

# Oral History

of

## W.O. "Bill" Nelson

Interviewed by:  
Jerry Grover & Bob Ruesink  
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**ABSTRACT:** At one time in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Predator and Rodent Control Program was the single largest budget item of the Service and employed more than half of all Service employees, and all the Regional Directors had their beginnings in this program. W.O. 'Bill' Nelson from his earliest days working in the field of wildlife resources was part of this effort. His many assignments throughout areas west of the Mississippi River and the Washington Office challenged him on other multiple conservation management issues until he retired in January 1980 as part of the Fish & Wildlife Service Directorate as the Regional Director for the Southwest Region in Albuquerque, NM for the final 10 years of his career. While thoroughly a supporter of the 'gopher choker' program and its use of the poison 1080 he has also been recognized for his efforts in the recovery of America's conservation bird, the whooping crane. Bill lives in his home in Twin Falls, Idaho with his daughter Jackie nearby.

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### ORDER of PRESENTATION

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### THE ORAL HISTORY

**JG:** This is Jerry Grover, a retired Ecological Services & Fishery supervisor in the Portland Regional Office and I am in Twin Falls, Idaho, to do an oral history on W.O. "Bill" Nelson regarding his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. With me today is Bob Reusink, a retired project leader from the Boise Ecological Services Field Office. Bill where were you born and raised?

**WN:** I was born in American Fork, Utah in 1921. I'm 88 years old.

**JG:** When you retired, what was your position and where were you located?

**WN:** When I retired, I was the Southwest Regional Director at the Fish & Wildlife Service Regional Office in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**JG:** How did you get interested in the field of Fish and Wildlife?

**WN:** My father worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service back when it was called the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, in the Division of Predator and Rodent Control. I worked one summer for the Forest Service while I was in college, and then the other two summers I worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service doing rodent control work in the high Uintah Mountains in Utah. Then, I went into the Army in World War II. After I got out, I

completed my degree at Utah State University and was hired by the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1948 right after I graduated. My first job was a joint project with the Utah State Game and Fish Department and the Fish and Wildlife Service on an antelope/coyote study in the western desert in Utah. We lived at the U.S. Forest Service Ranger Station about 50 miles west of Milford, UT.

In 1948, a severe winter weather hit the west desert across the country. A number of livestock froze to death or starved. We had one daughter, Judy, who became ill and my wife called the nearest doctor in Fillmore and while she was talking to him the line went dead. He went down to the drug store and told the druggist that Judy was sick and he could not get any medicine to her. There were some national newspaper reporters there, and they picked the story up and it made national news. A national commentator came on that night and said, "I have sad news tonight. The Nelson Baby at the Forest Service Desert Range Experiment Station in Western Utah is dying of malnutrition because no one can reach her because of the snowstorm." Of course, we had enough food to last us a month, and you know how a kid is, the next day she was well. We had no TV, no radio, and no power out there, so we did not know all of this was making national news. It was a great worry to our parents. This went on for a week before the Forest Service got an emergency radio to us, and many people were making all kinds of ways to rescue us. The doctor in Milford was a paramedic during World War II, and he said that he would get a parachute and parachute in to us, to treat her. When we found out about it we located a Forest Service emergency radio and told him that Judy was well, and not to come. In a couple of days, he got skis for his airplane out of Wyoming and flew in. We told him to go as we did not want to feed him also. We were snowbound for 20-some days. When we left, I stopped by the doctor's office in Milford and asked him how much I owed him. He said, "not a thing". He said,

“If I get away from this without being reprimanded for all those false stories I’ll just be lucky”. Then, I went to Salt Lake. I worked out of that office for 2-3 months before I was transferred to Phoenix, Arizona. When I was in Phoenix a month or two later, I read in the paper where the Doctor got some national award for heroism for going out there saving the Nelson baby.

**JG:** What grade were you hired in as a GS grade?

**WN:** It was a SP.

**JG:** A what?

**WN:** SP-6?. Yep or a SP-5!

**JG:** I don’t know that classification ...That’s before my time.

**WN:** SP is *Sub-Professional*, a classification. And when I went to Phoenix, I was hired as a GS-5 Wildlife Biologist.

**JG:** With a college degree?

**WN:** It was the lowest grade possible for a professional series. We damn near starved to death on that wage. I got my big check every two weeks and would take it into the bank and cash it. This one time I was late getting to the bank so I went to the grocery store and a kid was checking me out. I gave him my check and he said “Oh! I see you make the same every week that I make!” That was two weeks as a GS-5. Salaries were low right after the war. It was a while before they started raising them to make them more equal with the private sector. I was in Phoenix for about a year working as an Assistant to the State’s District Agent for Predator and Rodent Control. I worked all over the State.

I then was lucky to be selected to go to Washington, D.C. as a Department of Interior trainee on a 9 month program. However, they asked me to stay for a year to work on a special program. That was in 1954. I spent four months working in the Secretary of the Interior’s office and four months in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), working on different things. It was a good assignment. At the time the BLM did everything under the sun to get me to go to work for them at a higher grade. Then, the Fish and Wildlife Service finally gave me a GS-7. You know, living in Washington as a GS-6 with a child is pretty hard to do.

Then they sent me back to Phoenix. I was in Phoenix for about three or four months and they transferred me to Manhattan, Kansas, where I opened an office in cooperation with the Kansas Farm Bureau and Kansas State University. I ran that office for about a year. After a year, Dorr Green, who was the Division Chief, come by and asked me what I thought about the job and I said, “Kansas State University does not want to cooperate with the Fish and Wildlife Service. They want me to become an assistant professors and run the same program through the college.”

I was still doing strictly predator control work on coyotes as the target species. Kansas had an unbelievable population. They had never been controlled. One time we used 1080. It was the best poison available but it got such a bad name that we had to stop

using it. It was the most specific type of poison if you wanted to kill coyotes, but it would also kill dogs and foxes. You only put out one bait every six miles. The coyotes range is far, you could control them, but it would kill the dogs that ate on the bait giving it the bad name.

We would bait a carcass - 99% were horses, and use 1080 in a liquid form. You would insert the poison in the meat. Then you take the meat, like a leg out and tie it down with a stake so it couldn’t be carried away, and then leave it out for three or four months. Then you would go back and get it and either burn it or bury it, so it would not be eaten by anything else. That’s what got me in good with Nat Reed, who was then Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks in the Department of the Interior. In all of this controversy, Nat relied on me a great deal. I was flying back and forth to Washington every time I would turn around to meet with Congressional delegations, with Nat Reed, and others who were objecting to the use of it. Of course we found that we had to stop its use because of all the objections.

I went to Oklahoma City to work as the State Supervisor for Oklahoma and Kansas District and was there for about four years. I had about 35 or so trappers working in Oklahoma but none in Kansas. P&RC and had nothing going on in Kansas except meeting with the Farm Bureau and doing some extension-type work. Then, I moved to Oklahoma City. I was told I would replace old A.E. Gray who had been the State Supervisor for a long time. He was very ineffective and they tried to get him to retire but he was not willing to go. They had a law back then where you could work until you were 70, if you proved to be capable. He hired a lawyer to prove himself capable and he worked right up till he was 69 or so. After he retired I was the State Supervisor there for those two states for about four years. I received a promotion to a GS-11.

Then the Regional Supervisor’s job in Minneapolis, Minnesota, opened up, after Noble Beuell, who was then the Supervisor went to Washington as a Division Chief. He recommended me for this position. Dan Jantzen was the Regional Director in Minneapolis he came down and asked me if I would take it. Albuquerque tried to get me come over there as Assistant Regional Director, but I could get a grade higher going to Minneapolis. It was good for me but kind of tough on the family to keep moving. I stayed there for about four years. While I was there, I supervised along with other offices, an office in Purdue University that mainly experimented with new rodent and bird control agents.

While we were there the Purdue office experimented with Warfarin now used as a blood thinner world wide. They found out that it would also kill rats and mice by over thinning their blood. That’s where they came up with D-Con. Warfarin gets its name from the Wisconsin Alumni Foundation. The Foundation sent me a great big block of cheese that I divided up with the office in Minneapolis. We did a lot of bird research controlling birds and it was unbelievable. It scared the hell out of me. We had one guy, Fitzwater was his name, he’d do anything to find out how to kill nuisance birds. You know starlings are all right when you get 50 or 100 or 200 or 500, but when you get 4 or 5 million as some Midwest towns did, they became a problem. Bill Fitzwater got to where he could kill them or scare them away.

Histoplasmosis in birds was a big concern at the time. That was a disease the city fathers had to deal with because of the massive amounts of bird droppings on their streets. Fitzwater killed a lot of birds experimenting with them. One time, when he was showing Indianapolis fire department how to scare birds from a big bridge going into town Fitzwater took his car or panel truck where he had all these fireworks stored to scare the birds off the bridge. He had a big cigar in his mouth and he dropped it down in the firecrackers. We got a lot of publicity out of that!

**JG:** I'd like to step back just a moment and return to where you alluded to your family was present here...where did you meet your wife?

**WN:** I was going to Brigham Young University and she was in high school, in Pleasant Grove, Utah. She was an extremely brilliant young lady. She was the valedictorian. She was in the school plays and I think of her as a beautiful young lady. She was very talented. When I was working in Minneapolis, she developed a system of using flannel boards to tell old classical children stories to schools and on TV. She told these stories for money. Her usual fee was \$100.00 or \$150.00 depending on the size of the audience. She also told these stories on public television. When I was transferred to Washington D.C. she did some more of the same in a number of the schools in that area. There she started to develop MS, [multiple sclerosis] and she had to give it up. She passed away about 8 years ago.

Judy, my oldest, retired 4 or 5 years ago as Deputy State Director of the Bureau of Land Management in Portland, Oregon. My second daughter, Jacque, teaches science here at the junior high in Twin Falls, Idaho. My youngest daughter is an engineer and she teaches engineering at Cal Poly (California Polytechnic State University) in San Luis Obispo, California, so they have all been very successful. They all take after their mother.

**JG:** Let's go back to where you are in Minneapolis. When you took the job in Minneapolis and you were a GS-12 now?

**WN:** That's right. I was a GS-11 in Oklahoma and became a GS-12 as the Regional Supervisor in Minneapolis. Predator and Rodent Control was a big thing in Region 2 but not here. Refuges dominated the programs here in Region 3.

**JG:** But you stayed mainly in the Predator and Rodent Control program, P&RC?

**WN:** Yes. About 4 years later I was asked to transfer to Washington, D.C. by my former Regional Director Dan Jantzen in Minneapolis who had just recently transferred to Washington, D.C. as the Director of the Service.

Earlier he had selected Noble Beuell as his Chief of the P&RC program in Minneapolis. Then he moved Noble up to the Division Chief for P&RC in Washington then very shortly as Assistant Director for Wildlife. The new Director flew out to Minneapolis, I think for 2 reasons. One, was to ask me to go to Washington, but the other was to come and visit old friends. Anyway, a man by the name of Cliff Presnell, was Chief of the P&RC Division. He had transferred over from the National Park Service, and was not really

an old hand at predator and rodent control. They wanted to bring someone in with field experience. Cliff was due to retire in 1 year, and they asked if I would come in and be his assistant at the same grade, and in 1 year, they would make me the Division Chief for P&RC.

They put a lot of pressure on me to do it, so as soon as we could get things in order we moved. In the meantime, in Washington, D.C., the Predator and Rodent Control was getting much heat. Director Dan Jantzen retired after being in that office for a year or two. Then John Gottschalk came in as Director in 1970. When I got there John and Abe Tunnison, Deputy Director, called me in and said, "Look, we've got all of these problems and we need to bring someone in to give P&RC a new image and a new name." So, they brought Jack Berryman in who had little or no knowledge about the program. You know, the old problems of bringing in an outsider. The field was not that happy and he had many problems. Jack and his wife, Juanita, were very nice people and I got to know them well. However shortly after he took over he developed a drinking problem. This lasted for two or three months. This caused the Service and me many problems as you did not know when he would show up, and we were having lots of meeting with Congress at that time. He would come to work for only a few days off and on over 3 or 4 month period. He later straightened up and became a very valued employee of the Service

**JG:** Did he come from another Federal Agency? Jack Berryman?

**WN:** No! Jack Berryman was the President of the International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. That's where he was then and he had been President of the Wildlife Society. Before that he was an Extension Specialist out of Utah State University. He would come in the office once in awhile for a day here, or a half a day there. We were isolated from the main office who were located in the Department of Interior building while we were in the Wyatt building at 14th and New York Avenue

About that time I became the Deputy Regional Director in Albuquerque rather than the Division Chief. I worked under a man by the name of Bill Crumms for 3 years. Bill got sick and had to retire at quite a young age and then I was acting Regional Director for 6 or 8 months. Rogers C.B. Morton, became Secretary of the Interior in 1971 and he made me his first super grade appointment.

**JG:** Wasn't this about the time that you also had kind of a reorganization within the Predator and Rodent Program and changed your name to Animal Damage Control?

**WN:** That was one of the reasons they brought in Jack Berryman. He was to reorganize the Predator and Rodent Program and give it a new name. After he left they came up with the name Animal Damage Control. Now these activities have been transferred out of the Fish and Wildlife Service and to the Department of Agriculture. I think if I had not retired I would have tried to keep it in the Fish and Wildlife Service where we would have maintained a control over it. Now...I do not know whether it's good or bad, being in Agriculture.

**JG:** Rogers Morton was the new a Secretary of Interior, and has now appointed you to be the Regional Director in Albuquerque.

**WN:** Yes this was as a GS-16 at that time. About two years later they changed it to a GS-17 or a GS-18. Later Director Spencer Smith came out to Albuquerque and tried to convince me to come back and be his Deputy in Washington. He said if I would, he'd do everything possible to get me to be the next Director. He said he was going to definitely retire in three years. But my wife was very ill at that time with MS and I was already at the top of the salary scale. I made as much as the Director, and at that time the government did not pay moving expenses when you retired like they do now for super grades. My wife was just too ill.

Interior Secretary Rogers C.B. Morton was with our Field Committee on the Colorado River and I said to him, "Mr. Secretary, if you weren't here we'd probably have a cocktail at lunch." He answered, "Bill, I'd like to have joined you. I'd like you to think I'm drunk instead of stupid on these trips". (Laughs). He was a big person and very nice to travel with. .

I am going back a little, when I went in that Departmental training, about 1954. My first assignment was for 4 months in Congressman Stewart Udall's office, and I got to meet the future Secretary. He was a former Congressman from St. Johns, Arizona. He was in a hurry one night and asked me to come to the back of his office. He wanted to change his clothes as he had a meeting to go to." I went in while he changed his clothes and we talked. Later, he had all of these hearings in Congress and discussions with special interest groups on use of the poison 1080. Fortunately, he came from St. Johns, Arizona, where there are lots of sheep and cattle. It is where coyotes were really a big problem, and we had lots of control programs in that part of his state.

I got to know a lot of important people in Interior and Congress because of working on the predator and rodent control programs. It was a good experience testifying before Congress and various organizations explaining the use of control methods, especially 1080.

**JG:** You noted earlier that you were a member of the Washington Biologist Field Club?

**WN:** Yes, It was a great honor to be a member this organization. The Washington Biologist Field Club, membership was by invitation only, which was limited to 50 resident people, many being very notable world wide scientists. Then it was all men, now they have women members. The club owns an island in the Potomac River. You can see it from a bridge as you take the freeway around the city. They recently gave it to the U.S. Park Service with the understanding the Club can use it in perpetuity. They were afraid they could no longer protect it from all the tourists. To get to it you had to take a boat across a little piece of the water. It has an old cabin and is a great place. I would take the family out for a picnic. Each year the club holds an annual oyster bake and a shad roast with all the members and lots to drink.

**JG:** As Regional Director in Albuquerque. That was the last 10 years before your retired?

**WN:** Right. I was a Deputy Regional Director 3 years before that. I had an interesting experience before I was appointed Regional Director of the Fish and Wildlife Services. The Department of

Interior had a Commissioner in the Washington Office. He was out of Alaska, appointed by Secretary Hickel who had been Governor of Alaska. When the administration changed Hickel lost his job. The Commissioner came to Albuquerque and declared himself Regional Director. I talked to Director Spencer Smith. He said, "Hell, no", so I gave him a small office down the hall. I did not give him my office or any help. He stayed there for about 4 or 5 months and I don't know if he was even paid. I gave him a few special assignments, when I was appointed Regional Director. He finally gave up and went back to Alaska, but it was a trying time, especially for my wife. Here was guy that came out here to take my job. He told everybody that he was here to become the Regional Director and met with some of the State Game fish people and told them such.

**JG:** Let's talk about a chapter in your life with the Fish and Wildlife Service; let's talk about the Order of the Yellow Dogs. How did that come about?

**WN:** The Yellow Dogs was well established when I went back to Washington during my training days, and practically everybody in this Service, all the hierarchy of the Service, belonged to it, although it was run strictly by the Predator and Rodent Control program people. Many in the Secretary's office would come out to these big, big National meetings and would be speakers then they would go through the Yellow Dog ceremony and become members of the Yellow Dog. It was just a social organization where there was lots of friendship and booze, and snacks and things like that. It was all male at that time. I see now where women are members, but I don't know how active it is.

People from refuges and fish hatcheries all belonged to it. I don't think it went down to their field much, except if they were around Denver at the time, or wherever we'd hold these big National meetings, they'd all come to the big party.

**JG:** I've heard really some wild stories about the initiation process.

**WN:** About the initiation process - they'd make the room dark and the initiates lined up and would go around a circle and each one of the old members would do some little thing, and at the end they'd have a squirt gun of water - - - like a dog lifting its leg.! That was the final act of the initiation.

It was quite a deal. Everybody looked forward to it. I don't believe they hold those big National meetings like that anymore where they bring everybody together. I've got a big folder of one we had out in Denver. I was in charge of the Resolutions Committee and we thanked the Director for allowing it. We thanked the Hotel for allowing it. We thanked everybody. We thanked the Regional Directors for letting the people come to it. It was expensive, you know, that many people out on per diem for a week, but they'd bring in good speakers and college professors.

**JG:** Back to the element of the Yellow Dogs...what were the officers called?

**WN:** Chief Cur, Leader of the Mongrels, Custodian of the Bone and Custodian of the License Tag. It was a big party.

**JG:** A social organization that also had...sounded like it had a professional aspect to it.

**WN:** Yes. And, as I say, everybody in P&RC were members. Most of the leadership in all the divisions of the Fish and Wildlife Service belonged. Most of law enforcement belonged. Everybody in the Denver Research Center were members of the Yellow Dog. The Denver Research Center was the big thing for the Division of Predator and Rodent Control. In fact, our money supported most of the Denver Research Center at that time. I would guess 90% of their work had to do with research on control. A man by the name of Weldon Robinson found 1080. 1080 got its name by being the 1080 product tested.

The P&RC meetings were all very professional. They had very professional speakers and they usually lasted about a week. I was asked to speak when I was living in Kansas to the faculty of the University of Kansas, Department of Biology, and Dr. Raymond Hall, a real noted Biologist, introduces me, he said, "This is Bill Nelson, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Survey" or something like that..."and he is a practical Biologist." I think that described me about as good or better any description I ever received when I was introduced. He was against 1080. All the college professors were against 1080 poison. They never understood it.

Now, they are trying to bring prairie dogs back, They were a big nuisance to ranchers and that is why they were such a big item in the budget. Most all ranchers wanted prairie dogs and coyotes controlled. One time when I was State Director in Oklahoma, I got a call from the Division Chief. in Washington. He said there's a move on in Congress to outlaw 1080, and asked, "Is there anyway you can help to get it stopped?" I called Boots Adams who was Chairman of the Phillips Petroleum Company, the biggest company in Oklahoma. After I explained my call, he said, "Meet me at my ranch for breakfast at 6:00 tomorrow morning". I met him up in Nowater County and we talked for a few minutes and I told him about the problem. He got on the phone and he said, "Get me Jerry Kerr." Senator Kerr, the US Senator from Oklahoma at that time, was probably one of the most powerful Senators in the whole Senate. He talked to the Senator and he told him what we wanted. Jerry said, "Don't worry, I'll have that killed by tomorrow" and sure enough, he did! Politics, bang-bang!

Boots Adams had these high grade cattle on his ranch up there, and he wanted the coyotes killed, and he knew 1080 worked real good, and he didn't want a bunch of do-gooders telling him he couldn't use it. That was the way it was all over the West. The big wealthy, ranchers wanted coyotes controlled, and they had good contacts in the State, and Federal legislatures and they could get lot of control.

**JG:** So, you spent your career...you spent your career now coming up through the Predator and Rodent Control Program renamed Animal Damage Control. Who were some of the other Regional Directors at that time that you were with?

**WN:** All the Regional Directors at that time came up through Predator and Rodent Control programs. They were the leaders in the Fish & Wildlife Service. There was Ira Gabrielson, John Gatlin, Paul Quick, Leo Lathe and...uh...oh, hell, can't think of

the others! Early on I believe all the Regional Director came up through the control programs.

**JG:** During your career is there anybody that you can identify that was really helpful to you, that was a real mentor...or...someone who you respect?

**WN:** I think it was Ted Cates who was the P&RC Supervisor in Albuquerque. He was a great motivator. Then, in the last number of years, Noble Beuell, was the Assistant Director in Washington. He kind of took me under his wing and brought me along. Unfortunately, Noble died when he was the Assistant Director from a heart attack. One time, while in Washington as Acting Chief, I got a call from the Assistant Secretary's office. I went there with Noble and Paul Quick and Deputy Director Abe Tunnison. He was a defeated Senator from Missouri...I can't think of his name...when walked in the door he said, "You are fired right now". 'Abe Tunnison - did you ever know Abe Tunnison? He was a great guy. I liked Abe. Abe says, "Whoa...wait a minute, Mr. Secretary, what's this all about?" And he said, "Your man working in Texas is Bill Fitzwater. He met with a bunch of livestock people in Texas and told them if they wanted to get bird poisoning approved to go straight to the politicians and stay away from the hierarchy of the Interior Department. You're fired for hiring him." So we talked to him for awhile, and Abe being an excellent operator, told him what we would do and when we left we still had our jobs!

There was another time I had been gone on a field trip for a couple of weeks and was walking down the hall and I ran into him and said, "Abe, I understand there is an opening in Albuquerque an asked if I was to late to apply for it?" He said if you want it you should apply, and about a week later they gave me the appointment.

One of the hardest jobs I ever had while I was in Washington was when the Assistant Director Lansing Parker died while hunting turkey. I had camped and hunted with him a few times. He died of a heart attack, and John Gottschalk and Abe Tunnison called me in and asked me to speak at the funeral on behalf of the Service. You know, here is a good friend that just died, a person who I had been working with, and you knew all the people from Interior and all the conservation people would be there. It was tough assignment.

**JG:** Did you come across people in the Fish and Wildlife Service that you wouldn't care to ever see again?

**WN:** Oh...well this guy from this...that came to try to get my job in Albuquerque (chuckles) I...I had no love for him. He's the only one, but most of them were all good friends and if I was successful at all, my whole success was being able to hire good people. I had some real good people in fish hatcheries, in refuges, in law enforcement, and all. I felt so, so confident in the people I had. They were excellent.

I'll have to get the book, but my refuge supervisor went on to become Refuge Chief. My fish hatchery supervisor went and become Supervisor Fishery Chief. My realty man went in and became Realty Chief. Dick went into become Assistant Director – Dick Smith.

**JG:** Was Lynn Greenwalt among those?

**WN:** Greenwalt worked for me as an Assistant. I remember at a party we had been talking to his wife Judy. He was the Assistant Refuge Manager at the time. I told Judy "Just give Lynn a little longer. I think he'll be the Director pretty soon" and she says, "Well, I hope so. We need the money" or something like that and about 4 or 5, 6 years, Lynn was the Director. He had a lot of capabilities.

**JG:** Yeah, he was the last regular professional Fish and Wildlife Service Director for quite a spell until more recently.

**WN:** When I was at a training assignment, the Bureau of Land Management always went out and got a political appointee as its Director, and I felt how lucky the Fish and Wildlife Service was to get a professional at that time.

Back to Jack Berryman... While I was the Regional Director in Albuquerque, Jack was State Director of Arizona at the Game and Fish Department. These State Directors were appointed on 5 year terms. He came to me and said, "Bill, my appointment", it was when he was on his second one, he said, "I don't think they're gonna renew it", and he said, "I'd sure like to go to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. He said, "Could you get me in?" I said, "Well, Jack, you'll have to get on the Civil Service register, and we may be able to find a vacancy on a refuge." Just laughing and he said, "Oh, hell...all my experience...you gotta at least get me a 12 or so" and I said, "I just couldn't put you ahead of our full time, long time employees" and he was a little bitter about it.

**JG:** And this was after his bout with alcoholism?

**WN:** This was while he was still a State Director. I don't believe he had a problem at that time. Then he went and became President of the International Association.

Spencer Smith was a good Director. He went out to Denver when he retired as Director to work on a new organization when Lynn Greenwalt became Director. I thought the Area Offices were a fiasco. When I was first appointed Regional Director, the Region consisted of Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Then they reduced it to Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona. Then we had two Area Offices, one in Texas and one in Arizona. It was a small Region anyway, and it was just too much overhead. I worked to help get rid of the area office. I was against it from the start.

**JG:** Well, it lasted 5 years and then they went back to the way it was.

**WN:** That was a good move to go back.

**JG:** What other stories do you have in your career that you would like to have for posterity? You must have had some really fun times? You talk about the Yellow Dogs, and you talk about some of your trips, like with Rogers C.B. Morton? You have some more good 'ole war stories to tell? Memories?

**WN:** Oh, I've got these on these sheets of paper. You want them, instead of putting them on the machine there.

**JG:** Well, we'd like to have them as part of your W.O. Nelson archives file. I'll be glad to take them.

A lot of people have said working for the Fish and Wildlife Service was just like having a big family all around the country. Did you find that, too, in your career Bill?

**WN:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. We had parties together. Our wives had a Wives Club in Albuquerque. I thought it was a good organization. Yes it had some ups-and-downs. I stopped some of our realty people from flying their own plane and collecting mileage because I was afraid of an airplane wreck and the tremendous damages they could claim. This was on the advice of my solicitor. I took my solicitor, the Department's solicitor, with me on practically every meeting I had because we were having closures on grazing.

Did I tell you about the story with Senator Montoya? It was the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, south of Albuquerque where we allowed grazing in a limited amount. The damn guy would keep putting on twice or three times as much cattle as we allowed and so we canceled his permit. He went to U.S. Senator Montoya of course and they came in and met with me. I asked the Senator for his recommendation. The Senator just listened and I said, "If he will agree to run the amount we recommend, the refuge manager will allow him to graze there, but if he doesn't, we will cancel it". Senator Montoya who was powerful man in the Senate and had been there a long time, said to the rancher, "Will you agree to that?" He said, "Yes sir, if they'll let me do this". Well within 6 months or so, he was back putting on many more head of cattle on than we agreed so I called on the Senator. His office was just 2 doors down from mine in Albuquerque and I asked to meet with him again, and I told him, "Senator, he broke his agreement so we're canceling his permit. We're not going to allow any cattle to graze on the Bosque del Apache." The Senator said, "That's fine. He agreed in front of you and me that he would do this and if he didn't keep his word so go ahead and cancel it". We canceled the permit. It was tough to keep the Spanish-American people from taking down the fences and keeping their cattle out as they thought they owned the land because their early ancestors did.

**JG:** There was a story that I heard years ago that was attributed to coming out of your Albuquerque Regional Office, and it had to do with a Regional Director...I don't know...maybe you... but anyway, there was a general meeting...a hearing...on the use of 1080. At this public meeting, a lady that got up and was saying that the Fish and Wildlife Service ought to not trap these coyotes or to poison them. She made her pleading statement in front of this hostile audience with great oratory about man's responsibility for kindness to animals and all that. She ended with a plan, a request, that the Fish & Wildlife Service should capture the coyotes and give them birth control pills...you know, let them fade away naturally, rather than killing them. Somebody jumped up or it was the Regional Director said, "Lady, you got this wrong. The coyotes aren't having sex with the sheep, they're killing and eating them".

**WN:** (Laughs).

**JG:** Is there any truth to that story?

**WN:** (Chuckles) No...but it's probably a rancher that would get up and say that, not a Fish and Wildlife Service employee. P&RC did try something like that one summer here in Idaho, when I was in Albuquerque. They placed a sex deterrent in a lard cube bait and spread it over part of Southern Idaho desert to see if we could stop coyote breeding, but it wasn't successful. Yes, but we did try it...we tried everything. Yes. We weren't interested in killing coyotes, we were only interested in stopping predation on sheep and calves. Now they are bringing predators back so they're will go through the whole damn thing again (chuckles). Bringing wolves back and you know if you got wolves, they will eat and they will eat what's available... They're just opportunist. Whatever is available they're kill and eat it. You can't blame the wolves.

**JG:** Bill, I'm sure you saw a lot of changes within Fish and Wildlife Service over the course of your career, and I noted here that you got involved a bit with endangered species and whooping crane recovery.

**WN:** Oh yes, that was quite a deal. We mated and planted whooping cranes at Gray's Lake in Idaho and they wintered at Bosque del Apache Refuge in New Mexico. We had an agreement with the Audubon Society that we could still hunt snow geese. Snow geese and whooping cranes look a lot alike. They both have white bodies and black tips on the end of their wings but the cranes were much bigger with longer legs and wings. We were afraid that if we started the project that Audubon would demand that we stop hunting snow geese and the Refuge was the only place in New Mexico where snow geese wintered. Things went well with the snow geese...we hunted them with no problems...no one shot a whooping crane. They had loud speakers that said, "whooping crane in the area, no shooting" and stuff like that. The Whoopers didn't survive, they would hit power lines, or coyotes would kill them. The a project was discontinued when I retired. I still believe it was good one and by working on it they could made it work. However I am now an honorary life member of the Whooping Crane Association, because of that work.

**JG:** So, some of the early recovery work for whooping cranes, you started while you were Regional Director?

**WN:** Right. Right. The experiment at Grays Lake – Bosque Refuge also down to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on Gulf Coast in Texas. That's a very good refuge down there. We had a lot of great refuges along the Gulf coast down in Texas. We had a lot of great refuge managers. Yes, real dedicated! Really great people!

**JG:** I'm basically, basically through asking the questions, Bill. Is there anything that you wanted to add, or reminisce, or talk about on your career? People...incidents?

**WN:** I worked long hours. It wasn't an 8 to 5 shift. I'd go in usually at 7:00 and work on weekends...my wife kept track of me once...I was at meetings or attending different things for 10 straight weekends in a row. Game and Fish organizations would hold weekend meetings or sportsmen events as group meetings. I'd go on weekends to speak or listen and find out what was happening, but it was enjoyable work. You know, some of these sportsmen groups would get so wild or off on some other deals...and...yes. And, they always wanted to meet on Saturdays and Sundays

Oh...and I used to love to hunt ducks and pheasants myself. I tell you, I took a couple of beatings at some of the commission meetings in Texas. They didn't always agree with the Fish and Wildlife Service, but all you could do was support the Service. Most of the other state commissions were pretty good. They'd go along pretty good but Texas never did much (chuckles). They did appoint me an Honorary Game Warden for the State of Texas.

**JG:** Thank you, Bill for taking the time out and talking with us.

**WN:** Oh...my pleasure. I enjoyed it. I always enjoyed talking to groups while I was working.

# STORIES OF REMINISCING

## A VISIT TO THE FORT APACHE INDIAN RESERVATION - PROBABLY IN 1943.

At that time, I was the Assistant State Supervisor for Wildlife Services, U S Fish and Wildlife Service for Arizona. The Service was doing most of the fish and wildlife work on Indian reservations. On the White River Apache Reservation; in the beautiful White Mountains, the Service had a trout fish hatchery. The Tribe asked Wildlife Services to help with bears that were killing their purebred white faced cattle. This was the Tribe's most important enterprise. The Indians had great superstition about killing bears but did not care if others did.

I was assigned to check the hunter's progress and make sure the project was going right. The hunter assigned to do the work, Russell Culbreth was an excellent man for the job. He had a big old mule to carry his traps and other gear. The Tribe paid Russell's salary. He and his family were provided a nice home at a remote school and he invited me to bring JoEllen, Judy and Jacque with me. JoEllen was fascinated and a little scared, Judy four or five was very curious and loved to play with the Indian children who lived at the school. As it was warm, Jacque wore only diapers and she fascinated the Indian women. Their children wore only a top or shirt, no bottom. The Indian ladies laughed and thought it was crazy to soil a diaper, and then wash it. It made their day. In those days no one heard of disposable diapers. The small babies were in cradle boards. The first we had ever seen.

One night just before we went to bed there was a knock on the door and there stood an adult Indian woman with her face so beaten that you could not recognize her. They asked if we would take her to the hospital in White River. Russell and I did and when we returned we found out that she did not belong to the Indian group living at the school but had taken up with one of the men at a bar and came home with him. The other women at the school apparently had used their cowboy boot heels to stomp the flesh from her face and do other damage. I understand she lived.

I shot my first and only bear that Russell had it in a trap. This project lasted for a year or so. At another time Russell dressed out a bear for eating and brought some to the office. We invited some friends over to taste a roast and most of them liked it, some did not. We only cooked it once. Some at the office thought it good and others never wanted it again. You may recall in reading about early hunters, they always ate bear when they could.

When growing up Dad had bear grease at hand for us to treat our hiking boots claiming it gave them excellent protection and made them water proof.

## APPEARANCE BEFORE THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

I had just been transferred to Washington D.C, with the U. S, Fish and Wildlife Service as the Assistant Division Chief, Wildlife Services, in the spring of 1963. One day as the Acting Division Chief I was asked to appear before the Senate Appropriation Committee with Jim Stevenson, in charge of legislation for the Service and the man in charge of legislation for the Department of Interior. Having never been to the Capitol I was apprehensive but not too worried as I was not to speak and only to be there as a back up authority on the subject.

A Congressman from California had requested the Senate take away the tax imposed on netting used to cover trees and other fruit to protect them from bird damage. His request was being heard before the Ways and Means Committee chaired by Wilbur Mills's from Missouri. This is the most powerful committee in Congress.

When we arrived, the Military were requesting funds and went on and on. My companions decided the Military would be on for a long time and went for coffee. They told me to stay just in case we were called. No sooner had they left when Chairman Mills called for the Dept. of Interior. I stood up and told him others were here but not in the room and he said for me to take a seat and they would start. I raised my right arm and took the oath. Chairman Mills was abrupt and made it clear he was a very important and busy man. Chairman Mills asked two or three questions from information he had been provided. Chairman Mills then allowed the Congressman from California to ask me a few questions about the large money crop lost that was caused from bird damage. Then a Senator, a member of the committee, asked about the prospects for the duck hunting that fall. Then another member asked about ducks in his state. Fortunately I had just set in on a Director's briefing on the waterfowl surveys in Alaska, Canada and the prairie states. Then Chairman Mills cut it off and said to me that would be all and thanked me for coming.

Jim and the Department man came back about five or ten minutes later and could not believe I had testified. They were two worried men fearful that they may lose their jobs over this goof. However nothing happened.

I wished I had picked up a copy of the printed procedures but did not realize they were available at that time. This also gave me my first introduction to the famous Senate bean soup in the Senate dining room then open to the public.



## **WORLD WAR II - MY WORST NIGHT**

I was the postmaster at a US prison camp for German Prisoners and it was one of the plush assignments. This was new camp established to hold German prisoner that were surrendering very fast towards the end of the war. It was established in fields along the Rhine River with no facilities at all. We were housed in an Underberg factory. This factory made stomach tonic. My post office was on the ground floor so to be available to every one. I scrounged a nice desk from a paper office and furniture from a nice home. While in the home the two prisoners I had to load the furniture ask if they could go in the basement to see if there was any canned fruit. I said O. K. and in a few minutes they returned with out any fruit but told me there were two dead German soldiers down there. I checked it out, and then reported it, so they could send some one out to collect them. I picked up a German prisoner each day to clean the post office. I used the same person most of the time. He was a college graduate in engineering and learned to speak English while working in Mexico. I also fed him.

With no prison fences to start with, no shelter, no cooking facilities to feed the prisoners and the soldiers not trained to guard prisoners they were very much over worked. One day we were called and ask if we, who were not guards, would give the guards a break and help them that night. A friend and whom I have forgotten his name but I believe it was Johnny. We agreed to guard the railroad station as no trains were to arrive that night. As it was a small town with a small station it had only one light at the door leading to the waiting room. About midnight an unscheduled train loaded with German war prisoners arrived. It was a long train of cattle cars as full of prisoners as it would hold.

The guards unloaded the prisoners and lined them in a column of about 4's and it seemed like a half block long. We told them the prison compound was down the road about a mile or so and they told us no way. They said they had been on the train for over 10 hours and were dead tired. They were ours and got on the train and pulled out. Johnny and I talked it over and decided he would go for help and I would stay and guard the prisoners. He took off on the run and I ask for some one who could speak English. One volunteered and he and I walked down the row and I had him tell them we had machine guns located out on the dark and if any made a break they would start shooting the bunch; I then went back and stood under the light with the safety off my carbine thinking I would get 6 of them before they got me. Here I was, one person on a very dark night guarding a large train load of dirty, tired, hungry prisoners by my self. It seemed like forever before the trucks and the guards arrive.

It's a night I will never forget even though it happened in the spring of 1945, a long time ago. I have forgotten what town it was located in or the name of the compound or the unit I was in but I haven't forgotten crossing the Rhine River and some of the early hardships before we settled at the prison camp.

## **LONDON BRIDGE – WORLD WAR II GERMAN ROCKETS**

My brother Ray and I met in London during World War II and one evening, just after dark, while standing on London Bridge some one shouted to be quiet. We then heard putt, putt, putt and then the loudest explosion you can imagine. The impact was enough to shake the bridge so we thought it hit right beside it. We hurried and got off the bridge. The next morning we learned from the newspaper, a German V-2 rocket hit quite a distance from us causing a great deal of destruction.

Hitler told the World he was developing a new device capable for him to win the war. The V-2 rocket was to be the tool but they did not have time to fully develop it before the war was over. The Russians captured many German scientist but the Americans were able to capture Dr. Wernher von Braun, the chief German rocket scientist and a number of his colleagues. They brought them to the United States and stationed them at the White Sand Missile Range just out of El Paso, Texas along with a number of unfired V-2 rockets for additional testing.

In the Spring on 1948 I spent two weeks at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas for my reserve officer training assignment. The war had just ended in 1945 and Dr. Wernher von Braun was in full swing there. He spent a day with us [about 20 officers] and explained the U S plans for landing on the moon which happened almost the way he describe it about twenty years later. He also explained rockets to us and shot a V-2 rocket off while we were there. The rocket started off course and they shut it off causing a loud explosion when the unburned oxygen hit the earth. Dr. von Braun, a very brilliant man, later became the United States lead scientist for our space program.

In the late 1960 or the early 1970's the old London Bridge was torn down in London, England and the stones were kept in tack then shipped to Lake Havasu on the lower Colorado River in Arizona. The exact London Bridge was rebuilt with the old stones over part of the lake as a tourist attraction. Before the Corps of Engineers could give permission to allow water to circulate under the bridge they needed approval from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As the Colorado River covered many States, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services Regional Office in Albuquerque, New Mexico was the controlling federal agency for environmental issues covering the River. As Regional Director I signed the letter giving the U. S. Fish and Wildlife approval. This is the same bridge my brother and I had our near life threatening miss during the war.