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Lee Werst
October 29, 2012

Interview conducted by Jeremy Kaufman
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ANPR Oral History Project

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Jeremy Kaufman: This is the October 29th interview of Lee Werst by Jeremy Kaufman for collecting oral histories for the Association of National Park Rangers Oral History Project. So just first, a bit of biographical general information. Can you just say when and where you were born?

Lee Werst: Yes, I was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, on October 4th, 1957.

Jeremy Kaufman: And did you grow up in the Allentown area?

Lee Werst: I grew up near there, in Berks County, Pennsylvania, closer to the area of Kutztown, Pennsylvania.

Jeremy Kaufman: What were, growing up, some of your hobbies, interests, as a kid?

Lee Werst: A lot of sports, in particular played a lot of baseball and soccer. And always had a very great interest in history. I used to do a great deal of reading of history, and also a lot of things like science fiction, things like that.

Jeremy Kaufman: What about history sparked your interest growing up?

Lee Werst: I just seemed to always be very interested in it. In particular, in military history. And some of that may derive from my father's participation in the Second World War as an infantry officer and listening to many of the stories that he would have about what he went through during the war.

Jeremy Kaufman: Did he often tell you stories about his experiences?

Lee Werst: Ah, he would. He would sometimes tell us about the different campaigns he was on and, you know, some of the individual battles, of incidents that would've occurred during the time that he was serving. So yeah, he would talk quite a bit, probably fortunate in that regard. A lot of people would not want to talk about that, but he did, even though he saw a lot of very heavy action.

Jeremy Kaufman: So, when you were going to school then, did you have a sense that history might be where you would be going?

Lee Werst: Yeah, I did. That was, um, basically I was always a B-C student except when it came to history. I was like the A+ student in the class, so I think I just naturally gravitated that way toward history.

Jeremy Kaufman: What area specifically, I mean, you mentioned your father and World War II. What other history, military and not, did you look, interesting?

Lee Werst: Well, military history, of course, I liked quite a bit. Eventually I started to really like colonial American history quite a bit, and also British history. For some reason I became quite an Anglophile, as I

was growing up. I'm not sure of exactly why, but for some reason I just became very fascinated with English, British history in general.

Jeremy Kaufman: Any particular era or—

Lee Werst: Not necessarily. I do enjoy the English Civil War a great deal, for some reason! But not really. I'm pretty much all the length and breadth of it. I think one of the things that attracted me was the British Empire and its reach all across the globe, touching on different cultures, and its influence on those cultures, and the shaping of really world history. And I think that just sort of fascinated me, how that one little island nation could actually exert that type of an influence, that's actually, we still feel to this day in this country.

Jeremy Kaufman: What sort of opportunities did you have to further explore this interest in both British history but in general?

Lee Werst: Well, as a kid, as a young boy, one thing that we did was my family would make – I won't say frequent but a decent number of – trips to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, which wasn't too far away. And that's probably my very first experience with any type of national park was actually Gettysburg National Military Park. And I also happen to have an ancestor that actually fought in the campaign there with a Union emergency regiment, a Pennsylvania emergency regiment, and so we were always kind of, my brother and I, were always kind of fascinated with great-great grandfather Henry's participation in the campaign, and we did a lot of research to find out what actually happened to him there and his unit.

Jeremy Kaufman: Do you recall some of those first memories that you have of going to Gettysburg as a child?

Lee Werst: I do. When I was – I'm not even sure exactly how old I was at the time – I had to've been no more than six or seven at the most, there was a good friend of my father's who had served with him in the second world war, and he lived relatively close to Gettysburg, so it was very common that we would go visit them and then would go the two families together end up going to Gettysburg. And he, that individual, knew a great deal about the Gettysburg battle, and so we used to walk around on the battlefield, and he'd tell us stories and stuff. Never went on any ranger programs when I was a kid, didn't really see too much of that, but I just really remembering going around that having that individual – his name was Ed – actually telling my brother and I different stories about the battle.

Jeremy Kaufman: So, well you mentioned formal ranger programs, growing up, I mean, did you have a sense of, just by going to Gettysburg, what the National Park Service was and what they were trying to do?

Lee West: I knew what it was, but I didn't, I can't say I knew a whole lot about the mission of the Park Service. It wasn't something that, at that age, when I was much younger, it wasn't anything on my radar at all. The National Park Service didn't come within my radar, I guess you could say, actually until I was almost done with graduate school.

Jeremy Kaufman: So, what was on your radar before that?

Lee Werst: Well, I had gone to East Stroudsburg State College and had received a bachelor's in history, went back to East Stroudsburg where it had a name change to East Stroudsburg University, as all the state college system in Pennsylvania did at that time, and was working on a master's of arts in European history with a concentration in British, and I had completed every – and while I was doing that I also ended up taking a break to serve on active duty with the Army in a program called AGR, which is Active Guard Reserve, where I was an executive officer for radio operations company that was made up mostly of reservists and just a few active duty folks, so I had some military experience there, some overseas service with them as well. When I got out of the service in '86, I had the opportunity that I actually could've stayed in and transferred to I think it was the 42nd Army Reserve Command in California at Los Alamitos Armed Forces Reserve Center, and I turned that down, instead chose to leave the active service at that time in order to complete my master's degree at East Stroudsburg. I had to still complete my thesis, take my comprehensive exams, and there was another, one more course that I had to do.

Lee Werst: So I finished those up and as I was completing the writing of my thesis, I wasn't sure what to do with myself for the foreseeable future, and a friend of mine actually suggested 'Why don't you, you like history and you like talking about history and discussing it, why don't you become a seasonal ranger with the National Park Service?' And they in turn had a friend that had work as a seasonal at Delaware Water Gap, and so I thought, Well, maybe that's something that I should pursue. And, as it turned out, in my reserve unit that I was in at the time, which was the 1079th Army Reserve Garrison at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, there was a colonel in the MP division of our garrison unit who was a law enforcement ranger at Gettysburg, and so I talked to him, and he got me all the information and contacts to fill out what at that time was the standard type of seasonal employment form, which was just like a bubble form you would fill out and say I'm available at this time, these are places I'd like to work, and just some things like that. Nothing anywhere close to the type of resumes we might do today. And sent it in to a central office in Philadelphia, and as it

turned out, the year I did that was 1988, and that was also the year of the 125th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and they were taking on extra staff as a result. Cause at Gettysburg, it was very common that you would have teachers or other people that'd been there for a long time and constantly returning seasonals, and you didn't have a lot of new seasonals that were coming in. So, I really I lucked out. They gave me a call and I started there in, I believe it was March of '88, if I'm recalling correctly. And you know I just went into the visitor center, didn't really know a whole lot about what to do, was just a standard interpretation job. Showed up one day and they had us in a conference room, and they said that here's your badges, here. We'd already pre-ordered uniforms, they let you order uniforms ahead of time, and there was a box with uniforms that were all – needed ironing and washing and everything – and they said, 'Okay, we're going to drive you around the battlefield so you can see the battlefield and, oh yeah, tomorrow you start working in the visitor center and the day after that you'll deliver your first interpretive program in the National Cemetery'. And that pretty much started my career in the Park Service.

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, right before that I was gonna ask what kind of training you had and—

Lee Werst: It was one day. At that time, it was one day. You literally showed up, they took us up into a conference room in the visitor center, on the second floor of the old visitor center at Gettysburg that's not there any longer, and I'm trying to remember exactly who all was there. I think it was John Fiador [sp?] was there at the time, and he took us, it was just like a very, very basic training for the morning of just like 'This is what a ranger is, this is what a ranger does, this is how you should structure your programs', sort of an idea of how to do outlines, and then in the afternoon we all jumped into a vehicle, it was a van I believe, and we got driven around the battlefield and says 'This is Little Round Top, this is Devil's Den, this is the wheat field, this is the peach orchard, this is the first day's battlefield,' and like that. And we got to, after a couple hours of that, we got to go back into the library and we could spend the rest of the afternoon for a couple of hours actually starting to develop an outline, each one of us. I believe there were four that were in that particular session, and each one of us were assigned a particular program that we were supposed to be ready to start to deliver within a couple of days after we first arrived there. And, in my case, my first program was supposed to be the standard program that we give in the national cemetery.

Jeremy Kaufman: And how do you think that first program went when you were giving it?

- Lee Werst: I think it went okay. [Laughs.] I mean, as time went on, I really refined that particular program a great deal, but I had a lot of facts and figures in there at first and I started to try to change that. This is before we had the Interpretive Development Program, and fortunately for me there were some very good interpreters there and some very good supervisors, one in particular is Scott Hartwig [sp?], who was there at the time, and just observing his programs and how he would do some things, I really changed a lot of my style to reflect a lot of his and really many of the things that we started to hit on in the late '80s were really the things that you started to see in the mid-90s with the Interpretive Development Program. The universal concepts, the emotional connections, intellectual connections, things like that. We were basically starting to do that in the 80s already. It just wasn't formalized.
- Jeremy Kaufman: I'll definitely get back to those more formal interpretation issues, but in terms of that first summer when you were starting out, did you, what sort of expectations did you have that first summer and did you see yourself as this might be a continuing career at that point?
- Lee Werst: At the time I was just looking at it as something to, as just a job to occupy my time, and what I was actually striving for at that, my ambition at that time, since I liked history, I didn't really know what all to do with history, so okay, this ranger thing came up so I was doing something with it, but where I was going with it, I was sort of hoping to be able to get into more academia, perhaps become a professor, so I had applied for the Ph.D. program at American University in northwest DC, and was accepted into that, and my plan was to keep working at Gettysburg and just go to classes down at American and, you know, eventually get the Ph.D. and move on into academia. And of course, that changed after a little bit. I liked doing the ranger work and I felt very, it was very rewarding doing that work. I really enjoyed it a great deal. And at the end of the day I might be tired and I had sore feet, I'd been in the visitor center doing stuff and I'd done two or three or four programs out on the field somewhere, but it was very rewarding and the people that I worked with, we had very, very good rapport. We got along extremely well, and many of those people that I worked with in that first summer are still to this day some of my very best friends. And eventually I just figured I had the choice of being able to continue with academia or, as it turned out, I was offered a job. I went ahead and applied for a permanent position in Philadelphia in Independence Hall, which was common place for people to try to get permanent employment, so I applied for it and I was offered a subject-to-furlough park ranger GS-4 position in Philadelphia, and so I made the decision at that point that I'm going with the Park Service and I dropped out of my Ph.D. program.

Jeremy Kaufman: And so, what year was that?

Lee Werst: That was in '91, that would be June of '91, I believe. I had just started my fourth season at Gettysburg. And back in those days, it was very common that if you were a seasonal of some type, you could – even if you were on a seasonal appointment – you'd work a lot. Cause I would start normally sometimes like March at Gettysburg. And fortunately for me, I was also in the Army Reserves, so that was extra income for me. I actually made more money overall, when you added everything together, than some of the permanent employees there. It's pre-ranger careers. People were GS-4s, GS-5s. I was just a GS-4 at Gettysburg, but I still made more money than a GS-5 because of my reserve participation. But it was, where was I going with that [laughs], I don't remember where I was going with it. But it was very interesting working there, you know, it really piqued my interest. I got along with the people and it just started to come across to me that this might be a good career for me to have. And it was one that I hadn't thought about at all. I'd just like, I'd just stepped into it, no idea. It just happened.

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, I am curious about, as you said, you got there as they were preparing for the 125th anniversary for the battle. So, what was your role in preparation and the actual program itself?

Lee Werst: Well, for the program, they had several of the permanent rangers were assigned specific duties, specific areas on the battlefield for that day. And then we would have seasonals and some permanent staff that would then be signed in underneath them in those areas. I was assigned for the anniversary to the visitor center, so I was actually working in the visitor center rather than being out on the field, which is not unusual since it was my first year. You'd have the more experienced seasonals would be out on the field with some of the permanents where some of the action was going on. They had like living history encampments on the battlefield itself. They had simulations of battlefield tactics; no actual live firing was taking place at that time. There was off to the south and I think it was either in Maryland or almost in Maryland, to the south of the battlefield, there was actually a private reenactment that was going on. Some private company that was actually putting that one. And that's kind of interesting because their method for getting information out about their event was they actually had an office that they rented in the town of Gettysburg that was just down the street from the visitor center on Steinwehr Avenue, and what they did was they simply had a recording on a phone there that told people that if you were calling to get information about the reenactment that you should call the National Park Service Visitor Center, which we thought was interesting since we had absolutely

nothing to do with the reenactment [laughs]. And it was all a private, you know, type thing, but that was their way of getting around having to staff or anything. They basically just used us as their people, almost like we were their temp employees, you know? Actually, putting out information about their event. That kind of pissed us off. [Laughs.]

Jeremy Kaufman: Those first four seasons then, or the beginning of that fourth season, at Gettysburg, as you were growing into the ranger role, any personal challenges or successes that you had in those first few years?

Lee Werst: Oh, let's see. Well, I think it was challenging, just learning – one thing that I found to be a great challenge for me that I always have remembered is to try and respect multiple point of views. Cause when I would do my national cemetery walk, you would normally gather at the gates of the national cemetery, just inside the gates, which are right across from the visitor center at that time, and you would normally make one or two stops moving into the cemetery talking about the battle, all the casualties, why the cemetery's there, and the normal thing is you would end up talking about the Gettysburg Address, which took place right in and adjacent to the present-day cemetery. I remember talking about and really emphasizing how the cemetery was a Union cemetery, cause it was. It was just set aside as a resting place for Union dead: that was its purpose. And in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, when he's talking about that 'We won't forget what these individuals have done here and they will always be remembered and this kind of stuff', he was talking about the Union dead, because it was a Union cemetery. And that's something that I sort of emphasized a bit in my program, and I guess that's because I grew up in the north, had a Union ancestor, so I was very Yankee-centric, as I used to refer to it. And one day some guy – I remember he was taller than me and he had a haircut that was very military-like – and he came up to me and he was extremely upset with me because his ancestor was Confederate and it seems that, it never struck me that people would take it this way, but many people in America probably take the Gettysburg Address and what Lincoln was saying to not be specifically about the Union troops and that he is actually giving some sort of honor to both sides. And this guy was really, really pissed at me. He was mad, and all I could do was "I'm sorry, the war is over, it is a union cemetery, that's why Lincoln was here."

Lee Werst: It was just a very, very bad situation. I actually thought the guy was going to take a swing at me, at some point and, because of that experience, I realized that many Americans that come to sites, especially sites like Gettysburg that are associated with something like the Civil War, that there are going to be some viewpoints that

are very, very different from the ones that I hold, and that I have to remember to try and take into account all these different opinions that people would have and try to work with them as much as possible and try to make this place – in that case I might've actually turned off that individual to Gettysburg, to that particular site, and remember I started to take note that I really have to take note of the fact that there are other people with other opinions about this place. And I actually changed my program, where I started to talk about there are some Confederate dead who are buried there. They were buried there by mistake, like people, someone who was identified he was from Mississippi and the body was identified 'Miss' and when they came through and this was months after the battle, they would come through and start to identify these bodies and start to dig them up and re-intern them and that was mistaken for 'Mass', so this individual ended up being buried in a plot, in a Massachusetts plot, cause it's actually organized by different states, the plots are there, for the actual battle dead. And there are several instances of things like that throughout there. So there actually are a significant number of Confederate dead there. And I actually added something talking about the Confederate dead that were buried there, and talking about things like 'No matter what your personal opinion might be, whether you agree with one side or the other, you should still respect the people who actually fought here and gave their lives for a cause that they believed in, whether you agree with them on that or not'. And so, I really kind of morphed my program to take that into account. So that was something that had a very big influence on me, and it's probably had an influence on me to this day, in trying to always take into account what somebody else's opinion, experiences, feelings might be about particular subjects.

Jeremy Kaufman: So, somewhat in that vein I guess, in these first years and even to this day, what, how do you interpret yourself or how do you see the mission of the National Park Service and how do you try to, you know, bring that mission, both from that then all the way up till now?

Lee Werst: Well, I really see the mission of the Park Service, of course, you know, people discuss this all the time, about this sort of hazy line that we walk here, about enjoyment of the resources but at the same time preserving them. I guess I'm a little old school, because I think the paramount thing is actual preservation of the resources, cause if you do not preserve them, there won't be anything there for future generations to enjoy in any way. So I've always moved forward throughout my career always being cautious on the side of preservation, and I know like right now I work at George Washington Memorial Parkway, and I know that there's a great deal of pressure from local communities, especially from DC and

also from Alexandria as well, to try to utilize parklands for purposes other than preservation. They actually want to use them as community recreational parks, even though the sites they want to use for that may not be designated as part of the National Park System for those purposes, and it's very challenging trying to balance those things. I try to remember that what people, those individuals have their opinion about how they want to do it and, at the same time, I've got to try and work the mission of preserving these sites and it's a very difficult balancing act between them. But, you know, just try to do the best I can.

Jeremy Kaufman: What was the transition like going from Gettysburg, a Civil War park, to Independence, which had a more obviously focus on colonial history?

Lee Werst: Well, luckily for me, that's where my actual – who would've ever thought that a master's degree in British history would come in handy? Because obviously at Independence, British history is based there! I mean, that's a major thing right there! My history background helped me tremendously there. You know, we would talk about stuff like the Constitution, and I'd be able to compare that with the unwritten British constitution. You know, we actually have British figures taking part in these things, British military history would be involved, so my education it was actually not much of a transition at all. I was able to move into it very, very easily. And I then started to really read a lot of more stuff about people like Washington and Jefferson and Franklin and various other figures for the American War for Independence, which I like to refer to as the war for independence, rather than the revolution. Ah but, yeah, that's where I started to get a bit more, much more interested in the colonial American history aspect of the thing, especially the political and social aspects of things, with that period.

Jeremy Kaufman: Is there any difference that you see in the visitors or their backgrounds who come to a Civil War site versus a colonial site?

Lee Werst: I think you, if you're at a Civil War site, you are going to get, you have a lot of visitors who come there just because it's a very well-known Civil War site, like people know what Gettysburg is, and people will come there who don't know anything about the Civil War and they'll come there. But you also get really, really hardcore Civil War students or fans or whatever you might want to call them, people who are really into it as their hobby. When you go to a site that's dealing more with a colonial aspect of things, you're not going to get many of those types of individuals. There are people like that, who are very much into 18th century history, but they are far, far fewer than the Civil War group would be.

- Jeremy Kaufman: Now, as you are now a permanent at Independence, what added responsibilities did you take on, now that you were in that position?
- Lee Werst: When I started there as a GS-4 – back then the positions were a GS-4/5, so after you did required time in grade, you actually could be promoted up to a, or advanced I guess I should say, up to a 5-level – as far as additional duties, as a seasonal they basically expected you to be in the visitor center, do programs, things like that. When I moved into a permanent position at Independence, I would start to get other additional duties, like there would be things dealing with publications, they're be AV that we might have to maintain and you'd have to get into that, there'd be statistics, so there'd be like visitor statistics would be coming in and then you might be responsible for doing them, so we were actually getting more into what, much more of behind the scenes type of aspects of ranger work than when I was a seasonal.
- Jeremy Kaufman: And how many years were you at Independence?
- Lee Werst: I was there for almost three years.
- Jeremy Kaufman: And, in terms of your time in this permanent role, looking to the future, any mentors that you looked toward to help you advance your career early on?
- Lee Werst: Well, the individual that I would probably have looked to more than anyone else is probably Scott Hartwig at Gettysburg. I got to be relatively good friends with Scott and, like I said, he was an excellent historian, excellent interpreter, and he's someone that I would always look up to, even to the present day.
- Jeremy Kaufman: The, you mentioned that along with interpretation the Interpretive Development Program. Just for the record, when did that start to become more formalized?
- Lee Werst: When I first became aware of how it was getting more formalized, by that time I was on the National Mall as a supervisory park ranger, which I started that in '96. It had to be late '96 or maybe it was in '97, they started to talking about this Interpretive Development Program, and actually we'd heard something about something coming down the pike when I was at Colonial National Historic Park, which is where I went to after Independence, and we'd started to hear about things and they started to talk about where somebody would come out and film you doing a program, you'd have to send it somewhere. We started to hear about that stuff, and then when I got to the Mall, that's when it really started to come in. At the Mall they already, by the time I got there, they already had their own internal competency program that they had in place, which eventually caused a lot of problems. And then they,

the formal IDP finally came out, and the Mall was being extremely supportive, you know, they already had their own competency program in place, and they wanted to really support this new national interpretive development program, so they actually committed to send a number of individuals from the Mall to the first course that was given to train people to be Module 101 instructors. And I was basically involuntarily assigned to be one of those Module 101 instructors that got sent to Harper's Ferry to go through the training so that we could start to give Module 101 courses to people.

Jeremy Kaufman: You said you saw at that Gettysburg and some of these early you could say, you know, formal development type programs, the way you were interpreting back then sort of foreshadowed what was to come. What was your sense when you went to this first class of – was it—

Lee Werst: Well, you know, I had, it was kind of like I realized that over the years, I might not have realized it at first, but you know as I'm looking and when I started to go to this Module 101 trainer's courses, you know, I'd start to look at it and it's just that what I came to realize is that what they were talking about with the Interpretive Development Plan is basically all the things that very successful interpreters were already doing. It's just that they were formalizing it and actually writing it down and trying to create lesson plans in order to try and instruct people that, 'Hey this is how, if you want to be a really good interpreter, this might be a way that you can actually get to that point'. Um, a lot of people who were really good interpreters took great exception to that, because they viewed their form as a real art form, and they didn't think that it was something that could be instructed to people. But really, I think it was very early on when I was at Module 101 that I was like 'Well, this isn't really different from some of the stuff that we were doing at Gettysburg'. You know, we would be at Gettysburg and, if you're talking about Pickett's Charge, you're talking about, I remember part of my program for Pickett's Charge was talking about 'How did these Union soldiers standing on this line – how do you think that they felt in this hot sun with wool uniforms on and they're under this constant bombardment and then all of a sudden you'd see all these lines of Confederate troops coming across these fields?' And I always remember I had a line in there saying, "And you realize as you see them with gleaming bayonets in the sunlight that they are coming over here to kill you." And I actually used that, and as I'm thinking about it, well, back then I was already using stuff to try and get people to put them in the place, make them think of themselves in the place of these soldiers, and I was already trying to make connections with them about fear, fear of death, bravery, you know, all these different

types of emotional connections that you have with that, about the military mechanics, you can say, of coming across the field and how they would actually do that and why they were in formations and different so, there you're getting into some of the intellectual connections that were being made. Well I was doing all that stuff, and what I was doing was no different from what anybody else was doing at Gettysburg, you know, but we were already doing that there, but I think Gettysburg had a very, very good interpretive program when I was there, and I think what we were doing, I could actually see that what we were already doing was what they were trying to get at in the Interpretive Development Program.

Jeremy Kaufman: How, then, for people who were a bit more skeptical of the program, how was it presented to show it as a benefit to actually formalize interpretation and training?

Lee Werst: I think there's some people that would never see it [chuckles] as a benefit, you know. They were just so resistant, and some people were so resistant to it. One of the things that, with the program, we tried our best to explain, this is how you can possibly be a better interpreter so you can actually be better at what you're doing and some people just didn't like being told how to do it, they'd been doing this for so long they didn't want to people to tell them, and then when they came out with the – and at that time they were referring to these things as competencies? And when you would send a product away, you would record somebody doing a program, and you would record a way where some sort of anonymous people that nobody knows would then review you and critique you and if they came back and you didn't pass their scrutinization, you got an official letter that said you were approaching competency, and people took that, I had many employees who came to me and actually said, 'They are literally telling me in black and white that I am incompetent'. You know, I looked at it and I kinda say, 'You know, literally that's really what they're saying', and I can't emphasize how much damage the way that program was rolled out, how much damage it did to itself because of the way they rolled it out. And I think the reason that happened is because and this is the thing I say might be controversial and it might hurt some people's feelings. You have people that I refer to sometimes as being, I simply call them Interp Geeks, because they are so into interpretation, the philosophy of interpretation and techniques and things like that, there's a certain amount of common sense in dealing with employees, with people, that's sort of lost on them, because they're so focused. It's sort of like you have somebody who's a rocket scientist, and he's so into the rocket science and at the same time he has no social skills with the people around him, and it's kinda like, kinda like a show The Big Bang Theory, if you know what I mean.

Jeremy Kaufman: I do. [Laughs.]

Lee Werst: And that's what some of these Interp people were like, and they did not know. Now I considered myself and there's several other people I worked with I did not consider us to be Interp geeks, with air quotes around it there. I thought that we were much more very general, we were good, I won't say we were great, but we were very competent interpreters, and we also had certain social skills and leadership skills that I think this Interp community oftentimes did not have, but the Interp community pushed this and they didn't include us in it at first. And as a result, they just fell on their faces with the general employees out there in Interpretation out there with the way that they presented this thing. And I don't think it's ever recovered really from the way that it was presented in that way. They tried their best, and more of us people who'd let a little more, I'm just gonna say a little more common sense on how to deal with other individuals on a social sense, we tried our best as we got in there to try to change them and eventually we got—collective we, not me individually, but collectively—we were able to get them to change the stupid competency thing. Don't tell people that they're incompetent, you know! And tried to change that and it just took a lot of education of trying to get, and we did our best, but I don't know if it ever, you know, really worked with some people. I think it worked with a lot of people and it helped a lot of people, and I know people who came around to understand what it was about, but I know there're still people out there who think that Interpretive Development Program is one of the greatest ills. It's the great Satan from on high that has come down into the field. I don't know if there's any, I am out of any ideas as to how to convert any of those people into thinking of it any other way.

Jeremy Kaufman: In general, though, today, how do you see the landscape of where that program is, the acceptance, the effectiveness of the program?

Lee Werst: I've seen, in my experience while I was, I went from the National Mall, eventually I went on to a supervisory park ranger at Carlsbad Caverns, then chief of interpretation at Timpanogos Cave, and at all of those areas I actually saw how people who actually embraced the Interpretive Development Program and didn't have all these little prejudices against it, that those individuals in general, they really became much better interpreters and I think they actually started to bypass some of the people who were so resistant to the program. So, you know, it for the people who did embrace it and kept an open mind to it, I think those individuals most definitely improved in their interpretation, which definitely helped us, I think, actually do our job.

Jeremy Kaufman: On a sort of foundational level with the program with it's meant to address, since you've been a supervising at both historic and, you

know, cave, sort of more natural site, the program itself, is it effectively able to address both types of natural and historic?

Lee Werst: Since I've always had a background in history, I always found that the concepts of Interpretive Development Program I could translate those much more effectively into historical settings. It does work with natural things as well, but I have more difficulty with that because I didn't do a whole lot of natural interpretation during the course of my career, so it's not my forte, but I know people who that is what they would concentrate on for the most part, and I'd see their programs and they could very easily make transformation, you know, actually use it in their programs. So, it can address both of those. To me, my natural prejudice is to say that it's much easier to do it in history programs, and somebody who's a naturalist might say the exact opposite and think it's easier into naturalist.

Jeremy Kaufman: Um, so I guess, stepping back a bit before we do more specifically interp, how did you then get to your first supervisory job? What were the steps you took and was this a goal that you had to move forward and to become a supervisor?

Lee Werst: I wasn't sure, I was at Colonial when I, I left Independence, and this is pre-Ranger Careers. This is where we're actually getting into careers field of things as well. We had, the Vail Agenda had taken place much earlier, I forget the exact year, I want to say '90, I don't know why, if that's correct or not, and they started talking about trying to professionalize the ranger series, and everything came out and actually ANPR had a very, I would say a very big role in the whole thing, in helping, assisting there. They weren't the only ones. Other associations and other organizations had major roles as well. But ANPR was right there to help promote Ranger Careers, and it's one of the things that attracted me to ANPR as well. And as the implementation of Ranger Careers in July, actually July 10th, 1994, which I think is the day that every single park ranger should remember, just like the battle of Hastings, it was something like that in 1066. When that was implemented, it had an unbelievable impact, I mean, I knew rangers, me personally, I went from someone who would have to share apartments or houses with people in order to be able to live like a normal American type of life to actually being able to support myself and actually live completely on my own, and it was great! [Laughs.]

Lee Werst: It had a big influence on me, so I mean, at that point I thought Okay, we just jumped all the way up to 5/7/9, and when I went to Colonial, before Ranger Careers, there was actually a regulation, and I don't know what it was and I'd have to do research to try to find it, but if you were an interpreter at a site that had to deal with in-depth knowledge of more than one era – and an example would be Colonial where you're dealing with 18th century and 17th

century, because of Jamestown, Yorktown – Gettysburg was another example. While I was a seasonal, they actually had several rangers there who were dealing with the Eisenhower, they were dealing with 20th century and they were dealing with 19th century, cause they were moving back and forth from the battlefield to the Eisenhower home. If you were in a position like that, you were classified as being a 5/7. And what happened was, I was starting to think at Independence already, well, I should start moving up, but I didn't necessarily want to get into supervision and one of these positions, actually two of these positions, ended up being advertised at Colonial and I applied for it and I ended up getting one of those positions, so I was actually at a 5/7 position and then Ranger Careers came into effect and I just boom boom, 5/7/9, just right on up the ladder very quickly, and then after I was there for a little while as a GS-9, you know, I just started to think, maybe I should think about in keeping on with a career in the Park Service and trying to, you know, actually move above just frontline interpretation and move more into like middle management, and that's when I started to look seriously at any vacancies that came out that was at a GS-11 level, and I applied for some positions and didn't get those and then there were multiple positions, GS-11 positions that were advertised, actually they were 9/11 as I recall, were advertised for the National Mall, and I'm thinking, 'Uh, gee, do I want to move to Washington, DC?'

Lee Werst:

And I applied and son of a gun, if I didn't [laughs] if I didn't get the job, and I was like "Oh my goodness!" You know, I was, and I thought, "Well, should I want to move to DC? " I'm like "Okay, I'll give it a try," and I moved to like Arlington, Crystal City, and absolutely loved it. [Laughs.] Loved living in DC and being on the Mall and in the middle management position was, there's so much stuff going on all the time and right when I got there was the time that there was a log of controversy going on with all the t-shirt vendors on the mall, and one of my additional duties that I ended up with was to actually be the supervisory ranger who was sort of monitoring all the permits for the t-shirt vendors, which eventually went on to be argued into various courts. I think it finally went up to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court refused to hear it, if I recall, and it upheld the lower court's opinion that actually cleared the mall of the bazaar that was there at the time, but that was an extremely interesting time, and I enjoyed it because I was still dealing with some interpretation, which I enjoyed, but at the same time I was dealing with these other things, other aspects of park operations that I wouldn't have been doing if I were still a frontline interpreter. I started to really enjoy getting into things other than interpretation as a result of my time there.

Jeremy Kaufman: How did, if they did, how did other supervisors before you were a supervisor influence how you then took the job as a supervisor ranger and how you performed at that?

Lee Werst: Well, I had, as I mentioned before, I had Scott at Gettysburg was a big influence on me in how to be a supervisor, and then when I was at Independence, there were several supervisors there, one in particular, Mike Kush was his name, who's still in the service to this day, he's at Hot Springs right now, I believe, as the chief. He just sorta impressed me and took me under his wing a little bit while I was at Independence, sort of mentored me a little bit, and actually encouraged me to apply for Ranger Skills while I was at Independence. I applied for it and thought, 'Yeah, you know, I'm not gonna go to this', because back in those days – now we have Fundamentals, which is a great program – but back then you had Ranger Skills, and that's when they would actually pack you up and send you to the Grand Canyon for like six weeks, and you did everything. You did law enforcement scenarios, you did administration, you did budget, you did interpretation, you'd go out and you'd do rock climbing and you'd do rappelling and you'd do search and rescue, you did case studies on various – when I was there the big thing was water in the western parks and we did different case studies on that. We actually had individuals coming in from different sides. There was a controversy about Wounded Knee and about and about Wounded Knee becoming part of that and we had some members of the Sioux, various Sioux nations come in, and then you had some Park Service people come in and they actually had these panels and we discussed this and so, this unbelievable experience and had all these people coming together and you'd be going through that, and it was just fantastic training and really made me want to start to, one of the reasons why I wanted to get more into supervision was because I had that taste of more than just interpretation, as a result of that, and of course that's what I was aspiring now to move up to. So that, going to Ranger Skills, had a really big impact on me in making me really say, yes, I am definitely staying in the Park Service for a career.

Jeremy Kaufman: Ranger Skills, yes, you say now it's Fundamentals. When did that change occur?

Lee Werst: Uh, boy. Let's see, they were still going to Ranger Skills up until my, up until close to the mid-90s. When I went to Ranger Skills, that was '92. I remember that I was there for Clinton's first election. I was there in the fall, great time to be at the Grand Canyon. And I believe there were still classes going up, at least, I believe, I know there were classes after me, going into '93, and I'm going to say there might've been some going into '94 and '95, and then I believe that's when it started to come to an end and then all

of a sudden this Fundamentals stuff started to come up, and I think that's more like late '90s when that came in, but I really, right off the top of my head, I can't remember exactly.

Jeremy Kaufman: What are some of the major differences between the two programs?

Lee Werst: Well, I know that for the first stage of Fundamentals, they get a whole bunch of people from around the country together at the Grand Canyon at the Albright Training Center, just like they did for Ranger Skills, but you're only there I believe it's two weeks that you're there. I think that that's a big difference, because, spending, I mean, if you spend six weeks with the same individuals, you're going to develop a much different, a much deeper type of bond with those individuals I think, then you're off doing, you know, online stuff, then they bring you back again, I think it's for one week, if I recall correctly, in Fundamentals IV. Yeah, I is online stuff, II is going to the Canyon, III is more like online, independent stuff, and then they bring you back in. Yeah, dealing with that and because, when we were going through ranger skills, it was so much more ranger focused. You didn't have to be a ranger to go through it, but it was so ranger-focused, and I think Fundamentals is more spread out so that it's not doing as much of that ranger focus. You know, Ranger Skills, yeah, we did budget and we did some administration stuff, but it was a very small component, I mean, we were in the field doing ranger stuff. We were doing fire. I remember, I actually did my fire training there, cause you could do different stuff on the weekends if you didn't want to just have the weekends off, you could do different stuff and one of the things they offered was fire training. So, I got my fire training while I was there. I mean, just so much different stuff that there's no way that they're covering all of this type of stuff in Fundamentals. There's no way that they can do it, and I think that's very unfortunate because I think it was just such an unbelievable experience.

Jeremy Kaufman: I would definitely be interested in, for the record, in how as a supervisor at the Mall prepares for and sees through things like July 4th on the Mall, Cherry Blossom Festival, some of the rowdy, some major events.

Lee Werst: Well, we – back in my day on the Mall – we didn't necessarily deal with a lot of ICS type of things. Now it's very structured that way. But we did have, there was a deputy site manager. When I was there, that was Gerry Gaumer. He eventually went on to the Public Affairs Office in WASO and is not retired, and Gerry was basically the Incident Commander or the person in charge of 4th of July, and I don't know exactly when they did it but over time they'd done a lot of work, and they had these binders in Jerry's office and it had everything in there that you needed to do, step by step, in order to

do the 4th of July event on the National Mall, and you would just pull out those binders and you would 'Okay, we're like 90 days out so we need to be doing these', and they would have DI-1s in there to go to contracting for stuff like porta-potties, trailers, anything you could imagine, and next thing the binder would be talking about coordinating stuff with Park Police and you'd be, it was like a step-by-step timeline. Luckily for me, I was on the Mall for four years, and my last two years there, so let's see, I think, I guess that would be the '98 and '99 4th of Julys, I was Jerry's assistant, so I was the deputy person in charge of 4th of July, so I got to really work that stuff firsthand. And that was a fantastic experience, doing all that. And it wasn't really, we weren't really formal, formal ICS with the way we did it, but it sort of followed a lot of the ICS lines at that time. And I mean, that's just how we did it. Now where these binders came from originally, who made them up and did this whole step by step, I am not 100 percent sure, I think a lot of it was Jerry, during the time he was there, had put these things together. But it's like, if Jerry were sick or something, I could just go to the binder and I could say, 'Oh, today we gotta do this' and it was just step by step and you just went through it. I wish I had a copy of the whole binder to this day, because it would probably be a good guide for a lot of other events that I've gone through during the course of my career. Now, of course, they're very much into the ICS system and implementing that for 4th of July on the Mall.

Jeremy Kaufman: How many people were involved with you in the preparation for these, particularly the '98 and '99 July 4th events?

Lee Werst: You mean, like staff who—

Jeremy Kaufman: Staff or other management positions?

Lee Werst: Well, uh, boy, I'd have to stop and think, cause Jerry and I were one and two. We were in charge of it. There was an individual on the mall who was ex-military who had been with EOD, Explosive Ordinance Disposal, and he'd actually been an instructor in the Army, Mike Wilt. I have no idea if Mike is still around, if he's retired. He was in charge of fireworks. [Laughs.] Good person to have in charge of that stuff, and so Mike would work with us, and the three of us were like off schedule for everything else. We just did 4th of July stuff, when it was time to start, we were 4th of July, and Mike was working out all the details, contracting, everything with the fireworks company, who had already been selected because sometime way before that we had already put out a proposal and had bids and all that sort of thing through contracting for whoever was gonna do fireworks that Mike would be working directly with them. We would have, as we go closer to things, we would have the chief of maintenance and the deputy chief of

maintenance were very involved. We would have regular meetings with them, because obviously their crew were going to be doing setups and teardowns and things like that. Sometimes we'd have to change plans, so I mean, you know, had to have those guys involved in it. As we got closer and closer, we would have certain individuals that we would bring in, like on the Mall we actually had the Mall divided up into different sections or districts, and we would normally take one of the permanent GS-9 rangers would be in charge of each district that was set up, and we would pull them into it and they would start to plan and we'd start to gather what staff they would have underneath them and exactly what their jobs would be in that area. So as time would go on you know, as it would start out it would just start off with Jerry and myself and then as it got closer we added Mike, then we would have maintenance come in, so you know you're about like three or four months out and it's only a few of us, maybe three to five of us, and then by the time you're within like a month out, you probably have somewhere in the neighborhood of a good dozen plus individuals who would be involved with various planning for the event that was coming up.

Jeremy Kaufman: What about differences with an event that was that one day, like July 4th, versus an event like the Cherry Blossom Festival that is extended—

Lee Werst: Cherry Blossom, when I was there the Cherry Blossom Festival, we didn't do as much planning along those lines as to what they seem to do now. Now it seems, I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think they might even go under some sort of ICS system for Cherry Blossom. I might be wrong about that, but I'm not sure. But we didn't do anything like that for Cherry Blossom. For that it was pretty much, it was pretty much the day shift supervisors on the mall. We simply designated some individuals – you're gonna be responsible for this, who's doing the Cherry Blossom Walks, okay, you and you'll have these three or four people, you're doing Cherry Blossom Walks, you guys are dealing with do we have make some non-personal interpretive stuff, you know, handouts like bulletins and things like that, you're in charge of taking care of those things. We set up a regular patrol schedule for people to go around doing informal interpretation, which turned for the most part into saying, 'Put down the cherry blossoms. You cannot pick the cherry blossoms'. And telling people, 'Get out of the tree, please'. And all that. And it was just like that, it wasn't any type of bit ICS thing or anything like that at all. And it seems that now it's completely changed, that it's much more big whoop-de-doo. But back then it wasn't that big of a deal for us at all, it was just now you just throw something together within the first couple of weeks and that's all you needed to do. It just wasn't that big of a thing.

Jeremy Kaufman: So, in terms of security, I assume—

Lee Werst: Well, it's all pre-9/11.

Jeremy Kaufman: Right.

Lee Werst: Though I think a lot of the reason why you have a lot more ICS and some other planning and stuff like that is because of the post-9/11 world. That's when things started to clamp down a little bit.

Jeremy Kaufman: The transition then from you going – now did you go to Carlsbad right after, from the mall?

Lee Werst: I went from, from the Mall I went to Carlsbad, yes. That was in 2000, and because of my moving to Carlsbad, I missed the World Ranger Congress in Krueger National Park, South Africa, cause I was moving at the time.

Jeremy Kaufman: What sort of opportunity did you see – if I'm not mistaken this was your first non-historic setting?

Lee Werst: Yes.

Jeremy Kaufman: Opportunities you saw going from a historic site to a more natural site?

Lee Werst: Well, one of the things I thought, if I'm gonna have this career with the Park Service, there's more to the Park Service than just being, you know, in history parks. You know there are some people that, you know, I started off in a Civil War park and a lot of people stay in what we call the 'cannonball circuit' and they're just Civil War parks and that's it. They're not going anywhere else and that's what they do. I didn't want that. Maybe because I went to Ranger Careers and I had this much broad, exposure to a much broader range of things, I thought that I wanted to try and experience as much of the Park Service as I could and not just confine myself to historical or cultural aspects, so I started to, actually taking some correspondence courses in conservation and natural conservation and stuff like that to try and beef up my resume so that I could apply to natural parks, and you know really, really worked on the Interpretive Development Program, became a certifier in the Interpretive Development Program because I figured that would be a plus to help me get into some parks as well as also help my own people. And you know just did whatever I could and then the opportunity came up for Carlsbad, and I believe one of the things that was in my favor for going to Carlsbad was the fact that they had such a large staff there, and I was working with large – had experience working with a large staff, as well as supervising a large staff and being able to schedule, cause cave parks are unbelievably labor-intensive to try and deal with – and so I think those things really just kind of came together so I guess I was one of the best selections, or one of the best individuals the chief out

there thought on the cert for the job, so I went out there, you know, and started to work a little natural stuff as a result of going out there.

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, I have to ask. Then how are cave parks labor intensive?

Lee Werst: Well, the thing with cave parks, especially a place like Carlsbad Caverns, they're labor intensive because the resource is so fragile that you can't just let people go wandering all around. It's not like a battlefield and people can just wander around the battlefield. If, when they're going into the cave, most of the time the vast majority of your visitors are going to be going on ranger-led tours, and if you're going into a cave, what we normally did there most of the time you would have a minimum of two rangers going in. You'd have a lead and a trail, and a lot of that had to deal with safety, sometimes it had to deal with the number of visitor's, like the King's Palace Tour that's there. You could have up to 40 people on that, if I recall, and you're trying to get people to stay on the path, you didn't want them to get off the path touching stuff, then it was all a resource protection thing, and it's like you just needed people. And if you're doing, we would do like eight, eight or more of the King's Palace tours in a day, sometimes I think it would be more than that, so right there, I mean, if you had a – and sometimes they'd be overlapping so you'd have like, as one King's Palace tour is exiting the King's Palace, another one is coming in – so you'd have to have like, you know, two rangers on the first one, two rangers on this one, then at the same time you're doing Left-hand Tunnel tour that needs that, and you're doing a Wild Cave tour that's or out at Slaughter Canyon, Spider Cave, or Hall of the White Giant and there you need to have at least two rangers cause you're doing going into a wild cave situation, so a lot of times you're doubled up and you're doing a lot of different tours at the same time, cause you're having such heavy visitation. You need a lot of people. It's very labor intensive.

Lee Werst: And then you also have to have people – a section of the cave was self-guided, and a big thing that Natural Resources was always coming down on Interpretation, we could never do it well enough for them was they wanted us to have the path, the trail and the cave, completely covered with rangers in order to make sure that people aren't damaging the resources. And we could never get enough there to satisfy them. I think we could have a whole infantry division located on the trails down there and it wouldn't satisfy the Natural Resources people. We could never have enough. I think their ultimate solution was 'close the cave to everybody except us'. [Laughs.]

Jeremy Kaufman: Any differences between supervising and specifically training staff that works at a historic site or a natural site?

- Lee Werst: Well, by the time I got to Carlsbad, this was when the Interpretive Development Program is really going full tilt, so as far as like teaching or training in interpretive techniques, it's, you're not gonna have a whole lot of difference at that point between the two. It's all a matter of just applying the expertise and the knowledge that you have and applying the different principles of the development program to create a program. And it could be, you know, you could teach somebody a naturalist example or it could be a historical example, and it's the same principles, so I didn't find it to be a whole lot of different between doing the two.
- Jeremy Kaufman: And from there you went to another—
- Lee Werst: I went to Timpanogos Cave, and that was an 11. At the Mall I was an 11, then I lateraled as an 11 to Carlsbad, because I just, I know a lot of people will come in and they'll go somewhere, 'Okay, I got an 11, now I've immediately gotta move to a 12, and then I've gotta immediately move into a 13', and they do-do-do. I kinda liked having a nice broad experience at that level to give me a real good all – cause to this day I'll run into people, I won't mention names, but I've run into people who have been superintendents and they did that boom boom boom, moved up the ladder, and they don't know like one-quarter of what I now know because I spent time at that other level learning all sorts of stuff that they just don't know.
- Jeremy Kaufman: Do you have, or do you think you'll have a philosophy in the way you supervise and manage a staff?
- Lee Werst: I guess I started off on the Mall, I think some people thought that I was very militaristic in the way that I handled that, and of course I have some military background, and as time went on, especially when I moved out west, I mellowed a great deal, and I became much more laidback in my approach and I tried to be very conversational with my employees and not dictatorial, you know, we sit down and have discussions and you know I don't say 'You will do this' type of thing, it's like I say, 'This is what we need to do, this is why we need to do it, you know, we just have to get it done'. I've just really changed; I've mellowed a great deal over time.
- Jeremy Kaufman: If I'm not mistaken then, from the Caves you moved back to history with Women's—
- Lee Werst: I went to Women's Rights. That was a GS-12 at Women's Rights National Historical Site at Seneca Falls, New York.
- Jeremy Kaufman: And in 2008, I believe, they had the 160 anniversary of the convention?
- Lee Werst: That's correct.
- Jeremy Kaufman: What was your role in preparing for that?

- Lee Werst: I basically, our superintendent there, Tina Orcut – that would be the third park I worked in with Tina. We had crossed paths a lot, starting at Gettysburg. She was one of the people that started at Gettysburg in '88 when I did. And she actually planned a lot of that, but I had to put together a lot of the programming, a lot of the logistical planning for the event, and you know that was about it, it was really putting the logistics together for the event, and Tina was handling a lot of other stuff like speakers and things like that.
- Jeremy Kaufman: What was the main goal of the event? What was the site trying to do?
- Lee Werst: Well, we were in the process of rehabilitating the Wesleyan Chapel, which was the site of the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848. And so, part of it was really to emphasize the whole rehabilitation project that was going on with the chapel.
- Jeremy Kaufman: How successful do you think the program was?
- Lee Werst: I think they were relatively successful. Women's Rights is not a super-high visitation park, so I'm trying to remember exactly what that particular, yeah, we probably had over a hundred people there, which is really pretty good. Normally when we have the anniversary of the convention, you know, we'd have a number of programs during the course of a weekend and, you know, combined, if we would get up through a whole weekend if we would get, have like 2[00], 250 coming through the doors? I would consider that to be a big success. So that one event, I think we had over a hundred, if I'm recalling it correctly, so that's very, very good for that site.
- Jeremy Kaufman: Any other memorable experiences at Women's Rights?
- Lee Werst: Well, the opening after the construction project was over and that one, of course, for an anniversary, we had a ribbon-cutting ceremony and so we had some dignitaries, descendant of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, members of Congress, you know, were there, and the whole ribbon-cutting, opening it up to the public for them to see, so that was really a big achievement and that was in – was that in '11? Or was that in '10? I can't remember now, if that was in 2011 or in 2010 when we did that, and then not long after that is when – actually I guess that was in, that was probably in '11 – and then Tina, the superintendent, that was a big goal of hers when she first got there, and she spent close to seven years there and that was the biggest thing that she was working on the whole time, to get that done, that rehabilitation, and then she was offered the superintendency at Fort McHenry and so she left later in that year and that event was over, Tina knew that she was gonna be leaving and that's when the position for chief ranger came open at GWMP, and a chance to come back to the DC area, which I liked, living in

a great deal. It's where my soccer team is that I love and have followed all around the country, so I like GWMP a great deal, I figure I can't pass that up. I applied for it and actually, very much to my surprise, I ended up getting the job, and I think I left there in August of, yeah, August of 2011, and I think Tina had left just like maybe the end of July of 2011 to go to Fort McHenry, and I left there in August.

Jeremy Kaufman: What's it like being in management at a place kind of unique like GWMP, where there are many sites spread out, it's not just—

Lee Werst: It's very challenging and being a chief ranger there is extremely challenging because of the organization that's there. Cause we have the different sites there. There are sites that are little autonomous states on to themselves. Clara Barton House National Historic Sites, Great Falls Park, and Arlington House, of course, and with site managers. And so my official title is Chief of Interpretation, Recreation, and Resource Management, but for all intents and purposes I have absolutely no say or influence, consultation with anything going on dealing with interpretation at any of those sites, so it's really kind of weird. It's one of those things that there's a T-Map that's gonna be going on, recent like just about now I was supposed to do a phone call today but there's a hurricane on the east coast, and I was supposed to do a call to give my input to organization there, and that is the thing that I think is most challenging thing with my chief ranger position that I'm in, is how do I actually fit into integrating these sites who have people in charge of them who do not report to me and do not have to say anything to me about anything that they're doing, so what am I supposed to do with them? I'm not sure and I've tried to work a couple different scenarios with it, but it's probably the most challenging thing there. Now recreation – you know I'm dealing with special park uses, permits, we're doing like very, very, very involved with that sort of stuff. We also have the picnic program at Fort Hunt, gotten very involved with, once again. Resource Management, I have a Cultural Resource Manager I consult with on just about a daily basis on various things that are going on. Same thing with Natural Resources Program Manager and we're dealing with that One of the things I've been very interested in on the natural side of GWMP are the exotics and trying to get rid of those, and that's a very something that I've been trying to support as much as I can, ah, cause they've done a fantastic job of actually treating acreage and then actually maintaining acreage afterwards, far exceeding what our goals are, and it's something that, I guess it's something that over time it became near and dear to my heart starting when I was at Carlsbad about dealing with exotics and so that's something that I have an interest in on the natural side at GWMP that I'm trying to emphasize to the present day. And then,

of course, compliance. I have just hired recently, for the first time in a while, an environmental protection specialist to deal with NEPA compliance and so we're gonna be busy over the next year actually bringing that up to speed and getting that fully implemented.

Jeremy Kaufman: As we move forward toward more, I guess, broad Park Service based questions to look at your career as a whole, being as the ANPR Oral History Project I do have to ask a couple things regarding ANPR. Of course, one you did mention what attracted you in part was to Ranger Career and ANPR's role, when did you join?

Lee Werst: Yes, at, well, to back up from that a little bit, when I first became aware of ANPR was actually while I was a seasonal at Gettysburg. I was actually a battlefield seasonal, but I would be sent once in a while over to the Eisenhower home as well, and in the breakroom there, somebody would always leave a Ranger Magazine in the breakroom. And that was where I first got exposure to ANPR. I was reading Ranger Magazine during breaks or lunches while I was at the Eisenhower home, and at that time there was actually a seasonal insurance program that they had that was eventually discontinued, they couldn't keep it going, and that's when I first got really exposed to it, and then one individual I mentioned I worked with several times, Tina Orcutt, she got very involved with that. She ended up – we worked together at Gettysburg, she was a junior fellowship, it was a junior fellowship program where she actually started as a high school student. She was graduating high school and was a GS-2 and then she'd go to college and as she completed, you know, different levels of college she would be advanced to the next thing and then at the end of it, you would have, it's kinda like a CEP thing, you would have non-competitive hiring there at that point, and that's how she got into a permanent position. And so, we worked together there, and when I mentioned before that at Colonial National Historic Park that there were two 5/7 positions that were open? I applied for 'em and Tina applied for it as well. We are the two people who got them, and we ended up at Colonial together, so we used to kibbitz together about Ranger Careers and all that sort of stuff and I was aware of ANPR, I knew something about it. Tina, in the meantime, had become very active in ANPR and had joined, and her being in the organization really influenced me a great deal, in talking with her and of course Ranger Magazine I could readily get it from her all the time, and then finally while I was at Colonial is when I finally went ahead and actually joined the Association. And I believe that was '95, and the first rendezvous I went to was the one that was in St. Paul, Minnesota, which I believe was in '95. Believe I'm correct in that. And basically, I've been in the Association, I've been a member ever

since. I essentially became, I think it was while I was at Carlsbad, I became a life member and I have been to every rendezvous from '95 to the present day.

Jeremy Kaufman: Now before you were president of the Association, what was your role in it in those years prior?

Lee Werst: Ah, well, I would, when I, the first rendezvous that I went to, a lot of people right away – kinda like what you see today, you come to a rendezvous and you're a new person? And sometimes people want you to get involved and try to bring new blood in? And people were after me to run for the board, like immediately, and I'm like 'I don't know if I want to do that!' Kinda not too sure and then they convinced me. Very first rendezvous I was at, I got sort of pushed into running for treasurer, and thank goodness I didn't win [laughs] 'cause I would not have been ready for it at all at that point! And then eventually, let's see, which one would it have been? Eventually there was a vacancy. It was for treasurer once again, on the board of directors, and I have to really think now about when. I think it was when I was working at the Mall, so that means it would be somewhere in '96 or '97, I ended up running for treasurer, and I ran unopposed, so I ended up winning and so I was treasurer for that period of time, and eventually I was asked to – they were changing the times of the terms. It's like if you were treasurer you were from like '96 to '99, as an example, and the new person would begin, and they wanted to change that three-year period, so they wanted to move the treasurer back one year and the president at that time was Ken Mabery and he said we actually want to move the term for treasurer to get it so the cycle's up, so would you be willing to be appointed for an additional year as treasurer, and I said, 'Sure'. And I ended up spending four years as treasurer and then I ran again, and that would be in Reno, I was at Carlsbad at that time, so there we must be talking about 2000, I think it was 2001, and I ran and also Wendy Lauritzen was put up, ran, and I was voted out of office. [Laughs.]

Lee Werst: And then I spent one year off the board of directors and, you know, just like general membership, going to rendezvous, and then at the Plymouth Rendezvous the Association was going through some real problems at that time and, you know, there was a great concern about drop in membership and it was like pulling teeth trying to get people to run for the board and to do some work, and it looked like at that time – Ken Mabery was the president and he was looking for someone who would come in as incoming president – and nobody was stepping up. It's like they had no one. And they started actually talking about we might have to do something to change the by-laws in order to allow like either Ken or another member of the board to be appointed into being the

president, cause nobody was stepping forward, and finally I said, "I'll do it," just like out of the spur of the moment. "I'll go ahead, and I'll do it," and I ended up being nominated and ran unopposed, so I never ran for the board of directors against an opponent and won [laughs]. I don't know what that's saying! Have to. And there I became president and then, I think it was less than six months after becoming incoming president where you're supposed to serve one year as an incoming president to observe, then you do three years as the president, then two years as a past president to keep your knowledge on the board and all that, I think within six months of me becoming president Ken Mabery resigned, and we actually did a change to the by-laws cause this is something that we never thought of before that if someone is, if there is a sitting incoming president, they would immediately be elevated into the president's position. So, I ended up as a result spending more than three and a half years as president, which was a little unprecedented.

Lee Werst:

So, I spent the four years as a treasurer, so one more than I should've, and I spent maybe six months more than I really should have as being president also, and it was a very interesting time because politically. Things were very interesting at that time, and I would have to say that the one thing that I think I had no choice in doing was to try and keep my head down as much as possible for the Association, because the politics going on at that time were not very good, and there were other associations, other groups that we worked with closely, that were being extremely vocal and were really riling a lot of feathers in Washington, and I thought the best thing to do was to keep a low profile, do a lot of behind the scenes talking with folks at WASO and higher levels and just try to keep us sailing through this era until we get into a better time. And I think that did happen. One of the things that I'm extremely proud of for the Association, not necessarily for myself, but as I mentioned, one of the things that I noticed in Ranger Magazine way back when in '88 was that ANPR had this seasonal insurance program, and while I was treasurer – and that got dropped, said 'Oh we can't manage it, can't do it' – and then when I was treasurer, it came up on the board of directors once again that we should really look into this, and several of us – I was one of them and there were a lot of other people, wasn't just me – said, 'We should really probably look into this, to see if we can restart this, cause we think it would be a way to get a lot of new people to come into the Association, plus it would actually do something that would be a benefit to employees of the National Park Service'.

Lee Werst:

And there was a person for seasonal perspectives in the office at that time, and he went out and looked and he came back and reported he couldn't find anything, and then while I was president, that is when Fred Kugler stepped forward, and he wanted to come

onto the board dealing with seasonal perspectives, and that was probably one of the best moves that I could've ever made, was to have Fred come onto the board in that position, cause Fred went out there and very much to his credit he went out and he found a solution to it, found something, and that has been and Scot McElveen, we've actually talked about this and he's actually told me that he thinks that is probably the thing that saved ANPR, because that brought so much fresh blood and, once again, I think it's a very big accomplishment to be able to do something like that for employees. I think it's something we can really hang our hat on and show to people that 'Hey, this is what we're trying to do for you'. And we actually do care about the employees here and want to improve, you know, your life and try to help take care of you, and so that is something I'm extremely proud of with ANPR with recent history, and I'm very proud to say that is something that actually started during my presidency. Not that I'm the person that went out and found all this stuff. That was Fred, so he gets the credit, but I am very proud of what we were able to accomplish. We survived that era, and we actually did something that I think will have long-lasting effects with the Association and for employees.

Jeremy Kaufman: Where do you see the Association today?

Lee Werst: It's in much better shape now than it was when I was there as president, and that, and to get a little more background about that, we'd have to talk a little bit about some of the things that were done in the Association prior to that. While I was on the board of directors as treasurer, there had been, and Cindy Ott Jones was the president at the time, and it might've even been before her that we started talking about this. There was a lot of talk about needing to have an Executive Director. Now you go to a lot of associations and they'll have a board of directors, but then there's also an executive director that's normally an employee that's handling a lot of stuff. Well, the thought was, 'We should have an executive director and this person can do a lot of work for us, they can go to DC and be talking to people in WASO and the secretariat level, and they can be doing all this different stuff, and then a big portion of their job is fundraising'. And, if I recall correctly, we talked about \$40,000 a year position. A lot of executive directors, that isn't the only thing that they're doing, so you know they might have multiple positions like that, and we decided that we would try to explore this route to get an executive director and we voted for it, I voted for it, that we should get an executive director.

Lee Werst: The one thing that I think we all emphasized on the board was that there needed to be fundraising, that needed to be the number one priority for that individual at least in the beginning, because

otherwise we wouldn't be able to, you know, be able to keep sustaining it. If I'm recalling correctly, I believe that time, if you'd look at all of our investments, ANPR was north of a quarter million dollars that we had in assets. We were very well off, considering, you know, the Association. We were doing fine. Executive Director came on and I think it was a combination, like a perfect storm, you have an executive director come on, so that's taking like \$40,000 a year is coming out of the budget. Had a contract for three years and then on top of that the market started to tank, and we didn't time things correctly and a lot of investments that we had started to go south, and we actually found ourselves in some very dire financial situations. We, it also turned out that, you know, and this might be a little controversial among the Association, it turned out that when I eventually became president, I was treasurer, we got the executive director. His first rendezvous was my last rendezvous as treasurer, and then I wasn't on the board at all, and then I come in as incoming president and quickly become president, and I'm looking at the situation of things and it's like 'We're gonna run out of money fast here' and I talked to the executive director, Jeff McFarland [sp?] was his name. Really nice guy, he was great. And I said, 'Jeff, you know, this is really serious. Money is going out, we're not bringing money in, you know, what's going on here? What are you doing on fundraising?' And he basically said, 'What do you mean?' And I said, 'Well, your whole position, your number one priority is supposed to be fundraising, at least in the beginning'. And he said, 'No one has ever given me instructions that fundraising was my number one priority, and if someone had told me when I was interviewing that my number one thing would be fundraising?' he said, 'That is not a strength of mine at all, and I actually wouldn't even have applied for the position'. And I'm like, 'What the—?' And I try to talk to Ken, who was the president who hired him 'What's going on?' you know, 'Jeff says this' and Ken says, 'No, he's clearly knows that it is supposed to be fundraising and dah-de-dah'.

Lee Werst:

Now who's not telling the truth? I don't know, but somebody is. Somebody's not right or telling the truth with it. I don't know which one it is, you know, I can just tell – I'm not gonna tell you here, but I could tell you which way I think it is – and we were in some real serious financial straits, so another thing that I had to do during my presidency was that I had to be really, it would've been nice to be concerned about things going on in the parks, different policies and WASO and stuff like that. I was just concerned trying to keep the doors open at ANPR, started to cut the budgets, expenditures. We used to do things, like we'd have the board of directors would be able to meet one time a year other than rendezvous and meet face to face and that was paid for by the

Association – cut that out – implemented a lot of phone conferencing and things like that in order to get work done. We cut the budget to the bone, we cut merchandising to the bone, as much as we possibly could. We tried to maximize whatever income that we had that we could. You know, we had contracts with *Ranger*, with our editor and everything, she – god bless her – she kept steady, no increases or anything like that. At the end of the executive director's contract – he was under a contract and so there would be certain penalties if you just cut it – so I said, 'Jeff, you're gonna continue on if we can get some work out of you, but at the end of this no more executive director. At the end of your contract, that's it'. And let it run out, and that tried to save some money, and that's where you get into the situation where Fred finally comes forward and with the health insurance for seasonals. Like I said, lifesaver for the Association. That was a great thing.

Lee Werst:

And now? You know, as we heard this morning from Stacy, current president, as he said, 'We're bringing in more money than we're putting out'. We can do stuff now, like today. Supernaugh Fund started when I was president as well, and once again I don't want to take credit for that cause that's Gene, Bill's wife, and other people that were very instrumental in that, but they started to come in – look at it today. I remember that first Supernaugh scholarship folks that came in. I think we had two or three. This morning there were eleven. I mean, that's sort of a bit of an example right there of the financial state of the Association now, compared to way back then. So I think now we're in a much better situation, we're doing some great things now, we can concentrate on some other things other than just surviving and trying to help WASO or the park or individual parks, individuals, whatever – we can start to think about doing some other stuff.

Jeremy Kaufman:

Relevancy is always a word I hear when I talk about ANPR, but also the Park Service in general – how to remain relevant, how to people, how do we still appeal to people, I guess. And just in a broad sense, looking at both this Association and then the agency as a whole, particularly doing things right now, the Civil War Sesquicentennial, Park Service trying to have programs for that. How do you see, in your years that you've been part of this agency and this organization, how the agency as a whole and maybe this organization has tried to in a sense remain relevant and remain a place that people want to be a part of?

Lee Werst:

It's very challenging, and a lot of it's just generational. Like I come, I have to say it, I'm from an older generation now, and our whole outlook between the different generations is really different as to what the Park Service is, what just a career is, for that matter. And I don't know if I have any ready answers for you on that. I think

that, if we keep going in the direction that we are, doing stuff like you know the health insurance, doing stuff like this type of oral history project, there're gonna be some other things there that I'm sure are gonna be coming up. The World Ranger Congress that'll be taking place here in the United States 2016, heading toward the centennial with 2016, getting more involved with WASO and prep, sponsoring different things that might be going on. I think that might be the best way for us to remain relevant, at least to the agency. I think that the best way to stay relevant to the frontline employees out there is to continue to try to do things to advocate for their good. Training, insurance, things like that, and just try to show that we have some positive impact on their daily lives. That's what we've gotta try to do and, you know, I don't have any ready answers for any great programs I can pull out of my pocket and tell you right now that we should do but—

Jeremy Kaufman: For the agency itself, for example, months ago we both were at a meeting about Facebook and Twitter and social media, how do you think the agency has adapted to the change in technology over the years?

Lee Werst: Well, it's kind of—

Jeremy Kaufman: In terms of relevance?

Lee Werst: It's kinda slow, which you know, once again, as Stacy mentioned this morning as state of the association, you know, it's a real bureaucracy. When you're joining the Park Service, you are joining a bureaucracy. Bureaucracies, if you go back to ship terms, you know, they're like an aircraft carrier, you know. You have to start making that left-hand turn like two miles back there, before you start making the turn! And I kinda think that that's how this is. I think eventually it's going to pick up and we're slowly, we have gotten into it, and eventually we're going to get into it. Unfortunately, when that happens, other technologies are gonna come into play that are gonna pass us by, like we're still catching up with Facebook and more than likely something else is gonna come out. Whatever it may be. Handbook or something, I don't know, will be out there, and then we're gonna be playing catchup, 'Oh, we gotta kinda get on that'. It's, even though I myself I don't care for Facebook, why someone would possibly want to have all this information about themselves out there? I mean, I like privacy and so I'll never understand why people want to be on Facebook, but on the other hand, it is how a lot of younger generation, it's how they communicate and it's basically how they live their lives. Park Service has to get used to that; we have to do some more with it. So, we just have to get used to it, and I have to gradually get myself used to it. I'm never gonna get my own personal one, just never gonna do it, but you have to, because I mean that's how

people – the future generations – that's how they're communicating. That's how they're interacting. So, if we don't do that as well, how can we possibly hope to actually have them come into the parks, appreciate the parks, experience them?

Jeremy Kaufman: As of today, do you have, after talking a lot about many experiences, do you have a proudest accomplishment as a National Park Service employee that you can look to?

Lee Werst: Hm. I, um boy, I don't know that, I don't know if I can isolate one single thing. I'd say if there's something that I have to be proud about, it would be about some of the achievements my employees have made. People that I've worked with. I have some people that I've worked with very hard to help improve their interpretive techniques, and they in turn have gone on to become master interpreters, and I think that is the thing that I'm more proud of than anything else.

Jeremy Kaufman: Any final thoughts, memorable experiences, to wrap up or any thoughts on where you want to be in the future in the organization? And the agency?

Lee Werst: Well, with – eventually when I retire, which I'm a lot closer to than you might think – I would probably at that point try to get a little more involved once again, with some aspects of running it, cause I'll have more time to be able to get more involved with ANPR once again. I don't know if necessarily be like on the board, but perhaps could be doing something with like rendezvous or things like that. I also want to try and get a little more involved with the International Ranger Federation and try to deal with some more international stuff, so that's something that I sort of aspire to, once I retire. As it is right now, while I'm still, you know, in my current position and not retired, I'm probably going to be a steady participant in rendezvous and a few things like that, but I'm not gonna get quite as involved as I have in the past, because I think other people, younger people, need to step up and do that, and also because I'm really tired! [Laughs.] After some of the time I spent there, I think that I need to take a little – cause there was a period there, would be like an eleven-year period – I spent ten years on the board of directors. So, I think it's fine if I take the next seven, eight, nine years off before I get super-involved like that again.

Lee Werst: As far as with, in the agency, I don't, I do not – at one time, when I was much younger, like when I was going to Ranger Skills, it's like people used to refer to Ranger Skills as like Superintendent's School, because if somebody's gone Ranger Skills, first all you had to compete to get into the darn thing, and then once you went there, that means that you were an up-and-comer and, you know, people would say, 'Oh, they're gonna be future superintendents that

are going in there' – and I probably was thinking along those lines, that I would ultimately want to become a superintendent. Uh, any longer? I don't think so. Ah, now that I've gotten much closer to what superintendents do, and I can see it a little bit more? I don't think it's necessarily what I want to do, cause you get too detached from actually working. I still enjoy actually working directly with the resource and working with staff in the resource, and when you're the superintendent, that's over. I mean, you're just dealing with all sorts of politics and, you know, budget stuff and it's just – you know, I gotta do some of that stuff now, but I still get, I can go out with a GS-5/7/9 ranger and do some stuff at a permit event. I did, I monitored a permit just last month, you know, I went out there with staff and I was out there with maintenance staff and we were putting out cones and putting up barriers and stuff to close the parkway, and in monitoring the permit to make sure they're not putting things where they're not supposed to and they doing everything they're supposed to according to the permit and doing that kind of work. If you're a superintendent, you don't do that kind of stuff. And I really enjoy doing that kind of stuff and getting out there with other staff and doing it. So, I think that where I am right now, this might be about as far as I'll go at this stage. I don't know. Maybe in a couple years I'll change my mind. [Laughs.]

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, I want to thank you again for taking the time. I very much appreciate it. So, thank you for sitting down.

Lee Werst: You're welcome.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]