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Dennis Burnett
October 25, 2014

Interview conducted by Brenna Lissoway
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
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ANPR Oral History Project

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The narrator has reviewed and corrected this transcript

Audiofile: BURNETT Dennis 25 Oct 2014

[START OF TRACK 1]

- Brenna Lissoway: Okay. This is Brenna Lissoway. And I'm now doing an interview with Dennis Burnett. It is October the 25th, 2014. We are at the YMCA of the Rockies during Ranger Rendezvous at Estes Park, Colorado. So, Dennis, could you start your interview with just stating your name, date of birth and where you were born?
- Dennis Burnett: Dennis Burnett. March 7, 1950, Sacramento, California. Raised in Folsom, California, made Johnny Cash famous.
- Brenna Lissoway: Great.
- Dennis Burnett: So, I was in college. Enrolled at Cal State University, Hayward.
- Brenna Lissoway: Before you start with Cal State, could you tell me just a little bit about your family and growing up in Folsom?
- Dennis Burnett: It was a very small town. When I was growing up, the population was less than three thousand. There was an elementary school. There was no junior high school. And there was one high school. I think my graduating class in 1968 was 300. An older brother who was eight years older than me. An older sister who was five years older than me. I'm the only one to have gone to college. Grew up very outdoorsy. Riding bikes. Fishing. I did a fair amount of bird hunting. One of my best friends growing up was a top ten trap shoot champion in the teenage ranks. We would go pheasant hunting and I'd always get the first shot. And if I missed, he'd always bag the pheasant. So that was fun.
- Dennis Burnett: My mother was born on a cattle ranch. She was left-handed but she was in the era when she was forced to write right-handed in school. She rode a train to school every day. Fifteen miles from Latrobe into Folsom. My father was a maintenance mechanic. He could pretty much fix anything. He helped build Folsom Dam. He spent three years I the worst job of his life as a prison guard. Didn't like that. And then finally got a job working as a maintenance mechanic for Aerojet General during the aerospace period, was pretty lucrative for the country. He had a sixth-grade education. Had to drop out in sixth grade to help support his family. Did all sorts of odd jobs during that time before he finally got gainfully employed otherwise.
- Brenna Lissoway: What was your first experience of a national park? Did you all go to parks as a kid?
- Dennis Burnett: Yeah. I can remember camping in Yosemite Valley when I was very young. I think we may have been twice. I remember the fire falls. I can remember going to Glacier National Park and seeing cutthroat trout. I remember Old Faithful in Yellowstone. And

outside of those, it's the only ones I can recall. Perhaps Wind Cave. I know we did a cave and I know it was in the Dakotas. I mean, I guess that's probably what it was, but I don't know for sure. I did some trips up and down the California coast on Highway 1. I can still see the cars we drove, an old '58 Mercury. And my dad had a '61 Cadillac. All bought used.

Dennis Burnett: By the time I was 12, both my brother and sister were out of the house and married. And so, I was active in high school. Played football, basketball, and baseball. Baseball was probably my best sport. I lettered in all of them. I was three years varsity in baseball. All-conference, most valuable player my senior year. Went to American River College. Played baseball there for two years. And actually, played semipro baseball up and down the central valley for about four years. I played a lot of future major leaguers. And when that career didn't go anywhere, played collegiate ball for college. And when this opportunity at Point Reyes came up, I said yeah, that sounds like an interesting thing to do. I think I'll try it.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you were attending university where?

Dennis Burnett: Cal State University, Hayward. It's now called Cal State University East Bay, because it had more than one campus.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. And what were you studying there?

Dennis Burnett: My degree program was in parks and recreation administration with a minor in psychology.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you were studying parks administration already. Did you have a particular career in mind?

Dennis Burnett: Not really.

Brenna Lissoway: What were you interested in?

Dennis Burnett: Anything outdoors. It seemed to be the thing that I could do.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, tell me about this opportunity that came up with Point Reyes National Seashore.

Dennis Burnett: Yeah. As part of the degree program, we had to do an internship somewhere related to parks and recreation. I didn't want to get a job at a city park where I'm handing out basketballs and refereeing volleyball games. And I don't know if there was somebody else in the class that had previously been a seasonal ranger. I think there was. And he made this mention of he thought maybe Point Reyes would be interested in some volunteer work. I think two of us in the class took advantage of that.

Dennis Burnett: And so, we got it all set up. Went out and visited with the staff. They said yeah, sounds good, sign these papers, we can offer you, whatever the price was per day a volunteer, and we can put you up

in a house with no rent. So that started in March of 1972. I would leave, oh, what did I have, Tuesday Thursday classes, after class on Thursday I would drive to Point Reyes about an hour and a half from Heyward. I would work Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. Drive back in Tuesday morning for my Tuesday classes. Did that through June. Got 10 units of credit for my degree, which is what I needed to graduate.

Dennis Burnett: In May while I was there, the superintendent of Death Valley at that time, Bob Murphy, happened to be taking a tour of the Morgan Horse Ranch. And that's where I spent most of my time, working with the horses. It was just finishing up the foaling season. I'd done many ride-alongs there when Doug Morris was there, Herb [Gerky?] was there, Ken Patrick was there, Phil Brueck was there. I got to know all of those folks as well as a few others. But I seemed to draw an interest on the horse operations, so that's where I spent most of my time, and they were happy to have me.

Dennis Burnett: And so, when Bob Murphy did a walk-through one day in May and asked me what I was doing, I gave him a tour and explained my, what turned out to be an interest in the National Park Service.

Dennis Burnett: He said, "Well, as it so happens, Death Valley's going to have a seasonal job, summer seasonal job, first one in a long time because one of my rangers is back in law enforcement school in DC, and we'd like to have another person on the ground. Would you be interested?" And of course, there are no training requirements in 1972 for law enforcement, other than being able to breathe and walk.

Dennis Burnett: So, I said, "Absolutely!" So, graduated. Got my degree. Didn't go through the ceremony. I drove home to Folsom, loaded up what I needed. Ordered my uniforms. I either ordered them or I drove, I may have stopped in an [Albert and Ferguson?] in Merced and got my uniforms. Something like that. And then I headed to Death Valley. And, like I said, arrived on June 14th, 1972. And it was 114 degrees at Furnace Creek.

Brenna Lissoway: And so, you were going to take your first National Park Service uniformed position. What had been your impression of park rangers up to that point?

Dennis Burnett: Point Reyes, which is the only ones that I could remember. The other ones were so early in my life I don't remember even seeing a park ranger. But at Point Reyes, they were just all outstanding. Very impressed with them. I was very interested in what they were doing. So, it was a real good feeling.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, you started in the middle of the summer in Death Valley.

- Dennis Burnett: Mm hmm.
- Brenna Lissoway: Talk to me a little bit about what your summer was like.
- Dennis Burnett: Death Valley is the kind of place that you either love it or you hate it. When I got there, I was told that you could take the Statue of Liberty and set it down in the monument and never find it again. And that's true. I know that park better than any of the 13 parks I've worked. I know the back country, the front country, all of it. I drove everything that was there. Day trips into the back country would be two to three hours driving one-way on a dirt road, and then turning around and driving back.
- Brenna Lissoway: Okay. And how well were you prepared, did you feel? To do the job?
- Dennis Burnett: Common sense was about all we had. There was no training. I was taken out to the pistol range. I never fired a pistol. I'd used shotguns and rifles. Used to deer hunt with my dad. He would do all the shooting. But I did a fair amount of bird hunting. One of my best friends growing up was a top ten all-American trap shooter. And he had a membership in a pheasant facility along the Sacramento River in Sacramento County. And we'd go out on a regular basis pheasant hunting. And he would give me the first shot. And then when I missed, he would take out the pheasant. So, we did that for probably four or five years.
- Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. So, you had some gun experience.
- Dennis Burnett: Very little. I did qualify fine, I guess. Schneider took me out to the pistol range at Cow Creek in the valley. Qualified. He gave me the gun and a pair of handcuffs. Let's see, a briefcase. He may have given me a plastic baton because I remember leaving it in the dash of the truck and it warped from the heat. So, there must have been one there somewhere. And then he just says, "Go patrol." So that's when I started learning Death Valley.
- Brenna Lissoway: So how long were you at Death Valley?
- Dennis Burnett: I started in June and I worked 180 days, converted over, and did interpretive programs, walks and talks at the visitor's center for the latter part of the winter season to finish out the [bitter?] winter season working for Frank Ackerman. And then apply for summer seasonal jobs. And that would have been the summer of '73 I went to Isle Royal National Park.
- Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, you only spent, basically, about a year at Death Valley?
- Dennis Burnett: That first season. I went back four more times. That became my winter park.
- Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay. I see.

Dennis Burnett: So, I was five years as a seasonal. Death Valley was my winter park, so that was my base. Then I branched out to Isle Royal, Dinosaur, Isle Royal. We'll get to them, if I can remember them all. Yosemite.

Brenna Lissoway: Uh huh. Uh huh. Okay. So, Isle Royal, let's talk about Isle Royal then.

Dennis Burnett: Let's go back to Death Valley.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. You have other things to talk about? Okay.

Dennis Burnett: My career in the park service, I lived in a tent.

Brenna Lissoway: In Death Valley.

Dennis Burnett: No. In Yosemite Valley.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Dennis Burnett: But I lived in a castle in Death Valley. Scotty's Castle. At the north end of the park. Fascinating story. So, I always enjoyed that. I don't know of people know, but I do teach at the university. Dick Powell was a ranger, North district ranger, prior to my getting there. And after my first year in Furnace Creek, I moved up to the Grapevine District where Dick was. It was his investigation in 1969, 1970, that led to the arrest of Charles Manson.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow.

Dennis Burnett: Basically, in the back country during the winter we will get rain and flooding that takes out some of the roads. So, the park service takes their heavy equipment out, starts grading the roads, smoothing them out. And in lieu of driving them back, they leave the equipment out there. And so, Charles Manson and his family in their touring of the Death Valley back country decided it would be a hoot to burn the tires on these large road graders. Dick Powell showed up in a couple of days, found the damage, found a matchbook from the Panamint store at Panamint Springs, which is the next valley west of Death Valley. His investigation from there led him to the central part of the mountain range in Death Valley, where this family was hanging down in Myers Ranch. About two months later, he and the CHP and county sheriff led a raid on the ranch. Arrested Charles and a number of his family members. A lot of stolen cars with them. They had pretty much the evidence on the damage of the heavy equipment. But there was also possession of stolen vehicles. They were arrested and put in the lockup in Inyo County. And it was while they were in the lockup that one of his lady friends decided to start talking about what they did homicide-wise in L.A. County.

Brenna Lissoway: That's how they made the connection.

- Dennis Burnett: That's how they made the connection. Yeah, one of them started talking.
- Brenna Lissoway: Did Dick Powell talk about that much?
- Dennis Burnett: To me, he does. He doesn't talk about it to anybody else that I'm aware of. I was the best man at his second marriage. He was my wife, Ginny Rousseau's, first supervisor at Lassen Volcanic National Park. And then we worked, my last 13 years in DC, he was the chief of risk management. And he was one floor up. So, we stayed in contact quite a bit. Yeah.
- Brenna Lissoway: I'm going to just pause for one second. [pause] Okay, Dennis, we are continuing. So, what sorts of issues was Death Valley facing at that time?
- Dennis Burnett: Tamarisk tree invasion was pretty paramount. Big horn sheep, there's big horn sheep populations. I was involved in [terres?] eradication projects in the back country around stream sources. Spring sources. We built several burro enclosures, because the burros were throughout the back country around some of those springs, so that bighorn sheep could get in. keep the burros out, but the sheep could get through the enclosures. And they'd get [unclear] trying to protect that. Making sure people stayed on the roadways. Off-road vehicle travel was fairly popular. We spend a lot of time raking out tracks in the sands. That sort of thing. Depending what the rains were for the season, would we have a good flower show or not.
- Brenna Lissoway: Okay. What kind of a community was Death Valley?
- Dennis Burnett: I spent my first year at Furnace Creek. And then the next three years I was at the north end of the park, living in Scotty's Castle. His little apartment, if you will. And then my last season, it was back at Furnace Creek. I got my EMT while I was there. Seasonal refresher training. But there really wasn't anything mandated. This is all prior to 1976, before we had the NPS authorities bill. A wide variety of rainbow vehicles. There were no vehicle standards. Whatever GSA would give us.
- Brenna Lissoway: So how did you decide to go to Isle Royal?
- Dennis Burnett: That was back in the era when you would send out 50 applications for summer hire, hoping to catch one. And I was able to catch one.
- Brenna Lissoway: And were you offered others? Did you have to choose?
- Dennis Burnett: No. That was it. So, my dates were such that I could be the long-term summer seasonal out of Rock Harbor on Isle Royal. So, I was on the first boat going out. It was IRM, so it's interpretation resource management. So, I did boat patrol. I did interpretive

programs. I did interpretive walks. And I helped run the visitor's center.

Brenna Lissoway: And what was it like being in a park in the Midwest?

Dennis Burnett: Being in a park in the Great Lakes is pretty outstanding. There's no roads. Anything is either by boat or float plane or walk. There's one motor vehicle, I think, at the headquarters. [unclear] You get all of your mail and all of your groceries and all your supplies by boat. So, a week before you need your groceries, you send your list in to the grocery store. They would fill up the box and put it on the next boat coming out on Monday. You will get it that afternoon.

Brenna Lissoway: So fairly isolated.

Dennis Burnett: Very isolated, yeah. We were closer to Canada than we were to the United States. So, we had some maintenance folks with boats. And we would make a run to Thunder Bay, Ontario to buy beer and then come back. We were trained as custom inspectors. We could inspect Canadian boats coming in just to the islands. And if they were going back to Canada, we were required to do that, fill out the paperwork. If they were stopping off at Isle Royal and going on to the mainland of the United States, then they would hit the customs inspectors when they got there. They would [unclear]

Brenna Lissoway: Right. And so maybe if you could just kind of talk to me about how the rest of your seasonal time went, where you went.

Dennis Burnett: Sure.

Brenna Lissoway: Kind of the, yeah, chronology of that.

Dennis Burnett: First season at the headquarters in the Isle Royal. So, after that season was over, went back to Death Valley. Ended up at the north end of the park. That's where I spent that winter season. Summer of '74, went to Dinosaur National Monument. I was on the Utah side. Protection ranger managing two campgrounds. And there was no fee program, I believe, but we did have campground fees and a major boat ramp where they came off the end of the Green and Yampa. They'd come out of rivers at Split Mountain. But they exited the river in the district I was working in.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, Dinosaur.

Dennis Burnett: Dinosaur. And then back to Death Valley. So, then we're down to third winter season. Summer of '75, went back to Isle Royal as Windigo District ranger. GS6. Back in the time when everyone would tell you that seasonal rangers cannot get a grade above a five.

Brenna Lissoway: So how did that happen?

Dennis Burnett: They knew how to do it and they just did it. They got a vacancy. They liked what I did in '73. The assistant chief ranger, Ivan Tolly, actually called me and said, "Would you be interested in this job?"

Dennis Burnett: And I was in a conundrum because I had been accepted in Yosemite Valley. But it was for a very short season. And I'm thinking, in fact, I made a trip, had a meeting with the superintendent, Jim Thompson was his name, at Furnace Creek in Death Valley and said, "Looking for career advice. I've got an opportunity to go to Yosemite Valley as a patrol ranger, June to maybe September. I've got an opportunity to go to Isle Royal to be an acting district ranger from the end of April/first of May till just about October, till it freezes over. What do you think?" He convinced me that the acting time at Isle Royal would be very beneficial. So that's what I did. So, I spent that long season there. Back to Death Valley. And then the following season was able to get that next seasonal position in Yosemite.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you didn't have the option of going back as the district ranger?

Dennis Burnett: No, they filled that position. Well, I will say Jack Morehead came in as the new superintendent. Based on the old FSEE written examination you take, absent Vietnam veteran points, which I didn't have, I was not able to qualify high enough. He would have hired me had he been able to get to me. But I wasn't able to score high enough on what was required at that time for federal hires.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, you had this opportunity to go to Yosemite.

Dennis Burnett: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: As a seasonal.

Dennis Burnett: Jim Brady called me and said, "I have a position that I think I can offer you. It doesn't start until June. But if I can hire you on May first and not bring you on board until June, I can get around a whole bunch of people on the list. Are you going to be able [unclear] May first?" I said absolutely. He said, "Okay, you're hired. We'll see you June first."

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. Okay.

Dennis Burnett: But my paperwork said my EOD was on the first of May.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay. So, what was your Yosemite experience like?

Dennis Burnett: All the time there I was on valley road patrol. It was on day shift working for Randy Cooley and Mark Forbes. Living in Camp Six in the tent that I mentioned. Usually, I opted to take the six a.m. shift because it was nice and quiet in the valley at sunrise. I've seen people wake up, spend the first few hours of your shift taking bear reports. Bear damage to vehicles, to ice chests, those sorts of things, from the campground. You'll have a rash of motor vehicle

accidents. Early, or late morning, midday, for some reason. I don't know what. So, we did have half a dozen motor vehicle accidents on a weekly basis. So that would have been my first year. That next winter I went back to Death Valley.

Dennis Burnett: And then it was the following spring that I had the opportunity, that Brady said he could pick me up into a GS3 clerk typist position doing night road patrol. Well actually I started out as day [unclear] because I remember Mark Forbes saying, "You know, if you screw up, we're going to put you behind a typewriter and you're going to actually do what we hired you for."

Brenna Lissoway: Interesting.

Dennis Burnett: And I did my 90 days as a GS3. They converted me to GS5, park technician.

Brenna Lissoway: Was that just a way for the park to bolster—

Dennis Burnett: It's the only way you could get on. I wish I could remember the personnel's position in Yosemite. It starts with [unclear]. His name was Freeman and he knew all the hiring authorities. Nelson Freeman, maybe.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay.

Dennis Burnett: He picked up a number of rangers there during that time. Jim Brady knew who he wanted to hire. Just didn't know how he was able to get some of them, because a lot of them worked for him in Yellowstone. I wasn't one, but I got to meet him in Yosemite. Scott Connelly, was a ranger for him in Yellowstone. He worked Death Valley in the winter for a number of years. I worked with Scott. Scott and I made a couple of forays to Yosemite during that winter season. Got to meet Jim and a few other folks. Must have left at least a favorable impression, because Jim made an effort to be able to get me.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Just I wanted to, for the record, mention that you and I did a, or there was an oral history that was done about your time in Yosemite, an extensive one with the Yosemite Oral History Project. So, I think what I'd like to do is to kind of move forward in your career.

Dennis Burnett: Sure.

Brenna Lissoway: I know that you met your wife, Ginny Rousseau, at Yosemite and were married there.

Dennis Burnett: Yes. Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: But what I'd really like to hear is sort of what you were thinking at this point in terms of your career trajectory. Were you interested in

getting a permanent position? And how did, how were you thinking about that?

Dennis Burnett:

Definitely interested. By my first full year in Death Valley, I had a pretty good clue. Had a great time at Dinosaur and also Isle Royal. That yeah, I can do this. The issue is how to go about getting hired. And like I said, I spent five years in the seasonal ranks, bouncing around. When the opportunity came up, as luck would have it, it would be Yosemite, which was great, because I had an opportunity in Death Valley but lost out to a veteran who was also in Death Valley as a seasonal, very good ranger. No problems there at all. We were both neck in neck. But he had five points veterans, so he got the position, which is great, I'm happy for him. As it turned out for me, Yosemite was a much better fit, I thought, for what I was trying to do.

Brenna Lissoway:

Which was what?

Dennis Burnett:

Just doing a little more law enforcement than we had in Death Valley. Didn't have the back-country experience at Death Valley like I would have in Death Valley that I loved but learning new things.

Dennis Burnett:

So, if you're going to use that Yosemite, then, from the entrance, after we got married, married I had been moved from the valley to Big Oak Flat to become the seasonal road patrol supervisor along between Big Oak Flat toward Tuolumne Meadow, the station up at Tioga Pass Road. Prior to being, that season kicking off in January, I was offered a permanent GS5 position, park technician, at Petrified Forest, by Andy Ringgold, who was the chief ranger. So, sort of a subject to furlough position in Yosemite versus permanent fulltime. So, career-wise, I had to make the move.

Dennis Burnett:

So, I moved to Petrified Forest in January. We got married in Yosemite Valley in April. Then we both moved back to Petrified Forest in April. So, working Petrified Forest after Yosemite Valley, not a lot going on. The highlight of the day was to go down to the overpass of the mainline Santa Fe Railroad and watch the trains roll through about every 20 minutes. Or get out on a horse, or walk, get out of a car, do anything you could do. No need to be in a vehicle in Petrified Forest.

Dennis Burnett:

So, about June or July, probably June, put in for a position at Point Reyes National Seashore, GS7 park technician. Actually, was accepted for that position working the lighthouse. But if it had anything to do with my having worked there as a volunteer, I don't know. But we were in the process of, the movers were coming, we were getting ready to go. And a couple of weeks before we were supposed to move, a call came in that the last intake register that

the National Park Service had, I was one of them, and Lake Mead was looking for four rangers, GS9 full park rangers.

Dennis Burnett:

So called Point Reyes and said, sorry, I can't come, we're going to Lake Mead. I do remember Andy [Ringgold?] telling me, he said, "I talked to the chief ranger Newt Sikes, and he's got one isolated position and three positions in areas where there's always backup. He says, of the four names that I've got, I think you know them all, what's your recommendation?" He said, "Well, for your isolated position, I'd send Dennis because he can handle it on his own. The other three, Joe Johnson, Bill Briggs and Gary Rockledge went to FLETC as a firearms instructor, have to remember that, "put them where they've got people they can work with." So, I felt really good about that.

Dennis Burnett:

So, we moved to Echo Bay on Lake Mead, which is the Overton arm, an hour from Henderson and Vegas. And I worked as a GS9 and Ginny worked as, I believe, a seasonal, or permanent intermittent at Overton Beach, which was the next put-in. She worked for that area ranger. I worked for the sub district ranger at Echo Bay.

Brenna Lissoway:

Okay. And what were some of the challenges in that position?

Dennis Burnett:

A lot of law enforcement. Pretty heavy law enforcement, not unlike Yosemite. Boat patrol, which was great. When I was in high school, I built a drag boat with one of my best friends. We didn't race it, but it was fun. Eighteen and a half foot drag boat with a Chevy 396 V8 engine in it. Dripping with chrome and noise. So boating was kind of, the boats weren't the best, but the boating was fun. A lot of afterhours activities. A lot of motor vehicle accidents. Bar fights.

Dennis Burnett:

I don't know if I made more arrests in Lake Mead than I did in Yosemite. Probably not. But there's a different clientele that goes to Lake Mead versus Yosemite. A bad guy, at least in my experience, in Yosemite, if you arrest him for drunk driving, "Okay, you got me. Here we go." Lake Mead, you arrest somebody for drunk driving, they're going to fight you the entire way to see if they can get out of the cuffs or whatever they can do to get away. They did not have any respect for anybody. Lake Mead is known as the dumping ground for the crime syndicates in Las Vegas. We worked very well with Las Vegas Metro, great experience, great training with them. Very professional staff in Death Valley. The assistant chief rangers, I thought, were outstanding. Put the trainings together that we had. So, from that perspective, that was good. I got to use my EMT. I saw more motor vehicle accidents, more vehicle fatalities than I had ever

faced before. But that just comes from isolated roads and alcohol and high speeds.

Brenna Lissoway: How was that dealing with so many fatalities?

Dennis Burnett: I don't know. I guess you just learn to deal with it, to work with it. It's part of the job. Not something you go out every day wanting to do, but it just sort of comes with the terrain.

Brenna Lissoway: What do you feel like were some of the accomplishments you had there at Lake Mead?

Dennis Burnett: I think I upgraded their structural fire program. And that was based on, we had structural fire responsibilities but no apparatus. We had what they would call like a one-and-a-half-ton brush truck. I was able to outfit the work that we might be able to do a little bit of exposure protection. My skills at boating became pretty significant, I think. Was able to get on the park dive team. In high school, I dove a couple of times, not knowing what I was doing. But went with somebody that did. And thinking back on it, that was pretty stupid. But going through Dave McLean's dive program, I thought, was outstanding. Some good diving pressure there and in San Francisco. So that was a skill that I didn't have that I was able to obtain.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, talk to me about the transition to your next post.

Dennis Burnett: From Lake Mead, we moved on to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I put in for and got the position as back country, North Carolina back country manager, if you will. In talking to folks, what made sense to me for a rounded park ranger bag of tricks, I've got Yosemite Valley, I've got Lake Mead. I probably don't need more heavy law enforcement. Back country, resource management, trails, horses, seems to make a lot of sense in my portfolio. And in talking to Bill Wade, who was the assistant chief ranger that was hiring the position made a lot of sense to me. So, Ginny and I made the move there. I became the [unclear] back country ranger for Smokies and she became the campground manager of Smokemont campground, which is the major campground on the North Carolina side.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay. You mentioned that you talked to a lot of people about this. Were there particular mentors in your career that you relied on?

Dennis Burnett: Mm hmm. I don't know at what point in my career they became ones, but Jim Brady would be one. Jack Morehead became one.

Brenna Lissoway: And why were they good mentors?

Dennis Burnett: I liked their approach. They didn't get excited about stuff. As Rick Gale used to say, "If there's no blood in the hallways, there's no

emergency.” That sort of thing. Jim Thompson I’d mentioned I’d talked to about the Yosemite job. Folks that had been there. Tommy Thompson was my chief ranger for several seasons in Death Valley. I had a lot of respect for him. He retired as the regional chief ranger for Midwest region in Omaha years later. But yeah, he was very good, too.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So back country position.

Dennis Burnett: Back country.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. What was that like?

Dennis Burnett: I’d never lived in the South. I don’t think I will again. (laughs) Bugs. Humidity. Oh my goodness. The Smokies average 60 inches of rain a year. And I’m a California boy, where it’s sunny. If it’s not rainy and cloudy in the Smokies, it’s foggy or something. You don’t see the sun that often. But I was responsible for a little over 800 miles of trail, and the horse program for the North Carolina side of the park. I had 10 horses. At one point, Ginny and I developed, we put on a 40-hour horse patrol program that the district needed, because they needed more people on horseback. Didn’t spend a whole lot of time on horseback on the trails. I would just seem to be more comfortable on foot. Spent a lot of time on horseback around the campgrounds and stuff. So, did that.

Dennis Burnett: And I worked with, picked up two horses from the U.S. park police. I remember coming up from North Carolina to DC. Meeting with Sergeant Dennis [Ayres?], who ran the horse program for the park police. They donated two horses to us and took them back. One was unmanageable so we turned it over to the trail crew, which was run by maintenance. And as it turns out, two years later, the other one that we kept was blind in one eye. We kept wondering why he kept walking into trees. But he was a manageable horse. So, it was a fun part.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. It’s interesting, something just occurred to me. Just from interviewing a lot of folks, it sounds like oftentimes you are put into, you choose to go to new challenges and new places that you’re not familiar with, that are just completely foreign to things that you’ve experienced in the past. How did you approach that? Because you went to several different places. You went to an urban park. You went to this park in the South. What was your attitude towards approaching a new resource, a new part of the country, that was completely different?

Dennis Burnett: Well, number one, the desire, wanting to learn, was part of it. But what’s fun about seasonal work is I enjoy traveling. And with seasonal work, when you’re traveling from park to park, you know

you're going from a job to another job. And there's something new awaiting you there. So, there's always a surprise. Which is fun.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Yeah. Anything else you want to talk about in terms of your time at the Smokies?

Dennis Burnett: Oh, let's see. Hiked all the trails more than once. I'd average probably 1200 miles of trail a year. Obviously mostly during the spring, summer, and fall. Chasing poachers. A lot of the lands were taken from locals that have an endemic right, they think, to take the wildlife out of the park. Found out that the only shoes that would really work with all the wet trails and the stream crossings were the military jungle boots. I think I went through probably three a year for the three I was there. But you could get them army surplus sale, it wasn't that expensive.

Brenna Lissoway: What was it like dealing with those resentful local communities?

Dennis Burnett: Well, if you were successful, you'd end up with tacks in your driveway.

Brenna Lissoway: Tacks?

Dennis Burnett: Tacks to flatten your tires, yes. Which was not unusual. We weren't always that successful, so we didn't have that much of problems. We found out years later you need investigative work, you need sting operations to be able to identify these people. Your chances of finding somebody poaching in the back country away from vehicles on a major roadway are pretty slim. One of my employees on my staff were able to arrest two guys that were off-trail. We just happened to be there. They stumbled on us. And of course, we told them, "Wow that was a great tip they gave us. They were right, they were right here." Just to keep them thinking.

Brenna Lissoway: So, what was your next position?

Dennis Burnett: From there, Ginny and I moved to Sequoia National Park, where she was the sub-district ranger for Lodge Pole, which is 7,000 feet inside of the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks. And then I was picked up as a permanent intermittent GS5 step 10. And so, I would work as they needed me. FTE, they could keep me on the rolls. The fire management officer was [Art Parton?], who was one of my district rangers in Death Valley. Who I had a lot of respect for. And as the FMO, he had access to a lot of training. ICS was just getting established. So, he was able to run me through, bless his heart, a number of wildland fire programs to get my qualifications up to crew boss. The basics in ICS, and also structural fire, to where I became the structural fire chief for the giant forest area of Sequoia National Park. We have two apparatus, structural apparatus. So, Ginny was the sub-district ranger, managing the campgrounds. And if the fire alarm went off, she

would cover the house and I would head up the fire truck and we'd respond. We actually had, I don't know, probably half a dozen structural fire responses every year. Nothing major. But small fires.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, no major incidents while you were there?

Dennis Burnett: No. No.

Brenna Lissoway: And I know that during that period from our interview this morning, that you were the "house spouse" in quotes.

Dennis Burnett: Yes. (laughs) Our daughter was born in the Smokies. And we moved to Sequoia in December, between Christmas and New Year's. And got put up in the lodge at Giant Forest for a week until our moving van arrived. But the moving van couldn't get in because of the snow pack. So, I think we stayed in that lodge at Giant Forest for a couple of weeks before they got the roads plowed enough to where they could get the moving van up to the housing at Lodge Pole.

Dennis Burnett: And then we moved into a two-bedroom, maybe 800 square foot house, with a woodstove, a two-car garage, that you used one side for the car, the other side was for wood, and started over. Cut about 13 cords of wood a year, because we'd burn that much through the wintertime.

Brenna Lissoway: So, what were you thinking about at this point in terms of your career? So, you did the back country stint. You had a lot of front country protection experience. Now you had fire. What were you thinking in terms of your next step?

Dennis Burnett: I thought I was ready to be a district ranger. I think I had the skills I needed. As the Windigo District ranger, I had a staff of 10, I believe. They were all seasonal. Of course, I was seasonal, too. Didn't really have a supervisor title in Death Valley, but a couple of folks that did work for me. But that would have been about it. I had the position of road patrol supervisor in Yosemite, but never was able to utilize it, because I left before it started. So just looking around to see what might be out there. Ginny and I both put in for that job, and she got selected. So, thinking down the road, what's the next step?

Dennis Burnett: So, from there, well, as Linsay got older, and we had our second child that we delivered in the car, in the park, she was approaching kindergarten age. We were two hours from school, well, an hour and a half from school, Three Rivers. Talking to Bob Smith, the chief ranger, if there might be some opportunities for us as a family to move to Ash Mountain. And there were no vacancies. And we started early on in talking along these lines. Either there or perhaps at Grant Grove at King's Canyon, whether there might be some opportunities. But nothing really came up.

- Dennis Burnett: And so, I started looking around, flip flopping back and forth. Ginny had taken the last job, so let's see if there's something out there I might be able to get under. Put in for and was selected as the assistant chief ranger for The Arch in Saint Louis. Jefferson National Expansion Memorial National Historical Park.
- Dennis Burnett: Ivan Tolley was the chief ranger there. And he was the assistant chief at Isle Royal when I was there. So that was my connection to knowing him.
- Brenna Lissoway: So, you made the decision to move to Saint Louis.
- Dennis Burnett: To find schools, is what we told ourselves. (laughs) And took us maybe six months to find a house, but we were very specific on where we were going to live, because of school districts. Finally moved into a house. Got our daughter into elementary school. But she wasn't qualified that year because of her birthday, it was different from California. So, she was in preschool for another year.
- Brenna Lissoway: Right. What was that Saint Louis position like for you?
- Dennis Burnett: I'm not sure how honest we want to be on this. As a supervisor, you adjust your supervisory approach based on the skills of your staff.
- Brenna Lissoway: Okay.
- Dennis Burnett: And some staff in urban parks are different, not caliber, but a different approach to what the park service is about versus, say, a wilderness ranger in the Sierra Nevada's.
- Brenna Lissoway: How?
- Dennis Burnett: They're used to just walking the sidewalks. My protection staff was responsible for the Arch grounds and a parking garage. And no back country whatsoever. We certainly did have law enforcement incidents. We had shooting incidents. But certainly not, you get frustrated in Yosemite, you jump in the car, you can drive somewhere. At The Arch in Saint Louis, there's nowhere to drive. You can walk to the courthouse or walk back to The Arch. Go down, look at the river. So that does vary, to a degree.
- Brenna Lissoway: So how did you adjust your supervisory—
- Dennis Burnett: You deal with the personnel you have. And you look for the best of what each one brings to the job and you try to take advantage of that. To help them and help them do the job. And maybe improve them, also.
- Brenna Lissoway: Were there some specific instances or steps that you recall taking to help?

- Dennis Burnett: Well, I was in a position where if my dispatcher didn't show up for a night shift, I had to go in. So, I did that a couple of times. And when that same person kept calling in that they were sick, we'd have a talk. Say, "We've got an issue here. You're either going to have to show up more often for work or we're going to have to find somebody else to do it." And just being honest with them. I don't want to get up at nine o'clock and drive into Saint Louis and work the midnight shift when I've got to be there tomorrow morning at six.
- Brenna Lissoway: Right. Right. And what are the, do you think there are different skills sets—
- Dennis Burnett: You don't need as many skill sets in an urban park setting that you would in a wilderness setting. I mean, cross-country skiing's not going to be one. Search and rescue's not going to be one. Law enforcement's not going to change. The protection aspects are going to be there. The EMS are going to be there. So as long as you've got those, you're solid. And I don't begrudge anybody doing that. In fact, when we were teaching at the, well, here at NAU, North Arizona University, as well as Southwest Tech, and certainly we taught at that seasonal academy when we were in the Smokies, when these kids are looking to graduate permanent positions, they need to look at the Independence national parks, the Saint Louis national park units, because they have a higher turnover rate. And it's a good way to get selected, get into it. And if you've got the skills to get out, you won't be there that long.
- Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Other challenges while at Saint Louis? Or particular accomplishments you'd like to talk about?
- Dennis Burnett: It's fun watching the riverboats. (laughs)
- Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. And probably a whole different visitation.
- Dennis Burnett: Oh, absolutely.
- Brenna Lissoway: Than the kinds of visitors you were dealing with, I would imagine. What was that like?
- Dennis Burnett: Yeah, yeah. Well, not necessarily. Well, the homeless was an issue. Let's see. Subsidized housing was like two blocks north of The Arch grounds, so we would see them on a regular basis. The parking garage went in right after I got there, which was the main place people would go into the Cardinal games. Park in the parking garage, walk across The Arch grounds to the stadium, then come back through The Arch grounds. Some drunk. Relieving themselves, 11:30 at night, that sort of thing. But you got used to it. It was pretty regular. They didn't, as a rule, didn't cause an issue.
- Brenna Lissoway: What was the attitude towards park rangers?

Dennis Burnett: I thought it was okay. There was one seasons when, one year I can't remember what happened, something happened when the homeless population seemed to explode. And Saint Louis PD would put the homeless on the bus, send them to The Arch grounds, where they would get off. And we would turn around, put them back on the bus, put the quarter in the slot and take them back to the downtown area of the city. So, yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. A whole different set of challenges.

Dennis Burnett: It was.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. So, what was your next position?

Dennis Burnett: From there, I moved on up to Cape Cod National Seashore as the south district ranger.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Dennis Burnett: And spent five years there. It was, while living there, I used to say before I moved to DC, I was happy to say Cape Cod was the longest place I'd lived anywhere since high school.

Brenna Lissoway: And that was for five years.

Dennis Burnett: That was [great?], that was [unclear]. Great opportunity. Good staff. Good relations with the towns. Unique operation. Seashores are great.

Brenna Lissoway: How was it unique?

Dennis Burnett: They took a federal National Park Service unit and set it down over six existing town and told you to go make it work.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Dennis Burnett: But had the seashore not been established it would look like Atlantic City now. There would be no nature involved. So, I think it was a good thing they did it in the early 1960s. But once you get to know the locals, they were not that adamant about the seashore, other than the revenue the parks were making off the beaches that they had been, the towns were running, they would get the money, not the National Park Service.

Dennis Burnett: And there was a couple of issues where towns wanted to develop beaches, sometimes on park service property, which never came to fruition. But they were talking about it on a regular basis.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Okay. So, what was a day like for you at Cape Cod?

Dennis Burnett: It depends on whether Ginny was there or not. (laughter) And that will be in the other interview, right? So, I don't need to review that.

Brenna Lissoway: Right. Yeah. I mean, talk to me about what your sort of work—

Dennis Burnett: Well first two years I lived in government housing. And the office was a 10-minute walk away. [take home vehicle?] that sort of thing. I managed the south district of the park, which ran from Wellfleet, Eastham, Orleans and Chatham. So, I had four town, four town councils for chiefs of police that I worked with. North district was two, it was Truro and Provincetown. My protection staff, I had one, two, three permanent protection staff working for me. One FMO and hired an additional five protection seasonals and 25 lifeguards.

Brenna Lissoway: Lifeguards.

Dennis Burnett: Lifeguards. I had three protected lifeguard beaches in each district. And north district ranger, Irv Tubbs and I, were basically the land barons. We managed the seasonal housing for the park. Administration didn't get involved. And we knew where to put everybody when they came. That was a problem. You hired seasonal at Cape Cod, nobody can afford to live in local at the local prices. So, you had an enormous inventory of park housing.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay. And that fell on the protection staff.

Dennis Burnett: Fell on the district rangers, yeah. But I had a supervisor lifeguard that took care of all of them. I would meet with them a couple of times during the winter, during the hiring procedure in the springtime. Who was going to pick up, what schools it was going to go visit, what teams he wanted to see in competition, see who he wanted to consider. Each district had a senior lifeguard, supervisor lifeguard, that ran those programs. So, it made it a lot easier on us.

Brenna Lissoway: Particular accomplishments that you felt, changes that happened while you were there?

Dennis Burnett: Yeah. Because we had a fire management program. I had an FMO. We had no vehicles. And the standards that came out of Boise for the funding for fire apparatus, were written such that if you had agreements with a town or local community, your points went up tremendously versus somebody that didn't, and I had four of them. And for the North Atlantic Region, my submittal to Boise came out number one. So, I got a fire apparatus that maybe a more benefiting park might have been. But because of the way the standards were written, we ended up with a new fire truck. Which they have subsequently given away. (laughs) But they've been replaced with two others. But [unclear]

Brenna Lissoway: So really pushing the fire program there.

Dennis Burnett: Yeah. Actually, it was a gentleman working on his master's degree. He'd been working for about 10 years on the fire program. What burns, what doesn't burn, times of year, doing controlled burns. Occasional shipwreck. Nothing huge. Or shipping vessels

would wash ashore. Authority and jurisdiction class I'd teach at Northern Arizona University. We have broad authority within the boundaries of national park units. But once you cross the park boundary, it's very limited. Absent state authority that that will give you.

Dennis Burnett: My first year I got there, the pirate ship *The Whydah*, pirated by Blackbeard, crashed off of, it sunk off Marconi Beach. Barry Clifford in his underwater treasure hunting group found it about six months before I arrived. And were actively doing recovery of things [unclear] gold coins, silver, that sort of thing. And eventually, it eventually went to court to see who had possession over it. Is it the finder? Is it the state? Is it the federal government? Because at that point, it was right on the boundary. Part of it was in the park, part of it was out of the park.

Dennis Burnett: Historically, the seashore, the ocean side of Cape Cod erodes three to six inches a year. Over the last 25 years, it's been averaging 10 to 20 inches a year. So, where that wreck of *The Whydah* would be found today, it would be wholly outside the park. Because the park boundary kept migrating to the west.

Brenna Lissoway: Interesting.

Dennis Burnett: So, *The Whydah* exited the park as the shoreline eroded away.

Brenna Lissoway: Uh huh. So, what did they, what was—

Dennis Burnett: Eventually Barry got to keep virtually all of it. He opened a museum in Provincetown and a lot of it's on display. Yeah. Pretty fascinating story.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Definitely. Definitely. So, your next move was to where?

Dennis Burnett: Delaware-Water Gap. Northeast Pennsylvania. I was the Pennsylvania district ranger. And again, it was another promotion. And I managed to, I was district ranger on Cape Cod. You heard what that staff was, permanent staff, seasonal staff. Delaware-Water Gap was almost all permanent staff much, I had about 20 permanent staff, protection staff, plus fire in Pennsylvania. Plus, a major highway, Route 209, which runs through the park. Which when the park was established, prior to the park being established, it was a major commercial vehicle throughway from Pennsylvania and points west and south, and New York state and points north into New England. So, when the park was established, as you well know, that commercial traffic is not allowed. So, there was special legislation set up to where commercial traffic would continue to be allowed to use Route 209, traverse the park north and south. If they meet certain requirements and they charge a certain fee for it. And that was to be in place until an interstate bypass in New Jersey just

east of the park could be completed. That took about 15 years. So, we dealt with that a lot.

Dennis Burnett: We had some major winter snowstorms, I remember. And it's always humorous to think that Route 209 is open from north boundary entrance to south boundary entrance, but everyone outside is snowed in. so you could drive the park road, but you couldn't go anywhere else.

Brenna Lissoway: And that was because the park maintained—

Dennis Burnett: Park maintained the road, yes.

Brenna Lissoway: And plowed it.

Dennis Burnett: Yup.

Brenna Lissoway: Huh. Okay. Other issues there? Or was that, was Route 209 really the big one?

Dennis Burnett: A huge canoe operation, yeah. Floating the Delaware River is very popular. The clientele at Delaware-Water Gap could vary from year to year. One story says that the New York City Jews [this is what the locals said, not what I said], if they can't afford to go to Cape Cod or Cape May, they'll come to Delaware-Water Gap. The two major beach operations, the canoe livery operation, concession run, and we didn't manage any campgrounds, but there was a private campground right next to my quarters and district office that was run as a concession operation. Not by the concession.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. What was your next position?

Dennis Burnett: So, from there, I moved to the Washington office. Was hired by Jim Brady again as the regulations, jurisdictions and special park uses program manager.

Brenna Lissoway: And was that a new position?

Dennis Burnett: No, it was an existing position that had been around, well, forever, I guess. But had been vacant for a couple of months. Some folks had been acting. It was one that I had researched. Knew a little bit about it. Mike Finley had been in it one time. Russ Wilson was in it in an acting capacity prior to my getting there. A few other folks. And just something that really sounded interesting to me.

Brenna Lissoway: Why did it sound interesting?

Dennis Burnett: Well, if you're in protection you can understand the CFR, there were some things in the CFR that—

Brenna Lissoway: The code of federal regulations.

Dennis Burnett: Sometimes, yeah, sometimes it didn't make a lot of sense until I realized how hard it was to change it. Then I went oh, looks pretty good to me. (laughter)

- Dennis Burnett: So, I spent three years in that position working for Brady. Pete Hart came in as an acting, and Dick Martin and then Chris Andress. And then finished up with Don Coelho but was in that office. It was the Ranger Activities Division when I got there. That was 1994.
- Dennis Burnett: 1997, I was asked to take over the law enforcement program for the National Park Service. This is about the time we were moving from NPS9 to reference manual 9 and director's order 9. So, I was heavily involved in writing both of those documents with a lot of help, obviously. And—
- Brenna Lissoway: What were some of the big changes that happened in that rewrite?
- Dennis Burnett: Well, we became more specific on what was required in a protection program. To that point, it wasn't as specific or explicit as it should be. For example, we'd mention a rainbow fleet of vehicles we had in parks. And we were expected to be, not on patrol then, but pursuit then. There was a definition for pursuit vehicle that we didn't meet. And therefore, GSA would not provide us the vehicles that were required. So, we wrote into policy a pursuit vehicle will be a rear-wheel drive, V8, heavy suspension, heavy radiator, that sort of thing, to where then we order it, to comply with policy they had to provide those vehicles unless the park had the money to go out and purchase it on the open market as an [I?] vehicle. As an example.
- Brenna Lissoway: Sure.
- Dennis Burnett: There were parks where superintendents were telling rangers they couldn't wear their duty belts in visitor's centers. We made sure that came to a stop. We had parks where superintendents were telling rangers they couldn't write tickets. Not all parks, but these are the stories I'd end up hearing and have to deal with. So, we became much more specific in what's going to be allowed, what's not going to be allowed in a protection position. Doing law enforcement.
- Brenna Lissoway: This was about the same time as Ranger Careers?
- Dennis Burnett: Mm hmm.
- Brenna Lissoway: Did one initiative have any influence over what you were doing?
- Dennis Burnett: They benefited each other.
- Brenna Lissoway: Okay.
- Dennis Burnett: Ranger Careers, as I told Jim Brady, he and Bill Sanders retired, those of us that were in the ranks thank you for taking rangers off of food stamps. Because you gave them a living wage, is basically what it amounted to. And of course, the budget people would tell us, "Well, you just bankrupted the park service." Even though we

didn't, but they had to blame somebody. And I think funding was, I think Brady had to go to Congress to get their money, because park [unclear] wouldn't fund it. So.

Brenna Lissoway:

Were you involved at all in those efforts?

Dennis Burnett:

Nope. Bill Sanders was the author on most of that. And he's the guru. Yeah. So, from there, law enforcement manager during that time, I was there for 13 years. During vacant times I was the manager of the search and rescue program. I was the manager of the EMS program. For a little less than two years, I was the acting chief ranger for the division. Prior to 9/11, the Department of Interior staff that we worked with was Irv Tubbs and one other person. After 9/11, his operation went from two to close to 30. And so, what used to be a National Park Service autonomous law enforcement program became subservient to the Department of the Interior. And they pretty much started controlling everything, as they probably should have been. But basically, Homeland Security says we're only going to talk to one-person interior, it's going to be Department of Interior. We're not going to talk to Fish, Park Service, BLM, individually, it was going to be one voice. And so that's why their operation just exploded. With about four SES positions, maybe, something like that. So that's where they really changed.

Brenna Lissoway:

So, yeah. Talk a little bit about that post-9/11 world for park operations.

Dennis Burnett:

Yeah. Everything we tried to do, I think a law enforcement perspective, Interior didn't agree with. They might tell us that we agree with you. But in the end run, pretty much we did as they expected us to do. For I want to say close to over a year, national park rangers were staffing all the Bureau of Reclamation hydroelectric facilities throughout the west. And every three weeks, we were sending a couple dozen rangers for a three-week stint to these facilities. And that became very costly. Became very demoralizing to some of the rangers. That was about the time that rangers stopped answering their phones. We were sending them to Philadelphia, we were sending them to the Statue of Liberty. There were eight hydroelectric facilities. Folsom Dam, Hoover Dam, Cooley Dam, Yellowtail Dam, all of those.

Brenna Lissoway:

These were elective details for these rangers.

Dennis Burnett:

They were told to go.

Brenna Lissoway:

They were told to go. Okay.

Dennis Burnett:

We were funding it, but the parks were told, "You have to send them." And that left the park stripped. I don't care if it's Fourth of July weekend or not. Number one priority, Department of the

Interior, was the hydroelectric facility, to make sure they're not going to be vandalized, terrorized, or destroyed. And so, this became, after your fourth trip to Philadelphia and the Statue of Liberty, rangers got really tired of that. And so that then led to beefing up those parks' staffs, number one. And then number two, contracting out to security services to do some of the things that they were doing. Running the entrances to the Statue of Liberty, the magnetometers, those sorts of things. The vehicle inspections going across Hoover Dam. There's now a bridge in place that avoids the dam itself. But up until then, it was another six, eight years before that bridge was completed. Park service was manning stations on each side of the damn, inspecting every vehicle before it went across. And that's a heavily traveled road. Twenty-four hours a day.

Brenna Lissoway: Right. Huh. You mentioned that you were search and rescue, had a search and rescue in WASO.

Dennis Burnett: Basically, a staff position when it was vacant. Somebody had to.

Brenna Lissoway: Sure. Sure.

Dennis Burnett: Managing the statistics. Whenever we had to fund SARS it met the national funding [standard?], which if you spend \$500 at the park level, then it bumps up to a national budget. And then we have to fund it. Working with the budget office and making sure that gets accomplished. What can they spend monies on, what they can't spend monies on. The EMS program, same sort of thing. Making sure everything's in policy compliance.

Brenna Lissoway: What are some of the differences, to you, after having been a field ranger for so long, moving into the WASO arena. How is that for you?

Dennis Burnett: Ranger Activities division was known as the token green and gray of the Washington office. We were basically the only ones that could get field rangers in to work and take a stint at those positions. Which was not easy. Very few rangers are interested in going to Washington, DC, to work in the Ranger Activities office. Which then became the division of law enforcement, security emergency services after 9/11. But being able to get somebody in that's had the broad range of field experiences, because that's what you need. You're going to be talking to the field on a daily basis, nationwide. And doing things that benefit them.

Dennis Burnett: My primary mission in all of the positions I held there was to answer the phone on a field call.

Brenna Lissoway: To provide support.

Dennis Burnett: Just what can we do to help you. Jim Brady put up a sign in Ranger Activities 40 years ago, 30 years ago, 20 years ago? What

have we done for the parks today? That was the mantra. The phone rings, you answer it. Because somebody's asking for information. And we're there to help.

Brenna Lissoway: Maybe, are there any other major initiatives or things that you worked on that you want to talk about while you were at WASO?

Dennis Burnett: Oh. Yeah. The Olympics in Salt Lake City was kind of cool.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, you worked in the Olympics?

Dennis Burnett: It was interesting. When Salt Lake City was awarded the contract by the International Olympic Committee for Salt Lake City and surrounding areas, secret service was going to be the lead agency on that, lead protective agency.

Dennis Burnett: And I'm sitting in my office probably two years out, a year and a half out, I get a phone call from a special agent from secret service identifies himself and says, "You represent the law enforcement arm of the National Park Service." I said yes. He says, "And you guys have law enforcement authority in the national parks, right?" I said, "Yeah, that's right." "And you also have winter skills. Is that correct?" I said, "Oh, yeah, we have a lot of winter skills." He says, "We need to talk."

Dennis Burnett: So, we set up a meeting. I went over to their headquarters. Sat down with them and told them what we can do. What they were looking for was somebody with federal law enforcement capability that had the winter survival skills that could function in a snow environment. And he says, "You're our guys. You're going to be involved. You, National Park Service, will be responsible for venue protection for the overnight hours when nothing's going on. You'll be out there on snowmobiles, you're out there on snowshoes, you'll be out there on cross-country skis. You're responsible for protecting the entire venue," which was throughout the Salt Lake City area, "for the overnight hours."

Dennis Burnett: So, we ginned that up and I thought that was a huge kudo for the National Park Service.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. So, you were you specifically involved?

Dennis Burnett: I was the National Park Service liaison in Washington, DC, working with all the federal agencies that are going to be involved with the Olympics.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, did you actually get to go out to the site?

Dennis Burnett: No, my boss wouldn't let me go.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh.

Dennis Burnett: But we had, the people onsite, the contact, we had a person set up in charge. We put him, that person, in charge of making sure he

selected, basically identified the number of people we were going to have and what their skills needed to be, and they took it and ran with it.

Brenna Lissoway:

I see.

Dennis Burnett:

And so, everybody flew into the airport in Salt Lake City about two days before it begins. The U.S. marshal for the state of Utah shows up at the airport. "Everybody raise your right hand. You're now deputy U.S. marshals for the duration of the winter Olympics. So, you have authority wherever you go."

Brenna Lissoway:

Wow. That is an exciting initiative to be a part of. We're getting sort of a little bit close to our ending time. But I did want to ask you just a couple of sort of larger questions. Maybe you could talk about your decision to retire first. How you made that decision.

Dennis Burnett:

In a law enforcement [covered?] position you reach the age of 57, you're out. Young and vigorous workforce is what the legislation says. And when you reach that age, it's forced retirement. That's why you pay in more for your retirement throughout your career, so that when you do retire early, you'll have more in pension that would cover the years you might have worked beyond that.

Brenna Lissoway:

So, when you reached age 57, it was just—

Dennis Burnett:

No questions.

Brenna Lissoway:

No questions.

Dennis Burnett:

Yeah.

Brenna Lissoway:

Okay. How did you feel about that?

Dennis Burnett:

I put in for several superintendencies that I didn't get. And got to the point where if that's the way it's going to be, that's the way it's going to be. So, we'll see you. I won't be commuting into DC again.

Brenna Lissoway:

Mm hmm. And can you talk a little bit about what you've been doing in retirement?

Dennis Burnett:

First couple of years, Ginny and I traveled a fair amount. And we still travel an awful lot. But we're also now adjunct professors at Northern Arizona University where we help teach the National Park Service seasonal law enforcement program at their academy on campus. So, I have about six classes that I'm dedicated to teach. And Ginny also has a number of classes she teaches. And then we're involved in all the field activities, the scenarios.

Brenna Lissoway:

Okay. Was there ever a point in your career that you were asked to do something that you did not agree with? And, if so, how did you handle it?

Dennis Burnett: One that comes to mind is when personal watercrafts became a huge issue when we were sued by Blue Water Network and maybe another conservation organization. This was back when personal watercrafts, jet skis, first came out. They were two-stroke engines. So, you had the exhaust smoke that was coming out. And I always considered them a boat. And I thought if you can have a boat here, why can't you have a personal watercraft here? We were sued and told, the lawsuit said they thought the National Park Service should develop park-specific special regulations that will allow jet skis to operate in your park waters even though boats are allowed there already. I didn't see the difference between the two. I made it clear in some of the sessions I'd had with Interior, Blue Water Network, and maybe even NPCA, that to me it was still a boat and the determination was made by Interior that yes we would move forward with special regulations that would allow these personal watercrafts to continue using the park waters. Absent that, they would be prohibited.

Dennis Burnett: I had heartburn with that. I didn't see a difference. But that's the path they chose to take. That was about the time I stepped out of the regs job into the law enforcement program manager job and thought that was probably a good move on my part. Somebody else had to write the special regs. There was dozens of them. To get a regulation in place is two years plus. A lot, a lot of work just to doing one. And Kym Hall took most of the load on that. And I bet she wrote a dozen, if not more.

Brenna Lissoway: What would you say is your proudest accomplishment?

Dennis Burnett: Surviving DC.

Brenna Lissoway: Surviving DC.

Dennis Burnett: I think I did. (laughs)

Brenna Lissoway: And when you say surviving, what were the big difficulties that you felt there?

Dennis Burnett: Well, just the commute. The commute will kill you, yeah. I enjoyed the job. Loved the job. Every day was different. It's the old, what's the crisis of the day? You don't go in with a game plan, because it's going to change in the first two hours. That sort of thing. And that's okay. You've got a workload to do, so that's over here. And when the crisis pops up, then you address that, and you go back to what your agenda is. And the variety of things. I mean, we did make a difference, I think, working, what the Ranger Activities did, [visions?] those chief rangers, the Chris Andress's, the Jim Brady's, the Pete Harts, we made a difference, I think, for the better. Because they were thinking where we needed to be

thinking, where we needed to go. And it was fun to be a part of that.

Brenna Lissoway: And in terms of people who you felt were good leaders during your career. And if you want to mention any by name, that's great.

Dennis Burnett: Well, the ones I just mentioned would be them. Yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. And what made them good leaders?

Dennis Burnett: I just, the way they thought. They didn't get excited. This is how we're going to address it. Develop a plan and then accomplish the plan. You think it through.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about – oh, I know what I wanted to ask you. I almost completely forgot. ANPR, Association of National Park Rangers.

Dennis Burnett: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Can you talk about when you first got involved with that organization?

Dennis Burnett: Yes. The very first year, in 1976, when everybody in Yosemite left and I was told to stay there and cover the roads.

Brenna Lissoway: (laughs) That was your first involvement.

Dennis Burnett: That was my first involvement.

Brenna Lissoway: (laughs) So what actually made you want to join the organization and get involved that way?

Dennis Burnett: To support the field ranger. I mean, I mentioned it, but I flashed on the fact that early in Ginny's career in Yosemite Valley, it was always, "Oh, we've got a major rescue. Ginny, you stay and cover the roads. We're going to go on the rescue." Time and time again. (laughs) So that's where it comes from.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. And how have you seen the organization change over the years?

Dennis Burnett: We went to probably the first ten. And as we got farther removed in kids' activities and doing other things, it became more sporadic, unfortunately. Ginny coordinated the Rendezvous at Great Smoky Mountains. What was the dam? Fontana Dam. And then I coordinated the two in Las Vegas at the Showboat Hotel.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Dennis Burnett: And those were fun. And I was involved for at least 10 years in finding the venues where we were going to go. So, I think I located Fontana. I know I located Showboat and there was a couple of others. About eight to ten years that I was involved in trying to find these venues. And initiating contact with the properties. Tell them who we are, what we were looking for. And then the board

members would come in, they were the ones that were going to try to sign the contracts to finalize it.

Brenna Lissoway: And were you involved in deciding what the schedule would be?

Dennis Burnett: No, I didn't do the programs. I did the facility.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, okay. I see. I see. And so how have the Ranger Rendezvouses changed over the years? The actual events themselves?

Dennis Burnett: The breakouts, I think, are still great. The mentoring program that the park service, that ANPR provides, I think, I talk about that in my classes that I teach at NAU, I tell them they need to join. There's a lot of benefits here. The seasonal insurance program. That took for years and years and years to get off the ground is important. There used to be a little more beer. As Rick Gale would say, "You know, the older we get, the less beer we drink." And it's obvious, because there's not that much beer available here. At least the hours aren't as big as they used to be. When we ran the Rendezvous at Fontana, beer was available 10 a.m. to midnight. Coffee break. If you want coffee, fine. If you don't, something else. I guess that's a comparison.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Any other changes that you've seen over the years with the organization?

Dennis Burnett: I'm sure there are. But the last one we went to was 2010, and the one prior to that was probably 10 years prior.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, you haven't been to—

Dennis Burnett: Huge disconnect. Yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: Well, that's kind of interesting, though, having been away for a while and then coming to a Rendezvous again.

Dennis Burnett: And I think I found out there's 25 percent of attendees this year is retirees.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, is that right?

Dennis Burnett: Yeah. So, for us, it's a social gathering more than a professional gathering. Because the breakout sessions really aren't going to impact us unless they're going to do something on social security or Medicare or something like that. Which they could.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Yeah. Great. So, yeah, is there anything else that you want to talk about in terms of your park service career that we have not touched on that is important?

Dennis Burnett: I'm sure I'll come up with something in 10 minutes or an hour or two days from now. But right now, I think I'm hoarse.

Brenna Lissoway: (laughs) Okay. Great. Well, thanks, Dennis, so much. I think we'll stop there.

Dennis Burnett:

Okay.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]