

Cliff Floyd interviewed by Alton Robbins  
Transcribed by Loyce Martinazzi 1-34-2001

THS Tape # 21

AR This tape is being made for the Tualatin Historical Society. Today we are talking with Cliff Floyd, one of the first members of the Tualatin Fire Department. Tell me Cliff, were you born in this area?

CF No

AR Where were you born?

CF I was born in Dillard, Oregon.

AR How old were you when you came here?

CF Out here?

AR Yeah

CF Let's see, we moved out here in 1930.

AR You came to this area in 1930?

CF From Portland.

AR From Portland. Did you go to school out here?

AF No, mine was in Portland.

AR all your schooling was in Portland.

CF Yeah, I was let's see, how old was I, I'd have to go back, uhm you don't want that history, do you?

AL We want all the history we can get. Did you have any brothers or sisters that lived out here?

CF Nope, well yes I have a brother over here in Garden Home.

AL Over in Garden Home?

CF Yeah

AR Uh, what area did you settle in, here where you are now?

CF I settled right down here, just as we hit this rock road coming up here where those walnut trees are, that was my home.

AR How many acres did you have?

CF To begin with I had 5 acres and I let the boy have the half two he wanted he got married and he wanted to live onto it and so I had 2 and a half and he had two.

AR How many children do you have?

CF I have 3

AR How many grandchildren?

CF Uh, 13

AR You have me beat, I have 1

CF No, Grandchildren I've got uh, uhmmm let's see 3 on this side, 3, 4, I just got 4 grandchildren. I'm thinking of great grandchildren

AR Oh, 13 altogether?

CF Yeah

AR What did you do when you first came out here? Just run the farm or did you work in Tualatin or?

CF I worked for the farmers, a dollar a day it was right during the depression time

AR I used to weed onions on Nyberg's swamp

CF— The missus and I we got uh, we got acquainted with the Nybergs and Teresa and Bill Barngrover, heck, my wife and Teresa Barngrover, they were like sisters.

Ar Yeah, I went to school with the Barngrover kids, you know, Bill and Harriet.

CF Yeah

AR When did you join the fire department?

CF 1939

AR You started as a volunteer in 1939?

CF Right, A volunteer

AR How many run the fire department? Everybody was on it then, I suppose. A lot of volunteers.

CF Oh, they didn't have too many, uh, up to the time they started getting paid men they built up to around about 25.

AR When did they start having a paid fire department?

CF 1948

AR Not till 1948, eh?

CF That's right, and I was the first paid.

AR How many were on the first department?

CF There was 4 of us. I was on there, right off, for 3 months I was the only one.

AR Bill Barngrover was the fire chief, wasn't he?

CF He was the fire chief.

AR What hours did you work then?

CF I worked 8 hours.

AR I know some fire departments, they're on 24 and off 12.

CF Well, at that time, yes. We were that way along towards that, we'll get at that as we went along. Working days there and if he needed, we got a phone and the phone lots of times you couldn't get help so he got those uhm, I can't think of the name of it, I been thinking and thinking, each one of us firemen had it whenever the siren'd go off why this thing would buzz in there and it would tell us where the fire was.

AR Oh, uh huh, Do you remember the first fire you ever answered, fire alarm?

CF Uhmm yeah, it was a grass fire.

AR That right? Whereabouts?

CF Way up on top of Chehalis Mountain.

AR Way up there? All laugh. Take a little while to get there didn't it?

CF that's right. Well, we got up there and uh, what did we figure, 15 minutes?

AR Yeah. What was the biggest fire you ever worked on?

CF Uhm, biggest one. Uhm, probably that one was the one out there on, well there was several of them as far as that goes, but I think Sherwoods, the Sherwood deal was the , pretty near a whole block burned up there.

AR Do you remember when that was?

CF Uhm, you're getting me on my dates now.

AR That's alright. What kind of equipment did you have, just one fire truck?

CF No, we had uh, the 2 rigs, we had the Dodge, the Dodge Bumper ----, then we had the old Reo, we had a tanker too, at that time when that ----was on there, why, they had that old they had a tanker in there that had a thousand gallons on it.

AR Uh hm.

CF That's right.

AR Remember how big Tualatin was then, what the population was, about?

CF When we come in here, when I moved out here it was 325.

AR The boundaries are a lot smaller than they are now, too.

CF Yeah

AR What is it now, over 12,000?

CF Yep, better that 12,000, they say, there's a sign going down the...

AR Do you remember uh, first car you ever had?

CF The first car was the as far as the pumper was concerned was the old Reo.

AR Reo. That would be a real antique now, wouldn't it?

CF It was a school bus and we turned in, we changed the body onto it and put a tank onto it and put a pump onto it and...

AR How big a tank did you have on it, do you remember?

CF 500 gallons

AR 500 gallons?

CF Uh huh.

AR Could you get quite a bit of pressure out of it?

CF Yeah, We'd get enough pressure on it for a real reel hose

Ar Yeah, uh huh.

CF We used that and of course. We found out see when we become rural that was the Tualatin Rural Fire Department that before, it was just for the city down there.

AR The fire district covers quite an area now.

CF Oh yeah,

AR Beaverton and Tigard...

CF We go, the boundary line between clear down in Clackamas County and Willamette, we go clear down to the bridge on top of Pete's Mountain.

AR Oh you do?

Cf Uh hun

AR And do you go east into Clackamas County?

Cf We're in Clackamas County, that's a portion of the district.

AR You say you go down as far as Willamette?

CF We go down as far as the bridge crossing the Tualatin river going into the Willamette Park down there.

Ar Oh, you go that far?

CF That's right. Then if you come back there why, we go as far as the, well, everything on this side of the Tualatin River is really in our district. So we go on some of those side streets that go on down to the river, see?

Ar How far west do you go?

CF West? We go clear up there to take in all of Chehalem Mountain clear over there to the highway coming out of Scholls.

AR Out of Scholls?

CF Yeah, where you cross over there at Bald Peak.

AR Oh yeah. How many fire stations do they have now?

CF 7

AR 7 huh? And they're all manned all the time?

CF No, I don't think they're manned all the time. I don't think Wilsonville's is. I think Wilsonville's is still volunteer.

Ar Did you do your own cooking?

CF I did.

Ar Were you a good cook?

CF Sure, laugh. Well, we -liked my cooking anyway. Just let me tell you.

AR Okay, tell me what you can about the fire department.

CF Alright. The Tualatin rural fire district was started in 1936. That's when they started taking the volunteer fire fighters. Anybody that wanted to join, well all they'd do is come and see the chief and he'd sign them up. And uh, and most of us was, and I was a volunteer for 9 years from 39 to 48.

AR Excuse me, when there was a fire were you called by phone or by siren?

CF By siren.

AR Okay, got it.

CF Se, I could hear it clear up here and I would go down there and whoever was left there at the

station they would tell us where the fire was, in fact, uh, lots of the time there I would get there in time to take off for the second trip. And whoever was there.. And when I was a paid man, I would have to wait till I got one man and lots of times I'd get two, but if I got one I'd leave the station.

AR You couldn't go out alone?

CF Oh no, I can't go alone. See, I was classed as a driver and then this other man, he was a nozzle man, see. There was lots of times I'd get 2 or 3, but I couldn't even with one cause we'd drill even with one, even the volunteers they knew just what they had to do see.

AR Yeah. If I may get personal, how much did you get paid when you first worked for the fire department?

CF Well, I got \$200 a month when I first started in being a paid man.

AR I wonder what they get paid now?

CF They're getting \$2,200, some of them .

AR That right?

CF Oh, yeah. It's entirely different from what it used to be, boy. You take the guys today, why they've really got something there. I don't know just, this was in 1988, yeah, 89 was their 51st birthday, and in 89 I talked with a guy there and he's one of the drill masters now and he says he's making \$2,200, so they have, oh I suppose the chief there has 3, maybe 4 what they call battalion chiefs and they have their different programs you see. One of them takes care of all the parts there for the garage, and repair jobs and getting bolts and screws and whatever they need and another one, he's off to checking for different buildings, how they're fixed for fire and stuff like that, and they go to the schools.

AR Fire prevention?

CF Yeah, that's fire prevention we go up there to the schools and we give them a fire drill to see how they come out and...

AR I guess they still do that.

CF Oh yeah. Then we have all the kids there, that's what we used to why during that fire prevention week the kids would write up an essay on about it and what they think it should be doing and this and that. Some of them put out a pretty good...

AR That's good training for them.

CF Oh, you bet.

Ar When did you leave the fire department, when did you retire?

CF 68. Started in 48 and quit in 68.

AR Well, that's a nice round figure, 20 years.

CF Yep. why, I was forced to go then cause I was 65 and they had on the minutes there that everybody had to quit at 60 and when they put it on the minutes why, I was 62 already. So they had to let me, I got 3 years on them.

AR Do you have any idea how many men there are in the fire department now?

CF Over 100?

CF 100 paid men.

AR That's in all 7 stations?

CF All 7 stations. I think Tigard, and uh, Tigard and uh, King City, they're the biggest but they have some of the well, the bigger fighting,? like the snorkle and the hook and ladder at those 2 stations.

AR Yeah, they probably have bigger buildings to contend with.

CF Oh yeah, they got bigger...So then after we got going for awhile then, why uh, he put on an extra man for each of our shifts, we had 2 shifts down there so we got one day off, and that extra man, he would take our place for that day for each shift and then later on they came up there and when they got on to 24 on and 24 off why uh, then they went under AB and C, 3 different shifts. Well, down here at this station just wherever there was a tanker by itself there were 3 men but where they had this snorkel or the ladder they had 5 extra men. It took 5 men to operate that thing.

Ar When was this building built?

CF That was built from 36 to about 40-42.

Ar Sounds like it was a project.

CF It was all volunteer work All. We even had 2 contractors there. And then all the volunteer firemen who would come down each day, they'd come down there and they'd be packing mortar for these contractors putting up those blocks down there you know, and everything and uh,



course the reason for that, if we got a call there, some of us guys we'd have to go out on the fire.

AR Oh sure. I know that wasn't complete. I left Tualatin in 41 and it wasn't completed then.

CF It probably took longer than 42, maybe 43.

AR It wasn't completed when I left, I know.

CF Where we met before, it was in the city hall. That was where the Dodge was and for a long long time that was when we had the REO. The Reo and the Dodge. was in there then. The Dodge was the Pumper and the Reo ???

AR Where are they building the new station, do you know?

CF No, I don't know. Somebody said they mentioned something on the Tualatin-Sherwood highway. At first they was going to go up here on Borland Road past the hospital

AR Oh yeah, I know where that is.

CF But I think that's I think they changed there mind.

AR Oh it's set on Tualatin-Sherwood highway? I know they said yesterday in the Tualatin Historical society meeting that they expect this one to be torn down in a few months. They didn't know how long but as soon as they move out they are going to tear it down.

CF Well, they're probably waiting for the new one to be built.

AR That's right. They're waiting for the new one.

CF And uh, of course, they built the main office right down the across the street from Burns Brothers on Elligsen Road. They got a station down there and they have their offices down there. Then they got one out here on Mountain Home Road.

AR Oh, uh huh. Well isn't area where it is now part of that new development downtown Tualatin where they're going to build a new shopping mall? I think it is, part of that area.

CF Humph. I think they're growing out of their pants.

AR There's so darn many people out here now, they require a lot more protection than they used to.

CF I just found out that —was appointed

AR On the board of directors?

CF Then we used to have 2 down in Wilsonville, I don't know who they've got down there now. and then Moser, he was up on Johnson Road what they call Homestead Road now, and we had Hunsicker Road named after him and he was one of the directors. And then old woodhouse from Sherwood and then we had ...

AR Was Bill Barngrover the first chief?

CF Yeah.

AR Of the paid fire department, or the volunteer both?

CF He was volunteer too. In fact he was the one who started the fire district up. And when they first got, they just had an old Federal truck with a bed on it and they just had hoses in that . And they uh, and then they just used the hydrants, there was no pump on it or anything. Now when that was when the hydrants was built down there. That was through the PWA.

AR Oh yeah, in the 30's.

CF Before that, I think. Could be.

AR I think that was in the early 30's sometime.

CF I guess so.

AR Yeah, Seems to me like it was.

CF Yeah, and when we started to go out we found out that we needed something besides that Reo and we needed something besides that old Federal and...

AR After you'd go out on a fire, I often wondered how do you dry the hoses out.

CF How do you drag them out?

AR Dry them out.

CF Dry em? We didn't.

AR You put them away wet? Wouldn't they mold?

CF Well, I think we found out some of them did so finally they built that tower down at the station there where they could string them up and drain them.

AR Let them drip out huh? Drip dry?

CF Of course we got them pretty well cause lots of times there we'd roll them up and as we held them up to roll them why that would force the water out of them.

AR Yeah, but they were still wet inside. Of course if you used them often enough why..

CF In those days we were using them. That was before these environmentalists got in there and begin to kill the... You can't build a fire now unless you have a permit.

AR Yeah, I know. It/s crazy, isn't it?

CF I don't know whether it is or not. On some people yes.

AR They make us even quit using the fireplace maybe.

CF They're going to make you quit using your wood stove even. I think that's going too far, to my notion.

AR There's an awful lot of people that can't afford anything.

CF You can't afford electricity, that's a cinch.

AR They go out and cut their own wood. Of course if you buy wood today it's kind of spendy. My neighbor tried to a cord of wood the other day. It was maple.\$160.

CF There's different little things. They went back east and they got that hook and ladder and that was in the late 50's.

AR How long a ladder was that, do you remember?

CF 100 feet.

AR 100 feet, eh?

CF Uh hum.

AR Ever go up to the top of it?

CF I was the first guy that climbed it.

AR Go up the top and down the other side?

CF In fact when I was drillmaster down there that's how I used to do with our ordinary ladder. Two guys holding it and the other guy went up and he went over the top and come down the opposite side. When they first did it some of the guys said "you're nuts," "No I'm not, if I do it, will you guys do it?"

AR You gotta have a lot of faith in the one that's holding the ladder in a thing like that.

CF Alright, They had to learn to limb the ladder even, you know a lot of guys they'd just wiggles, their little butts going from one side to the other, well, that ain't no way to climb a ladder.

AR No

CF You goddamn near have to climb it stifflegged.

AR That's right.

CF So I went up and come down the top and some of the guys that was there that night said "Hell, I'll be damned." I says, you can be damned so go ahead, I says listen, if you get leery of it if you go up one side and go back that side for the first 2 or 3 times I says I don't expect you to for over there the first time. I says I drove down at Klamath Falls there for 2 weeks. Chief sent me down there. The state had a school down there.

AR Oh uh huh'

CF State Fire Marshalls, see.

AR Did you ever have anybody freeze up there, afraid to come down?

CF Oh yes, I had one guy hell, he wouldn't even climb the ladder, whenever he was there he'd say, "I'll operate the pump." And I says listen boy, I says, one of these times you're going to get caught, somebody is going to force you to go up. I don't know if he ever did or not, but hell, he's retired now so I guess he don't have to worry about it.

AR That would be kind of bad to have a fireman who wouldn't climb the ladder.

CF Yeah. We went up different places where I had to have a rope there and tie it to my waist and they'd tie it to a tree or something there so I could hold on. For a chimney fire.

AR Yeah.

CF No I'll tell you, I had one guy, one volunteer, whenever he came out on a fire, he said "I'll go up Cliff, if you follow me up there and help me get up on the roof, I says I don't want

anybody else to help me.

AR I don't suppose there were any fire alarms, in those days, for the homes were they?

CF Finally they began to get these smoke alarms. Your phone was awful bad. That's why we on all the trucks there whenever we went out we had a 2 way radio, we didn't have to depend on no phone. We'd call back in to the station and give the station a call.

AR No the phone wouldn't be very dependable.

CF Yeah.

AR Did you have a spotted dog on your fire truck?

CF We had a dalmatian down there for a year or two.

AR You did?

CF Yeah, It got so bad some of the guys didn't want to take care of it and stuff and oh when we first got it he rode with me, he'd ride right back there on the hoses back there.

AR I understand they like that.

CF Oh yeah .

AR Isn't that funny, a lot of dogs like to ride...

CF Yeah, we had a dalmatian, just the old typical firehouse dog.

Ar I guess they don't do that much anymore.

CF No, I guess they're getting away from it.

Ar The old gag was, they always took him along to find the fire hydrant.

CF We was classed Was right next to Portland in the rating.

AR It's still pretty high, isn't it?

CF You bet it is, I just can't figure it out, I don't know how it is now you see all the all the Washington County has all gone into one and I still don't know that would be all except Hillsboro city, that's still in the city, but Hillsboro one and you take Aloha , take Cedar hills and

I don't know if Beaverton is in with them or not.

AR Beaverton is in this one, Tualain Valley.

CF Well, I know that, but whether they went in with them. Then there's West Slope, then there's Tualatin # 2. They all have chiefs.

AR More chiefs than Indians?

CF Well, I'm just wondering, when they all went in together, I'm just wondering how some of these chiefs are making it.

AR somebody got demoted?

CF Of course Tualatin down here he just got a new one cause even Washburn he retired when they made this change he just got out of it. I often wondered just how he would act if he was if he was cut back, if he had to be cut down and go back down as a battalion instead of a chief. That's quite a thing you know if a guys works himself up to be a chief and made the district flourish you know and everything and he gets into one like that and all those chiefs get together and they pick somebody else to be the main chief, I don't know just how that would work. To get that, they was going to, they was getting in new machinery and some of the firetruck salesmen told them about that. And it was either one of the directors or somebody went back there, I don't think the chief went it was one of the directors and they went back there and they brought it back to all the directors and they decided to go out and buy some.

End of Side 1

AR I suppose most of your firetrucks are made back east. They're not made on the west coast are they?

CF That's right they was, A lot of our tankers are made over in Cornelius.

AR Is that right? Do they still make them over there?

CF I imagine they <sup>have the</sup> Western - western -

AR I didn't know they made them over there.

CF What they do, they probably get the chassis and they put the bodies onto it.

AR Yeah

CF The body and the tank and the pump and everything. As far as the truck itself, the engine and the chassis, naturally they come from wherever its' built, back east someplace. But that's the main thing, to get that body and that tank on there and everything, reel hoses and tailgate.

AR On average, how long do those hoses last? Do you have to replace them every 4-5 years or...

CF Uhm on the average well, so many of them, they're scuffed around they just get wore out. And they ...

AR Cars driving over them *& everything*.

CF A lot of that too. But just dragging them around a lot of it and they get scuffed and they get so weak you know and the first thing you know they *pop* open. There's quite a little pressure on some of them.

AR Must be.

CF You take that pumper on our inch and a half that's the one we drag around that's really the hose that goes first is your inch and a half, cause they're dragged right on the ground. Unless you're packing in any distance and then you don't drag them so much cause it's all packed in shoulder pack.

AR About how many feet of hose can a man carry, the average person?

CF You can carry 150 feet, *A-Start walking* that's 3 sections. You pull it out of the truck you just pull it out and put it on your shoulder. Just like a fold see, and whoever's there, the officer of the day, the captain or lieutenant or whatever he is, you'll tell so many men to take it so the lead man he with his load he'll pull out one extra section, that's an extra 50 feet then he'll stop, the other guy, he gets ahold of it and he pulls out 3 more folds then he steps out a hundred. It all depends on many they need. Sometimes they take at least 3 or 4 guys.

Ar I suppose.

CF Just like when we drilled up there at the old intermediate school *out there* in Sherwood. They had their fire hydrant right out in front of the school Just off the road by the flagpole. We pull up there and we'd clear around in the back on our drills we'd go clear down where they'd park and they're going into their schools bus garages and everything and clear around to the back. That would take 4 guys to get inside see? If you had 3 guys going down he had 150 feet well you were practically at the door so you had 150 feet to fight inside the building. Quite a knack to it. Quite a drilling. Boy, I had a lot of those guys there. they were taking a lot of interest in it. Couple of the guys got it in their head I wasn't doing it right. They says what are you doing that for, I said "who's doing this?" "This is my way, I says, if you want to be the trainer here for this you go and ask the chief there to take it, just let me alone as long as I'm the drillmaster." There was 2 or 3 directors standing on the front porch of the school and they heard every goddamn word of it. Well the next morning the chief got me down here when I came to work. "What happened up at the school house, Cliff." I didn't say anything. "Come on," he says, "come on, you tell me," I says you don't want to hear this. He says Why? It's hitting pretty close to home to you boy. I says 2 of your relatives there thought I wasn't doing very good and They let me

AR -  
know about it and I said if they can do any better they ought to see you, My throat was cut down there a lot. I was captain of the department. Did you know Bob Saarinen?<sup>7</sup> Well he was one of the members. Well, he had to quit, because of his health, and a lot of his work he was working out of town a lot see? And then his health was to, so he told the chief I'll give up the captainship of the department if you'll give it to one guy. And he says who's that, and he says you give it to Cliff and I'll step aside. So that's how I became captain. And I guess there were a lot of guys didn't like it.

AR Oh sure, that always happens.

CF Sure I had 2 or 3 of them there they got to be battalion chief I just kept captainship, chief is way over me. One of the chiefs there, hell, he was my partner when there was only 2 of us. Two double shifts. Hell, I didn't complain, hell, I told them, more power to you, I says, hell...

AR Yeah

CF That's just the friction in the department itself.

AR It's the human element.

(Background <sup>voice</sup> probably Bernice Floyd Foster, Cliff's daughter.) The human element, can't get by without it.

AR Yeah, that's right.

End of interview side 2 0-150