepping in and wanting to listen. That's important.

BF: Yeah. Well, and it was. I'm basically pretty good at that so I did a lot of that. Not everybody had super bad morale. It wasn't like the entire park was moping around every day, but they over time had been sort of shellshocked by the previous superintendent, for one thing. All of a sudden, here's a guy that's willing to listen and try to fix things and get things done. I always enjoyed getting things done. I was sort of a list person; I'd make a list. I liked checking the list off, checking something off. So we did a lot of that. One of the things I found early on that I wasn't quite prepared for was, one day I went out with the chief of maintenance, who was my senior by age by probably ten years. Bob LaFrance was his name. He'd been around a number of parks and he had a lot of fire background. So we actually enjoyed each other's company and talked about common friends throughout the system. He'd worked in Sequoia and Kings Canyon, for one thing where I had some acquaintances from years before that he'd worked with as well. So one time early on, he and I are out—and Padre Island had this huge parking lot. I mean, it was big enough for what some big football dome stadium parking had, practically.

TM: Why did it have such a big lot?

BF: Well, because they were going to have this big maintenance area and they had some other long-term plans for infrastructure being put in, which didn't get put in. They got the parking lot, but they didn't get the rest of it in there. I ended up getting a lot of it removed, eventually. But you know, you

don't do that the first day. So within the first couple of weeks, I'm out driving around with Bob. One of the things I always liked to do, in places that I had any kind of control, was I would say, "How come we have this here? Why is this pipe sticking out of the ground?" And in this case, I made the comment about, "Why is this light pole in this particular spot?" or something to that effect. Because the lights weren't on. That particular light wasn't on; it wasn't being used, et cetera. It was pretty much worthless. But I said, "Well, how come this pole is here?" Sure as shootin', within a couple days that pole was gone. I got back to Bob, and it wasn't that I was mad or anything, it was like, "You know, Bob, just because I ask a question, does not mean that I am disappointed or that I want something done, it's just that I'm asking a question." It's sort of like, are you interested? Well, yeah, I'm interested. So, I asked Bob, "Why is this pole around here?" He probably gave me an answer, but we continue to drive and going on to another something pretty minor, relatively speaking. The next thing I know, a couple days later, that pole's no longer there!

TM: So, he's looking at the park in new eyes as well, and saying, oh, yeah, there's no reason for that to be there; it doesn't work. Interesting.

BF: Again, I'm sort of old school, if it's not necessary... Even if it's there, if it's not necessary and won't be necessary in the future, maybe we ought to get rid of it. Maybe it's a distraction to the public. Maybe it's a distraction to us. Maybe it's a hazard. I don't know, but maybe it doesn't need to be there. Another example of this, although it's not totally analogous, I guess, there were only a couple of paved roads in the entire park. There wasn't more than ten miles total that was paved. The 66 miles of the seashore, which goes follows all the way down the coast, is actually by state law a state highway of beaches.

TM: Really? How'd that happen?

BF: So you could drive... Well, when the park was set aside, in order to get the property the Department of the Interior/the federal government agreed to the stipulation by the state of Texas that, if you want our land here—and, of course, the state of Texas had to buy some of it as well—if you want this land, here are a couple of stipulations. One stipulation is that it remains a state highway.

TM: The beach is a state highway. I have to think about this for a while. I have to think about turtles; I have to think about birds; nesting birds in a state highway. That's interesting.

BF: We didn't have too many nesting birds, per se, but we did have peregrine falcons, which are endangered. We did have the Kemp's Ridley turtle, which was endangered, which comes into play later on in this period of time here. Which, actually, as I look on the clock on the wall, we're getting close to ending here. Or, at least, the time period.

TM: Yeah, we are.

BF: So, the example I was going to give is there's a big curve on one of these paved roads, and it goes out to Bird Island Basin. Honest to goodness, there must have been ten or more of these yellow and black little signs that go into the ground that warn you about a curve. There's probably a good word for that, but I don't know what it is right now. And they start *way* before they're necessary.

TM: Like a little line, a half-circle sort of line with an arrow on it, or a quarter circle.

BF: Not so much about the circle, but the black line's like a little arrow, the tip of an arrow showing which way the curve is going. The background is yellow and the arrow is black. It just warns you that

there is a curve there. That's pretty standard throughout the country. But there's way too many of these things. Anytime we get signs... We need to look at signs, which we did. That was part of what I did was look at all the signs in the park. Is that sign necessary? Do we need that sign anymore? If we don't need it, let's get rid of it. I was real good about that. I don't know if this is hyperbole or not, but we go from, say, twelve or so of these black and yellow signs, just leading up to this curve, down to about five or six. The speed limit's only 35 to begin with.

TM: People aren't going super-fast.

BF: They're not supposed to be, anyway. So, we remove half of those signs. Now, if you go out there today, I don't know what exists. I know that there's probably a lot of stuff that was up that is no longer there and nobody misses it. That was just another example of... But your original question was, a lot of it had to do with listening, a lot of it had to do with being empathetic to what's going on in the park. You know, I know that this part of the budget is reduced, or is not as much as it should be or could be; how can we fix that, and where can I go to get some other kinds of funding for a particular part of the operation, et cetera. That's somewhat how I was able to help take care of the problem, or the morale. I think the fact that I was willing to do this, and the fact that I showed up sober, and that I was working much more than eight to five. Once my kids were gone—which becomes another issue—but, you know, for the first five months, I don't have any real reason to go home. There's nothing there. I devoted a lot of time and I was there after hours and trying to work on stuff.

TM: Alright, well this sounds like a good place to think about wrapping up this part, which gets us into Padre Island. Maybe next time we can talk about more of that.

BF: Yeah, there's some big-time issues. For one thing, I got sued for a hundred fifty million dollars at Padre Island. For two years there's three orders from the Department of Justice that are defending me, and the Secretary of the Interior, and the Regional Director, I guess, from this lawsuit.

TM: That's a good topic for next time.

BF: It's the biggest thing I did at Padre Island.

TM: Well, hopefully that will open up some of the other smaller things that you did as well. That'd be great. Alright, so with that, this will wrap up Part 19 oral history interview with Butch Farabee. Today is July 13, 2020. My name is Tom Martin, and Butch, thank you so very much.

BF: My pleasure.