

INTERVIEW WITH KEITH HAMEL  
BY ARDEN TRANDAHL APRIL 16, 2001  
SUNDANCE, WYOMING  
Others present, Mrs. Shirley Hamel

MR. TRANDAHL: This is Arden Trandahl and I am recording retired FWS employee Keith Hamel. The date today is April 16, 2001. I have Keith with me here and we're going to talk a little bit about his career in the FWS. We'll get his impressions and some of his experiences. We appreciate his participation in this project. Well Keith, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself? Give us a little bit of background on when you were born and things like that.

MR. HAMEL: I was born on November 2, 1930 in northeastern Colorado. Where there was no fences. It was what they called an open prairie. The ranchers there just turned the cows out. It was 'free range', that's what my Dad called it. Free range. My folks; that's where they got married and set up housekeeping in 1921. I didn't come along until 1930. From then on it was drought and disaster and hard times in the 1930s. My folks "dried out" and starved out. They went back to where they were raised in southeast Nebraska. That's where I grew up and spent my early childhood days down there.

MR. TRANDAHL: So you started out in Colorado and got to Nebraska. Then you went to school where?

MR. HAMEL: My school days were in Nuckolls County in southeast Nebraska. I went to a rural school. There were several schools in Nuckolls County because my parents moved around two or three times. I spent a large part of my time in what they called the Ox Bow neighborhood. That was a little neighborhood that began in the early days of the pioneers. I went to grade school and from there I rode a bus to school. I got on the bus about 6:30 in the morning and I toured the country. I was the first one on and we went probably forty to fifty miles to gather up all of the kids and got to school by eight o'clock. I never will forget in those days, my high school days, we had a one-eyed bus driver. He drove like he was a madman. I don't know why we ever survived even getting to school, let alone anything beyond that! That's something I'll never forget.

I graduated from high school in 1948. I got my diploma there. My folks had always had a rough time with farming and they thought I should go to school and get a little education. So I did, I went to Hastings College and in the fall of 1949, I taught my first rural school. I taught for three years, 1949, 50, 51, 52. Then Uncle Sam had his eye on me and I was drafted in the Army in May of 1952.

MR. TRANDAHL: So you are a Korean Veteran then?

MR. HAMEL: I am a Korean Veteran. Yes, I spent two years in Uncle's Army. I was inducted at Omaha, Nebraska. I went to Camp Crowder, Missouri to pick up my clothes and spent the rest of the two years at Fort Riley, Kansas after taking sixteen weeks of basic training. There were eight weeks on rifle. It was kind of a strange situation. From there, one day they had us all line up in a single column and count off by four. My number was number four. The first guys went into I think it was the Marine Corps. Ever guy who had number one stepped forward and they said that they were now in the Marine Corps. I thought I had really lucked out there because I didn't want nothing to do with the Marines. So it went on, they needed some truck drivers and clerical workers. I missed that by just one because I had had some training in clerical work and in leadership with the teaching of school. The next this was, 'all numbers fours step forward'. That was my number so I stepped forward and they said that we were now going to school for eight weeks to be a cook! So I spent eight more weeks right there at Camp Funston, at Fort Riley, Kansas. After I got out of the eight weeks, they were shipped fellows over to Korea just as fast as they could get them ready for heavy weapons. The riflemen, truck drivers, cooks, you name it. Anybody that could do anything went to Korea. Well, there was a shortage of personnel at Camp Funston and by luck and chance, they picked me to stay at Fort Riley in Camp Funston and cook there for the trainees that were being trained for over seas duty. That's where I spent two years of Uncle's time.

After I got out with my honorable discharge, why, I came back and taught for two more years at rural school and my certificate had run out. I kind of decided that maybe that wasn't my line of work. So I started in the retail business. I got Veterans rights and privileges and on the job training. I think they were looking for good, hard working young fellows that wanted to spend a lot of time with retail. But they had sort of a false bottom. They paid you by the month and they worked you by the hour! I decided that wasn't the way I wanted to go either, so I started with the Hiestad-Lee Variety, which was very similar to the Ben Franklin stores. I spent a couple of years there. They transferred me to Sydney, Nebraska to a large store there. They were putting in a fountain that had a hundred foot front. It was about a hundred foot square store and they carried everything! Of course, I was Assistant Manager. You caught a little of everything, which was good training but I decided that they were just using me for all they could get. They really didn't have a store for me to go into so I left the variety and went into Safeway. I was in charge of the dairy products and I worked part-time there and I also worked in a fiberglass fabrication factory. We made boats, tractor cabs, coffin vaults and I can't think now just what else, but those were the main things. I went home one noon and I heard the fire whistle blow. When I came back at about one o'clock, the place had burned down! The resin and the fiberglass was a high combustible material. I don't know what happened, but it sure did go in a hurry.

I kind of fooled around a little bit and I thought why not take a Civil Service examination for clerical work. They were needing some people out at the Sioux Army

Depot there at Sydney, Nebraska. I got on the roster and by the time I got on, why, their quota had been filled. They put my eligibility in with the FWS.

MR. TRANDAHL: That was probably a good move for you! A lucky break!

MR. HAMEL: It was beginning to be! I got a call from Fort Niobrara, at Valentine, Nebraska. They had an opening for a Clerk.

MR. TRANDAHL: That's a National Wildlife Refuge?

MR. HAMEL: Yes. Howard Moon was the Manager there. We talked and he was a nice fellow. Everything looked good, and the word was go. But he said that anybody else who was already established in FWS could have the job and they would create another vacancy someplace else. That was the case. I fellow by the name of Fred Rush was already working at the Crescent Lake NWR and he wanted a transfer. So he took the job at Valentine and that opened it up about 45 or 50 miles from Sydney. So everything worked out. I went up in the Sand Hills and checked that out. Housing was bad! There a Pony Express house that FWS had which was to be used for the clerical personnel. They had another ranch type house for the maintenance man. Of course, the Manager lived in the HQ house. They said they had a bid in to the regional office to build two new houses. They were badly in need of them. I took the job.

MR. TRANDAHL: I guess you and Shirley were married at the time?

MR. HAMEL: Yes. Shirley and I married before I went in the Service in 1952. Of course I went on in and Shirley stayed. She also taught school. When I came back, why,...

MR. TRANDAHL: So you moved to Crescent Lake together then?

MR. HAMEL: Yes, we moved to Crescent Lake. That was quite an experience. We had good hard roads from Sydney on Highway 6, on to Highway 34, I believe it was. We went straight north to Oshkosh. Then from Oshkosh, it was thirty miles up to the refuge. The further north we went, the less road we ended up with. Finally we were into opening gates and crossing cattle guards. We had to be real careful not to get stuck in the sand. That sand was like sugar. You drive through that and the car just sunk and there you were! We soon learned that you didn't fool around crossing a blow area in the sand. Otherwise you were on foot! But we took the job and moved out there. There were a lot of lakes. That first winter the well froze up coming in to the house, and the sewer froze up going out. When spring came we had a good population of mice. The old house was pretty drafty. There were times when we killed mice with flyswatters! It as terrible! But in 1964, they did build two brand new houses and the clerical person, which was myself, and the maintenance man, who was Chris Schuller each, got a new house to live

in. It was a three bedroom, full basement, with an attached garage. It was really nice. The Manager at that time was Richard Rogers. He had been there since about 1958 maybe. Then he transferred out at about 1965. Then the next Manager was John Wilbrecht. He transferring in from I believe it was Wisconsin. There was only three people. The refuge was 46,000 acres, which was originally a great big cattle ranch that the government had bought. They thought it was a suitable area to raise ducks. There were lots of grouse, antelope, pheasants, deer, and an occasional elk would pass through the area. There were lots of ducks and we had about three hundred free flying Canadian geese that stayed around refuge HQ. We used to take the government grain truck and go to Kerwin, Kansas to haul milo and go to the refuge down at Omaha; Blair National Wildlife Refuge, they raised a lot of corn. They raised a lot of corn. So we'd make a two-day trip and haul back a big load in a two and a half ton truck of corn. The maintenance man made a self-feeder. So we just put that grain in the self-feeder so the geese could get it. They learned where to come. We scattered a little around on the ground to entice them to go to the feeder. When spring came, why, they'd go out on the lake and make their nests. We had a lot of trouble with coons. What the maintenance man did with the suggestion of the manager was to make nesting islands out of poles. We bolted them together. They had four legs on them. At the top we'd cover them with a sort of woven wire. Then we'd get some hay in the pickups and throw it on top of the nesting island, then another cover of wire so the hay would stay there. We'd throw an old tire on top for them to nest in and it worked! Those darn geese would find those nesting islands, which we'd, made and haul them out on the ice. We set them on the ice and when the ice would melt in the spring they'd drop in to the water. Those geese would find those nesting islands and we raised Canadian geese! We'd got out there in a canoe. I was with the manager a lot of times. We'd go and check the islands and find out how many little goslings we had in the nests.

MR. TRANDAHL: It sounds like the duties of a Refuge Clerk were more than just paperwork.

MR. HAMEL: Yes, you're right Arden. I got in on a lot of that outside stuff. This was due to the fact that I had a farm background and I knew how to do a lot of things that needed to be done on the refuge. Then, when the weather was bad and we'd get done with the clutch counts with the grouse and geese and ducks and everything, it's was my job to take of all of the grazing permittees on the refuge. I counted the cattle on the refuge. I counted them off of the refuge and I computed all of the grazing bills. It was my job to collect the checks, submit the billings and correspond and be with the permittees. We got certified checks; and after I got the bill all made up and the checks received from the permittees, the manager would sign it and I'd send it in to the regional office. We had quite a moneymaking thing that supported a lot of the other refuges for bird restoration and project that they used the money for. I thoroughly enjoyed it there. I loved that area.

MR. TRANDAHL: How long were you at Crescent Lake then?

MR. HAMEL: I started there on July 5, 1960. My two kids; my oldest boy and my daughter were real small. They also went to a sand hill school. The school was about three or four miles away. We had to take them every morning and go and get them. The teacher lived right there in a trailer house on the school grounds during the week. If the weather was bad, she would stay the weekend until the weather was nice and she could go to town. My two older kids had the same teacher for gee, about six or seven years. I didn't feel that they were getting the right kind of education that they needed. They were missing out on a lot of activities that kids get in town. So I put in for a transfer. I received a transfer to the Detroit Lakes, Minnesota at the Job Corps Center. My duties there with Job Corps were as a Corpsman Supervisor of a dormitory of about fifty boys. I would say forty of them were colored; seven of them or the rest of the ten were a mix between Spanish American, Indian and white. They boys were mostly colored.

MR. TRANDAHL: So the Job Corps program was initiated and funded by Congress, but the FWS was one of the agencies that ran Job Corps camps?

MR. HAMEL: That's right. And it was through the administration of President Nixon that he promoted that through FWS and it was a branch of FWS.

MR. TRANDAHL: It was a training program for the boys?

MR. HAMEL: Yes, it was a training program for the wayward boys. It took them off of the streets and put them in to school there at the Job Corps center. They went to school for a week, and the next week they would go to a training center. There were several different areas; woodworking, mechanics, and several difference types of activities to train these young boys so that they could go back home and get a job and be off being a deadbeat. A lot of the boys that came there; it was really sad. Some of those boys couldn't do much more that write their names! My background was in education. I used to help the boys write letters.

MR. TRANDAHL: Is that right? What kind of letters?

MR. HAMEL: Well, they couldn't write. They'd call home but that was expensive and they'd run out of money. The Job Corps supervisor said that since I had had administrative and clerical background that I should help the boys write letters. I started out of an evening after they came back from their daytime activities. We got together with the boys and helped them. They wanted to write letters to their girlfriends. So I said, "Okay, what would you like to say?" "Tell her that I am thinking about her and I'd like to be with her". I'd help them get the different ideas that they had down on paper. They thought that was really pretty nice. In about several days, I found out that the whole dormitory was writing letters. I thought, 'gee, this really took hold!' What I had found out after I had helped this one or two guys or maybe three, and what did the rest of

them do, but copy them! They sent out about fifty love letters to their girlfriends all written by the same person! But it worked, and they all got letters. The supervisor was happy. And of course they would receive letters and some of them couldn't hardly read it. It was a fun job, I enjoyed it. Then the Corpsman supervisor came up with the vacancy at the PX. The center had a PX there for the boys. When the Corpsmen didn't have anything else to do, why, they could go watch a movie, or shoot pool, or buy a candy bar. They were given so much for an allowance each month. They wanted somebody to run that. So I got picked for that, so I was a glorified Pool Hall manager there for a while till it finally closed. One project that we had going, and I had it pretty well accomplished was that from the sales of the small items like candy bars and popcorn and potato chips and everything; we had enough money saved up to buy a television. We had just bought it and were just about to receive it, (they had it ordered), when the final word came that Job Corps was closing. That was in 1969. The spring of 1969. I had been there for about a year and things were really going good for me until we got work that they were going to close. Nixon was going to close everything. We didn't know what was going to happen. My supervisor was a retired Army Major. He was the Corpsmen Supervisor. It was his job to run those Corpsmen like the military. He was an old military man and that's the way he ran things. Anybody who didn't like either bent to his way of thinking or they weren't around very long. He was a good guy if he liked you and you really wanted to like him. He could do a lot of things for you. And he was fair. He was honest and he was fair. Maybe people didn't like the way he ran things, but in the long run it was good. He used to tell me, "Hamel, they can't close this place, we're doing too good of a job! Keep the faith! Do your job and do it good!" He gave us good moral support and he lived what he said and he believed what he said. But when those buses came the first time to pick up those boys he couldn't believe it.

MR. TRANDAHL: This was when they were closing the camp and moving the boys away?

MR. HAMEL: Yep, they were moving the boys. Some of the boys transferred to other camps that were staying open a little bit longer, those that were about to graduate. But the ones who weren't had no other place to go except that we gave them a one-way ticket home. It was sad. Those boys, most of them liked it there. We were out in the woods there at Tamarac. There's the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge up there in the woods. That's what they wanted; a place that was isolated so that when they got there, the boys could be slinking off. It was too far to walk and too cold to hitch a ride in the wintertime. It was a good place to stay in the winter and learn something. We were doing a good job, we were. We had good ratings. Our capacity was two hundred boys; fifty to a dormitory. There were four dormitories. They were named bird names like the Redhead dormitory, the Bluegill for the fish dormitory, golly, it's been so long I've forgotten what the other two were, but they were names of things that were on the refuge so that it all kind of created the atmosphere of fish and wildlife. Of course we had our signs and

emblems and we wore uniforms. All of the employees were given a uniform allowance. We had the shirts and that patches.

MR. TRANDAHL: So you wore the FWS uniform?

MR. HAMEL: Yes, we sure did. We had the hats; caps, coats, shirts, pants and then we had our summer and then our winter uniform. We were given allotments to buy them from different sources of supply. There was a catalog. All our vehicles were marked with the FWS emblem on it. It was a nice organization. I thoroughly enjoyed it. They finally closed it and when the boys were practically all gone and there were only a few of the staff left, Bob Summers he took his daughter and her friend to the movies.

MR. TRANDAHL: He was the Camp Director?

MR. HAMEL: Yes, he was the Corpsmen supervisor. And it so happened that Howard Woon left Refuges, well the refuge phase of it. He was the director from the Minneapolis center. He was the director not only of Tamarac but a few other Job Corps centers in region three. His fellow Bob Summers was an employee of FWS, but in the Job Corps division. He came home that one night and he just couldn't believe what was happening; that they were doing totally away with the Job Corps part of it. He came home and his daughter went in the house to go to bed. He drove the car in the garage and closed the door and that's where they found him the next morning. We had a strange incident with one of the schoolteachers there. He went fishing. This was before Bob's final day. He went fishing to one of the close by lakes that were all around. Someway or another, he didn't make a curve and he ran smack dab into a big tree and that was the end of him.

People took Job Corps serious because it was a good program. It was betterment for a lot of troubled boys. There also were some Job Corps sites in Omaha, Nebraska and in Clinton, Iowa. These two were for females. They had similar programs for girls. We used to do some corresponding with them for different functions and activities that we could correlate with them.

MR. TRANDAHL: When did you leave from there?

MR. HAMEL: I was transferred to Bulla, Wyoming. I had never heard of such a place! What in the world was there? It was a fish hatchery, USFWS fish hatchery. It was a genetics research station raising Rainbow Trout. I arrived there on June 15, 1969. A fellow by the name of Bruno Von Limbaugh was the Director. I can remember the first words that he ever spoke to me. He never looked up. I walked in and introduced myself to Edna Sager, the Clerk. They were expecting me because they had said that they could take some of the employees that had quite a bit of time. At that time I had ten years in. It was a little over ten years, in fact, and I didn't want to waste it. I didn't have enough time to retire. I like the FWS and I wanted to continue. So that was the reason I took the

transfer even though I didn't know anything much about the fish. I was told not to worry. I would be taught anything and everything you'll need to know. Well, it sounded good. Of course they were trying to place as many people as they could, and people were mostly grateful for that fact. I arrived there and the old boy says, "The first thing you better do young man is find you a place to live!" I didn't know what to think or say. I asked him if he had any idea where I might be able to find a place. "We are not in the business of renting places to live! We raise fish!" He told me to hurry and find a place to live and get back in and get to work. I thought that was pretty rude and abrupt. I had never been there before in my life. I didn't know anyone, or any place to go to even look. At that time there was a little motel on the highway, which was to become interstate 90. It was five miles from the fish lab so I rented a room and started to look for a place to live. I went to Spearfish and I went to Belle Fourche and Sundance. Things were tight. I went ahead, before I brought family from Detroit Lakes to see what I could find, and let them know where to bring the furniture and everything we had complete the move. I had to call and tell them not to come. I couldn't find anything! I said, "It's just tighter than fiddle strings!" So the McNenny State fish hatchery was real close. It was about seven or eight miles from the Genetics Research Station. So I went over there and talked with some of the employees. They didn't really know of anything that could be rented or used for a family to live in. They were moving fish. They were busy and I didn't want to take up any more of their time than I had to. So I came back and I didn't know what to do. One of the wives, Mrs. Storebeck, Clarence Storebeck's wife, she had heard that there were going to be some new employees down at Ranch A. She was curious to get acquainted, and I was eager to talk with somebody that would be halfway what I thought was civil and friendly. She told me that there was a ranch house just over the hill from her place. I couldn't believe what she was saying! The house might be available for rent. So I jumped on that right quick, and sure enough it was about a mile and a half from McNenny Fish Hatchery. I rented it from a farmer/rancher. It was a two-story house. I rented the down part. It was two bedrooms, a big living room and a kitchen with a porch and a garage. It was a rural setting, which eventually worked out real good. It was close to Ranch A. The roads weren't too good. I was lucky enough to have an old four-wheel drive that sure came in handy. The roads were terrible. In the wintertime you couldn't hardly get there many times without chaining up the four wheel-drive to get down there and then to get back. It was really tough on vehicles. The area was a beautiful area. Ranch A was in a beautiful setting. It was a former ranch that the government had bought previously through a lot of dealing from Mo Annenberg. His name went down in history. That could be another story for another time. Ranch A was the Annenberg Ranch. It was beautiful. They had a beautiful log lodge and a beautiful barn, which was built. There was another two-story garage/living quarters. Then they had built another complex that they called R and D One. That's where they raised the small fish until they got to be six to eight inches long or one or two pounds. Then, later on they built what they called the R and D Two complex. This was the area for the adult fish. I worked with the adult fish. There were a hundred and twenty-six tanks. Those tanks varied in size from four foot to eight foot. What most of them were was metal livestock tanks that were coated so the



metal wouldn't be toxic to the Rainbow Trout. Then, many of the other deep tanks; they were about four foot deep and eight foot across fiberglass. All of that water down there was artesian. The water was endless. They piped it through various ways to get the most use out of it and raise fish up there at R and D One where they had the eggs. They would spawn the fish and extract the eggs and put them in incubators. That's where we raised a lot of fish.

MR. TRANDAH: So these fish were being developed into new strains and things like this through manipulating the genetics?

MR. HAMEL: Yes, they had several different stains of fish. We had a few albinos. But basically it was the variations of the rainbow trout. What they wanted to do was eventually; well, basically a rainbow trout will spawn once a year, usually in the spring. They wanted to take those fish and hybridize them to the point where they would spawn at least twice a year. The same fish would spawn twice a year. We cross bread, in bread, out bread and eventually it was down. We had fish that would spawn twice a year. That was a real big plus. But it was the way that the personnel was handled that was the sour part of it. The employees were given very little consideration. The Director's name will give you an idea perhaps, of how things was ran, when his name was Bruno Von Limbaugh. That's kind of a tough twister, and he passed that on to his employees. He was a very sharp, critical person.

MR. TRANDAH: We changed the tape here; we were just talking about Bruno.

MR. HAMEL: Yeah, Bruno was an awful hard guy to work with or even for; that was worse. Everybody, all the staff stayed as far away from him as they could because he was always derogatory and critical. Even the neighborhood down there at Sand Creek, close to the ranch never fraternized with the staff because he was so antagonistic. Finally, one incident that we had was that we got word that we were going to have an inspection from our office in Washington. We were directly administered from D.C. They had to fly in to Rapid City and rent a car and drive out. Well, when they got there, it was around mid morning about 9:30 or ten o'clock. They drove up to headquarters and he was in the spring. I was cutting grass that particular morning with the lawnmower. Bruno went out there to greet them and he said, "Where in the world have you fellows been? We start work here at eight o'clock! That's when I expect you people to be here!" He was giving those guys; his supervisors, what for and they were coming from Washington, D.C.! They didn't really take that too well. They didn't like that. It wasn't very long after that that Mr. Bruno received transfer orders. He didn't want to go, but they threatened to close the place up because they didn't feel, or at least the word got down, that they didn't feel that Bruno was accomplishing what the FWS wanted out of Ranch A. He thought they were, so there was a big difference of opinion. He was on the short end and they were on the authority end so he had to do what was sent down. He eventually transferred back to Virginia, I guess. It is some place back east. When he got

there, the story that I've heard is, and it might be a little bit different according to whom you talk to; but when he got there he didn't have any staff, hardly a place to go to call an office, or a room that had anything in it for furniture. He finally had to scrounge a chair and a desk. He never really had anything to do. He was never given any directives to do any work for the FWS. He finally just wrote a note in the desk, that he wasn't coming back and that was the end of him.

Later on, a fellow by the name of Bob Bridges and Ray Simon became directors of the FWS Ranch Aide down there.

MR. TRANDAHL: Ray Simon was before Bob Bridges?

MR. HAMEL: Yes, Ray Simon followed Bruno. He was down there a couple years maybe, and then he transferred out. Then Bob Bridges, who had been there, previously under a different title, came back as Director. He would be the one to finalize the closing of Ranch A. That morning; it was the early part of August or the later part of July, I'm not real sure. It was early fall or late summer, that we had a staff at one time of probably ten or fifteen people. Some lived in Sundance, some lived in Spearfish, some lived in Bulla, and others lived right on the Ranch A complex itself. We, as soon as everybody got there at eight o'clock, the word was that everybody was to go to the main office for a staff meeting. Gee whiz, what in the world is going on now? Everybody walked in and never said a word. They didn't dare say anything. At least, that's what we felt; we didn't want to get somebody's foot shoved down our throats. We just were quiet and listened to what was said. He said, "We are now officially closed. We will start phasing out employees and fish tomorrow." Everybody couldn't believe what we were hearing! It was the process of closing the Fish Genetics Laboratory at Bulla, Wyoming. I, and a fellow by the name of Jack Howell, were offered, since we had been under a writ from the Job Corps; we heard first hand that we would be given the first opportunity to transfer someplace else. He took the transfer. I think he had just built a new home through an FHA program or something like that. He had just about finished this new home in Spearfish. I was living in Sundance, and had recently bought a house. My wife was working at the manager of a motel there in Sundance. We had just recently acquired an apartment house. We had an awful decision to make as to whether to transfer and take a third chance with FWS, or go out on our own. I had enough time. I had I think it was 22 years of federal service; with my military and the time with refuges and the Jobs Corp. And I had put in eleven years plus at Ranch A with the fisheries end of it. I was just short of the age of fifty. You had to be fifty years old and have twenty years service to be able to retire. My birthday is in November, and this happened in August, I believe. It seems like it was in August. They got real sharp and nasty with me because I wouldn't transfer. When I asked them where I was to go they really wouldn't tell me for sure; nor would they give me any satisfaction of actually having a job when I transferred! I might transfer and the job would be done away with before I'd get there. I just didn't feel like I totally wanted to trust those people. They had done a lot of crazy things to people

before, and I didn't feel it was beyond them to do it again. I was worried again. I didn't know what to do. I was about six months short of being able to retire. I thought it was pretty nasty of them not to make some kind of an arrangement so I could fulfill six more months until I was fifty years old and then be able to retire. On my way home from work, back to Sundance, our State Representative, Marlene Simons God bless her. I stopped in there and she was home. I told her what the news was down there at Ranch A and how they were closing it. I told her my situation and how I was just a little short of being able to retire. There's a lot of forest pastureland being permitted to ranchers. And she and her husband had some forest land that they were running cattle on. The forestland was neighbor to Ranch A. There was a lot of resentment and between and jangle between Ranch A, the Forest Service and the Bemidji. Marlene and her husband were somewhat in the middle because they were neighbors and they had land and cattle. She didn't exactly like the way that people had been treated in the past down at Ranch A. She told me, "Don't worry, I will get in contact with Cheyenne and we'll see what we can do." That was the first part of the week, on a Monday or Tuesday. I think it was maybe Wednesday, or the next day after I had seen Marlene that she went to bat. She called Cheyenne; she called Dick Chaney at the time down there. She told him the situation down there. Mr. Chaney said that that fellow, (me), being a Veteran and with as much time as he's got with federal work and with the FWS, will be able to retire. "We will see to it that he does." I think it was the next day after that that my wife, here in Sundance received a call from Washington, D. C. They said don't worry. They had received word through Dick Chaney and Marlene Simons of the situation going on. I was told that I would be transferred until I was old enough to retire. And if I wanted to take retirement rather than continue I had that option. I was feeling pretty good. I did my job the best I could to fill what they wanted, and to do what they wanted down. They got awful sharp with me. They really got to me pretty bad. Bob Bridges, the Director at the time said, "We have made arrangements." I told him, "No, you haven't made anything! I have had telephone conversations, with paper work to follow that I will be able to retire and will be transferred. I don't know exactly where at the moment, but it's all been taken care of and you didn't have a darn thing to do with it!" That really ticked him off! He didn't like me telling him what I already knew. But I just went to work, kept still and did my job and the cards fell in the right direction. I was the last guy to leave and I was not sorry when it happened. I did receive word that I would be transferred to the McNenny Fish Hatchery, which was six, seven, maybe eight miles from Ranch A. I worked over there under Arden Trandahl who turned out to be an awful good friend of mine. I think a lot of him! It come to be November 2, and I was fifty years old. And I said, "I think I'll just go home Arden." We had our home and business and I had my retirement from the FWS. I was too young to retire. I was in good health and I kicked around for a little while. I had an opportunity to become a security officer at the Wyodak Power Plant in Gillette, Wyoming. Due to the fact that on refuges, part of my duties as clerk, I did various duties as directed and as needed. I was a Game Warden. Through law enforcement, the state laws of Nebraska, we regulated the refuge in co ordinance with state laws on hunting deer, antelope, ducks, and some geese. It was my job along with the Refuge Manager and the

maintenance man also to check people who had been given authorization to hunt on the refuge for a license; we had to make sure their hunting license was valid. We also checked their bag limits. It certainly paid off in later life. That was my background that got me in to security work over at the Wyodak power plant. I worked over there two winters and one summer. One day, the County Sheriff who was living here of course at the time, came over. He knew I was security officer. I had gotten acquainted with him. He said, "Keith, I need a jailor. Why don't you come over and start work?" I was surprised, a jailor at a Jail? Working with all of those criminals? He told me, "It's not as bad as you think. Come on over and I'll show you what I want you to do." Holy Cow, I didn't know what to think! I knew that sixty miles every day was getting pretty heavy on the old car. That was a lot of miles. He told me that I would have to use my own car to get the meals for the inmates. Well, in the wintertime it can get pretty cold here and stay cold. Driving a car two or three block and shutting it off and fighting snow is.... I don't know. I turned him down the first time. It was about a year to the month later, here he come again. "I need a Jailor, and I want you to get over there this time!" He told me about the sick leave, and health benefits and all of that good stuff. I told him, "Ron, I don't need the health benefits. I've got it from retiring from the FWS." He says, "Well super! We'll just pay you for it!" That sounded pretty good. And he said that in addition he had arranged to have a County vehicle to be used to go get meals for the inmates. It sounded better all of the time. So I took him up and I became the second Jailor that ever was in Cook County, Wyoming. I was the second Jailor and I also became a Wyoming, Certified Jailor through going to school and obtaining my certification through Douglas. I spent time down at Douglas learning techniques of being a Jailor. I went to classes at Douglas and at Gillette. I was Cook County Jailor for seven years until I was old enough to retire again.

MR. TRANDAHL: It's really quite interesting that your background in the FWS was very useful to you after you retired from the FWS.

MR. HAMEL: Very definitely. It was a total benefit! It worked out super.

MR. TRANDAHL: So what's the best thing that ever happened to you in the FWS?

MR. HAMEL: The best thing that happened? Being hired!

MR. TRANDAHL: Well that's a good answer!

MR. HAMEL: I never regretted that for a minute. Sure, there's differences and hardships that I went through, but all in all, man, that was it! That, I enjoyed!

MR. TRANDAHL: What's the worst thing that happened to you then?

MR. HAMEL: Being transferred to Ranch A! [All laugh] That was something else.

MR. TRANDAHL: Well, there must have been some good experiences out there too, though.

MR. HAMEL: Well, the one incident that really stands out in my mind that happened very shortly after I retired. That was on November 2, 1980. I think November 2<sup>nd</sup> was on a Friday. It worked out just perfect. It was the end of the pay period. I didn't get to see Arden too much. He came out, but his main stay was in Spearfish at the Booth Fish Hatchery. That was number one, and there was McNenny. But never the less, it was a valuable asset. I went home, finished up and waved goodbye. I was done. And the next week, I believe it was, Arden began to set up the Christmas party for the employees as he always did there, apparently. This was something totally different from what we ever dreamed of at Ranch A. It was just another workday there. He called me long distance and said, "What are you doing this Friday night?" I said, "I don't know, what have you got in mind?" And he told me that they were having a Christmas party and that they wanted me to attend. I said, "What, a Christmas party?" He told me that all of the employees were getting together and having a little party and they wanted me to come too. That really swept me off my feet. I really didn't know what to say. It kind of took my breath away. My senses finally came back to me and I said, "Yeah, okay, what time should I be there?" He said, "Oh, after supper. Right away we'll have a little party with a few snacks and have a good time. Six thirty or seven o'clock would work out good." So we did. We went down there and sure enough, everybody was having a good time and visiting. It was unreal. I couldn't believe the atmosphere. It was just unreal. It was super! And later on Arden announced that we were going to have a grab bag. Holy Cow! I hadn't brought anything for a grab bag. He said, "Don't worry about it, it's all been taken care of. I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything. So everybody reached in and pulled a string out. It had a little package. They passed a little basket around and it was my turn, so I pulled out a little package. There was a little bottle of a *real good* perfume! I'll tell you a little dab really did the trick! Everybody was joyful, and talking about what they got and different things that happened. Arden came around and said, "Did you get a package?" I told him I had. And he said, "Well good, I wanted everybody to have something from the party." That was great! That really made the whole thing worth it. To my dying day I will always remember that.

MR. TRANDAHL: How did your family feel about your career with the FWS?

MR. HAMEL: Well, they enjoyed refuge. My youngest boy, the third member of the family was born right after we moved there in 1961. So he was very small, but by the time we left he was about ready to go to school. When we transferred to Detroit Lakes we lived close to Frazee, Minnesota. They had a big school there. I think there were about a thousand kids there that they bused in from all over; grade school kids and high school kids too. It was a big school, and it was like night and day. I thought, oh boy, here we come from a little old one-horse grade school that had one teacher for several years;

and the education they received was quite narrow. Now, they get into a school with this many kids and teachers. I didn't know whether they were going to be able to handle that or not. But they fit in good! It really worked good. As far as the family, well, we loved it on the refuge but it was the fellowship that we had with the boys. Basically those boys were kind, and quite courteous and they were respectful. My wife did volunteer teaching during the school days. She worked during the day and then I would come in at five o'clock and be with the boys 'til about one in the morning when they went to bed. They had a night check. There was another group of guys who made the night checks.

MR. TRANDAHL: This was at the Job Corps?

MR. HAMEL: Yes, this was the Job Corps site. I think the family enjoyed the Job Corps because the kids were small and we went out to various activities and parties they had on the weekends. I think they liked it pretty well too. But this fish place, everybody was nervous on that one.

MR. TRANDAHL: Well, we've about run out of tape here. I just really enjoyed visiting with you today Keith. We've really got some interesting things down here.

MR. HAMEL: It's always a pleasure to visit with you Arden.

MR. TRANDAHL: We always know that sometimes in life the road is bumpy but sometimes, well, we always generally get to the end of the road there, so. I am glad things have worked out for you, and I have certainly enjoyed your friendship. I am just so glad that you took the time to put some of your thoughts and experiences down on tape here. These are very important for people to understand the FWS because we sometimes are not really the image that people think we are. We generally have a good image, you know, and have certainly the best employees in government, I think. I thank you very much and we'll see that you get a copy of this.

MR. HAMEL: Well, thank you Arden. And again, I appreciate everything you've done. This has been an enjoyable afternoon.