Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Charles "Butch" Farabee (BF)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
Subject: Death Valley National Park Part 5
Date of Interview: June 11, 2020
Method of Interview: Over the phone.
Transcriber: Susan Seibel
Date of Transcription: August 27, 2022
Transcription Reviewers: Dick Phaneuf, Tom Martin

Keys: Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Death Valley, Wildrose Ranger Station, Panamint Mountains, Ranger, National Park Service, position classification standard for Park Rangers, Dick Powell, Charlie Manson, Rainbow Bridge, Echo Bay, law enforcement credential, Don Carney, Jim Purcell, Bob Murphy, *Desert Shadows*, Tate-LaBianca murders, Los Angeles County, Lassen National Park, CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps, Anne Farabee, Stovepipe Wells, Yosemite Valley, California, San Francisco, Scott Connelly, Paul Fodor, USGS maps, petroglyphs, burros, Trona, Patty Moehlman, Bunny Ranch, Beatty, search and rescue, Ubehebe Crater, Don Chase, Scotty's Castle, Sequoia Kings Canyon, Tucson, Mahogany Flats, Telescope Peak, snow, dynamite, abandoned mines, Dusenberry Point, ghost town, Ballarat, Woodstock era, hippies, United States Park Police, Washington, D.C., Jack Fields, George Buckingham, Yosemite riot, professional law enforcement training, Steve Wolfe, Daryl Stone, Rocky McCreight, Don Utterback, Bill Worthington, Dick Marks, FOST, Bryan Harry, Judge Ottonello.

TM: Today is June 11, 2020. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Charles "Butch" Farabee. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Butch. How are you today?

BF: Good, Tom. Thanks. I hope you're doing good, too.

TM: Good. Thank you. Butch, may we have your permission to record this interview over the phone?

BF: Yes.

TM: Thank you. As I mentioned, this is a Part 5 oral history interview. We left off in Part 4 as you were leaving Lake Mead National Recreation Area, headed for Death Valley. Can you pick that thread up from there?

BF: Okay. Well, I was— I'd been at Lake Mead for about a year and a half. And in those days back in that, you know, the '60s and the '70s, if you were offered a transfer, the feeling was among the lower-level people, anyway, that you didn't turn them down, because they were sort of hard to come by and, you know, you didn't apply for jobs in those days. You were selected. And you could turn them down, but after one or two— Well, maybe not so much one, but after two or three refusals, you know, you started to be

overlooked. And when you're at a GS-7 brand new Ranger, not knowing which end of the gun to point at people practically, you didn't turn things down as a rule. So, as I understood, when I was chosen to go over to Lake Mead, the superintendent from Death Valley had gotten ahold of the Chief Ranger, not the Chief Ranger but the Superintendent at Lake Mead, you know, those guys work together. They're pretty close geographically. And as I understood it, Death Valley asked for a list of three potential candidates that would fit into this spot which was very isolated. It's called Wildrose. It's not in the valley itself. It's not in Death Valley itself. Rather it's at 4,000 feet and the Furnace— No, that's not right. And the— I guess it's the Panamint Mountains. And at that time, for years, you know, back in the '30s, '40s, and the '50s, it served as the summer headquarters. Everybody would move up to Wildrose because it was at 4,000 feet, and this was before air conditioning. I think there was, like, one or two people left in the valley itself. So, my— There was one neighbor, a maintenance man and his wife.

TM: Hey, Butch, before you start talking about Wildrose, can you speak for a minute to just what you were talking about, which was when you got an offer, you took it. I was just curious to know why that would be set up that way.

BF: Well, I guess I don't have a finite answer for you, Tom. I think, you know, the electronics and the technologies were such that it wasn't that convenient, I think, to do advertisements. You know, today, you can do all that sort of thing technologically right off the bat.

TM: Right.

BF: But in those days, you know, whatever that is, 60, 50 years ago, that sort of thing didn't exist. And the communications between the national office in D.C. and the regional offices and the parks themselves was, you know, relatively crude. Everything was probably done by telephone. There might have been some sort of pre-fax that I can't remember. But, you know, I guess that was, that's my answer.

TM: Well, it seems kind of odd because just about the time you get to know, kind of, geography and the players, it's time to go to a new park. It just seems like it's not— Well, it might be— I don't know, as an outsider looking in, I'd assume you'd want somebody to stay around another couple years so that they could, you know, get a better handle on what was going on after they just kind of got settled in.

BF: Well, I'm not suggesting that people didn't move. I mean, a lot of people stayed in one spot for a long time.

TM: Right.

BF: But in this case, the guy who's place I took, Dick Powell, is the guy that caught Charlie Manson. And they needed somebody who could work, again, in an isolated area, a self-starter, somebody who didn't mind living in a place like that. And in fact, Wildrose,

at least in those days, was terribly isolated and except for my maintenance man and his wife who lived next door, there's nobody else, literally, for at least 30 miles.

TM: And you had been isolated at Rainbow Bridge—

BF: Yes.

TM: —and so, you were familiar with that and done a good job there, so I could see why they would say, look we need someone here. This guy's got the experience. Let's ask him.

BF: Well, maybe. I mean, I guess. I think you're giving me too much credit. I don't know that I did a particularly good job up at Rainbow Bridge, but I think I did a pretty fair job at Echo Bay at Lake Mead. But I think the bigger issue was they wanted somebody who had, you know, some law enforcement credential because of this Charlie Manson.

TM: Okay, well, tell me about Charlie.

BF: Well, of course, everybody knows about Charlie, really. But he was caught by Dick Powell and Don Carney principally. I mean, he was followed. He burned a front-end loader up at the racetrack, which is in the northern end of Death Valley. Somebody reported the fire, and so these two Rangers, Carney and Powell, were very dogged at about following him in terms of literally tracks in the road and talking to the few visitors that they might encounter. "Did you see anything like—" you know, "Did you see something"— So, they ended up following this guy, but nobody knew— You know, the legend of Charlie Manson hadn't happened yet. It was just a bunch of hippies. A couple of adult male hippie men, and ultimately, they found a bunch of underage girls and runaways. But they'd all taken refuge. They'd taken over this abandoned ranch in the Panamint mountains. And at the time, it was not in Death Valley. But, you know, they burned up this pretty expensive front-end loader. I don't know if it was brand new, but it wasn't an old front-end loader, so it was a pretty costly fire.

This was the summertime, and so these guys followed— They found where Charlie was and they ended up making a little task force with the local highway patrol. Jim Purcell is one that I remember and a couple of sheriff's deputies from, I guess it's Inyo County. Anyway, they had a task force of some Rangers, some sheriff's department, some highway patrolmen, and probably, you know, maybe 10 or 12 law enforcement people went in, and they went in before light. There's actually a pretty good book written about this written by the Superintendent of Death Valley at the time, Bob Murphy, called *Desert Shadows.* But they went in before light, and they found the kids, the underage kids, and they found Charlie. Dick Powell and Jim Purcell, the highway patrolman, found Charlie scrunched up underneath a— inside of a kitchen cabinet. Now, this is an abandoned ranch. The water didn't run. I don't know. I guess they brought in their own water. But he was scrunched in underneath this kitchen cabinet. And Charlie, I guess, is not a very big man, or I guess he's dead now, but wasn't a very big man. And apparently some of his long hair stuck out through the crack of the cabinet. They saw his hair. So,

they were able to find him. And then at this point, you know, not, again, not for probably a week or more was there any connection between Charlie and the Tate-LaBianca murders in Los Angeles County. So anyway, they took all these people to jail and did whatever they had to do with the underage kids, and ultimately people started putting two and two together and I think somebody overheard Charlie or one of the girls, the young women who were sentenced as well, talking about this murder, these murders in L.A. So anyway, they were able to tie that group of people to these murders. So, they then— And then Dick and his wife were transferred to Lassen National Park. And I think I always thought for years and years and years it was because he was getting some sort of threats from the family or something of that effect, but in fact he told me one time that, no, it was just sort of his time to go. They'd been there for a couple of years.

So, they wanted somebody to live out there, again, remote area, and who could take care of themselves, who had, I think, some law enforcement experience. And it became even more important after they figured out who Charlie Manson was. And Death Valley in those days, maybe even to today, does attract a lot of people who want to be off the grid. Some are good people; some are bad people. But, you know, in my year there I encountered a little bit of both. But I did encounter some people that were pretty strange and pretty potentially dangerous, I think. But I had a good time in terms of exploring. I lived in a two-bedroom CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps, buildings that, at some point, they had pushed together to make a little bigger building, which also served as the Ranger station, Wildrose Ranger station. My wife and I lived there. I taught her how to use a shotgun. We kept the shotgun behind the front door of the ranger station. And you know, then I would be— I patrolled. I mean, I just didn't sit around the Ranger station because there wasn't very much visitation, for one thing, because this is not on the main road.

TM: What did Anne do?

BF: Well, so, pretty quickly— Again, she's a very smart, organized self-starter. She ended up getting a job at Stovepipe Wells in the gift shop and that amounted to— I was trying to remember this, but maybe 45 minutes. almost maybe an hour drive from where we lived to Stovepipe Wells.

TM: Wow.

BF: And in going there, she would pass Immigrant Ranger station, which is where my boss lived. He and his wife, and I think a child at that time. Pretty small area. Again, pretty remote. So, she did that pretty early on. Now, I was only in Wildrose for one day less than a year of 364 days. And the reason I remember this is that early on right after I got to Death Valley, which would have been, I think, the June of 1970, and I think it was late June, pretty quickly thereafter there had been this, the riot took place in Yosemite Valley. But there had been events taking place up to it at that point. And my wife and I went on a little trip up through California and up to Oregon coast and in doing so, we stopped by the regional offices in San Francisco. And I'd never met the any of the muckety-mucks there, you know, and I was a GS-7. I was 26 or 27 years old, maybe 28, I guess, perhaps some place in there. So, the regional Chief Ranger, once we introduced

ourselves, said that— You know, he had had a heart attack. He was in the hospital when I was transferred over, and he said, "Had I known that you would have got, you were going to Death Valley, I would have stopped that and had you sent to Yosemite."

TM: Interesting.

BF: Because at this point, they're starting to think that they needed some law enforcement experience and training in Yosemite. But we went and met the regional director, really nice guy and I just— His name just slipped my mind and he's just recently deceased. He said, "You know, I can't move you right now, but I'll tell you I will guarantee you, you will not be in Yosemite Valley or Yosemite (I'm sorry) in Death Valley the entire year." So, one day less than a year, I took a transfer to Yosemite Valley. And the the job that I went to was as the shift supervisor, the night shift supervisor. I went there thinking I was a GS-7. And in those days the Park Service was going through this park technician, park Ranger shuffle with the personnel series. It may not mean too much to anybody, really, but I was an 025, and a technician was an 026. And the 025 was supposed to have had too much education, etc. So, I went there as a, I thought, as an 026. And that fight is still going on today. Not so much the 026 part of it, but Rangers, this is in 2020 now, are being re-cataloged, not cataloged, but— Yeah, maybe cataloged to the series as 1801, which is more as an investigator. And as a result, they're starting to lose things such as resource management, and search and rescue, and fire, and all that sort of thing. And I don't know enough about it to get into any kind of a mention at this point anyway, but it is a big issue in 2020. So anyway, I went to Yosemite.

TM: So, hang on. I'd like to know a little bit more about your year in Death Valley, if you're willing. Can you tell me what you remember about Bob Murphy?

BF: Well, Bob Murphy was— In those days, the Superintendent was a GS-13. And today the Chief Ranger's a GS-13. So, you know, there's a grade creep and sort of things, but anyways, GS-13, and he'd spent a long time in Yellowstone, for sure. And I don't know all of his history, but I do know that he gave me a lot of information when I was working on my first book about some rescues and things that took place in Yellowstone back in the late '30s and the '40s. And he was quite a cowboy and did a lot of the buffalo herding and that sort of thing, which I think he took a lot of pride in. But anyway, he was a nice man. You know, stature was fairly— He's probably fairly small in stature. He had a pretty good grasp on the field skills, I think. And again, I don't know much about his management history. The one thing that I didn't like about him is that I had my quarter horse in Lake Mead, and there was actually a corral at Wildrose, and I thought it would be a natural for me to bring my horse over. But in those days, you know, staff could not have pets. You could not have a pet. You couldn't have a dog. You couldn't have a cat. You could have goldfish. You could have birds, if you were an employee of any National Park area in the country. And there's all kinds of stories if you talk to some of the old timers about hiding their cats, and people squealing on each other because "I saw a cat in the window" kind of stuff. So, I thought, well, you know, it seemed to me to be logical to bring my horse over as my patrol horse. But, you know, Bob said, "No. it'll be interpreted as a pet." And I don't know if there hadn't been other people in the park, perhaps he

would let me bring it, but I'm sure he thought there'd be other people squawking about it. So that was one of the things I didn't like, but I think overall, Mr. Murphy was a very nice person and probably a pretty good manager as well. I only worked for him for just one day less than a year.

TM: Who else did you meet there that would, you know, that you would carry on friendships with for the rest of your career?

BF: Well, Scott Connelly was a seasonal Ranger, and I worked with him for a long time in Yosemite. Paul Fodor was a Ranger in Death Valley, and he and his wife, who was Japanese, and my wife and I would go down and we'd literally sleep on their floor so we could watch a little TV because we had absolutely nothing. We couldn't even get AM or FM radio during the daytime in Wildrose and certainly no TV. But, you know, that was fine because my wife and I were still in the putting-the-jigsaw-puzzles-together stage of our marriage. We hadn't been married too long at that point, a couple years. And so, Paul Fodor and Dick Powell, who I didn't work with while I was in Death Valley, but I got to know him pretty well over the years, he ended up being the Chief of Safety for the Park Service for quite a few years. You know, I have a lot of names almost on the tip of my tongue, but I'm having a little trouble getting them out.

TM: No worries. So, what were some of the more memorable things that happened to you at Death Valley? Do you remember?

BF: Yeah, I remember a few. I mean, they weren't necessarily gigantic, although a couple, I guess, were. But I had a really nice 4-wheel-drive Chevrolet pickup, half ton, that had a winch on the front, and it was raised up pretty high. It has a lot of clearance and I've always told myself, you know, if you don't know what's out there to protect yourself— If you don't know what's out there to protect, how can you protect it? So Rangers ought to range. So that's what I did a lot of. And somebody before my time had started putting together a scrapbook, or a— Scrapbook's not quite the right term, but they had all of these 15-minute USGS maps in a book or a scrapbook, and it had a, you know, a wooden cover and a wooden bottom to it. So, and over the years previous Rangers and personnel have been adding things to this map. They would find a spring that's not on the map, or they find an old plane wreck that wasn't on the map and, you know, a little bit of a road that wasn't on the map. So, I always loved coming home in the afternoon or the evening whenever I'd get off of duty. You know, living out there by myself, I was sort of on duty 24 hours a day anyway.

TM: Right.

BF: But it wasn't like I was on the main drag either, but I would come home and open up my scrapbook or my map book, and I'd end up adding, you know, a half-mile dirt road that wasn't on the map or some petroglyphs that I would find, which I did— I found several sites although not particularly of any consequence, but they were there, that were unknown to the park. But, you know, I put them into this map and so people who would follow me, just like I was doing with people that I followed, would have some sense as to

what's there. You know, go take a look at it, and here's a spring that nobody knows about, kind of stuff. And some of that stuff was sort of the biggie for the day.

Then we had burros that would literally, this is the honest to goodness truth, you know, I bet you there were between 30 and 50 burros because the water source is real close to where we live, one of the water sources. And on any good evening we could easily have 30 or 40 burros out in our front yard or front area anyway. And of course, they'd make a lot of noise, and they weren't always there, but they would come back and forth, and you know, they would eat their way up and eat their way down. And you had to have a fence so that anything that you grew, like a little lawn or something, they wouldn't take care of it. You know, they wouldn't do it. But one day, my wife and I were in the Ranger station and some visitor came in all excited and apparently a coyote or some coyotes had killed one of these burros but had left a baby burro. There's probably a name for that, right? Well, what would a baby burro be, Tom?

TM: A baby burro. I don't know.

BF: Yeah, I guess. So, I had this baby burro and so, you know, you're supposed to let, sort of, nature take care of its own kind of a thing, except that the burros were not indigenous to the area. But so, my wife and I drive up there in my 4-wheel-drive government pickup with real high wheel wells. And I go out and make sure that the burro's dead, I guess. But in the interim this baby burro goes up underneath the truck into the wheel well, thinking, I guess, that somehow the warmth of the engine and whatever, it duplicated the mother. So, you know, my wife has not going to let this lay, so we ended up taking the burro home, and she raised it in our house.

TM: Whoa!

BF: She named it Sweet Pea. So, the nearest town, Trona, was 60 miles or so, it was a good hour's drive, had a little vet store, a little feed store, not so much a vet store but a feed store, and she got some, you know, the milk and the formula that they fed calves. And she got that, and she got some rubber gloves and cut the tip off so that the baby burro, Sweet Pea, could nurse. So, we literally had that burro in our in our washroom where our washer/dryer was. And, you know, of course, the burro would have scours, which means that it had diarrhea all over the floor half the time. But we ended up— And then when it was safe enough or the weather was good and stuff, we'd have the burro would be out in the front yard. And, of course, it would bray on occasion. So, for a whole year we had that burro, and while we were there, you know, there are a number of houses that were still intact that could be used by a road crew or somebody on a temporary basis. Well, we had a graduate student from University of Michigan. Her name was Patty Moehlman who was working on a doctorate in zoology, and she became our neighbor, and she was doing her doctoral dissertation on social structure of burros, which was the reason she was living there.

[Transcriptionist's note: Mr. Farabee may be referring to Dr. Patricia Moehlman, a zoologist who served as Chair of the IUCN/SSC Equid Specialist Group.]

BF: And when we left, when we transferred out, we actually gave it to her, and apparently, she ended up taking it home with her, and although I didn't follow her career, I do know that she became a professor of zoology at, maybe like, Michigan State or someplace back there. So, we had to, we had the burro. And then my next-door neighbor, his name was Spike.

TM: He's the maintenance guy?

BF: Yeah, he's the maintenance man, and his real name was Charles, just like mine. But his nickname was Spike, so we got Spike and Butch out there holding Wildrose down. And his wife— It was common knowledge, although I don't think they went around bragging about it, but his wife Emma had been working at the Bunny Ranch in Beatty, which is where Spike met her. And for those of you who don't know what the Bunny Ranch was, which I don't think is in existence anymore, but it was a house of prostitution. And of course, in Nevada that's all legal. So, my wife and she got along just like two peas in a pod. We did great, and we went back and forth and became pretty good friends. And so, you know, that was our living condition. And then we had the burro, and then a couple of events, one would be—

Well, from a search and rescue standpoint, one of the bigger events was Ubehebe Crater, which is quite a geological landmark in Death Valley itself, and it's about 500 feet deep. And it's, I don't know, it must be half a mile, if not longer or wider, in terms of the diameter. It's a volcanic crater, and there is a trail down into it. It was all— There was just a cinder all the way around, and the walls in some places were vertical. And we got a Ranger up at the other end. I got a call of two young boys, and they turned out to be about 11- or 12-year-olds had scrambled up, had gone down to the bottom and had started to climb up the wall, the cinder, you know, wall, which would break loose in your hand practically. They started climbing up there and when they got to a certain point, one of the little ledges behind them broke off, so now they became trapped. And there really wasn't any real practical way to go up to them, and they were about halfway down. I mean, they were a couple hundred feet from the rim but a couple hundred feet from the bottom, as well, and literally, if they had fallen, the odds are very good that they would have been killed. So, I hear this over the radio and, you know, I'm red lights and sirens on my way up there. And it's probably an hour's drive I guess, roughly. So, three of us end up pulling off this rescue, which in the annals of the National Park Service search and rescue was very unique. And, as I said, you know, pretty unusual because we dropped down from the top above these kids. We drove an axle, which had actually been designed for something like this. We pounded with the sledge hammer this axle into the cinder on the rim, so that we could hook a rope around.

And then Don Chase and I, who was my best friend, and he was working a split. He worked part of the year at Scotty's Castle and part of the year in the back country of Sequoia Kings Canyon. And they used to do that for quite a few years, this split position. And Don and I, who had palled around and did some diving together and traveled, went to different places in Mexico and stuff, so we go down, we repelled down and work our

way down to the point where one rope is extended as far as it'll go, and that was probably 150 feet down, perhaps. And now these kids are still another 50 or 75 feet below us, so I end up putting the rope around me and belaying Don, and he repelled, or actually lowered, I actually lowered him, I guess. I lowered him off of my body because I wedged myself into a little rivulet where over the years the water had made this little, tiny gully, a couple feet. So, I was able to brace my back against one side and my feet against the other side and then lowered Don down to where he could get to these kids.
So, I'm holding him, and I'm at the bottom of this rope, which is tied off to this axle, a motor vehicle axle, and he's talking to these kids. The one kid— And so, what he's going to do, it ends up he's going to lower them down to where somebody at the bottom can, you know, get to them safely. So, one kid, he did that. And so, I'm holding him. He's holding the kid. There are no anchors except at the very tippy top. He lowers his one kid down. The second kid is afraid doesn't want to go. So, Don, in order to, you know, call his bluff, said, "Well, okay. I'll see you later then." Something to that effect. And, you know, the second boy said, "Well, wait a second." So, Don ends up lowering both of these kids down, one at a time, and then I belayed Don back up to me. He's scrambling, and I'm pulling, and we get up to this little gully, which, you know, if you look at this whole thing you'd say, "Holy moly. I mean, you guys are really either very stupid or very brave." And it's mostly very stupid. And so, then we're able to jumar and scramble our way back up to the top of this rim. And this took all afternoon, and there's several hundred people watching this whole thing from the other side. And that was really a pretty interesting rescue. And, you know, in today's climate, I mean, you just did it and, okay, you know, so, what's for supper now? I'm going to go home. No big deal. Probably didn't even do a report. If we did, it was like a little handwritten thing. Although, I guess as I think about it, I don't think we had to do the report. I think another Ranger had to do the report maybe.

So, you know, that was just an interesting day, but there weren't that many of them. A lot of it was just patrolling. And one time the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office had been tracking some domestic terrorists in L.A. County and they'd been following them by air and they're following them at night. They couldn't— They lost them in traffic on their way up, and they ended up probably coming into Death Valley. So, they brought up a team, and I ended up spending a couple days with them, going out and looking at some of the off the wall places both in the park and outside the park where potentially these guys could be. And we found a spot where they had actually been using a high-powered, automatic rifles and probably like a bazooka where they had been practicing their marksmanship and stuff. Because there was a very rugged part of the park where it was so isolated that no one would ever hardly hear any rifle rounds or even this bazooka.

So, that was kind of fun for a couple of days. Since I'd been a Tucson policeman and worked the felony car for Tucson for years, I could speak the language a little bit better than a lot. So, let's see, that's probably, you know, that's probably the real biggies. For those who've never been to Wildrose, it's really a very interesting area. And also, you pass it on your way up to two little campgrounds that are dry. One's called Mahogany Flats and the other one is— Well, I think Mahogany Flats at the top and there's another small one in between. And then the road— there was a road that went all the way up to

not the top of the range but close to it, which had a radio repeater in it. And it took care of the radio repeating for the county, as well as the park. And that was part of my job was to make sure, you know, to keep track of who's around. Of course, there was a gate on that thing. But one night my wife and I drove up there in the government pickup, and then we hiked to the top of Telescope Peak, which is the highest point in Death Valley.

And I was still thinking about flying, so I had this brand-new, big, almost a boombox-size radio with me that could get all the radio traffic from Los Angeles International. So, we slept on the tippy top, beautiful, you know. You could see forever all the way around. And then I would lay there and listen to the approach and departure controls out of LAX, if not elsewhere as well. So, you know, you sort of had to make your own entertainment and in my case, I like to explore and wander and do play, do things in those kinds of places, so it wasn't all bad. It was a lot of fun in many ways.

TM: Yeah, sounds like it. So, at 4,000 feet, did you get winter snow a little bit?

BF: Yeah, actually we got— Yeah, we got snow and not all that often, but it wasn't at totally alien to us, either. I've got nice photos of Death Valley or, no, Wildrose with snow on the sign that says Wildrose Ranger Station. And in fact, you know, that probably led me to one of my more interesting adventures, which was to take that 4-wheel drive with the winch on the front, and I didn't have any— I think I might have had chains, but I was probably way too lazy to put them on. But I probably had them in the truck. But I ended up driving all the way up to this, the high campground, which I think is called Mahogany Flats, and then there's another one below that that I can't remember its name. But I drove up there. Of course, there's nobody there. I end up driving into this campground, and I'm going literally through at least a foot of fresh snow, maybe even deeper. And no one's ever said I was very smart. I ended up getting stuck a little way into this campground, and I couldn't back out. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't go forward. So, I had to get the winch out, and I winched myself all the way through this campground by, you know, directionally. I would winch 25 feet and then be able to put the winch little different direction and winch myself in all around. It probably took me a couple of hours to do that and, of course, I'm not going to call for help, and I don't know that anybody really could help me too much at that point anyway. So, yeah, that's a long answer to your question. We would get snow up there, but there wasn't enough traffic to worry about it.

In those days, we still— I don't know if they do today, but we had to keep track of these big 55-gallon drums of water. There'd be these signs on the main highways that would say "Radiator water half a mile ahead." Something like that. And that was part of our job was to make sure at least a double check and see what the levels of these tanks were. And I don't think that we personally put water in them. I think they had a tanker, you know, one of the maintenance guys would come out periodically and fill these water containers up. But that was a big deal in the days when radiators were much more susceptible to overheating. And, you know, even with air conditioning on, there's a lot of long-distance, slow upgrading parts to that park where if you're not careful, you can easily overheat. And in the summertime, you know that could be deadly. So, that was part of our job, was to keep track of those.

TM: And were you thinking, “Okay, I talked to those guys in region in San Francisco, and they said they were going to bust me out of here”? So, were you thinking you were going to get a job transfer, or did it come as a surprise when you got an offer to transfer to Yosemite as a shift supervisor?

BF: Well, you know, Tom, I'm not sure that I actually remember that. I don't think— I think I suspected that I was going to go to Yosemite. I don't think I was all that surprised that it took place within a year. But I don't think I was counting on it either. Again, I don't have a definite answer for you. I just think that it was a little bit of a surprise as well as sort of a “I think it's going to happen but I'm not going to bank on it yet.”

TM: And when it did happen, were you like, “Yep I'm there,” or did you stop and ponder it for a while?

BF: No, I didn't ponder it. I mean, I was ready to go. I mean, there was never any questions that we weren't going to go there. Now, did I miss Death Valley a little bit? Yeah. And, you know, just like Lake Mead, when my wife and I drove into Lake Mead from Tucson and up to Echo Bay, we were a little skeptical or nervous because there isn't much out there in many ways. But when we left a year and a half later, we were terribly sorry to leave because we enjoyed it thoroughly and it's a really interesting area. There's lots going on. There's a lot of places to explore, and there are a lot of things that you just don't recognize until you're actually there and play with it for a while.

TM: Well, it sounds like both of you are able to make lemonade out of lemons, if you will. Wherever you land, you enjoy it, you anchor in, Anne gets a job, you go exploring. It sounds great. But I guess I'm thinking that part of the job was that you understood this was going to lead to something else.

BF: Yeah, but I didn't think it was going to lead to any kind of upward mobility. I just thought it was going to lead to a different park.

TM: Right. And that's kind of part of the territory. Okay, I'm working at this park, and I'm going to get to know it and serve it as best as I can. and then I'm going to move to another park.

BF: Right. And I don't— I think I'd only been to Yosemite a couple of times and didn't know it very well, but I did know that there was there's a lot going on there. I didn't recognize how much was going on there until I got in the middle of it, of course.
But I, you know, I had a, in retrospect, an interesting time in Death Valley. One other incident that that comes to mind that I ought to share to, I think, to put the final nail in, you know, just how stupid I am category. When I was on the trail crew in Sequoia Kings Canyon, I got to be the, for the last couple of years, the summers, I got to be using explosives. You know, I could set the dynamite, use the blasting caps and set them off with the electrical generator and stuff. So, I was all self-taught, all on the job training, no formal training, no nothing. So, I had some sense as to dynamite. So, I'm in Death Valley

and, of course, there's a lot of, in those days, a lot, a whole lot of mines, open shafts, open tunnels and adits. Some of them had been explored, but in those days back in the ‘60s at least, there were still things that miners had just basically dropped walked away from, you know, 40-50 years before. And with my habit of exploring some of these very, very minor dirt roads, I end up going to places where some of these things, you know, there hadn't been many people there for 20 or 30 years.

So, I find a tunnel out by Dusenberry Point. There's a little ghost town there whose name I forget at the moment. And I find this, I find this tunnel, and I've had a report or somebody’s reported finding a box of dynamite there. So, I'm able to find this box of about a half a crate or a half a box of dynamite that had been weeping, which means the nitroglycerin is coming out of the sticks.

TM: This isn't Ballarat, is it?

BF: No, I spent— Well, I’ve got stories about Ballarat, too. In fact, I got another story for you—

TM: All right. Oh, good.

BF: — that really is more important. So, here's a box of dynamite. It’s way out in the middle nowhere. I get on the radio. I called down and I asked one of the Rangers, “So, how do I get rid of this dynamite? “Well, burn it,” they told me. So, I think I went back to my Ranger station. I got some diesel oil. Took the diesel oil back. This is all taking a whole afternoon or so. I got the diesel oil and soaked this whole box of dynamite with this diesel oil. And I walk out about— That can't be very far. It couldn’t be more than 50 feet. But there's a big boulder about the size of a several refrigerators, I guess. And I take a, not a railroad fuse but a car fuse for accidents, you know, a Fusee. And I pop it, and I end up throwing it into this box, and I'm able to get it there eventually, I guess, to burn it. And I'm not expecting anything to happen other than this dynamite will burn. Well, of course, it didn't burn. It just exploded. And fortunately, I was behind this boulder. And when it went off, there must have been, you know, I don't know exactly but I bet you there were 20 to 40 sticks of dynamite sitting in it. And I ended up getting thrown to the ground, but fortunately I am sheltered by this big boulder, and there aren't a lot of projectiles or anything. But I'm also recognizing, Jiminy Christmas, had I not, had I just assumed that this thing was going to burn like I was told it would by people that knew more about this than I did—

TM: Like, walked up with a match and just put a match to it. Right.

BF: Well, something almost that casual. But I still to this day think about how lucky I was that I wasn't more cavalier. I was probably cavalier enough as it was. Again, by today standards, they'd have all kinds of, you know, we’d close the roads off. They’d have some sort of way to—

TM: Yeah, they would have brought out a blasting cap and a bunch of wire and, like, the guy would have been 1/4 mile away and—

BF: Yeah. It would have been done much more professionally than I did it, of course. I got the job done. I don't think it collapsed the tunnel. I don't think I even cared about that at that point. I was just lucky I was alive. But so, Ballarat. You mentioned Ballarat, which was not in the park, which Ballarat's little ghost town. There was one guy, I think, that lived there.

TM: Ballarat was not in the park. Okay.

BF: No, it wasn't in the park in those days.

TM: And there was a caretaker living there.

BF: Well, not so much a caretaker as much as there was somebody trying to make a little living. If I recall right, you could actually stop in and get a hamburger at this little store, and you know, I say there's one person. There might have been a few more, but it was virtually a ghost town. And the history was such that, you know, somebody had told me long before when I started going to Ballarat that there were a bunch of stolen cars one time, and they buried them all out there. So, there's all this mystique of sort of the Charlie Manson-kinds of area where you're really looking over your shoulder to make sure what's going on. But since it wasn't in the park—Well, it wasn't in the park. So I would end up still going out there and patrolling it and Surprise City— Is that right? That sounds— In Surprise Canyon, let's see, there's a little ghost town, which is really neat, in this canyon. You have to walk into it now, but I could drive into it then. but I was, you know, even though it wasn't in the park, I still felt responsible for going out and keeping track of what's going on, etc., which I did. And I got to know the guy in Ballarat a little bit well.

So, this is the Woodstock area, or time, rather, and they're going to have this big rock concert in Ballarat and they put all these flyers out and notices in various newspapers or whatever for people to come to Ballarat. And in many ways it would have been very attractive because it was remote, a lot of hippies those days, of course, a lot of nudity, and various little canyons and springs and things, and so this is a perfect place to have a rock concert. So, they actually brought in a contingent of about a 25-man United States Park Police team from Washington, D.C. They brought in roughly six or eight Rangers from around the West, and so there might have been— I don't know exactly, but I'm sure that the county, as well as perhaps the highway patrol, I mean, everybody was gearing up to have this huge influx of people. So, as it turns out, of course, nobody came. I mean, they gave a rock concert and nobody came, basically. But one of the park policemen, you know, they had a— One of these guys had a wreck and flipped his car. He's still paralyzed. He paralyzed to today.

And my wife and I had, we had a couple of Rangers, Jack Fields and George Buckingham, were two that my wife, we invited them over for supper one of these nights, and perhaps it was right after the rock concert that didn't materialize as sort of a

celebration night. And my two-way radio in those days was in the house was a base set, which meant that it was the size of a small bookcase that had a hand mic on top of it, and it was a place where you could actually sit down on top of it, if you were careful.

TM: Okay, so big unit.

BF: It was a pretty good-sized two-way radio, and it was in my house. It was a base station. And one of these guys, either Jack or George, sat down on this thing. Well, it turns out he was sitting on this microphone for half an hour—

TM: Oh, no!

BF: —you know, the group of us, and there were probably five or six people in that room, and we weren't necessarily getting on anybody's case too much, but we're telling some gossip and probably things that we should not have been having broadcast.

TM: Well, so this is an open mic!

BF: It is an open mic. And after maybe half an hour, literally, after all this time I start smelling ozone in the— You know, you could sort of smelled electrical burning something. And I started thinking about this, and it seemed like forever that it took me to make that decision, but probably 15 seconds I recognize that we were sitting on this microphone, and we were in the midst, my wife and I were in the midst of telling about having gone to one of these nearby towns and staying in a motel just to watch TV and have the air conditioning going for our weekend. And we had bed bugs, and we're telling this story, and we're about halfway through the bed bug part of it. And whoever was sitting on it, we get him off of there, and without missing a beat, the woman who was normally sort of a dispatcher during the daytime, at least, in the valley, her name is Dorothy Chally [phonetic spelling], she ends up coming on the radio, and everybody in the entire park has been listening to this. Anybody that has a radio because, you know, that— And you always had your radio on in those days. My wife used to call it coitus interruptus but— So, she ends up without missing a beat saying, "Well, come on. So, what happened with the bed bugs?" [Laughter] And I think that we finished the story although probably pretty quickly. We were certainly chagrined. And then for the next hour or more we're trying to think, okay, who did we bad-mouth? Who did we tell stories about that maybe we shouldn't have. But we finally decided that we were actually pretty okay. We didn't really spill the beans too much on anybody. But that was not a good thing.

But this Ballarat concert that didn't come off was what was taking place all around the country. I mean, we were not unique in that regard and that sort of led up to, you know, the— That was the sort of the era where you had the Yosemite riot that year. There were things taking place all around the country, and I don't know the exact chronology, but Kent State wasn't too far before that. Of course, Woodstock. You had all kinds of Vietnam War protesting. Lot of race riots. Women were burning their bras. Draft cards were being burned. It was really a very, very tough time. Unique. And, you know, with

today's issues with Black Lives Matter and all the protesting that's going on. I couldn't make a comparison, necessarily, but I do know that a lot of what was taking place in the ‘60s, the mid to late ‘60s was somewhat comparable to what's taking place today. So, having said that, Tom, I think I'm done with Death Valley, at least until I go to bed tonight, remember something that was important. I don't know.

TM: That was wonderful. I love the open mic story. That was very funny.

BF: Well, that was embarrassing, of course.

TM: Oh, of course, but that's what makes wonderful stories.

BF: And I think there are— There's probably— There are very few Rangers and probably not many policemen out there or other people who have microphones who haven't had somewhat comparable stories where they sit on their radio in the front seat of their car or something.

TM: Sure. Sure.

BF: You know, that's fairly common.

TM: So, who was it that asked you to come to Yosemite?

BF: Well, I mean, I guess— Well, I mean, I'd have to look at the personnel papers to see who actually signed off on it, but the regional director is the one whose name I— You know, I wish I could remember. I’ve seen them numerous times here in Tucson. He lived in Green Valley, although he's now dead several years ago. Very nice man, but he's the one that I think pretty much guaranteed us coming to Yosemite but I'm— I was always in, you know, I'll believe it when I see it kind of thing. But in this case, between he and the regional Chief Ranger, they were looking for people to come to Yosemite or to be brought into Yosemite who had some law enforcement, professional law enforcement training, and when the riot took place, and we can talk about this at some other point here. But when the riot took place in 1970, the first five Rangers in the Park Service were going through what would turn out to be eventually the federal law enforcement training center, but it was a park police law enforcement school in Washington, D.C. So, the Park Service was just teeny tiny tip of the iceberg starting to get, you know, Rangers into professional law enforcement training.

And there were— Of course, this is just a guess on my part, but there might not have been more than a dozen or 15 Rangers throughout the entire National Park system. And remember that there weren't that many parks in those days, probably less than 200 or so or park areas, but there were maybe a dozen or 15 Rangers who had professional law enforcement training. Somebody might have been— One guy that I remember, Steve Wolfe, had been a California highway patrolman. Daryl Stone had been a sheriff's deputy in Madera County, so there are, you know, those kinds of people. Butch Ferebee had been a policeman in Tucson.

So, there were those kinds of Rangers out there, but there weren't many. And so, anyway, I don't think I really totally answered your question.

TM: Well, no, this is fine. What I was thinking is when you went to Yosemite— I want to introduce a couple people, and one is the superintendent and the other is the doctor at the clinic, and these are people you know well and will work with well for many years ahead. So, I guess I'm thinking where were you assigned housing or were you living outside Yosemite and commuting in? And what month did you transfer over there?

BF: So, I got— I arrived on June 21, 1971. I'm pretty sure about that date, but it was certainly June 1971. And I lived in the valley. We were assigned a two-bedroom house in Yosemite Valley, and I was, as I say, the night shift supervisor. And we took a U-Haul trailer. We loaded the trailer up. I got a Ranger from Death Valley, Rocky McCreight, to help me move. You know, I had to rent this U-Haul. They paid some expenses, and I remember how that works exactly, but they paid expenses, but you could move yourself, but you could also get professional movers to do it also. And so, we went from Lake Mead to Death Valley to Wildrose with a professional mover. But you could move yourself and you could— They would give you whatever a moving van would have cost. They would give that to you. And if your U-Haul trailer was less, then you could keep the excess. And it was perfectly legal. Lots of people did it, depending on how much you wanted to work and that sort of thing.

And so, we did that. I got a U-Haul trailer, a truck, rather, and went to Yosemite Valley moved into this two-bedroom house, very nice house, Mission 66 house, and right in downtown Yosemite Valley. And I could be at my office by walking from my house in less than a minute or about a minute if I walked, you know, kind of quickly. And I was within a block of the fire station, a block of the rescue cache, a block of the jail. So, I was right in downtown Yosemite Valley. Now, what else did you ask me about?

TM: What were your duties as night shift supervisor?

BF: So, anything that took place from a certain time, this varies somewhat, let's say from 4 o'clock in the afternoon to midnight or 1 o'clock that took place in the valley in terms of emergency response or fee collection, you oversaw. And in the summertime in Yosemite Valley, in those days, there were probably six or eight permanent Rangers that I oversaw, as well as another 20 or so seasonal Rangers. So, you know, law enforcement, search and rescue, rescue itself, although I wasn't at this point involved with the structural fire brigade, you know, fires that would take place maybe once a week. And campground management.

TM: So, Butch, hang on. I'm thinking of this. Wait a minute. Suddenly you've got about 30 people working for you, working under you. Did you get any training in management at all, either at—

BF: No.

TM: No. It was just, like, here you go.

BF: Yeah, basically, that's right.

TM: Wow. Who did you have to mentor you?

BF: Well, I mean, not much actually, Tom.

TM: Okay.

BF: At least not initially, no. I had a District Ranger. His name was—

TM: Would have been your boss.

BF: Yeah, he would have been my boss. Bill— Oh, I forgot. Nice guy. You know, common sense of an old Ranger. He had a lot of common sense. And in the middle— You know, Yosemite Valley in those days when I walked— The first week or two that I was in the valley, and I would go out with somebody, and they, you know, that I worked with. A guy by the name of Don Utterback comes to mind real fast. Bill Worthington is the District Ranger who I couldn't remember. So, I go out on, you know, ride along with them. I just didn't go out there right off that first night. I mean, I had somebody that I went out, and they showed me where everything was. You know, where the bathrooms were, where the jail was and everything. But there were more felonies taking place in that valley per square inch or per square thing that I ever saw in the Police Department. Lots of drugs. Lots of out-of-bounds camping and lots of just drinking kinds of things. You have to remember the era, though, too. A lot of counter culture, a lot of the hippie era and the riot had taken place the year before. That sort of set the stage.

TM: Was Dick Marks still Superintendent, or had he moved on?

BF: No, Marks was never Superintendent. Dick was—

TM: Oh, I'm sorry. That's right. He wasn't Superintendent. He was—

BF: Chief, Chief Park Ranger.

TM: Chief Ranger. Right. Was he still Chief Ranger?

BF: Well, and actually that's a little— That is not totally accurate. He was not the Chief Ranger. He was the Staff Park Ranger, which is a little different than the Chief Ranger. There was a Chief Ranger Mac— Geez, well, I forgot his name at the moment. I mentioned long time ago the series, the park technician and the park Ranger series.

And there was this big move throughout the entire park system called FOST, which had I thought I was going to mention this, I would have looked up what those, that acronym

means. I used to know it. But it was a movement all throughout the entire agency to do certain things. And one of them, in addition to this 025, 026 kinds of grading and putting people in job series was that Yosemite was going, was under the unit manager concept. So, the unit manager for the valley who oversaw, and this wasn't totally all that good, but oversaw maintenance, interpretation resources, and protection, and so he was in some ways was also my supervisor. His name was Bryan Harry at that time. And Mather District and Wawona District had the same units. I mean, they had their own little units so the head of that unit, like Bryan was in the valley, and I'd have to think real quick, I guess, for the other two but—

TM: Well, this makes sense because on large parks like this where you have centers, I mean, I'm thinking Grand Canyon has the South Rim Village. It has the North Rim Lodge area, and it has the Back Country. It has the river. It has these different areas, and so you would have a unit manager oversee these unique, fairly large and fairly complex areas.

BF: Yes. Well, and Grand Canyon had units, you know, desert-view units.

TM: Right.

BF: South Rim, I think, had its own unit

TM: North Rim had its own unit.

BF: North Rim with Rick Gale [phonetic spelling], yep.

TM: So, it makes sense that Yosemite has different unit managers for different areas of what is a very large park, so—

BF: Yeah. And, of course, the personnel— There are a lot more personnel in Yosemite now than there were in those days. But there were probably several hundred permanent spots in Yosemite National Park when I went there. And I went there as a— Let me make sure I do this right. I think I went there as a GS-9, thinking that I was a park technician, and I never really looked. You know, I got to be cavalier, and I never really looked at them personnel papers themselves. As it turns out, I was transferred there as a park Ranger. In those days, there was a significant difference. Now, you basically did the same things, but in theory there was a different degree of education necessary. You had different responsibilities at higher levels if you were a Ranger versus a technician. Technician was supposed to be, you know, more skilled in certain field areas. So, I was sort of a weird combination, I think. But I went there, I believe, as a GS-9. Again, you know, as a shift supervisor. Now, I think those guys are GS-12s, and to some degree, they still have that same, that same organizational configuration. But I had a lot of people working night shift. There were a fair— There were lesser people on the day shift, but there were still significant number. And it was an interesting time. I mean, it was terribly non-stop. I mean, it was one call after another. Lots of action, you know, fire alarms going off, search and rescue incidents, law enforcement—

TM: So, really different from Death Valley, which would have been super quiet in comparison.

BF: Yeah, yeah.

TM: I think we're getting to a good place to stop this Part 5 interview, but I did want to ask you, I think this could fit in well, what did Anne do?

BF: Well, you know, throughout that entire time, I mean, she did a lot of different things. She was— She started out as a campground fee collector. Pretty quickly she became a dispatcher, and the dispatch office was right literally within a minute of walking from my house. So, she was a dispatcher for a number of years and ended up her time in Yosemite as the secretary for the United States magistrate.

TM: Oh, okay.

BF: Ottonello was his last name, and I, you know, I'd have to look or think about his first name. It was always Judge.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Okay, great. Because I have a bunch of questions for you here, so we've been going for about an hour and 15 here, I guess, a little more. That's alright. Unless there's anything else you think is important to put in this interview, we'll stop here and pick up again at this point.

BF: Well, I'm just trying to real quickly go through my little brain on—

TM: Transferring over from Death Valley.

BF: Well, yeah, and my time in Death Valley. I mean, there were things that took place but not enough to warrant, you know— Although, you know, Murphy's Law is, of course, as soon as we hang up, I'll remember something important.

TM: [Laughs] Well, we can segue that into Part 6, in the start of Part 6. Great.

BF: Yeah.

TM: Okay, well, with that this will conclude part five of the Grand Canyon oral history interview series with Butch Farabee. Today is June 11, 2020. My name is Tom Martin. And Butch, thank you so very much.

BF: My pleasure. Talk to you later.