

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: John Decker

Date of Interview: February 17, 2005

Location of Interview: Forest Lake, Minnesota

Interviewer: Mark Madison

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 27 years (1977-2004)

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Assistant Manager at Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, Utah; law enforcement work, Lake Andes National Wildlife Refuge, South Dakota; National Elk Refuge, Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In law enforcement went to: Seattle, Washington, training station; St. Paul, Minnesota; Sandusky, Ohio; Phoenix, Arizona; Chicago, Illinois; St. Paul, Minnesota.

Most Important Projects: Helped with Operation Falcon, Cactus case, Texas Waterfowl Case.

Colleagues and Mentors: Marvin Plenert, Cleveland Vaughn, John Gavitt, John Cooper, Terry Grosz, Joel Scrafford, Bill Zimmerman, Adam O'Hara, Bob (Robert) Jarmuz; Bob Standish, Rick Leach, Larry Keeney, Dick (Richard) Lichtenberg, Dennis Crouch, Bob Hodgins, Keith Parcher, Kevin O'Brien, David McMullian, Kevin Adams; Joe Budson, Larry Hood, Dick (Richard) Dickinson, Al Ludden

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Decker talks about early life, going to college and graduating from Iowa State in fisheries and wildlife biology, joining the military, and eventually working for the Fish and Wildlife Service. He would work for refuges before transferring to law enforcement, taking CIS training and going to FLETC, and eventually into special ops before retiring in 2004.

Keywords: history, biography, employee (USFWS), military, waterfowl, assistant manager, refuge law enforcement, wetland easement enforcement, Pine Ridge Reservation, Special Operations, CIS, FLETC (Federal Law Enforcement Training Center), SABS (Special Agent Basic School), cactus case, Texas waterfowl case, Mesabi Fur

Subject/USFW Retiree: John Decker
Thursday, February 17, 2005
Interviewed by: Dorothe Norton

D. Norton:
Well good morning John, its good I finally got out here.

John Decker:
I'm glad you did.

D. Norton:
You've been here ten years, and I finally made it! Okay, so the first thing I am going to ask you in this interview is your birth place and the date.

John Decker:
I was born in Burlington, Iowa and the date was January 9, 1951.

D. Norton:
January 9th, that's my grandson's birthday.

John Decker:
Really?

D. Norton:
Yeah. Okay, and your parent's names?

John Decker:
My dad was John and my mother is Alberta, both good German names.

D. Norton:
What were their jobs and education?

John Decker:
Well, my dad was a tool and dye maker, so he worked in machine shops a lot. He was a high school graduate and then he did his apprentice work in tool and dye making, so that's what he did all of his life. My mom went to the University of Iowa, but she didn't finish, she got interrupted by the war. She was pretty much a homemaker all of her life until us kids, I have a sister and a brother, until all of the kids were gone and then she went to work for the public school system in their lunch program, so she served lunch, just mostly for something to do.

D. Norton:
Yes, to keep busy.

John Decker:
Yes.

D. Norton:
So where did you spend your early years, all in Iowa?

John Decker:
Until I graduated from college, Iowa State, and from then on I started just moving around basically.

D. Norton:
Did you have any hobbies or books that you liked to do or anything special when you were a kid?

John Decker:
Well, I played a lot of sports, baseball and basketball and all that, and did a lot of hunting with my dad.

D. Norton:
Oh that's good, fishing too or just hunting?

John Decker:
Well fishing too, sure.

D. Norton:
So your dad taught you?

John Decker:
Yeah, well we lived on the Mississippi River, so there was a lot of fishing and hunting going on. Yeah, yeah we had a good time with that.

D. Norton:
Well, while you were in high school did you ever have any kind of a job?

John Decker:
Oh yeah, I worked all kinds of part-time jobs, I guess mostly I worked in gas stations.

D. Norton:
Oh, okay.

John Decker:
Working on cars, pumping gas, and changing oil. Simple stuff, but needed spending money, needed beer money!

D. Norton:
While you were still in high school!

John Decker:
Well of course!

D. Norton:
Okay. So what high school did you graduate from, and where was it located?

John Decker:
While in Burlington there is a catholic high school, it's called Notre Dame High School.

D. Norton:
What year did you graduate?

John Decker:
1969.

D. Norton:
Okay, and then did you go to the university after that?

John Decker:
I went to Iowa State University, straight to college.

D. Norton:
What degree did you get there?

John Decker:
Fisheries and wildlife biology.

D. Norton:
Okay.

John Decker:
Actually, I started out in engineering, it didn't take too long and I figured out that wasn't what I really wanted to do. Just looking all through the different degrees available, I saw fisheries and wildlife biology was one, checked it out, it looked like what I wanted to do, so that's where I spent the rest of my time.

D. Norton:
Okay, so you got a bachelors degree then?

John Decker:
Yep.

D. Norton:
What aspect of your formal education equipped you for the future?

John Decker:

Well, mostly the background in biology, wildlife biology was just imperative for working for the Fish and Wildlife Service. It wasn't actually required and still isn't required that you have a biology background, but if you're going to work for Fish and Wildlife Service it seems like you ought to know a duck from a deer! It doesn't seem like that's required anymore!

D. Norton:

So then you didn't have any military service?

John Decker:

Oh yes, yes.

D. Norton:

Oh you did?

John Decker:

When I went to college, that's of course when Vietnam was going on, and many of the guys that I graduated from high school with went over to Vietnam, and I went to college and of course was deferred, but always thought that well maybe I owed something to the country. Also, during college, and I think it was my last year but it might have been the year before, they came up with the lottery system and even some of the kids that were in college ended up getting drafted, I got one of those really high numbers so I knew I wasn't ever going to get drafted, but I thought maybe I owed something. Vietnam was still going on when I graduated in 1973, of course it was starting to wind down, but I still thought well maybe I ought to do some time in the military. I had a chance because I was a college graduate, I had a chance to get into the military flight training program, so I chose the Navy and went to their Navy flight school and was a pilot for the Navy. But just for short while. What happened is when I was going through the instrument flying school I got an eye infection and I couldn't read the instruments in the airplane very well, so they sent me all over and they sent me to the military hospital in Bethesda in Washington D.C., trying to figure out what was wrong. They never did actually come up with a cause for the infection, and ultimately they told me, well actually the Admiral called me in and he said, "Well, it looks like you are going to be grounded for a year." So they gave me a little time and I taught ground school to the new pilots, and then they called me in and they said, "Well, you know we can't afford to pay you all this pay for flying if you're not flying." They gave me a choice, they said, "You can either be executive officer on a submarine or we'll let you out of your commitment and let you out of the service." I said, "Well, of the two choices I'm going to take the second one, I'll see you later!" I wasn't interested in submarines.

D. Norton:

Yeah.

John Decker:

So anyway, I left and I went back to Iowa then, not really knowing what I was going to do. I started working for a local company there in Burlington, a construction thing. I was testing concrete and asphalt and doing some surveying. I don't know where it came from or how even the Fish and Wildlife Service got my name, but I was working on a big construction project, they were building a big hospital, about a city square block-sized hospital, all of the sudden I got a call from Fish and Wildlife Service in Salt Lake City, Utah, they wanted to know if I'd be interested in moving to Fish Springs Refuge.

D. Norton:

In Utah?

John Decker:

Yes, in Utah. I remember the guy when he asked me that, I said, "Well what are you going to pay?" I was kind of intrigued with the idea but then he phoned me, he said, "About \$9,000.00 a year." That was in 1977, and that was way less than what I was currently making and I said, "You know, I'll have to think about it for a little while, can I give you a call back?" He said, "Well, we've got to know today if you want the job." So we hung up and I thought about it for like a couple of hours was all, and I knew that I didn't want to work construction like I was working, I didn't particularly want to stay in Iowa. So I called him back and I said, "Well, I'll take the job." It was funny because, like I said, I don't have any idea how they got my name, I don't recall applying for anything, and the other deal was once I said I'll take the job, I said, "Well, when do you want me out there?" and he said, "Well, can you make it in the next two weeks?" and I said, "Well, okay." But within that two weeks, the two week time frame, I got a call from the Forest Service, and they offered me a job also up in the mountains, I don't remember exactly, in Utah, working for the forest service. Also, I got another call from the Forest Service, a different national forest, and they wanted to know if I'd be interested in another job with the Forest Service, also in Utah!

D. Norton:

Oh jeeze!

John Decker:

And I don't know where all that came from, but I ended up I took the one with the Fish and Wildlife Service. So I just rented a U-Haul trailer, I didn't have much to haul back then!

D. Norton:

You were single then?

John Decker:

Single, yeah. I drove out to Utah, and I remember I got to Salt Lake City, my job was assistant manager at Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, and I got to Salt Lake City and they'd given me instructions or directions on how to get to Fish Springs Refuge, it was about 140 miles south and west of Salt Lake City. They said it was on a dirt road

and it wasn't a very good road, and they told me, they said, "Well, make sure you gas up your car at this place which is before you get on this dirt road." So I gassed up the car and started out this dirt road, and it was a bad road, bumpy and windy and over hills and mountains. I remember I was driving out there on this old dusty, nasty road, and I got to the point to where the gas gauge was about half, and I thought well, I hope this place is coming up pretty soon because I might have to turn around and go back! But I kept going and eventually I came to Fish Springs Refuge, and I was way below half tank of gas, so I knew I didn't have enough to even get back, but they had gas out there that I could buy. So, that's where my career started. February of 1977 I showed up and didn't know anything about what I was doing, didn't know anything about what I was supposed to do or who I was working with or anything. The funny thing is, my salary was \$9303.00 a year, and I remember when I got my very first paycheck and it was for two weeks, of course, and it was for less than \$100.00 for two weeks, and even though back then the government supplied me with a house to live in, but I remember going to the boss and saying, "I don't know what happened, but I'll starve to death if I can't make more money than that!" He said, "Well, you will, you just to have to bear with it." But anyway, that was my thoughts, that my first paycheck for two weeks was less than \$100.00 net, and I thought oh my, what did I do!

D. Norton:

When I started with the Navy back in the 1950's, it was \$2,983.00 a year!

John Decker:

Yeah.

D. Norton:

So let's get back to the service, so you were in about two years in the Navy then, about?

John Decker:

Yes, just about.

D. Norton:

You didn't have to go overseas at all?

John Decker:

No. Like I said, while I was still finishing up the flight training that's when I got that eye infection, so I never did.

D. Norton:

Where was that duty station?

John Decker:

Where I ended up was in Corpus Christi, Texas.

D. Norton:

Oh, that's a pretty nice place.

John Decker:
Yeah, not too bad.

D. Norton:
So, did you ever get the decorations or any special awards while you were in the service?

John Decker:
No, they gave everybody a metal, or it was a ribbon actually, that served in the military during the Vietnam War. They gave everybody the same thing, so it wasn't anything special.

D. Norton:
Now before we get to your career, first you didn't meet Beth until after you were already working for Fish and Wildlife, but we like to know when and where and how you met.

John Decker:
Well, I was, of course, already transferred then to Law Enforcement and I was stationed in St. Paul, Minnesota. Back then we were in the Federal Building, the 6th floor, downtown St. Paul, and just down the hall from our office was the regional office for ATF. I knew the ATF agents, the regional director, and one day a new secretary came to work for ATF and I remember seeing her walk down the hall, and I thought that's a nice one! I remember asking then the regional director about this gal and I remember him telling me, he said, "Well, she's a nice girl, you stay away from her!" Well, of course we got to meet because she was just two doors down. So that's where I met her, she worked for ATF and I worked for Fish and Wildlife.

D. Norton:
Okay, and so then when and where did you get married?

John Decker:
Well, while I was in St. Paul then I transferred away from here and went into Special Ops, and I was over in Ohio and Beth stayed here and worked. Then I got transferred from Ohio down to Phoenix, Arizona. Beth came over to Ohio and visited a few times and when I went down to Phoenix, I remember I asked her if she'd come down and help me hunt for a house down there, and so she came down and helped me find the house that I bought and then she went back home. Like I said, we just stayed in touch and visited a few times, and when I came back to St. Paul I visited her, and ultimately I asked her if she wanted to transfer down to Phoenix with ATF or if she could. She started looking around, she couldn't stay with ATF but she was able to find a job with Customs down in Phoenix. So she did transfer to Customs and worked for Customs, and she moved down to Phoenix and we lived together there for probably a year or maybe a little more, and then she was able to eventually transfer over to ATF in Phoenix. In 1990 we decided we should get married, so June 1, 1990 we got married. We came back to St. Paul because that's where Beth's family, most of them, lived, and so we came back to St. Paul and got married and then went back to Phoenix.

D. Norton:

Well that's good, and now you have one little boy and he's only two, so we don't know yet what he is going to be when he grows up, but he sure is going to be a charmer!

John Decker:

Yeah, he is that!

D. Norton:

Okay, now we'll go into all of this career stuff. You started in Salt Lake City?

John Decker:

Yes, in 1977.

D. Norton:

And so, where did you go from there? How long were you there?

John Decker:

Well, I was in Fish Springs Refuge for it must have been about a year, and that was a place out in the middle of nowhere and there was just four guys; a refuge manager, assistant manager, and a couple of mechanics, and that was it! It was kind of an event just to see a car coming in, and there weren't many. So, that was kind of a desolate place, and for a single guy it wasn't, well you know, I wasn't going to stay there too long! I got a call then from the regional office, actually the guy that was the head of refuges then was a guy named Marvin Plenert, and he ultimately was the regional director in Portland, Oregon, but anyway, Marvin Plenert asked me, he said, "Do you want to transfer to South Dakota?" And I said, "Well, sure." So I moved to Lake Andes Refuge in South Dakota, and even though it was a small, little town of 800, but it was about 800 more people than Fish Springs! So, anyway I transferred there, and I was there for about four years. There I got to do a little more law enforcement work and worked with some of the agents, I did all of the wetland easement enforcement stuff in South Dakota, around Lake Andes.

D. Norton:

What part of the state is that?

John Decker:

Well, actually the south central part of the state, right on the Missouri River. So, I got to meet several of the agents, Cleveland Vaughn, John Gavitt, John Cooper, Terry Grosz, Joel Scrafford, and some others. Anyway, it seemed like something I liked to do, and I worked with them several times on different little projects, weekends. Gavitt one time while I was still in Lake Andes, he had an eagle feather thing he wanted to work on out in on the Pine Ridge Reservation, so he wanted to know if I'd go with him and help him on an undercover buy, and I said, "Sure." So we went out there, and I remember Gavitt was of course an agent then in Sioux City, Iowa, and he was pretty green, and of course I was too! But I remember we went out there and we were going to buy some eagle feathers from an Indian lady and we were going to go into a general store, and that's where

supposedly they were selling them out of the back room, and we went into this store and Gavitt had a shoulder holster on, I didn't even have a gun with me. Anyway, we went in there and went into the back room and bought a box of eagle feathers and as we were leaving, this was an old general store, wood floor place, as we were leaving I remember all of Gavitt's bullets fell out of his shoulder holster and they were just boom-boom-boom on this wood floor, and Gavitt didn't know what to do, so he went out the door and left me in there! I didn't know what this lady, what she thought, but I was standing there and I was kicking the bullets out the door and Gavitt was outside picking them up. I don't remember but I think there were six, and I got outside and I said, "How many did you find?" "Five." So we jumped in the car and got the heck out of there!

D. Norton:

That was your introduction to law enforcement!

John Decker:

That was my first undercover buy! Anyway, I've done some law enforcement things. Then Marvin Plenert again called, and he wanted to know if I wanted to transfer to the National Elk Refuge in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and I said, "Well of course!" So I went out there and was out there for a year and a half or so I guess. I still kept in contact with some of the agents that I knew, and Gavitt, he was one of them. Eventually he was working on, well it was Operation Falcon was what it was, and another operation thing and I can't remember the name of it, but he was doing stuff in Montana. By then, Gavitt had transferred to Special Operations; he was doing all undercover stuff. Anyway, he would do whatever he was doing up in Montana and then he would stop down to my place in Jackson Hole, and sometimes he would hide a car there, spend the night for a couple of days. Anyway, again it seemed interesting, and I did whatever refuge law enforcement work on that Elk Refuge, and then one day Gavitt asked me, he said, "You want to transfer to law enforcement?" And I said, "Well, I hadn't really thought of it but maybe, yeah, sure." And he said, "Well, if you do, Terry Grosz wants to talk to you down in Denver." He said, "So you've go to drive down to Denver and talk to him, interview." So, I did, and that was in 1983, and so I went down and actually I talked to Terry Grosz. The interview, I don't remember a lot of it, but I remember Grosz was going to give me a test, and he asked me a couple of wildlife questions, and I remember one of the questions was what mammal had the most teeth, and I got that right, I told him possum. He asked me what the smallest duck was and I told him teal, green-winged teal, and I got that one right. So he said, "Well okay, you're hired, we'll make you an agent." So he hired me as an agent. At that time, John Doggett was the...

D. Norton:

Chief of Law Enforcement.

John Decker:

No, he was the Chief of Training.

D. Norton:

Oh, Donald (unclear).

John Decker:

Yeah, Donald (unclear). Well, Grosz said, "Well, Doggett will call you and tell you what's going." So Doggett did, he called me and he said I had to report to training, and then he asked me, he said, "Well, where do you want to go?" I said, "Well, what are my choices?" He said Seattle or Los Angeles or Dallas, and I said, "None of those are actually my first choice but I said, "Of those three, if I have to choose one I'll take Seattle." He said, "Well good because that's where I was going to send you anyway!" So anyway, I went down to FLETC and went through CIS first. If I remember right, we had a little interim period where we went back to our duty station, and of course all of my stuff was still in Jackson Hole, so I packed up all of my stuff and drove it up to Seattle and found a place to stay. Shortly thereafter I had to go down to SABS at FLETC, and so I went to SABS and then back to Seattle.

D. Norton:

And from there where did you from Seattle?

John Decker:

Well, I spent not even a year in Seattle as my training station. I remember when I got to Seattle, the SRA, who was supposed to be my training officer, he was on medical leave, Dick (Richard) Lichtenberg, he'd gotten hurt and he was on medical, there was another agent, Larry Keeney, in the office, but he was doing full-time undercover work and so I hardly ever saw him and when you did, he'd come in, go into his office and shut the door and that was the end of that, that's all you'd see until he left at the end of the night. The only other officer there was Dennis Crouch.

D. Norton:

Oh sure, okay.

John Decker:

Dennis Crouch had just moved the same week that I showed up, he's moved from Des Moines to Seattle, I told Crouch I said, "Well, here I am, what do you want me to do?" He said, "I don't know, I'm not sure what I'm doing!" So anyway, we kind of muddled through for six months, and that was my training. I hung around with Crouch and he taught me everything, not everything, but he taught me what I needed to know, something. Then, I guess it was our first in-service, as I remember it was down at FLETC, I ran into Bob {Hodgins} and Bob told me, he said, "Come on over, I want to talk to you." So I visited with Bob a little bit and he said, "Would you like to transfer to St. Paul, Minnesota?" I kind of thought about it for a little bit, but at the same time Keith {Parcher} was the SAC in Seattle, and I knew he was planning to move me from Seattle to Portland, Oregon to work on an undercover fish case, and I wasn't really fond of the idea of moving to Portland, so when {Hodgins} asked me if I'd move to St. Paul, I said, "Well, yeah." He said, "Okay, in two just report to St. Paul." I remember asking Bob, I said, "Well, I've got to go back and tell {Parcher} that I'm leaving." He said, "Don't worry about, I'll handle that." So I never said anything to anybody other than the guys I worked with, I just loaded up like {Hodgins} said, and drove to St. Paul. So anyway, that's how I got to St. Paul.

D. Norton:
From there, then you went...?

John Decker:
From St. Paul, I was here...

D. Norton:
Two or three years?

John Decker:
Yeah, I guess something like that, a couple of years. Then Gavitt again, he called and he wanted to know if I wanted to join the Special Ops, and I said "Well sure, I'll do that undercover stuff." So they sent me over to Sandusky, Ohio. We were working on a fish case, Great Lakes fish investigation. Ultimately, it really didn't go anywhere, kind of went in the tank. Then Gavitt transferred me down to Phoenix, Arizona to work on a cactus case, so transferred down there and worked on the cactus case and worked on several other cases as well. There was, as I remember, the eagle feather case in Arizona and Mexico, and that's where I basically met Rick Leach, he was working for ops and that's what he was working on. So I worked with him some and worked with Bob Standish on a Texas waterfowl case where we hunted with all of the waterfowl guides along the whole Texas coast. But my main job was that cactus case, and worked with (unclear) and met, well I knew Bob (Robert) Jarmuz from when he was here in Minnesota and worked on Mesabi Fur, some on that. Then, of course Jarmuz went to Special Ops just before I did. Anyway, so that was kind of my Special Ops thing. Then in 1991, when things had changed in Ops, and the cases that I had worked on were over and Adam O'Hara was the SAC of Special Ops, and he gave me kind of an ultimatum that I had to move to Washington D.C., and I didn't want to do that. So the alternative was to go back to Region 3 where he came from, and the only place open was Chicago. So I went to Chicago and spent about four years, from 1991 to 1995, in Chicago. I always wanted to get back to Minnesota. Of course again, that's where Beth was from and most of her family is here, so in '95, over the objections of the ASAC, that was Bill Zimmerman at the time, his thoughts were that he didn't want to transfer people within the region because it cost too much, ending up paying for two moves. But over his objections, I ended up getting back to St. Paul in '95, and here I am! So it worked out for me.

D. Norton:
Yeah, you bet, and eligible for retirement and that's what you did.

John Decker:
Yeah.

D. Norton:
Well that's good. Do you remember all of your supervisors in all of these different places?

John Decker:

Sure, sure, the Law Enforcement ones anyway.

D. Norton:

You said Keith {Parcher} was...

John Decker:

When I first started in Seattle my supervisor, again, his name was Dick Lichtenberg, and he was out on a medical, so I saw him maybe every couple of weeks. He would just call me up and tell me to come pick him up and we'd go for pastry or coffee, and that was that for an hour or two maybe, and that was all I saw of Lichtenberg. Then Keith {Parcher} was the SAC in Region 1. When I came to St. Paul, my direct supervisor was Kevin O'Brien, he was the SRA. Bob {Hodgins} and David McMullin, Hodgins was the SAC and McMullin was the ASAC.

D. Norton:

In Jackson Hole, of course, Terry was the RD for the Law Enforcement.

John Decker:

Yes, when I was in Region 6 all that time. I remember actually, of course, when I was working for refuges, I didn't think a lot about the regional law enforcement people, but I remember Terry Grosz was the SRA in Bismarck, North Dakota. I remember he had a new agent, I think he might have been the trainee then, by the name of John Cooper.

D. Norton:

He trained him well because he's doing a good job.

John Decker:

Yes, the Director of South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks. I remember when I was in Lake Andes Refuge Cooper had a chance to move from Bismarck, North Dakota down to take the SRA job in Pierre, South Dakota. I remember he did that while I was at Lake Andes Refuge, and that's where I got to know Cooper. Anyway, after Grosz left North Dakota, Joel Scrafford came in as the SRA. Ultimately, Scrafford went out to Billings, Montana. When I moved to the Elk Refuge, Scrafford was still in Billings, and I would see him every once in awhile when he came down to Wyoming. When I left St. Paul, I went into Special Ops like I said, and at that time John Gavitt was the SAC of Ops and Kevin Adams was the ASAC. In Ops things changed, and Gavitt left and Adam O'Hara was the SAC.

D. Norton:

Rick Leach was just a Special Ops agent, never was...

John Drecker:

Well Leach was before Gavitt the SAC of Special Ops, but he decided he wanted to get out of that Washington office, and just went to work in the field in Phoenix. He went to

Phoenix, I think, because his wife's had some relation in Phoenix, and also because it was work that they wanted done, of course. I never really worked for Rick, I just worked with him. When I got out of Ops in Chicago Joe {Budson} was the SRA. Well, I guess it was Larry Hood who was the SAC in the Twin Cities and Zimmerman, by that time, was the ASAC. Actually, Zimmerman came to the Twin Cities under {Hodgins}, and he ended up staying around the Twin Cities a long time. But ultimately Zimmerman transferred away too, but that was when I was in Chicago. No, I was already in St. Paul.

D. Norton:

So, who was your supervisor in St. Paul?

John Drecker:

In St. Paul, when I first transferred here in '95 it was Dick (Richard) Dickinson.

D. Norton:

Okay. Of course now when he retired, his name, who is the guy who is in charge of the St. Paul office now?

John Drecker:

Al Ludden.

D. Norton:

I met him just that one day. Okay, you remember them very good.

John Drecker:

Yeah.

D. Norton:

Did you feel that you had promotion opportunities then too when you became an agent?

John Drecker:

Well, you always felt like you had promotion opportunities.

D. Norton:

So when you started what did you start as when you transferred into law enforcement, a 7 or a 9?

John Drecker:

No, in refuges I was a GS-11, and they busted me back to GS-9 when I transferred to law enforcement.

D. Norton:

Okay, but now that you're retired, what did you retire as, a 12 or 15?

John Drecker:

I retired as a 12. See, I was promoted to a 13 in Special Ops over a lot of people's objections, Clark David and Jerry Smith, they didn't think we ought to be. Anyway, we finally convinced them that that's what the journeyman position ought to be and we got it. Then, when I got out of Ops, they busted me back to a 12 step 10, so I've been a 12 step 10 since 1991 until 2004, when I retired.

D. Norton:

So the training that you received was mostly what you did a lot of anyway from doing refuge training, but you received the training mostly on the job plus the annual training that they have every year.

John Drecker:

Yep, that's about it, and a few other courses here and there.

D. Norton:

So, did you ever have to work with animals, with the animals themselves?

John Drecker:

Oh yeah, of course. When we were in Special Ops I worked with basically Leaches case, I worked with Operation (unclear). We were buying parrots from both South America and Mexico, Australian parrots and African parrots. Some of them were babies and we'd have to house them and clean their carriages and do all the selling and run the quarantine station. It was nasty, nasty work, but yeah.

D. Norton:

How did you feel toward the animals when you would get them, sorry for them, want to keep them alive?

John Drecker:

Of course, a lot of them you knew were not going to be treated well. Other cases, you know things were being killed, but you know that's all part of it. Of course as a hunter, you know that hunting and harvesting as a manager, it's all a management tool, and sometimes some things have to be sacrificed for the greater good. But that's just part of it.

D. Norton:

How do you think the service was perceived by people outside the agency?

John Drecker:

For the most part, I think their perception is that the service is doing good, and for the most part, I think that's probably true and accurate. You know, unlike any other taxpayer, even when I worked for the service, there's a lot of bureaucracy and a lot of waste. Bureaucracy is hard to change and hard to persuade, and maybe oversized.

End of Dictation...

Note: Names in brackets { } = unverified spelling

Key Words: history, biography, employee (USFWS), military, waterfowl, assistant manager, refuge law enforcement, wetland easement enforcement, Pine Ridge Reservation, Special Operations, CIS, FLETC (Federal Law Enforcement Training Center), SABS (Special Agent Basic School), cactus case, Texas waterfowl case, Mesabi Fur,