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Interview with Tommy Paschall Regarding Dark Fire Tobacco Barns and Processing (FA 476)

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Folklife Archives Project 476 – Dark Fire Tobacco Barns
Interview with Tommy Paschall (B2,F5)

Interviewer: John Morgan
Interviewee: Tommy Paschall
Also appears: Scott Paschall
Project: Dark-Fire Tobacco Barn Project
Date: January 8, 1993
Location: Outside of Hazel
Transcriber: Matthew Ripley
Note From Transcriber:

- a. Interviewee Tommy Paschall is abbreviated TP.
Interviewer John Morgan is abbreviated JM.
- b. An ellipsis indicates a sentence that is unfinished due to interruption. A dash indicates a sentence that is unfinished due to change of thought.
- c. Square brackets are used to indicate additional information not taken directly from the words of the interviewer or interviewee.
Parentheses are used to indicate nonverbal actions.
- d. In parentheses “laughs” means laughter by a single individual, “laughter” means laughter by both parties, and “chuckles” means the beginning of laughter that occurred while the speaker continued to speak.
- e. Filler words such as “um,” and “uh,” were removed if I felt they detracted from the intelligibility of the sentence. Filler phrases such as “you know” were kept when possible.

Disclaimer: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing the event.

[Begin transcription]

JM: Okay, today is January 8, 1993. My name is John Morgan and I am going to be speaking with Tommy Paschall. We are in the kitchen of his house just somewhere outside of Hazel I would say (chuckles). And we are going to be talking about stripping dark fire tobacco. Okay let me begin, how do you class tobacco? Now describe to me the different classes and what each of those classes are.

TP: Basically, we make three classes. Lugs are trash-lower quality, well grade lower. It is usually dirty or has some kind of damage or holes in the leaves. They come off the bottom of the plant. Mostly because it is the part of the tobacco that will get dirtier. It has been on the plant longer. Now when you pull it off the seed bed and set it, some of those bottom leaves are on there then.

JM: So that would be the lower part of the cut-stalk?

TP: Yeah, right. Of course the longer they are on there the more damage they get, and of course they are closer to the ground too. And then, I make a second, normally. Now some, the first tobacco I stripped this year I didn't make a second because there wasn't

really any on it. Now I don't know exactly why, but it was just lugs and leaf. It wasn't this big. The tobacco was already tobacco and it had went through different type weather and the tobacco didn't get near as big or as tall or have as many leaves. It basically didn't have any seconds on it. Seconds are a higher quality than lugs. Mostly a lighter color than leaf. There is a big difference between seconds and leaf. Most of the seconds come out somewhere close to the middle. If you pull three leaves off the bottom for lugs then the next two or three are usually be seconds, and then on up to the top of the leaf, will make leaf. I have no idea why the top of the plant goes darker mostly. Seconds you class differently than leaf by quality and by color. Uh, it is just usually a lighter color.

JM: So what you call lugs are a lesser grade. Seconds are in the middle somewhere.

TP: Seconds will sometimes grade up with leave. Sometimes, usually, maybe one quality grade lower. A lot of times that doesn't make any difference in price. A lot of times, especially if it is good seconds, and a good leaf it will bring the same price. {JM: Really?} But sometimes it doesn't too. Like I said, the first crop I had - now it didn't have near as many lugs, but it wasn't - the overall weight of the tobacco per acre wasn't near as much as the later tobacco is. But it just didn't have any seconds on it.

JM: So the best quality is the leaf. Try if you can to describe what that leaf looks like or feels like matter of fact.

TP: It's – the leaf will have more stretch, more body. Body it's almost stretch like rubber, it should. It won't tear, it is fairly thick compared to most tobacco leaves it has the most leaves. The dark fire tobacco will stand and it gets thicker than burley for instance. I don't know, if you can get one without a hole in it, and solid leaf hasn't got any holes in it. It is better if it has got a good black stem.

JM: So that is something to look for? When the stem has turned black?

TP: Yeah, the stem if you don't get your fire in- on it at the right time, now you can get the color through if you let the fire go out at the wrong time and stem will still mold up on you. Leaf will go ahead and look fine but the stem will go ahead and show white mold or- and it is sometimes, and I have no idea why, and I still make the mess in the barn sometimes. I can do a good job, maybe fire in the barn one year, and the next year I just won't do good. Sometimes the stem will go through and it won't mold, but it just won't be a good black color it will be more of a brown, and I don't know why. Some people can come more like to getting a black stem than others. And, sometimes it doesn't have anything to do with their ability they have for coloring tobacco. I don't know what it is. Maybe the guy down the road can get a better color on his leaf, but he can't get as good of stem.

JM: So, you may have said it, but if you will remind me. What would cause a stem to mold?

TP: A stem with mold would be if you dry the leaf out, and get the color through on it. Of course I don't know where I was explaining to you in the firing about you have to sweat it so much to get the color through. So if you dry it out too fast it will be green. Ok, if you dry the leaf out and get the color through and then let your fire go out – and don't get back in to build a fire to dry the stem out, and the stem is still green – if it isn't dried out with fire it will mold. I mean if it is just dried out with air, because I mean if it was one leaf out by itself it probably wouldn't mold it would probably still go to a brown color, but it is so much packed together that in the barn it will mold.

JM: And it what? Is there just too much moisture in the stem is that what really causes the mold?

TP: Yeah, it will still be green. It would still be a green stem, and it would it, instead of being dried by fire and dried out, the moisture would make it mold in the curing.

JM: Right. So earlier today, while I observed you all working, there was some mention that they used to have – more grades than three. How many grades did they used to have?

TP: I can remember daddy making five. Well, what he would do, what they used to have tie leaf. They had a certain color leaf, out like – well usually out of the seconds that they would use for a tie leaf, because buyers and graders don't usually look at the heads. It's called the head. The top of the tobacco where it is tied is called the head. {JM: And the tie leaf is the...?} Yes, what's wrapped around the – used to bind the top. Buyers don't usually look at that so they would usually get a lighter color and use that as a tie leaf. But people just don't fool with doing that anymore. At that time people weren't hiring much help they were doing it all themselves. Of course now the labor problem and the amount of money makes a difference. If we would have had any green today – now there wasn't any green tobacco in that today. If you have green you would want to hold that out definitely. Either throw it away or at least put that in a class by itself. Because green probably hurts it worse than anything. {JM: It's just not worth...} No, they just can't use it. The buyers may buy it. They claim they can sweat it through and put it in a (unintelligible) and sweat it through the next year. Now if you get a green in your tobacco it will drop the grade from - it will drop the price oh seventy cents or a dollar. I mean you know. If you get a G on your grade from the buyer – it is the same as burley.

JM: That is if they spot green tobacco in their?

TP: It'll do almost the same thing on burley.

JM: Okay, let's try- if you can. You've taken the tobacco down out of the barn, you've got into your stripping – is that what you call it? {TP: Yeah, stripping shed.} Describe what happens to a stalk of tobacco. What happens to it?

TP: When we take it off the stick the classer pulls the, usually the lugs and seconds off, if you can get plenty of classers, but most people don't. You can have one person class

the lugs off, and then hand it over to somebody else who classes the seconds off. But mostly I have the – well mother and Rita do most of the classing for me. Others help some and if I get time I do and Wayne does, Berry and Elaine if either one is there. But mother and Rita, I would say, classed sixty or seventy percent of my tobacco.

JM: Okay, your mother Imogene Paschall, and then Rita Brandon who has worked for you for a number of years.

TP: They lay the lugs down in a box try to keep them straight and they tie up the seconds. Like we were talking about a while ago where you pull the leaf out and tie the head. Then pass it over, and the other hands pull the leaf, or the better tobacco, off. That's – we've always called it: leaf, lugs, and seconds. Now, that is just always what it was called when I was growing up, I don't know...{JM: That was just what it was called, no sense in changing it} When I mark my bundles I just put one, two and three, because it is just easier to keep up with.

JM: So is the tying – you actually use a leaf. You are gathering the different classes of tobacco into a bundle. They call that a bundle. Well, it's not really a bundle. Is that a hand?

TP: It's a hand. Yeah, it's called a hand of tobacco. Now that's – now there is just one class in each hand. You don't have them all mixed up. In other words you've got a hand of lugs, a hand of second, and a hand of leaf. And you take a leaf – leaf and seconds are fairly easy to find a leaf to tie with. Lugs are sometimes a little harder because they're past the drier. {JM: It's a point of quality.} The tobacco is drier, and the leaf you use to tie the top with you have. It has got to have quite a bit of moisture. (Unintelligible) is what we would call it. But that is what that means.

JM: Just having order. I mean we can clarify that. We talked a little bit about that before. Is that when a leaf has good order it just regained...

TP: It regained the moisture. If you go out morning after it's rained the oak leaves laying in your yard will be in order (laughter) I mean you know, you pick them up and they won't crumble, and you can fold them and...

JM: So you have classed it. And as you said there are a couple of different ways people class. People used to just pass the stalks on to different people.

TP: A lot of the older ones. Like you said, they made a green, a tie leaf, a second, a lug, a leaf, a short and a long. They would separate them if they had them. As you noticed out there today some of that tobacco is longer than others. But we didn't separate it, but they did then. If they had a hand of – if every tenth stalk was a shorter stalk with shorter leaves they would separate that out different and make another class. But I can't afford to do that. I mean it would probably – the thing about it is it would probably grade better if I separated all that out. It would probably get a little better grade but when I sold it I don't think it would make any difference in the price. {JM: But you would still be

spending the time.} You'd be spending the time. I mean the more you class it the more it costs you. I mean if you just took it all off tied it up in a hand it would be faster than going to class it. Now going down those stalks like I was talking about earlier, when you are classing and pulling those lugs off you will see a leaf that is in the top of the plant where it would normally be leaf or good tobacco that has been torn or something has happened to it, and you have to reach down and get that off because that will go in a lower grade. You have to have somebody that kind of knows what they are doing.

JM: So when they have got a hand of tobacco, which I would feel certain that the name came from a handful of tobacco.

TP: I don't know it has just always been called that.

JM: They find a suitable leaf and then they actually tie it off. Right? Try and describe that to me. We have some photographs, but try and describe that to me on the tape.

TP: You wrap it around the ten or twelve leaves you have in your hand. Eight or ten or twelve leaves and probably wrap it one and a half or two times. Then separate the six or eight leaves in the middle and bring the what's left of the top of the leaf through. It will hold.

JM: So you split the bundle and bring the top of the leaf through. {TP: Split the hand.} Split the hand rather, and bring it through.

TP: You start with the tip. You know what I am talking about? The tip of the leaf, right? The head of the leaf is next to the stalk. The top of the leaf is next to the stalk and then it goes out the tips. The tip is furthest away from the head of the stalk. And that is what you start wrapping with is the tip and the head or the big stems it goes through.

JM: Right. Okay, Scott. Scott. Are you drawing? Scott Paschall, Tommy's son, is over here drawing us a picture. I have to get this on tape. So the tip is what we would call the tip or the end of the leaf {TP: um hmm} . And the head is the part that was attached to the stalk. {TP: unintelligible murmurs}

SP: And you have your tobacco like this. And then you take the tip and you just wind it around like this, three or four times, and then you spread it apart in the middle. You bring it through.

TP: That is kind of hard to describe. I mean it's not hard to describe; it is hard for somebody to understand it when you're just talking about it. You almost have to watch it.

JM: So can I have that drawing to go along with the tape?

SP: Yeah, you can have that drawing. It's not the worlds best, but...

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JM: Okay. Well, so, let's see you had 1-2-3-4-5-6 people plus yourself at one time working out there.

TP: Had Elaine, Rita, and Wayne, Roberta, mother and Gayle. Yeah. {JM: Plus yourself} And that's not counting two boys at the barn.

JM: Who were taking tobacco down, right. Now is that average or is that just a good day?

TP: No, no. That is probably the most hands I have had all year. But now, some people will have a lot more than that depending on the size and amount of hands they can get. Now it has been hard to get hands this year too.

JM: So that just – the lack of labor just continues all the way down the line?

TP: Yeah, a lot of people are bringing in Mexicans. To cut and some of them are keeping them over to strip. {JM: Really showing them, teaching them} I guess they're taking – I don't know how they are classing but they are probably to hire a couple hands to class and then letting the –

SP: (unintelligible comment) laughter

JM: So um, let's see. You were also talking earlier. How with that many hands, say six hands how many acres you could strip and class and get bundled up?

TP: A that is a guess. If you had six hands every day you could probably do between an acre and a half and two acres a week. {TP: Is that right?} I don't know, but that is a guess yeah. I didn't count the sticks today. We've – let's see – with mother, Wayne, Roberta and Rita we did 250 sticks the other day. But I think Randy, one of them boys, I was tying and one of them was rousting – what I was doing today. The rousting that's boxing, waiting on bringing in the tobacco.

JM: Rousting? That is keeping sticks in the shed, bringing them in, taking them off the stakes, laying them in front of people, and the bundling operation also? {JM: Um, hmm} Boxing, that is what you call it. Can you describe that to me?

TP: That is just - I take two hands press them together and you put them in the bottom of a box, it is usually about ten or twelve hands wide, make a run then another run at the other end of a box in the tails of the tobacco. Tips or tails of the tobacco - lay them up in the middle to keep them from breaking. I do five runs, simply because that gets it between seventy and eighty pounds and that is about as big a bundle as I want to fool with most of the time.

JM: So when you say five runs you mean like...?

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TP: Five runs on each side, high, and you can do ten or twelve hands and then do one on the other side. Then you come back and do another run ten or twelve high right on top of that one.

JM: So as you put them in the bulk of the leaf is in toward the center overlapped. And the tied {TP: The head, they call those heads.} the hands are facing out. How long have they been wrapping it in paper like that?

TP: The first box I ever saw daddy made – my father made when I was oh, eighteen. I was seventeen or eighteen years old. Now I don't know where he saw it. He was pretty big into co-op and he went to a lot of tobacco meetings and stuff. And he saw it somewhere. They all sit there. That was the first one I ever saw. But now in – well let's see that would have been in the '65 or something like that. By early or middle seventies everybody was using it. It was so much easier, once people saw it. Because before you had to book it on a wagon – that's hard to describe too.

JM: Okay, well "booking it" that is an interesting term.

TP: Okay, that's what I – why I was (unintelligible) when I grew up. I would come home from school they had been stripping all day. We'd go out that night, in the barn, and book tobacco down on a wagon or a scaffold. A scaffold being, you lay something down in the barn, and you usually put tobacco sticks on it then you have a flat surface and you can book tobacco down on it, can book tobacco down on it.

JM: But sometimes you would put it right on the...

TP: Sometimes you put it right on the wagon. And that was because you knew you were going to have to move it and put it right on the wagon anyway. So sometimes...

JM: So was this laid out in a particular pattern on the wagon?

TP: Booking – It has been so long since I did that. Booking – like we laid those in a row on that box, if you started booking you could start probably next to the wall or next to the side, the side of the wagon, and lay a run all the way down one side of it. Okay then, lay a run on the ends and on the other side and then you would have to lay runs in the middle. But you would have tobacco, all tied together, laid all over it. But when you got to the floor (unintelligible) you had to take that up. Two or three hands at a time and hand it up to somebody boxing it up on the wagon. It was much harder to do. You probably should ask some of the older farmers more, because they would know more about that than I would. I never did do that much of it. I did that when I was kid, but I didn't pay any attention to what we were doing. (laughs) I mostly handed tobacco and fussed.

JM: Well so, so you said your dad probably built a box when you were about eighteen?

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TP: Yeah, I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. I remember. He and I went up there and built the first box I ever saw one snowy day when we couldn't strip. And it was real cold.

JM: Right. So you had two kinds of boxes out in the shed now.

TP: One of them is just a nearer box that I – that was just built later that I just had ends in it. That box works pretty good unless you get real long or real short tobacco. Then if you get in real short, obviously it's too short when it comes out the end. But you can put in three runs. Put a run in the middle and tie it. If it gets in real long it tries to build up in the middle. The other boxes are some old boxes. Actually those are some old boxes from my brother in law that I picked up at his house this fall. I have been swapping work with my cousin and we have both been stripping in the same place and he had a box – two boxes. Then I had so much tobacco this year we decided we couldn't get it all stripped. So he moved to somewhere else and he took his boxes with him. (laughter)

JM: Well, how many acres did you raise this year?

TP: I only had, well counting Berry's - I had only had seven and a half acres of dark. I've got a lot of burley.

JM: But seven and a half acres of the dark fire tobacco?

TP: Counting Berry and mine together.

JM: About how long do you estimate you will be stripping, classing, and bundling that? Just an estimate. I wouldn't want to...

TP: What I am trying to think when we started. We stripped burley first. We stripped for a week and then we started back – Okay probably a month and a half to two months.

JM: To strip seven and a half acres?

TP: Yeah. Now I haven't been – of course New Year's week and Christmas week we didn't strip all week long. We only stripped three days Christmas and I think we stripped four days New Years.

JM: So it is a lot of work. It is pretty labor intensive in terms of...

TP: Tobacco, dark fire tobacco I think – I have raised tomatoes, peppers, burley tobacco. Stretched out over the whole crop is probably the most labor intensive crop I have ever worked on. Because you've got the firing. I mean you're looking at five or six weeks for firing. It's hard work, as well as raising it in the field which you have got to do like everything else. It takes a lot of – well it's a labor intensive crop. Pretty labor intensive.

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JM: I noticed. It seems like it could be pretty monotonous work, the stripping part, but people just do a lot to talk to themselves.

TP: (laughs) The good thing about tobacco – well one thing is it's if you're looking at six weeks of stripping it's pretty monotonous but you haven't got to do it again for another eleven and a half months before you get back into it. That is one advantage. I am sure if you sit down and strip and think "well I got to do this for the next twenty years" it would get real monotonous.

JM: But you look at it one year at a time...

TP: Yeah, one year at a time and you don't have to do it all year long. Yeah, when you get a lot of people who work together and they strip every fall together, yeah they do a lot of talking.

JM: Well they seem to entertain themselves when they are doing it. But it is a full day you usually put in there right?

TP: I only work seven hours. Well, I have worked more than that, but I only usually keep the hands seven hours, and then take an hour off for dinner. Most people strip eight. It may take me a little longer to get my crop stripped, but I think I probably get more production from my hands with seven hours than I do with eight, because everybody gets tired. Put those hands – and those were good hands I had out there today – you can put them – I work three and half hours a morning and three and a half hours I the evening they will do between twenty-five and fifty sticks (unintelligible) I am sure that would hold true at anything else at any other kind of job. People just get tired.

JM: I noticed that they didn't slow down when it wasn't break time.

TP: Oh yeah, they don't slow down. They just get more done every morning. You just do anything if you have a lot of people to (unintelligible) it's the same way. (unintelligible) or pick tomatoes or anything they'll get more done in the first two or three hours than in the next two or three hours. People get tired (laughter), including me.

JM: But your day is not necessarily finished when the strippers leave?

TP: I start, I generally go out – if we don't get the bill we try to clean up everything, well I do before we leave. I go out in the morning and clean up or build a fire if I've got some that I didn't finish boxing from the night before. I do that. I generally start about an hour or two before they do in the morning. The two boys, especially Randy the one boy, that was helping me take down today. They usually stay with me, and then we take the stalks out, finish the bundling, move the bundles, move the sticks. So if they quit at four we usually get done about five thirty. Another hour and a half more, so yeah about two and a half hours more on the average. That is a guess.

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JM: That is a full day. Let's see I am trying to think – in the photographs that will accompany this tape are pretty self explanatory too. I am trying to think about anything I might be missing. We talked about classing, the three basic classes.

TP: Yeah, mostly. Mostly three basic classes now. Most people make that. Some make two, and I don't think hardly anybody I know makes four or five. Like I said, unless there is a lot of green in it. A lot of people – and I would too – there are two kinds of green. That one today didn't have any green in it. I didn't notice any. You've got like a firing green, like I say if you get it too much fire its kind of a dull, kind of a light green. And then you got a sunburn grain. Which is when cut and laid on the ground, if it's laid there too long, it's strange it turns black. In the field the tobacco is green it turns black and will have a black spot on it. When you fire that out the green turns black and the black turns green, and I mean it is a bright green. That's strange, but I have had a little of that earlier, but none of that today. I had one barn that had some of that. Mostly you would pull it out, and most people would pull it out.

JM: So, let's see it's January 8th now and you're working – about how far do you think you are with this?

TP: I am hoping to get done the last of January. Will you wait to go to the sales floor then? I will probably haul some of it, and I will probably haul some of it next week, before it gets stripped.

JM: And when does the dark tobacco sales floor?

TP: I think it starts - hell I am not even sure I think it starts the twentieth. I think. Uh, it starts in Mayfield one day and then Murray the next. I am not sure. I think about the week of the twentieth is when they open.

JM: And where do you take yours? Is there a special place you takes yours for sale or...?

TP: I generally take mine to Murray, but I may go Mayfield this year. I took my Burley down there. Of course, they don't have a Burley floor in Murray. But I am not sure where I am going to take it (laughter). I haven't made up my mind. There are two floors in Murray, two different floors owned by two different people. The one I went to – I worked in one for years in Murray, and had two owners. One of them got out several years ago and another guy bought in. The other one is getting out this year, and somebody else is taking over and I don't really know them any better than I do the people in Mayfield so. I might just try Mayfield to see if I think it does any better.

JM: Meaning you might get a better price for it?

TP: Well, some people have told me [End Side A] that bring their tobacco from Calloway county get a little better grade in their tobacco. And their tobacco stands out a little better. So it seems to look a little better.

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JM: Let me make another announcement. This is side two or B side of the Tommy Paschall interview on January 8th, 1993. Okay, so we were just talking about trying to basically you've got it all classed, stripped, tied, bundled, and you were just talking about you didn't know exactly where you were going to go for sales.

TP: I don't know I will probably haul some next week, but I just don't – I haven't made up my mind for sure. Now a lot of people sold at the barn -

JM: Well, now that's the way it used to-

TP: Well now, used to, used to. But that really is before my time too. They had ten hookers that came around and bought at the barn if they thought they could make they would offer them a price. The even years ago, which I don't remember at all, they bought it all at the barn. Before the association that was when the floors were set up. Now you said you were doing something or studied some on the nightriders. (overlap of voices)

JM: Yeah, dark-tobacco growers association. That was 1910 just about.

TP: Before that they bought it all at the barn. The companies just came around. But now, since then the association has been set up and then it goes to the floor and then the government graders come in. They come in and give you a grade, and if your grade is a 2 or 5 moneywise, the buyers don't buy it. The association takes it. But now they have got where they come along and buy some at the barn. My brother in law has got, which he's got twenty acres. I think they bought eight of his. Somebody told me that the other day, but I haven't talked to him. Somebody told me they bought eight.

JM: Is that the first nightman? No, that's your cousin yeah right.

TP: No, no, that is my cousin. Now I don't know why, I saw his tobacco and it was good tobacco, it was all good tobacco, so I don't know why they bought eight acres but they didn't buy the rest of it. I have no idea. Some of it they would buy and some of it they wouldn't. I am not even sure if they did this, someone told me they did, someone dependable, I haven't seen him or talked to him.

JM: Well, I am trying to think. Is there anything I've forgotten? Regarding stripping and classing?

TP: Something you didn't get any shots of, and mother was right, is the taking down. But it is a lot like running up when you, I guess, if you are going to do a whole series on it and watch people run in about it.

JM: It's just in reverse. (laughter)

TP: Yeah, it's in reverse it's easier. You've got to – it's got to have some moisture in it. Some order, otherwise if it's too dry it will break it into pieces. Order, if you get it too

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wet, of course, you can't set it, I mean it won't keep. It has got to be keeping order. And once you get it off those stalks you can't dry it out hardly. You got to have it in pretty good shape before you can pull it off the stalk. As long as it's still on the stick and that was a tobacco stick where there are six stalks on it, you can always hang it back up. Or you can lay it down on a pile – you took a shot of the scaffold in there? (JM: Right) If you get it layed down like that, you can always pick it back up and hang it on a wagon and dry it out. But once you get it off you can't do anything with it.

JM: Once you get it off the stalk?

TP: Yeah, and it is fairly important to keep it in the proper order.

JM: Now I noticed you had the scaffold , that is the tobacco that has been taken down to the barn and dropped. You had that in another section where there was no heat. Is that intentional? Are you trying to –

TP: Well I warmed it up some today. If you can dry it out with heat it will freeze out with cold. But now, if you cover it with plastic it won't hardly freeze out with cold. But you can dry it out with heat quickly. You can take, a hand of tobacco say, and have it outside when it's 38 degrees and think it's dry. You can bring it in and hang it over a stove and in just two minutes you can tie it in a knot. (laughter)

JM: Just taking it down you still have to take care of it? After you've taken it down out of the barn. (TP: Oh yeah) You still have to watch it, you can't just throw it anywhere until you get to it.

TP: You've got to take care of it. You got to keep it fairly straight and you got to keep it clean. Because of the smoke, I guess, and the finish is sticky. It picks up dirt real bad.

JM: I noticed there was a kind of gummy – on the front side of the leaf. Tommy is showing me his hands just now.

TP: You didn't look at anybody's hands. Now a lot of the women wear gloves.

JM: Yeah, I noticed that some of the people were wearing gloves.

TP: At you had looked at one of the stripping hands, because I wasn't stripping much, one of their gloves or anyone who didn't have gloves on, their hands were just coated black. It is a gum. Now even tobacco in the field has got a gum. But when it has been fired and you're stripping it it is really gummy.

JM: But when I felt one if felt that the gum was mostly on the underside of the leaf.

TP: Well now – the back. (JM: Yeah, the back) yeah or the bottom, maybe it's on both sides then. When you fold that leaf up – that's one thing – when you – the tie leaf – I don't know whether you paid any attention or got a picture of it. Now the tie leaf, I am

talking about the one they tie the head with. They fold it out, and where the stem runs down through the middle they fold it back and put the top on the outside. Normally a leaf just hanging it would be on the bottom on that side.

JM: Yeah it did seem to curl – if it was hanging it seemed to curl the top inward. But I did notice that. Let me get this straight for the tape here. The tie leaf they actually fold it back, so the top of the leaf –

TP: It's a darker, a darker better color that looks better. They fold it just like that on the outside.

JM: That's part of it. Your tie leaf you're trying to get a sense of the leaf itself. That is what people see at the end of the bundles right?

TP: That's one thing you learn immediately. You don't tie it with the back side of the leaf out. You just fold it backwards and put the top of the leaf out. I am trying to think, even on a, any kind of tobacco anything that has got a big leaf if you took it and it has a – if you took it and it was dried and it had moisture in it, it would fold inwards. If you took a stalk and hung it up, the leaf would fold inward, and what you would see would be the bottom of the leaf and maybe on the back side. You would have to turn it – inside out to get that wrapping leaf.

JM: So is hard to teach someone to tie off tobacco? Tie off the hands of tobacco?

TP: I don't – it depends on the person. Roberta, I haven't tied much tobacco and she started this year and she is doing awful good. She, the first two or three days she had trouble not getting the head tied good enough. If you'll notice, and all these things you matter most if you would have talked to somebody earlier. If you had noticed mother or Rita or somebody else they squeeze the hand. They keep squeezing the head, they keep squeezing the head, because the tighter you can get it the tighter you can pull that leaf around.

JM: They keep compacting the hand...

TP: All the time they are stripping it, and that leads to it. They keep compacting the hand.

JM: And there is no set number of leaves?

TP: Nah, I just go by, when it feels right in my hand. Sometimes you got a stalk lying in front of you, and it has got two leaves I will go ahead and put them in even though it feels like it's got enough. No there is no set number. Now it used to even when I first was growing up, the leaf especially the good tobacco, they didn't want over eight leaves. Now they have made the other hand the bigger hand because it is less processing for the companies. They're just like me and everyone else, less labor. The

less hands you got – the more leaves you got in the hand the less hands you’ve got to have.

JM: But now I suppose the classes would be a little harder to teach somebody.

TP: Oh yeah, classing is quite a bit harder. It’s, a different art. Now anybody can look at it and say “this is the lugs because it’s got green, or it’s got spots on it, or holes on it” But to get the color and everything right it’s a – two people don’t class alike. Well, mother and Rita class pretty close to alike. You won’t get – you can put four or five in a room and they probably won’t class – some will class closer than others. Usually ones that class closer are slower (laughter) the ones that don’t class (inaudible) are faster. You know, sometimes if you’re in good tobacco – and that tobacco out there today wasn’t all that good, it had a lot of field burn in it. The lugs had a lot of spots in it because the lugs burn in the field before it came in. Good tobacco – a real fast classer is probably your best hand because it’s not gonna, it hasn’t got that much bad tobacco in it anyway. They can get it out in a hurry, and rough tobacco you would want a more particular hand. In my opinion, everyone might not agree with that.

JM: That is something you – that is just a skill you acquire through experience right?

TP: Well like Rita, she didn’t grow up, well she grew up here in the country. We taught her, mother and I taught her how to class. Most of the classers are old. Most of the strippers are older. That’s why I reckon its getting harder to find people to strip tobacco. Most of them are in their sixties. They mostly learned when they grew up on a farm and started doing it when they were kids and learned how to class. Some people, I am not one, pay more for classers than they do strippers, because you can pick them up easier. Well you should be able to, I have had trouble picking up anybody this year (laughter). But mostly it is a learned skill from growing up on a farm. Like I said we taught Rita cause I, we taught Rita, we didn’t have any help and we didn’t have any help classing back several years ago. I said for her to sit down and we were going to show you how to do this. Now people all over the country are calling her and she says, “Well, I got to wait until I get done helping Tommy.”

JM: Oh wow, is that right? So she is getting pretty good?

TP: Oh yeah, she’s a good hand, a really good hand.

JM: OK, so it will be ready to go to the sales floor around the 20th of January.

TP: I will probably haul some tobacco next week. Deliver it down there. I don’t know the first sale my be {in audible}. I don’t particularly like to sell on the first sale anyway. I never have. Either second or third.

JM: Why is that?

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Interview with Tommy Paschall (B2,F5)

TP: I don't know. (laughter) I just wait and see what it is going to do. Now it seems to me that the last few years it hasn't made any difference in darkfire. Darkfire is in pretty big demand right now. Like I said with the smoking thing, I think there are more people dipping snuff and chewing tobacco. Whereas they can buy the burley and the others from South American foreign countries it's hard to find the dark in a foreign country. It is hard to go to Brazil to teach them how to do it, and get a good quality out of it. But years ago when I first started selling it, it seemed to me that the third sale was the highest sale. I don't know why. I just watched the floor over the years and it seemed to me that, more often than not, that would be the highest sale of the ten or so sales they would have. It's just sort of a superstition.

JM: Sort of an observation, scientific observation combined with superstition (laughter).

TP: Now it doesn't make much difference though, really. You can't ever tell. I have seen 'em. US, which is one of the companies, come to the floor and their buyers got so many pounds to buy, you would want to try – or I would – to try to find the floor that he was going to buy on that morning. At dinner they'll figure up their pounds, and if he's close he may drop off. Not buy as much tobacco and that will drop the whole sale price. You know, if you got like B3F tobacco has been bringing so much all morning and he's buying every third basket of it or every second basket of it or whatever, if it drops off...If he says, "Well, gosh I don't need but 5,000 more pounds." he ain't gonna buy many more baskets. When he does that it takes one buyer almost out.

JM: So you actually try and watch which buyers are?

TP: Like I said, it hasn't made that much difference in the last year or two. But when they, I think – I am not a buyer, that they have got a quota. When they go, there boss says we need so many million pounds and they start buying. Also I think, the tobacco does a little bit better a little earlier in the week. I think if you can find a sale date early. And this is strictly from my observation and opinion. I think that is because they have more hands to work it and they have a lot of room and by Thursday and Friday they are getting pretty full and they can't work as much tobacco. So they just don't buy as much.

JM: OK, I think I will wrap this up, because I am going to want to talk to you some more about the sales. I am going to be bugging you for the next year or more. OK, well let's wrap that up. Unless there is something more you want to add about the stripping and classing?

TP: I can't think of anything, the more water you can get without getting a W or getting it wet the better off you are, because the more weight you got. But you definitely don't want a W. You definitely don't want to get a W. Wet, water, they won't buy it. Because they can't buy it because it's unsanitary, and the reason they won't buy it is because they can't keep it.

JM: OK, well I will wrap up this interview...now. {FIN}