

## Charles L. Gray

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Oral History Interview  
311 Slater St.  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
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Interviewed by James G. King

Jim: I'm in Fairbanks at the home of Chuck Gray and we are going to talk about the Fish and Wildlife Service operation in Fairbanks back in the 1950's. When I first met you, Chuck, I think it was in 1951 when I went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. At that time, you were working for the *News Miner* but employed by the Army?

Chuck: Yes, that is kind of the way it was. I was drafted in January of 1951. That was during the Korean War. I had been working at the newspaper and had recently started a photo engraving operation for the paper to make plates for local pictures for the newspaper. I think Ray Woolford, who headed the office here in Fairbanks for the Fish and Wildlife Service, conspired to get me back to Fairbanks. Ray had a successful enforcement operation at Ladd Field; having a couple of military people assigned for conservation duties. That had not happened yet at Eielson AFB which was 26 miles away. I was assigned back to Eielson after basic training and immediately to this wildlife detail.

Our duties as far as the military was concerned was to indoctrinate new troops in the fact that there were game laws in Alaska. We were to sell licenses and do some patrol work, particularly with civilian enforcement

people on weekends when most of the GI's were out. During those years, between the two bases, a very high percentage of the people out hunting and fishing were actually military people.

Jim: Were you actually a military police?

Chuck: I was assigned to the military police squadron. I was in the Army with the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment that was divided in half between Ladd Field and at Eielson, to defend the bases. It was fairly easy to lend me to the Air Police Squadron where this operation was supposed to take place.

There were two of us. The Air Force contribution was a master sergeant and I started out as a private. As it turned out, he was older and he liked to do the office work and hang around the Base. I spent more time in the field and in the Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Office than he ever did. I don't know if you ever met him. His name was Eugene Elkins.

Jim: I don't remember that name but I do remember that was a pretty important program for the Fish and Wildlife Service. The year I started working, there were three agents – Ray Woolford, Bob Baine, and then Frank Chappodos. They left in the fall of 1951. Woolford was assigned to spend the duck-hunting season in Louisiana and here I was, a brand new employee/trainee, and really didn't know a thing about being a game warden. That fall, I made trips with Sargent Sauer who was at Ladd Field and Frank Glasier and with you. We kept the Fish and Wildlife presence alive, I guess, whereas, if I had been all by myself, I wouldn't have known what to do.

Chuck: I guess it worked out. We had some good times. I was thinking about some of the highlights as I remember them. One of them certainly was making some trips and getting acquainted with Frank Glasier, the predator control agent, better known as the “Alaska wolf man.” He was a real old timer who had done market hunting and guiding. He eventually worked for the Service as a predator control agent. He had been quite successful in working with wolves in the interior.

At that time, Clarence Rhode was the regional supervisor in Juneau and Ray Woolford was head of the local office here. He never had more than a couple of people working with him and for him. It was a pretty sparse operation in those days. Ray was a unique guy. He was quiet and unassuming but very effective in what he did. He did a lot of work in bush villages. The people out there had a lot of respect for him and I think a certain amount of fear because he definitely made cases where there were flagrant game violations. He also considered the intent of the case. It was a pleasure to work with him and get better acquainted with him, although I had known him a little before I went into the Service. He was a very worthy successor to some of the pioneering work that Sam White had done as the first flying game warden in Alaska.

There were usually only one or two game biologists around. Bob Scott was around the office some and I think he was actually assigned at the University.

Jim: He started out as a federal aid biologist when the Pittman-Robertson funds became available from the tax on sporting arms and ammunition. The money was doled out to the states and Alaska wasn't included but then somewhere in the late 40's, they sprung some of that money for Alaska. Scott was one of those federal aid biologists. Later he went to the University as the wildlife research unit leader.

Chuck: I know he was around the office quite a bit and it seemed his interest was in mountain sheep. He had a Fish and Wildlife airplane and he was doing surveys once in a while. He would do counts in McKinley Park. The sheep had almost crashed there in the mid 40's. They were making a bit of a come back by the time that he really got into it.

Ed Chatelaine came up from Anchorage occasionally and it seemed like he was interested in the buffalo and bison at Big Delta. I had the pleasure of being a guide on the first bison hunt that was ever held in October of 1951. There were some permits given out, probably 25. The requirement was that every hunter be accompanied by a Fish and Wildlife agent as a guide and backup so there wouldn't be wounded animals in that operation.

I was always interested in airplanes and I had my own at that time. I started flying in Fairbanks when I was in high school but I didn't get a license until 1948; a couple years out of high school. Those big airplanes that the Service had were interesting, the Gull Wing Stinson, L1-Stinson, both 300 hp radial lycoming engines. They were kind of a brute to handle on skis, to get them turned around.

I occasionally flew my own plane. I flew with Glasier on some of his observation flights and also to drop a few baits at times. I flew Ray Woolford up the Fort Yukon once to pick up his plane that he had left there, I think because of weather.

There was one rather hazardous landing I made on the Taylor Highway going into Eagle when they were building it and that was with you, Jim. We had gotten a report about the people at the construction camp there that were eating moose meat. The closest place that we could find to land was on a point where the road went around the end of a hill. There was enough clearing there to come in on the point and miss trees and land. Then we had to walk about 8 miles to the camp. We were walking about 4 miles per hour, which was a pretty good clip. We got there and investigated the guys and didn't find anything. They drove us back to the airplane.

Speaking of Ray Woolford, I probably should have gone over this with you before we started talking, although it can be eliminated, I suppose. This is kind of a funny story. I wasn't at his house but I remember Ray telling the story.

There was a time when the office hours were supposed to be 8 to 5 and the only place that you could buy licenses in town was at the Fish and Wildlife Office. To accommodate the public a little better, Ray decided that he would open a little later in the morning and stay open a little later at night, like maybe until 5:30. That was kind of against the rules. Apparently, there was an administrative assistant or a fellow in Juneau that was in charge of such things. I think his name was Howard Baltso.

The office in Juneau apparently got wind that Fairbanks wasn't keeping proper hours. They tried to call the Fairbanks Office early; it wasn't open yet but the telephone operator knew Ray's phone number so she transferred the call to Ray's home. Ray took the call at home, which should have been taken at the office. They asked him for some information out of the files. Ray covered by opening and closing and slamming the oven door and cabinet doors and finally said, "well, the secretary isn't here right now and I can't find it so you will have to call back later."

Jim: That was the time when we were two hours difference in Fairbanks from Juneau. This administrative officer was calling up at 10:00 o'clock his time to catch Woolford not in the office. I think Woolford had talked to the people at the telephone company, the operators, he knew them all. Fairbanks was that kind of a little town then. They had been told if callers didn't get an answer in the office, to ring him at home and that is what they did.

Chuck: I think that we military game wardens did some good. I remember we made a case on Mt. Fairplay where five civilian people from the FAA or CAA at Northway had shot several caribou right from the road. There was a little snow on the ground and they had already left with their caribou by the time we got there. By talking to other people and using car tire tracks and that type of thing, we ran them down and got confessions. We got commendations out of that from the military. They were pleased to acknowledge that we were doing something.

There was another case rather interesting up on the Steese Highway where a cow moose had been shot and it was reported. There was a little snow on the ground. It had snowed the night before. I met up with Frank Chappados, who was an agent in Fairbanks. The culprits had gone back to town to get butchering equipment and then had come back. We encountered them on their return and searched their vehicle. We found knives, saws, and tire tracks. When it came to their trial, their defending attorney, Warren Taylor, was quite famous for defending criminals in Fairbanks. His defense was that it was illegal to search on the highway and seize their weapons. The ballistics matched the bullet used from the gun and the moose. I don't think you would win that type of case in the courts nowadays. The judge allowed it and they were convicted.

Soon after I started as a conservation officer, or whatever we were called, the provost marshal of the military police squadron at Eielson came to me one Monday morning and said that a couple of officers had been checked for licenses while fishing the previous day. They didn't have licenses so he wanted me to issue a couple and backdate them. I thought about that for a while and being young and a little inexperienced, I did something an older military person would never do. I just jumped into the vehicle that was provided for us for patrol trips and drove down to the base headquarters. I got an audience right away with the base commander and told him what I had been asked to do. I asked him if that was the way this was supposed to operate. I think he had taken a special interest, along with Woolford, in getting this operation going. He said, "no, that is not the way it is suppose to operate." Within minutes after I left he had those two officers and the

provost marshal in there and gave them a real dressing down. We weren't asked to do anything like that again!

Jim: I would like to make an editorial comment here -- I really think this program was extremely important and it is great to get your description of these things. It was a program that no one has heard of now. As you pointed out, some of the military people didn't do much but in your case, you were really operating like the experienced agents doing flying and making cases. It was important at that time and it is neat that we are getting your description of it here.

Chuck: At the time I thought it was rather inconvenient to set aside a couple years of my life to go into the Army. As it turned out, I can't complain about the duty that I had and not only that, but getting to know and work with Frank Glasier was more of a bonus that I would have thought. About a year after I returned to civilian life and back to the newspaper, one of my uncles from Illinois wanted to come to Alaska to hunt.

At that time a person needed a registered guide for about any type of big game hunting here. I thought I would apply for a guide's license. There was a written test but there was also a requirement that you be endorsed by a registered guide. Frank Glasier endorsed me for that which filled that requirement. I suspect I was the only person that Frank ever did that for.

I went on to do a fair amount of guiding for the next 41 years. Not only interior game animals but we hunted polar bear up on the Arctic coast for



about 16 years, and down the Alaska Peninsula for brown bear, etc. It was an important, pleasurable part of my life.

Jim: As I recall back in the territorial days, the game commission would license guides and at the same time they were deputized wardens under the Fish and Wildlife, Alaska game laws. You were probably the only big game guide that was qualified to carry a deputy game warden badge.

Chuck: That's right. I did have a badge.

Another thing that I wasn't exactly in on but I was an observer at the time was the big Umiat wolf hunt in 1951. There were four teams that went up there for a month to kill wolves on the North Slope. They shot and poisoned, etc. That came about because the Canadians had lost a good part of their caribou and there was fear that although they were numerous in Alaska, they might crash here as a result of predation. There was a lot of argument between the professionals that thought that it wasn't necessary to do it and some people that thought it was necessary to do it. Finally, Clarence Rhode made a command decision that it was going to be done. The operation has been written up many times. For instance, our ex-governor, Jay Hammond was one of the team leaders. We observed the operation from the Fairbanks office. As various things happened, such as needing more shells, how many wolves they were getting, sending Frank Glasier back to town with a badly frozen hand, and all those kinds of things.

Jim: As I recall, Morry Kelly shot the tip off Jay Hammond's propeller.

Chuck: Morry Kelly was head of the predator division in Alaska as the boss of the other agents. He was a nervous type of guy. I don't think the guys were very anxious to haul him around but he had to shoot at a wolf and sure enough he shot the end of a wood prop off. Everafter, he was called "prop shot Kelly." In that case, there was an immediate terrible vibration, but they were able to land and I think they cut the other tip off and got it balanced well enough so they could get in the air with a high rpm and get back to town.

Jim: Were you in on some of those trapline patrols with Woolford?

Chuck: No, I never was. I think he always took one of the regular agents with him. They would go out and stay for a few days visiting different villages and particularly checking beaver sets in the spring so that the traps and snares were a legal distance away from the houses. In those days they were trying to encourage beaver to come back from the low numbers. Nowadays, we have too many beaver. The price has hardly changed in the last 50 years on beaver. It is a lot of work in skinning, etc. There just isn't a lot of beaver trapping anymore.

I think Ray knew about all the traplines in interior Alaska. It was just amazing the way he was so well acquainted with the whole vast area. He had good contacts in the villages. If there was something very bad going on he knew about it. He made important cases.

Jim: A lot of people think that if they get into one of the Native villages and try and investigate something that has happened it's like hitting your

head on the wall and nobody will talk to you. That wasn't the case with Woolford. He could go into any of the villages in the interior and visit with people and learn what was going on. It was really pretty neat. I always thought that in part it was because the trappers remembered how it had been before there were any game laws; when the country was full of white guys ripping off, high-grading everything in sight, feeding their dogs on moose meat and blowing out beaver dams and all that. They liked to see game wardens around and wanted to have things they didn't like taken care of. I suppose some of that goes back to Sam White. You knew Sam pretty well too, didn't you?

Chuck: Yes, fairly well. I remember one time I interviewed him on a tape recorder to get some of his wolf stories. I wanted to write a wolf article. He was in his old rocking chair at his house and every once in awhile he would get excited when he was telling some part of some story. He would rare back in that rocking chair as I was recording the story and it would make loud creaking noise. I think it would have been a very valuable tape to have today. The last time I looked for it, it had disappeared. Our sons were about 8, 9, 10 or so at that time and I suspect that the tape got over recorded with some kind of raucous music.

Sam was another person that commanded a lot of respect. He was a big guy but extremely fair. In his later years he went back to flying for survey parties and finally ended his flying career as a bush pilot for Wien Airlines.

Jim: After Statehood, when they started having an advisory committee on the game laws and that sort of thing, didn't Sam get active in helping set the stage for good state laws?

Chuck: Yes, he did. He never lost interest in good game management.

Jim: I remember asking him one time if he could ever live down having been a game warden and he said, "no."

Chuck: Again, he just dealt with important cases. He was the first flying game warden in Alaska, or in the world. It was customary to shoot spring ducks when they arrived back in the Fairbanks area. He wouldn't tolerate that if he was around. He would sometimes announce in the paper that he was going down the river for a couple of weeks and he would be back at a certain time. That was more or less open duck season because upon his return, it was over with.

Jim: I think he was concerned about market hunting and killing big game for dog food, poisoning foxes, etc.

Chuck: He was the one that kind of had to wind up the market hunting. There was still a fair amount of market hunting for sheep in the Alaska Range when he began his work.

Jim: You want to say a few words about what kind of community Fairbanks was back then. It was quite different than what it is now.

Chuck: There is no doubt about that. In 1951, I'm guessing the population was about 6,000 in town and probably 3,500 people at each of the bases. It was kind of a sleepy little town. There was some doubt as to whether it would actually continue to exist after WWII. Before the war, it had gold mining, first placer and then in the 30's, the big time dredging operations. There were up to eight dredges in the Fairbanks area.

After the war, it became obvious that the price of gold that they were dredging wasn't profitable so the dredges were closing down. The economy was stagnated for 3-4 years but then it just picked up again. It has been a slow growth ever since with a few flat spots. The area population now is about 84,000 and the population in town is about 36,000. That's not apt to change unless the boundaries of the town change. The economy is quite good now with the big gold mine operating north of town, two bases, the main campus of the university, a couple of satellite tracking sites, the Clear Ballistic Missile Detection Station and of course support for the North Slope oil industry. It seems like the economy here is fairly well secure, I think.

Jim: Back in the 50's, people were really participating. It was a more important thing for hunting and fishing for everyone than it is now. Most families had game meat on the table in the winter and they could keep it in the fall over there at the cold storage. Nobody had freezers then but you didn't need a freezer if you shot something after the middle of October.

Chuck: There was the Wickersham Cold Storage lockers that you could use. There are still a lot of serious hunters in the area but percentage wise, it would not be as high as in the earlier years.

You have to be pretty interested in hunting because it is more complicated than it used to be. Between 1974 and 1980, when so much of the country went into Native private land and all the federal preserves that were established in 1980, we lost about 65 % of our sheep range as far as hunting goes. Back then we had a little pamphlet of the game laws and now it is a thick book for each of trapping, fishing and hunting. It is extremely complicated as far as areas, size of moose antlers, and all that. Unless you are pretty interested in it, you just kind of throw up your hands and go to the market and buy your steak.

Jim: Then, back in the 50's, there were pretty colorful fur buyers in Fairbanks and also some hardware stores that catered to trapper needs. Did you have any dealings with those kind of operators?

Chuck: Johnny Swegler was the well-known fur buyer that came up every year. He chartered out on different bush air operations to get to the villages and try and beat out the other buyers.

Another kid and I, when we were in high school, did some beaver trapping. I remember we sold our beaver to Charlie Main who had a "little bit of everything" department store on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> and Noble.

There was a bounty on wolves at that time. All the wolves had to be sealed at the Fish and Game Department office. They were more or less checked to see if they hadn't been bountied before and that they weren't sled dogs. They had to leave the left leg bone to the hide. They would cut that bone off

when they were certified for bounty and punch an ear, etc. All those had to be brought into the office and a lot of them came in in sacks from the villages in the mail. They were certified for bounty for \$50 each and then mailed back.

Jim: One time I went over to the Post Office and they had a mattress cover there stuffed with wolf hides from Anaktuvik. It was a full size mattress cover. The guy in the Post Office handed me this thing. It wasn't heavy but I looked kind of funny going down the street with it. He told me not to bring it back that way. He said, "we won't take it back like that!" We had to cut the mattress cover into two sections to send the hides back.

Chuck: A wolf of any size, including pups, could be bountied. In the few areas where people were really adept at getting pups in the spring, they would be the same value as an adult.

Jim: We had to rely on Frank Glasier to show us how to identify any dubious dog skins that might come in occasionally.

Chuck: I remember him being asked to referee. People like Dr. Buckley out at the Research Unit at the University, and fellows like Bob Scott often had questions and would ask Frank about practical things like, "Hey, Frank, when do the wolverine breed" and those kinds of things that only Frank knew the answers.

Jim: I remember Buckley wasn't too sure about Frank. He thought some of his stuff lacked scientific integrity. Frank went up the Steese Highway

one spring and reported 40,000 caribou crossing the Steese Highway. Buckley had flown around some with Bob Scott and they could only find about 10,000. Glasier's report was in the paper and Buckley wouldn't believe it. The next year when the caribou were getting near the highway, he planted students every 100 yards or so over Eagle Summit to get a count of how many caribou crossed the road. They came within about 10% of what Frank had reported a year before up there all by himself in his car.

It was hard to refute anything Frank said.

Chuck: You know Jim Reardon who wrote the book recently about Frank from many conversations that Reardon had had with him over the years as well as finally getting access to his diary. Reardon said the thing he noticed about Frank was that the figures he told 30 years ago as far as the temperature here or the amount of game or whatever, he said those things never changed. Apparently, he never embellished on them at all.

Frank was a great storyteller and he liked to talk. He lived alone in the hills a lot of years as a trapper. He made up for it when he got to town.

Jim: Back to the military thing – one of the things that I remember that was good about that program was I think we civilians felt like it was easier to go into a Native village than to go into a military base and try and unfathom something that was wrong. We always got one of you guys to go with us if we had people on the base that we needed to question about things. That was really an important element. I think a lot of cases of having access to the military agents was an advantage.



Chuck: Well, we knew our way around the bases and where people and things were.

Jim: We always wondered about you. We would say that we think the only time Chuck puts on his uniform is when he goes out on payday once a month!!!

Chuck: You weren't the only one that said that! I still kept doing the photo engraving in the evenings while I was doing my daytime job. It was a 2-3 evening a week job. I kept my hand in the newspaper work that way.

After my two years were up, I made a decision to go back to that profession and it worked out well. I could take off to guide or hunt in the fall and not have to be looking for violators. You yourself switched over from being an enforcement type to the biology of migratory waterfowl.

Jim: Yes, but that was after Statehood. I didn't want to go Outside and the other option was going to work for Fish and Game and that didn't look so good either. There wasn't anybody from the Fish and Wildlife Service that went to work for the State Fish and Game that stayed. It was just too awkward.

Chuck: Eventually, they got their act together. It wasn't too long before the enforcement people were assigned to the state troopers. There was a complete separate break from the Department as far as biology goes. The enforcement under the State just never got connected with the bush like it

was in the Federal days. They just found it easier, politically, to stay away and let those people out there do their thing. It is even more so today. The policy is just leave the people in the bush alone. This is kind of sad because if urban people are going to be prosecuted for game cases, the same thing is going on in the bush and there are flagrant cases out there too. It is just something we are going through right now with this transition.

Jim: How was it being a guide under the State rules after having been a guide under the Federal rules?

Chuck: I did have to be retested again, but I made it. The changes were pretty slow as far as the regulations and that type of thing went. As there became more guides, it became more concentrated. Where guides were assigned to certain areas, you had to do your guiding within that and that worked very well until some guide couldn't get an area that he wanted. The system was taken to court and it was found to be unconstitutional because special privileges can't be given out for use of fish and game. It was decided in court that guiding was so close to harvesting fish and game that it was the same thing. Now things are pretty hectic.

They concocted another system to somewhat restrict the amount of guiding in an area but it is not working very well. Theoretically, if there is too much game being taken out of an area where several guides are working, one or two of the guides can be thrown out on a point system. To my knowledge, that has never been invoked yet. Therefore, the better game areas are being hit hard. Three areas are called Unified Conservation Units. You can't work just anywhere in the state but you can pick three areas and quite a few

other guides will also pick those same areas. You are rubbing elbows with other guides. Because of health reasons and age, I gave up guiding about five years ago. I just sit back and watch them scramble now.

Jim: Do you want to talk about wolves? We used to talk about the various arguments. Some of them were pretty intense back there in the 50's between those who thought there were too many and those who thought they needed to be protected. We laughed about that quite a bit as I recall.

Chuck: Seems to me you and I concocted a phony name and wrote a letter to the editor just to stir things up when things got dull.

I guess I took my clues from Frank Glasier but I was of the opinion that some predator control was desirable in areas where humans could utilize more of the big game. That is still my opinion. I think you and I both agree that wolves can sustain a very large harvest as far as being harvested as a renewable resource.

The argument goes on. Presently, there is virtually no predator control in the state. There are some areas that are suffering very low moose densities now and high wolf populations. It's true that in 20 years or so that will turn around again but I don't think it is necessary or desirable to have those long cycles when a little predator control work could turn it around more rapidly. That has been my long-standing opinion. I think you have been very much a realist in pointing out to me several times over the years that intense predator control is no longer acceptable and probably will never happen again.

Jim: The most striking thing to me about the whole business is how little change there has been in people's attitude – the arguments, the letters to the editor, the things you hear on the news on the pros and cons of wolf management aren't any different today than they were 50 years ago. I get the feeling, well, people talk about solving the wolf issue but I don't think it is an issue that you solve, do you?

Chuck: You are right. It doesn't seem to be solvable. It is something you just live with.

Jim: It's sort of like the abortion thing and some other things. People have firm convictions and they aren't going to change their mind. I do remember some of the trappers coming into the office wanting to talk to Frank Glasier about getting out and helping them on their trap line. Some of them with virtually tears in their eyes because they would get wolves following their tracks and cleaning out their traps before they could get to them. Some of these guys did a winter's work for nothing because they had wolves they couldn't deal with. People don't recognize or remember that aspect of what predator control was all about. The same thing was true of the Natives with reindeer. They got wolves in their reindeer and they lost very large numbers of them.

Chuck: When wolves are in a very large population of game like caribou, it is actually a sport with them to kill and they just run from one animal to another as long as there are a lot of them there, they just kill for fun and sport and really don't eat much of it.

Jim: It seems to be really difficult for people on the ground to effectively trap them, although Frank Glasier seemed to have some sort of uncanny way of getting wolves on the ground.

Chuck: In his day, a good wolf trapper was a rare thing. You just didn't get very many that way. They are a very smart animal and they learn from other wolf's experiences. Until they use poisons, even Frank was at a disadvantage.

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