

Carl Mulvihill
NPS Skagway Oral History Project
Skagway, Alaska
December 4, 2009
Interviewed by Karen Brewster

Karen Brewster: Carl, thank you for coming over and taking time to chat with us.

Carl Mulvihill: Well, it's always a pleasure to come and share some of the history with others rather than keep it to yourself.

Karen Brewster: That's what this project is about, people in twenty years some of these pieces of history might be gone so we want to have it recorded.

Carl Mulvihill: Twenty years, well, yea.

Karen Brewster: So why don't we start by you telling us about yourself, I know you were born here in Skagway.

Carl Mulvihill: Yea, I was born here in Skagway at the White Pass Railroad Hospital. My father was a conductor on the railroad and my mother was a nurse at the hospital at one time so I born, raised, grew up here.

Karen Brewster: When were you born?

Carl Mulvihill: 1936

Karen Brewster: What was it like growing up here in Skagway at that time?

Carl Mulvihill: Oh, it was a lot of fun. It was a small community so we had a lot of freedom. You don't have the problems you have today with the drugs or the abductees and all those other bad things so it was wide open, you can go hiking anytime you wanted (parental permission of course) but we did a lot of outdoor activities, we were in the hills a lot, camping out.

Karen Brewster: Now the name Mulvihill, what is the origin of that name?

Carl Mulvihill: That's Irish.

Karen Brewster: So, did your father come over from Ireland?

Carl Mulvihill: No, my grandfather's father might have. My grandfather came here in 1900 to work for the railroad. So we've been associated with the railroad for practically its entire history. This room that we're having the interview in is the dispatcher's office. That's what the bay window is there for, they can look out the window and see down Broadway.

Karen Brewster: Oh, so the train used to come right down Broadway.

Carl Mulvihill: Right, that's why the bay windows there and that's why there's a clip in the building, it came down Broadway and then turned that way.

Karen Brewster: So this is the old depot building?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, this is the old railroad depot building.

Karen Brewster: so outside the steps up on the boardwalk was that so you'd be even with the train?

Carl Mulvihill: No, that was the ground level, they reconfigured Broadway years ago and they paved it and changed some of the drainage.

Karen Brewster: So, when did they re-route the tracks off Broadway?

Carl Mulvihill: Back in World War II, about 1942 or 1943.

Karen Brewster: Do you remember when the army came in?

Carl Mulvihill: Oh yes, quite impressed with all the military vehicles and marching.

Karen Brewster: What did that do to Skagway with all those military people coming in?

Carl Mulvihill: It pretty much overwhelmed everything I think. The Army had their own USO here, their own Post Office, literally a city within a city. There are several detachments here one for the waterfront, then they operated the railroad, they leased the railroad for the duration of the war.

Karen Brewster: your father was working for the railroad at that time?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes.

Karen Brewster: So did he continue to work for the railroad or did he work for the army?

Carl Mulvihill: No, he continued to work for the railroad but the military and the civilians all worked together, there was no separation. It was rather confusing time, they had lots of trains running at all hours and people complained about the lack of sleep. It wasn't the rigid so many hours off that we have today at that time.

Karen Brewster: what time of town did the army, the city within the city, where was the military?

Carl Mulvihill: Every available lot had some type of military thing on it, barracks or this sort of thing. This whole area over here was all barracks for contractors coming through, the railroad detachment had barracks and Quonset huts on the north end of town. There were several thousand military personnel here during World War II.

Karen Brewster: Wow, that's a big difference between the normal population of Skagway.

Carl Mulvihill: Nor anymore, in the summertime we still have up to 10,000 people a day here from the cruise ships but at night they all leave.

Karen Brewster: So tell me about your work with the railroad.

Carl Mulvihill: That's one advantage of being a small town as soon as you become 16 years old your eligible to go to work and the railroad hired the kids to go to work in the main (something) sections so we started out on the track service for a couple summers and gained some experience and when other openings came up you could work in the railroad shop or in the train service.

Karen Brewster: So what was the first job you had?

Carl Mulvihill: The first job I actually had was working in a railroad grocery store and then from there I went to the section and worked on the track a couple years then I worked in the railroad car shops helping repair rolling stock then I became a train baggage man riding the train from Skagway to White Horse, unloading the luggage and the groceries from the section and this type of thing. When I was in college, coming back for the summer they hired me as a train dispatcher and I was drafted from that job to the army, came out of the army and started working up to dispatcher and then up to Chief Dispatcher and then to Chief Clerk for the railroad.

Karen Brewster: What does the Chief Clerk do?

Carl Mulvihill: He's the chief administrative officer for the railroad working for the superintendent and probably by default when the superintendent is out of town he's in authority but it never was a formal thing, made the necessary decisions to keep things going until he got back.

Karen Brewster: So let's go back, I want to hear about those different jobs but so first the grocery store so the railroad owned the grocery store.

Carl Mulvihill: Yea, that was a result of the union contract. A lot of people were concerned about the high price of groceries in town, we had two grocery stores and so the White Pass opened their own grocery store called the Commissary at that time and operated the store there.

Karen Brewster: Could anybody shop there or just railroad employees?

Carl Mulvihill: Just railroad employees I believe, or I presume anyway.

Karen Brewster: And did you pay with money or did you have?

Carl Mulvihill: You could pay with money or you could charge.

Karen Brewster: It could come out of your paycheck or you could pay at the end of the month.

Karen Brewster: So this was a real company town, huh

Carl Mulvihill: Yea, they ran the community hospital and regular people could go there but they had to pay a fee every month and then they had their own surgeon here, several nurses, and when they had patients there they would have a cook to cook all the food.

Karen Brewster: Now there's no hospital here.

Carl Mulvihill: Right but we have the health center though. White Pass donated their hospital to the city in probably 1966 or so and the city operates it since.

Karen Brewster: But that building that housed the original hospital is gone?

Carl Mulvihill: Long gone and we built a new mental building in 1967 as part of our centennial building and it's been superseded by a new one opening up in a few months.

Karen Brewster: I'm curious about the railroad work, working in the section houses, the track work what was that about?

Carl Mulvihill: Ok, let's define each section or probably six or seven miles of track is called a section and they had several section houses which is in essence a boarding house with a foreman and several track

men to work on the house and a cook all from here in White Horse. Working on the section you'd replace the railroad ties, the rails, maintain the ballast, kept the rocks off the track, vegetation, trees, that sort of things it's a constant maintenance program.

Karen Brewster: And it was year-round?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, year-round but in the summer time you could do a lot more work because the grounds not frozen and change the rails types things. In the winter we'd walk the tracks, make sure there was no ice covering the rails, no snow slide coming down to cover the rails, or rocks on the tracks. If there was a snow slide then you'd tell the dispatch and then he'd call the rotary snow plow fleet who'd go up and clear the snow.

Karen Brewster: That's like the big rotary thing out here?

Carl Mulvihill: That is correct.

Karen Brewster: that wasn't on every train every time?

Carl Mulvihill: No, on an as needed basis. After a heavy snow storm they'd go out ahead of the trains.

Karen Brewster: So those people working on the section houses are pretty isolated.

Carl Mulvihill: Very much isolated, yes.

Karen Brewster: And so you did that for a while?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes.

Karen Brewster: Which one did you work on?

Carl Mulvihill: I worked on the Glacier section which is at mile 14 and I also worked on the Skagway section which was in town here.

Karen Brewster: So what's it like being out there doing the section work?

Carl Mulvihill: You work hard all day, you're well fed, in the evening you could do whatever you wanted, read or play cards but you didn't leave the section house. Weekends they would let some of the crew go to town but somebody had to be there all the time. Normally the section chief and the cook were there permanently so they would come to town on weekends to have dinner out or a little entertainment and then go back up.

Karen Brewster: So did you like that work?

Carl Mulvihill: Oh yea, good work, good hard work. Things you learn up there of course you use the rest of your life, just using a shovel you learn how to raise well raise buildings, raise sidewalks so certain mechanical things you learned.

Karen Brewster: What was your next job after that?

Carl Mulvihill: Working on the trains, load baggage in the morning in Skagway here, mail bags off the ship going to Canada and each section house you'd unload groceries or drop their mail off and pick up new. You stopped at Lake Bennett and everybody would get off the train and have lunch there, halfway between Skagway and White Horse. Get to White Horse the end of the day, usually 3:30-4:00 and

unload the baggage and everything and the baggage man was off work officially but most of us helped the brake man and put the train away and gather up the train the next way, a way of gathering more experience to your next promotion as a brake man on the train.

Karen Brewster: So how long of a trip was it from Skagway to White Horse?

Carl Mulvihill: About six and a half hours.

Karen Brewster: And then you spent the night in White Horse and come back the following day?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes.

Karen Brewster: So how did that work, you said you picked up mail from the ship so how did that work because at that point you were hauling freight, it wasn't just tourists.

Carl Mulvihill: Ok, the trains in those days were called mixed train. They'd have a freight section in front and a passenger section at the back end. The length of the train depended upon when the ship came in with freight. We had a lot of freighters before 1955 and 1955 the White Pass built their own freighter designed their own containers and became the first railroad company to operate brand new integrated container/freight service in the world. In 1965 they completely revised that and put in a combination freighter/tanker and they adopted a 25 foot container that they're hoping it was going to be international, they had a lot of studies out to see what would be international, they had lots of studies out to find out what the international style container and white pass took a gamble to follow the Matzen Line design which was used to go to Hawaii and was a 25 foot design. A couple years after that International designed 20-footer but that didn't make that much different here because all of our freight was basically self-contained between Vancouver, Skagway, and White Horse and up and down the highway with the White Pass Highway Service so it didn't mix with other groups coming in.

Karen Brewster: The railcars were built to match that 25 foot design?

Carl Mulvihill: The standard railcar size at that time was 30 foot, so any size would fit that, 20 or 25 foot.

Karen Brewster: I find it fascinating that nowadays cargo ships and containers are all standard, never occurred to me that places like Skagway and White Pass Railroad would have come up with that.

Carl Mulvihill: Well, it was efficiency and White Pass is an innovative company in those days, tried to make things cheaper pilferage, breakage, damage to your freight going through Canada and this was one way of doing that. Very little damage inside the container, like carrying 25 tons easily in a container.

Karen Brewster: Did that containerization motivate other changes that had to happen to get them from ship to train and whatever happened on the other end to trucks or whatever?

Carl Mulvihill: At same time they went from steam powered locomotives to diesel locomotives. Had their own specially designed locomotives for the heavy snow conditions we have here. That was quite innovative, most railroads still operated with steam, so they had their own diesel and it worked quite well and they eventually had a fleet of about 22 diesel locomotives. One of the big mines in the Yukon opened up called Anvil and that brought down lead and zinc ore concentrates to this ore terminal building that's down on the waterfront now and for that they designed another specialized container put on trucks transferred that small sighting out of White Horse to rail, brought down here and then

dumped into warehouse and we'd get probably a 30,000 ton ship here twice a month to haul the ore concentrates literally around the world. Some went to smelters in France, Belgium, Russia, Japan, Korea.

Karen Brewster: How did the materials get transferred from the ships to the trains?

Carl Mulvihill: The ship had a gantry, which is a big crane and it pulled the containers out of the hold and onto the train car itself or if it was a low priority shipment they'd just put it on the dock and they'd have strata carrier, which is a mobile crane so to speak over the top of the container, pick it up, then wheel it over to where they wanted to store it.

Karen Brewster: And all this was as early as the 1950's?

Carl Mulvihill: Strata carriers started in 1965, when they had the new designed container before that they used a forklift truck to move the containers.

Karen Brewster: A lot of work to move all that freight around.

Carl Mulvihill: A lot of work, yes. Initially it was every other week with the White Pass Freighter but after 1965 they had a new designed container and we had a shipment every week. Every Monday morning a new freighter came in and you'd haul freight to White Horse. Coming back the back haul would be lead zinc ore from a different mine as well as raw asbestos fiber from Cassier Mines in Canada.

Karen Brewster: Nobody thought about having raw asbestos?

Carl Mulvihill: It was in a container, you weren't working with it as such so there was no problem with asbestos.

Karen Brewster: Tell me a little bit about the locomotives, I think you might know something about the history of all these locomotives.

Carl Mulvihill: The first locomotive arrived here in 1954, built by General Electric Company as 800 horse power locomotives. These were diesel electric. Each engine adds a diesel, and a big generator and the diesel would run the diesel the generator would produce electricity which would operate the traction motors on each of the axle and this is where the propulsion comes from.

Karen Brewster: Were these designs specifically for the White Pass and the narrow gauge?

Carl Mulvihill: That is correct.

Karen Brewster: At that point I'm not sure the term narrow gauge was still so readily used.

Carl Mulvihill: Ok, narrow gauge is anything less than a standard gauge, standard gauge is 4 foot 8 ½ inches. In America or United States the 3 foot gauge was fairly standard. Other parts of the world narrow gauge can be meter gauge which is 39 inches basically or 42 inch or any other those are the most common gauges but there are other variations depending on the country or company that first designed it.

Karen Brewster: Why didn't the world only have one type of gauge, why all these different gauges?

Carl Mulvihill: Depends on the whim of the engine of the company that built their initial railroads. At first the railroads didn't connect to each other so there's no problem with the gauge of transferring

locomotives and cars. Later on they discovered it would be better to not just run the car from A to B but from A to B to C to D and elsewhere. So gradually they came together and made the standard gauge except for Russia and Russia has a 5 foot gauge a little bit of incompatibility to the rest of Europe when they're changing.

Karen Brewster: Is there an advantage or disadvantage to a different size?

Carl Mulvihill: Probably a wider gauge would give you more stability and larger tonnage trains but the 4 foot 8½ works very well, they've worked well through the technology they've worked the problems out of it and the compatibility is the biggest advantage you can go anywhere in North America on one gauge without having to transfer from one car to another car.

Karen Brewster: So do you know any history about the steam engines here?

Carl Mulvihill: Yeah. The initial steam engines were all second hand they were immediately available as the railroads in the lower 48 should we say began the standard gauge the initial narrow gauge track, again, for the same reason. This gave you a surplus of used engines and the White Pass picked them up cheaper, and this got them building railroad right away moving trail up the track and later on they had their first new locomotives in 1899 a year later. In 1900 they had another large order for locomotives.

Karen Brewster: So the steam engines? They special ordered?

Carl Mulvihill: They special ordered from Bolton Locomotive Company primarily after the first two brand new ones they changed their design to a better locomotive for our operation here with the mountain railroad. We had a fairly steep grade which is up to 3.9% and this makes a limiting factor on how many cars and tonnage of train so their initial design for their road locomotives from Skagway to White Horse were called 10 wheelers, they had 4 wheels on the pony truck in front of the engine and then 6 driving wheels on 3 axles so that gives you 10 wheels so they call it a 10 wheeler. Then they had one heavier locomotive used as a helper, it was a different wheel range a 280 or a consolidation, 2 pony wheels in front and 8 driving wheels. That was the basic design up until 1938 when they ordered a different design, a heavier, more efficient locomotive called a Mikado, this became what we called our 70 class, 70 being the first road number of that particular class it was so successful they ordered another in 1939 and right after the war they ordered 2 more of the same engines. After that the steam engine company's went out of business so they were forced to go to diesels.

Karen Brewster: I wondered why they switched to diesel.

Carl Mulvihill: Because they couldn't get anymore steam engines basically.

Karen Brewster: And they couldn't keep those existing ones maintained?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, but because of the tonnage requirements of more and more trains they needed more engines. By then all the 1900 trains had been retired and when the Army was here they brought in locomotives from Colorado, brought in 8 from there and then they brought in 11 universal military engine but these were not designed very good for White Pass because they had very large drivers and couldn't haul things very well up the hill.

Karen Brewster: What's the "driver"?

Carl Mulvihill: The driver is actually driving wheels are the wheels that give them propulsion is the easiest way to say that. On the steam engine they're the ones that connect with rods so all the wheels turn together at the same time and it helps pull the train up the hill.

Karen Brewster: I would think with all that tonnage and freight they were probably pulling huge loads up that pass.

Carl Mulvihill: Up to 27 trains per day on the pass.

Karen Brewster: What tonnage per train?

Carl Mulvihill: Depends on how many engines you had, each engine is rated at so many tons. For instance the 70 class is rated at 160 tons behind it, a lot of the army engines were less than 100 tons so you could have up to 4 or 5 engines on a train.

Karen Brewster: Does each car have a certain tonnage it can carry?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, depending on the wheels and axle bearings most cars could take between 20-30 tons per car.

Karen Brewster: So, 400 tons per engine and how many cars?

Carl Mulvihill: And you have the weight of the car too, a flat car would weigh say 9 tons, a box car 11 tons empty. And you add the freight to that.

Karen Brewster: So, those trains when the army was here how many car long were they on average?

Carl Mulvihill: They'd be up to 25-30 trains.

Karen Brewster: That's a long train. I haven't been on the route but I'm assuming it must be fairly windy going down.

Carl Mulvihill: Yea, a lot of curves and grades down and more curves you have it adds to the friction of pulling the train up the hill. Weather conditions make a big difference, if it's rainy your rails are more slippery and the fall of the year you have leaves on the track and that adds to slipperiness and there's winter conditions with ice and snow.

Karen Brewster: This is a challenging route.

Carl Mulvihill: It can be.

Karen Brewster: How did they get the big engines here?

Carl Mulvihill: Barge them up and unload them. Unload them from the ship with heavy cranes to pick them up or drop them off or you use a barge ramp and just take them off at high tide.

Karen Brewster: Even the railroad started here in 1900?

Carl Mulvihill: In 1898.

Karen Brewster: So those initial engines from 1898, is that how they got those engines here too?

Carl Mulvihill: Yep, ran them off barges.

Karen Brewster: They built a track right to the beach?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes.

Karen Brewster: I think it's amazing that they put a railroad in here; that must have been a feat to build that track.

Carl Mulvihill: It was quite a feat in the fact that you have weather conditions have time for a very steep grade to get over the White Pass Summit and also had the problem of a very instable labor force, usually they got to Skagway and they were broke and they worked long enough to get enough money to buy mining supplies and food and then off they would go to the mining fields so it was a very constant turnover. Involved in that of course every time you hire a new person you have to train the person what to do.

Karen Brewster: And they did all that by hand, too?

Carl Mulvihill: Mostly by hand, a lot of black powder, a lot of blasting – they didn't have the modern drill machines with compressed air, when they drilled a hole in a rock they had to do it by hand with an awl pounding on a long rod and hit it once and turn it, then hit it again and turn it until you eventually work your way into the rock.

Karen Brewster: So are there places up there where the track is secured just to rock like that?

Carl Mulvihill: It's on a rock base, yet, cut a shelf out of the granite cliff.

Karen Brewster: That's amazing.

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, it really is, the fact they did it in two years and our modern highway here took a lot longer than with modern equipment.

Karen Brewster: There must have been a big push to get it built quickly then.

Carl Mulvihill: Well yeah, the quicker you build it the quicker you can start making money. But the other factor too is it's hard to work in winter time, in a storm particularly, or shoveling snow.

Karen Brewster: So a little bit back to the locomotives, they obviously keep upgrading and changing do some of those old ones, have they been restored?

Carl Mulvihill: Yeah, we just restored one that was built in 1908 and we restored it and it's running now.

Karen Brewster: And it's being used now?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes.

Karen Brewster: Did you work on that restoration?

Carl Mulvihill: Not as such no.

Karen Brewster: We were talking about the steam engine restoration and I'd asked whether you'd worked on that locally because I know in other communities people have done that as projects themselves, so how did that work in Skagway?

Carl Mulvihill: Ok, basically in Skagway it's called a union shop everybody works at the shop belongs to a union and in order to work there you have to belong to the union, as such. The railroad shops here they have a very-very skilled workforce, they can do almost anything, they built their own cabooses out of steel, their own depressed center cars, they've completely refurbished their locomotives, they can tear them apart and put them back together again. With steam engines a lot of parts you have to make since you can't buy them anymore and they have the skills to do that with the machine shop.

Karen Brewster: I find people who are machinists that it's an amazing skills that they have.

Carl Mulvihill: Oh, yes it is. It's fascinating just to watch them take a piece of iron and manufacture almost anything you want out of it.

Karen Brewster: What did you say a center car?

Carl Mulvihill: Oh a depressed center car. A flat car is flat on top from one end to the other. A depressed center car is flat on top over the trucks and then it comes down and the bed of the car is just a few feet above the rail, that way you can put a large piece of machinery in the depressed center section and still fit through the tunnels. If it were on top of a regular flat car it wouldn't fit through a tunnel or a snow shed.

Karen Brewster: So if you're carrying a D8 cat or something? Do they build those carts to spec for a specific piece of equipment or are they pretty much generic?

Carl Mulvihill: They're pretty much generic, depends upon what the normal freight they're trying to haul through.

Karen Brewster: So what are the heights on the tunnels and snow sheds on this route? Is there a certain height they are?

Carl Mulvihill: Not off the top of my head, no.

Karen Brewster: Nothing gets stuck apparently?

Carl Mulvihill: They pretty much know how high those are so they know how to load a car, so if they struck a side of a tunnel or snow shed it could be disastrous.

Karen Brewster: Yes, it could be disastrous. So those old steam engines, they've been restored here in town or?

Carl Mulvihill: Most of the steam engines have been sold after they went to diesel's and one that they had sold previously went to a couple different railroads and it's inoperative, they bought it back and did a certain amount of restoration at the locomotive restoration shop in Wisconsin and then brought it back here and they completed it here.

Karen Brewster: Now, some of the old 70 locomotives they've refurbishes as well?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, they have two steam engines working right now.

Karen Brewster: Those 70's were they the first diesels that they used?

Carl Mulvihill: The first diesels were started with number 90. The second generation began with a number 101 so they call them by the number class, 70 class is steam engine, 90 class is diesel locomotive built by General Electric, a 101 class is diesel built by American Locomotive Company known as ALCO.

Karen Brewster: So the diesels are still new enough not to require restoration, those 90 class?

Carl Mulvihill: No, they've began a new program now of taking the diesel engine out of the locomotive of the 90 class and putting in a larger engine and it's gonna double the horse power. These are engines built in 1954 so they're extending the life so to speak for another 50 years. This is a program they began last year so we have two rebuilt now and two more being rebuilt now.

Karen Brewster: Do train engines have a certain life?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, most engines have a certain life, normally about 30 years.

Karen Brewster: Is it based on how many hours it runs or how much tonnage it's pulled or a combination?

Carl Mulvihill: Number of hours its run, mileage, everything runs out in time but because narrow gauge engines are special built it becomes a major expense to buy new ones all the time. It has to be custom built. It doesn't come off a production line.

Karen Brewster: So how does a narrow gauge engine, I can understand the wheels or cars are different but how is the engine different as far as narrow gauge vs. regular?

Carl Mulvihill: In some cases smaller.

Karen Brewster: Tell me a little bit about being a dispatcher and what did you do there?

Carl Mulvihill: Well, a train dispatcher basically starts out the morning by getting all the weather reports from the trains or section houses and determining in winter time if they have to run the rotary snow plow out ahead of the train. He gets a list of all the freight cars loaded from the wharf and he designs the train accordingly, how many engines you need to pull the trains and cars, hear from the passenger department as to how many passengers you have to take that day and you design your train accordingly. Then you have to schedule the train so they can meet north bound and south bound meet in various places.

KAREN BREWSTER: where there are side tracks where they can pass each other. I guess I assumed this was a one-way route but it was not, it is now but it was not.

Carl Mulvihill: No, it's still not. Still have trains going both directions. So this depends on when the train leaves on where they can meet.

Karen Brewster: it sounds like the dispatcher is a very important job in terms of the operation.

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, it's part of the operation it brings everything that everybody else has done together and makes the train from White Horse efficiently.

Karen Brewster: Can you please tell me what being the Chief clerk was all about and what you did?

Carl Mulvihill: Chief Clerk is the administrator for the railroad and all administration goes through him, paying bills, ordering certain supplies for the paperwork for the trains. That time we also did the unemployment for people who are not working, you made arrangements for people to sign up for railroad retirement, just a very large miscellaneous administrative work. You push a lot of paper.

Karen Brewster: Was it typical for you to go from the guy out on the track all the way up to management it sounds like, is that a typical progression?

Carl Mulvihill: It can be, yes. Depends on your interest and availability of jobs, in other words people who've worked in the shops have gone up from machinists to foreman to master mechanic and some of those have come to be railroad superintendent.

Karen Brewster: did you like the change that happened in our career?

Carl Mulvihill: Oh, it was quite interesting, yeah. Change is always good as long as you can have some control over it. Sometimes you get a position where you can't work with people or you find the job monotonous so various reasons why people change.

Karen Brewster: but you didn't mind being a paper pusher after being a guy out on the line?

Carl Mulvihill: No, I guess paper pushing wasn't that hard, some people fight it but when I was in the army I was a personnel clerk so pushing paper wasn't that strange.

Karen Brewster: You mentioned that, a little bit about the Situk Railroad out of Yakutat, the fishing railroad, what do you know about that?

Carl Mulvihill: Primarily built to haul fish from the fishing boats to a cannery, then packed to be shipped out.

Karen Brewster: Do you know when it was operational?

Carl Mulvihill: I don't recall for sure when it began, it was owned by Libby McNeil, the cannery company. It was probably built in say 1910 in that era somewhere.

Karen Brewster: How long maybe did it run?

Carl Mulvihill: Think it was all through running about 1950's

Karen Brewster: And there's enough fish in that area to (spoken over) railroad?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, at the time, they had a big cannery there that they shipped the raw fish to.

Karen Brewster: But why did they use a railroad? Why didn't they use another transportation method?

Carl Mulvihill: When they built it railroading was the most efficient way of moving things rather than by truck.

Karen Brewster: You said that White Pass was the first railroad...

Carl Mulvihill: First railroad in Alaska and by railroad I mean it was a common carrier, in other words they would haul freight for anybody to a destination. There was a mining railway earlier out in the Aleutians and it strictly operated between the mine and their port, privately owned company.

Karen Brewster: A common carrier would carry passengers also.

Carl Mulvihill: Passengers and freight for the public.

Karen Brewster: Ok. Why was this railroad built? It was sort of after the big Klondike push was over.

Carl Mulvihill: Well, the Klondike Gold Rush was the reason why it was built because the transportation to the Klondike was in the summertime by the river from say June-September but not year round. Or else you carried it on your back over the pass here a very inefficient way of carrying a lot of freight. Dawson was quite large at that time 1,000 people so a large amount of freight, a mining area so you had heavy machinery going in so railroad the most efficient way of hauling all of that on a year round basis.

Karen Brewster: So even though it kind of wasn't finished until a lot of those were already over there.

Carl Mulvihill: The gold rush was over when the railroad was finished and that made it very difficult for the early years making money to pay for the expense of operating it as well as construction cost.

Karen Brewster: I find it interesting that White Pass is a railroad that's managed to keep itself going for so long, why do you think that is?

Carl Mulvihill: The management I would say was very innovative, they were interested in maintaining the country, personal interest in keeping the Yukon going. Through efficiency they bought out the riverboats on the Yukon so they would eliminate all the problems of several different company's and different rates so they could operate as one management system. They would control everything, they were a monopoly as such and anytime you're a monopoly you have problems of people claiming you make too much money but that's political as well as social. You have to maintain your equipment, you have to have enough money coming in to do everything so you do what you can do but you don't want to kill the golden goose either. Then when the highways opened up after World War II they went to the highway division, trucks and tankers and everything. In 1934 they began their own airline out in Skagway offering up to Dawson.

Karen Brewster: That would seem like a challenging flight.

Carl Mulvihill: Quite, quite challenging, yes. Because of various political areas they work in, let me back track, the railroad itself is 3 different railroad companies, one U.S. company, one British Columbia company and a Yukon company but all operate as one.

Karen Brewster: That's what it is now or used to be?

Carl Mulvihill: That's what it is now.

Karen Brewster: Oh, that's complicated.

Carl Mulvihill: the airline they had a US and a Canadian airline. The riverboats operated in Alaska and Yukon and the ones operated in Alaska were the Alaska division and the ones in the Yukon were the Yukon division. But they all operate together as one company.

Karen Brewster: Seems like a complicated company to keep functioning.

Carl Mulvihill: It can be because there are political areas to work in.

Karen Brewster: So how have they kept it all together?

Carl Mulvihill: By keeping up with the times, with modern technology, always on alert of making things better trying new schools for instance, trying to use coals aboard the riverboats and the available coal wasn't so good so the riverboat era they burned wood. On the railroad side they burned coal for years imported from Vancouver Island and in the 1950's they switched to oil, always trying to keep up with the most efficient way of operating.

Karen Brewster: Well, I guess it didn't work so well considering they went out of business in the 80's, right?

Carl Mulvihill: Yes, in 1982 they went out of business because the primary mine they were hauling the concentrates from went bankrupt and it took all the freight out of it and they couldn't operate on the available freight going to the Yukon. Of course they had competition from the freight coming up the highway which was quicker. So they shut down for a few years and realized there's enough tours coming to Skagway that they could operate and it's grown considerably since.

Karen Brewster: Yes, it seems a viable business still. Well, there's certainly more I'd like to talk to you about with but I know with you having a cold you might not want to keep talking.

Carl Mulvihill: Maybe we could come back a different day?

Karen Brewster: Ok, that'd be great so why don't we stop it for now and give your voice a rest. Thank you very much for all your help, appreciate it. You have a long history in your family in the railroad and you obviously know a lot about the history of this railroad, are there some of the other highlights of that history that you want to talk about?

Carl Mulvihill: History of the railroads been more my interest is history anyway so it comes naturally to want to know more about the White Pass history. Very familiar to us, I know the people so I did a lot of studying on the railroad and felt a certain amount of history in question of the railroad.

Karen Brewster: what do you consider are some of the milestones and key points in that history?

Carl Mulvihill: The milestone of the railroad probably 4 different eras, of course the initial gold rush and the building of the railroad, then the next big part was during World War II when the army operated it and the post war modernization of the railroad in the 1950's and again the 1969 when a big mine opened up in the Yukon which brought in a new development for containerization so these are probably big events in the railroad. Then they shut down in 1982 and re-opened in 1988 as a strictly tourist railroad, so I guess that's 5 isn't it?

Karen Brewster: You've been around for at least 3 of those transitions.

Carl Mulvihill: Yea, I became more conscious during the World War II era, everything before that was all BC, before Carl.

Karen Brewster: But did you hear stories from your father and grandfather?

Carl Mulvihill: Well, not much from my grandfather but my father heard various stories when I was in college and when I eventually got out of college and learned the history of the railroad. Once that got

started I just continued digging through the history and developed histories of every piece of equipment on the railroad and collecting of the garbage that they throw away but this is valuable stuff you know.

Karen Brewster: So you have a great variety of personal memorabilia I bet.

Carl Mulvihill: Yea, but for most people it's probably junk but I know what it is, it probably needs to be labeled which is a big problem for people collecting stuff, people don't label them and then nobody else knows the value of them.

Karen Brewster: So what's one of your favorite things you've collected that's maybe unusual or?

Carl Mulvihill: Probably the most would be photographs. I've collected a lot of old photographs of the White Pass had a large glass native collection here that I printed many years ago and I take a lot of photographs every year of the railroad so.

Karen Brewster: So you have pictures of the different engines and how it's changed.

Carl Mulvihill: Various areas and what's going on, derailments, rebuilding engines, people working, all phases of the operation.

Karen Brewster: What about some physical thing you've collected that's one of your treasures?

Carl Mulvihill: Well, one room in my house I built it to resemble the interior of a coach. I have some of the original coach seats in it and I have an original restroom with what called a dry hopper, just a porcelain bowl that goes to the floor you use it all the material goes to the tides, no water flushing. This is kind of incorporated in my one section of the house.

Karen Brewster: Cool, sounds fun.

Carl Mulvihill: Different challenge, I like challenges and to do things, just takes me longer to do things than it should.

Karen Brewster: You mentioned derailments, is that a problem on this route?

Carl Mulvihill: Derailments happen everywhere. Usually equipment defect or a track defect. On this railroad because they don't operate very fast it's not usually serious.

Karen Brewster: So there haven't been serious derailments with trains falling down mountainsides up here?

Carl Mulvihill: Not normally, they had one slide they had a work train once and one piece of equipment went down the canyon.

Karen Brewster: That big avalanche where there's a cemetery for the avalanche victims?

Carl Mulvihill: Oh, that was in Dyea. That was over in the Chilkoot Pass and wasn't related to the railroad.

Karen Brewster: Where did you go to college?

Carl Mulvihill: I went to Tacoma, to the University of Puget Sound.

Karen Brewster: And did you get a degree in history?

Carl Mulvihill: No, I got a degree in business and economics and from there I was drafted into the army and since I was working with the railroad when I was drafted I just came back here and worked.

Karen Brewster: Oh, so you weren't sent overseas or anything?

Carl Mulvihill: No. So I came back here because in the army you don't make much money so I had to try to increase my economic well being and just kind of stayed.

Karen Brewster: So how long did the army stay in Skagway? Was it as soon as the war was over they left or as soon as they got the highway built?

Carl Mulvihill: Basically when they got the highway built in the end of 1944 they began to pull all their troops out in December and ship a lot of the equipment back out, the troops went to Europe from here. The White Pass became the primary operator of the railroad and the lease expired in April 1946.