

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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JULY 2018

SMOKEJUMPER

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Front cover: *Paracargo floats above fire camp canopy, Interior Alaska, 1998. (Courtesy Mike McMillan)*



Message from the President



by **Jim Cherry**
(Missoula '57)
President

I WANT TO USE this issue of the President's Message to inform you about the way your NSA Board of Directors (BOD) operates. First, you should know that the Board meets face-to-face twice a year—Seattle in October and Boise in March. These two locations on an annual basis allow us to be cost-efficient and it gives us an opportunity to connect with jumper alumni living in those areas, as well as being able to invite fire and aviation leadership to bring us up-to-date on developments in those arenas.

At our recent meeting in Boise, we heard from Roger Staats, National Smokejumper Program Manager for the USFS. We also heard from **Todd Jinkins** (NIFC-98), BLM Boise Base Manager, and **Grant Beebe** (NIFC-90), Deputy Director for Fire and Aviation for the BLM. Both the USFS and the BLM are committed to continuing with the current levels of jumpers.

I want to give a shout-out to the way the BOD functions as a team. Our meetings are held on a tight schedule so that we can accomplish our work in a single day. Board members come prepared and have handouts in advance, so recommendations/actions can be reviewed prior to the meeting. To their credit, the BOD does their homework. There are always situations that will arise that require BOD action between those two meeting times, and we have two options for dealing with those needs: the four-person executive committee is authorized to act on some issues and/or the entire BOD is polled and votes via email. Again, that provides for an efficient operation and a rapid response when issues are time-sensitive.

The BOD has been fiscally responsible. There are five restricted funds that have been established to assure that your donations end up being used as you have requested: the Good Samaritan Fund, the Life Member Fund, the Scholarship Fund, the Historic Preservation Fund, and the TRAMPS (trail project) Fund. All these funds are supported by your donations. Our operational expenses (the stuff required to "keep the lights on") are funded through the dues you have paid and through undesignated donations. Our restricted funds are

generally well funded now, but we can always use additional help with the operational side of our budget (memberships and undesignated gifts).

As the NSA has “aged and matured” as an organization, the BOD found that we could no longer rely only on the volunteer efforts of our BOD members to carry out all the complicated and detailed jobs that are required. Several years ago, the BOD hired the part-time services of a CPA to handle our bookkeeping and the annual filing of reports to the Internal Revenue Service. The BOD also recognized that as volunteers, we were not knowledgeable enough to manage the development of a high-quality web site. Again, we sought out and retained, on a part-time basis, the appropriate expertise in this area. I hope you are pleased with the results.

At this time I want to give special acknowledgement to **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) for the work that

he has done to hold together so many aspects of the NSA's functioning. Chuck is our only employee, and he wears several hats. He is the editor of the *Smokejumper Magazine*, which is a huge task requiring extraordinary organizational skills to produce such a high quality quarterly publication. In addition, Chuck is the one who manages the NSA store, organizes all NSA general mailings, receives donations, deposits them into the appropriate accounts and acknowledges them in a timely manner. As if that was not enough, Chuck has also done extensive work on our historic preservation projects and has spearheaded the development of our multi-site smokejumper display—some of which is situated at permanent locations and some available as traveling exhibits. Chuck has been out there on the cutting edge of NSA leadership, and we owe him no small measure of thanks.

My thanks and appreciation to all the members of the NSA BOD—past and present—for the extraordinary efforts that you have put in to leading this organization to the place we stand today. 🔦

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage.....ANC	Grangeville.....GAC	Redding.....RDD
Boise.....NIFC	Idaho City.....IDC	Redmond.....RAC
Cave Junction.....CJ	La Grande.....LGD	West Yellowstone WYS
Fairbanks.....FBX	McCall.....MYC	Whitehorse Yukon YXY
Fort St. John.....YXJ	Missoula.....MSO	Winthrop.....NCSB

Next Issue Of *Smokejumper*: Fire—Any Hope For Change?

by Chuck Sheley

The 2017 fire season saw the Forest Service spending \$2.6 billion on wildfire efforts. Here in California, fires in the wine country killed 44 people and destroyed over 9,000 buildings and homes at an estimated \$3 billion in damages. Cal Fire spent \$700 million, nearly half of it on the 300,000 acre Thomas Fire, during the last fiscal year.

John Culbertson (FBX-69) gave us an excellent view of the Thomas Fire in the April 2018 issue of *Smokejumper*. In addition to the fire itself, that area was hit with tremendous mudslides during the rains. More loss of life and destruction occurred.

I've been putting together articles and ideas from a number of our members concerning the annual wildfire situation for the upcoming October issue. A lot will be outdated as the 2018 fire season will be putting up even larger numbers, in my estimation.

Even if the specific events in the October issue might be a bit behind time, I'm sure the fires and the end results will be the same for the 2018 fire season as they were in 2017—just different names. 🔦

Alaska, Bent Props And Luck— *An Unintended Sequel of Risk & Humor*

by Bill Mader (Boise '75)

The beginning of this article has two beginnings. The first was my article “Alaska, Bent Props And Luck” published in *Smokejumper* April 2017. The second came by email, a name I didn’t recognize in my college emails and almost missed completely. But unlike some emails now-a-days, it was a good email. The name I did not recognize was **Tony Pastro** (FBX-77) and, as Tony eloquently pointed out to me, he was one of the eight of us who jumped a float-plane crash in the Brooks Range in 1977. This was a fire of “un-jumpable wind,” where half the load landed in the fire and the last jumper suffered a broken leg. Since it was deemed an emergency, we jumped it.

In my April 2017 story, I’d stated that the rookie on this jump, a BLM jumper, had been the eighth man, the “broken leg man.” Tony mentioned that *he* was the rookie out of Fairbanks, but that he did not break his leg and that **Tom Emerson** (FBX-74) was the jumper who broke his leg. So I had this detail wrong. I cited the floatplane crash in the April article as “The second airplane crash.” The other crash mentioned in the article, “The first airplane crash,” involved an unlucky Volpar that bit the dust (tundra really) at Galina by the Yukon River.

Many will recall that those days were a raw era stuck in time, a place where B-17s, Volpars and DC-3s winged through space with chutes crashing into the terrain below while slurry bombers laid trails of red. It was a twofold world of bad luck and good luck, an occasional map, and where bad luck and some spit crossed names and airplanes off chalk boards. The following saying by someone struck me as apt: “You don’t have to understand here to be here.”

Martin Dugard, in his excellent book *The Explorers – a story of fearless outcasts, blundering geniuses, and impossible success*, made an insightful observation regarding explorers. “They simply

believed it was better to try and fail than not to try at all.” In Alaska there was always the urge to explore new places, jump into extremely remote country (many now National Parks and Preserves), and worry later about where you might be. I think we had a bit of the explorer’s blood in our veins and a few Neanderthal impulses. (Incidentally, 2-3 percent of our genetic makeup is Neanderthal, however unsettling.) Dugard further added: “There is an explorer within each of us, silently longing to climb our own personal Everest.”

Readers of magazines such as *Outside*, who wear the best REI clothes and carry the best GPS equipment and portable solar panels, probably can’t grasp a world where you reported to a forlorn wooden hanger in Fairbanks, Alaska, that looked like it had last been painted in WWII. Of course, when we walked to work from the barracks, which had an uncanny resemblance to the hangar, we usually had no idea where we might end up at the end of the day. On top of this, all your personal gear was stuffed into a small bag hanging under your reserve parachute. And, of course, that wonderful device invented maybe a thousand years ago and now called a “tent” was nowhere to be found, including fire emergency tents. The jump planes had no seats or seat belts and the jump door was not always closed in flight, so you had to be careful about sliding in turbulence or when the plane banked.

You sat on the floor jolted by vibrations or on top of a cargo box that had a chute on it, and you tried to remember stuffing earplugs into your head. If you had to vomit (it was contagious once initiated) and forgot your vomit bag, you used your helmet.

The places we went to sometimes had no sunsets, often no names. They were mountains, hills and flats that were invariably north or south of a curved line on the globe called the “Arctic Circle” and west or east of the Yukon River. GPS



Jumpers loading into a Volpar at the smokejumper base in Fairbanks, Alaska, 1976 or 1977. Tony Pastro researched the later history of 700WA. It crash-landed (on non-jumper business) east of Fairbanks in 1996. (Courtesy B. Mader)

did not exist. Most interesting of all, perhaps to young people now, is that you actually *parachuted in* (with round chutes and bone-jarring impact) and were left to manage best you could. Hopefully the radio, if you remembered it, worked. Or if it didn't work, your fishhooks bought you time until you were "discovered."

Seems Stone Age primitive now when every square foot of the earth has been mapped by satellite, and you can always see your face on Facebook, your phone plays music to you, and you freely talk to it like it's an adult and even ask it for advice. Things seem even more primitive when you watch videos on YouTube of "Jetman" flying formation with a passenger jet over Dubai. There were certainly mission failures, fires that got away, and some tragedy, but Dugard's description

of "better to try and fail than not try at all" is dead on.

I think the general public, through no fault of their own, has difficulty grasping what things were like or what they are like now in smokejumping: the personal physical punishment. They probably think of mass parachute jumps (from aircraft with seats and seat belts) and floating softly into big open meadows. Of course, the reality was (is) often crashing into tight, timbered spots on ridges, usually in twos (a stick) and, in my case anyway, occasionally missing and going "down canyon" with any migrating birds that happened by.

Alaska back then, as my jump friend **John Snedden** (Boise-73) put it, was "The Wild West of Smokejumping." John had to shoot an attacking black bear with a 357 pistol on his first fire

jump in Alaska. In the final analysis, I think many of us always carried that urge of exploration, that sense of curiosity to see what was around the bend in the trail. I think that was also maybe the end of “wilderness” in Alaska. “Wilderness” is loosely used nowadays, and everyone has a different view of what it means. In my humble view, real wilderness no longer exists on the planet.

So Tony’s email started me thinking again, and not just that his memory was better than mine. Tony went on to jump for 34 seasons in Alaska, including spotting jumpers for over twenty; no easy task, especially with agencies like the BLM and USFS trying to corral the brute called risk. Nevertheless, all this started the wheels turning about reflection, what things had changed from those days in Alaska, the bread crumbs left in my curved trail and, most importantly, how people look at risk anymore and how we sometimes cope with it. My comments are not important and have yet to cause a solar eclipse, but perhaps they are vaguely interesting and might start some wheels turning.

The Third Airplane Crash & a Dash of the Past

In my April 2017 article, I pointed out the two airplane crashes I’d been involved in during my jump years. Just for the record, there was a third crash many years later, but it had nothing to do with jumping, so I didn’t mention it. Of distinction, in contrast to the other two, I happened to have had the honor of flying the third crash. It was a 150-horsepower experimental plane I’d built which was very similar to a super cub bush plane. A mechanical malfunction (the left exhaust system broke off the engine and caused a fire and smoke in the cockpit) was the source cause of the emergency landing, which put me and the plane in an alfalfa field upside down. Alfalfa smells different upside down. But such things are a mere pothole in the tarmac compared to **J.B. Stone** (MSO-56) who flew combat over North Vietnam and shot down a MiG-21. (See *Smokejumper*, April 2012, “Operation Bolo: Smokejumper shoots down MiG-21.”)

Anyway, I rebuilt the damage to the tail and wings and still fly the plane today. That crash was

about twenty years ago when I was in my forties. The plane has a few scars and bandages and very graciously never mentions our shared tragedy. What it does remember is “smokejump-like” things: pushing the envelope, exploration and adventure – flying over ancient Indian ruins, over the Grand Canyon, finding golden eagle nests, discovering dinosaur tracks in long lost strata, passing over battlefields, chasing pelicans in New Mexico (they hide out there), and (this was my favorite) buzzing herds of buffalo.

Two “Clubs”

I am 65 years old as I write this. I’m reminded of Mark Twain who said: “If I cannot drink bourbon and smoke cigars in heaven, then I shall not go.” I jumped when I was 23-25 years old in the prior century. That’s the century right after Custer was wiped out at the Little Big Horn. My twenties, as far as adventure went, were my best years. I was fortunate to have done the first population ecology study of any raptor in Central or South America supported by *The National Geographic Society* and *The American Museum of Natural History*. It got me a Ph.D. I don’t think of this as significant. The sun still rose about the same time every morning, if I noticed it rising at all over the lagoons and birds. It’s just another story by another jumper who drifted to parts unknown and sent a message back in a bottle; probably a beer bottle, maybe a whole six pack.

But it was discovery of the best kind because it put me in the “Boots and Machete Club.” They were modest discoveries only I remember and they had risk. The publications that came out of this sit on dusty shelves in obscure hallways in science libraries. Nevertheless, discovering something no one has ever seen and/or documented in a wild place is a magnificent experience. These kinds of experiences are fast fading with extinction rates calculated at 25-30 or more *per day* (or about *3 per hour*, conservatively) and the rain forest spinning down the toilet at 72,000 acres *per day*. Slowly though, I started giving thought to other questions. They centered around perspective mostly, and invariably many had a philosophical link to jumping and what Drugard was talking about – and that five-letter word “humor” and that four letter word “risk.”

I think humor was necessary in the South American days just to get through the physically draining environment. Vampire bats monitored your whereabouts at night, poisonous snakes were curious and jaguars smelled you. I walked with piranha, crocodiles, sawed a live monkey out of a tall tree for Smithsonian scientists (it was the right thing to do—measurements, scientific stuff—he landed on his head fortunately, fully recovered), and chased giant anteaters on my motorcycle (okay, I like to chase things). In the accident column while on my motorcycle in Venezuela, I hit one jeep, a small cow (as opposed to a big cow – it’s all about impact), and one crocodile. I view them as victories. I wish to state for the record that I had the right-of-way in all these incidents, and a court – if there had been one somewhere – would have concurred regardless of witness testimony. Anyway, all this aside, smokejumping in contrast put me in the “Boots, Hard Impact, Tumbling, Groaning, and I’m Sometimes Lost Club.”

What Drives People

So when I reflect now, I think of those times and I think about what drives people, what carries them through risk. Remarkable people jumped fires. Remarkable people died on fires including jumpers, hotshots, slurry and helicopter pilots, tanker crewmen, various foot crews, volunteers, etc. Other jumpers died in jump plane crashes or when their chutes failed or with the CIA in foreign lands. Indeed, three jumpers in 2017 were awarded stars on the CIA’s Memorial Wall for fallen operatives. Other jumpers broke on impact and limped to new, rewarding careers. Of course, most had no issues and many, like Tony Pastro, stayed and guided jump operations at bases for years, becoming cornerstones of experience. Others left and rode the tide elsewhere, including myself, but most invariably still talk of stories laced with humor – often self-deprecating.

To this day fire remains a soulless beast yet to be tamed. It still lurks in ravines and on steep slopes, and it is always waiting to consume someone’s future; a mistake, a miscalculation, a little bad luck, an unexpected wind, and suddenly that’s the end of it. Then the obituaries get printed, usually after the want ads. But at least the beast

looked you in the eye. He let you know he was coming – you could always hear him, night or day. Of course in the 1970s we saw huge fires, but the situation is worse now and the beast even less forgiving.

All this gets us to perspective and maybe on occasion, when the planets line up, humor. A humor moment seems to reduce hurt because the neurotransmitter dopamine is released by the brain and “rewards” the prefrontal cortex of the brain. This is the computer in the brain, and we all have them except politicians or donkeys that were born prematurely.

Take the former jumper and astronaut **Stuart Roosa** (CJ-53), who orbited the moon and was obviously a pilot and adventurer of the first order; he also had a fear of heights early on. Roosa carried tree seeds with him called “Moon Seeds,” some of which survived and grew into trees here on a planet he could cover with his hand 200,000 miles away as he orbited the moon in “Kitty Hawk.” After he passed away, his son wrote a letter to the National Smokejumper Association stating that his dad didn’t talk much about NASA, a place of supremely high-risk endeavors. Fourteen astronauts died in the Shuttle program alone. I still remember seeing the space shuttle *Columbia* burning up on re-entry over southern Utah in 2003 when it was traveling at 22 mach. It moved so fast I barely had time to put my 10x50 binoculars on it. I could clearly see bright flashes coming from the fuselage, but I thought this happened in all re-entries, that it was normal. It wasn’t until later in the day that I heard on the radio that it broke up and left pieces scattered across Texas.

So instead of Roosa talking a lot about NASA, his son said he liked to tell stories about smoke-jumping. This struck me as intensely interesting since NASA and orbiting the moon is probably what I and most people would have talked about had we done it.

I have given this seemingly simple observation a lot of thought. Why do jumpers (and others in hazardous occupations) love to tell stories while people who served in extraordinarily high-risk occupations, like combat (among others), don’t generally wish to talk about it or if they do, discuss it only reluctantly?

My father Robert, who was in WWII and



B-17 slurry bomber, most likely Missoula, Montana, 1975. Many firefighters including the author regularly saw B-17s drop on fires in the 1970s and earlier years. (Courtesy B. Mader)

served on Guadalcanal, was one of the latter. He never told me about his friend who was next to him when they were on guard duty one night and who was bayoneted by a Japanese soldier. My father shot the enemy in the neck and killed him with his Thompson Submachine gun. Or that he had been strafed by Zeros and that a dud Japanese artillery round landed next to his foot in his foxhole. The round had struck a tree above him and damaged the detonator so it did not explode. Luck, the good kind. He told my older brother, Thomas H. Mader, MD, Col (R), U.S. Army, that the Lunga River on Guadalcanal was literally plugged with dead, bloated Japanese bodies after battles. Later, on Bougainville he described the bodies of Americans they found. The U.S. Navy had cut off supplies to the Japanese on that island and they were starving to death. So the Japanese butchered and ate the Americans they killed. My dad saw the bodies that had been chopped up like dead cattle. He told my older brother these stories reluctantly because he wanted him to know the terrible sacrifices many of his comrades had made. In a wartime environment, maybe there is just nothing redeeming or pleasant to reflect on. I suspect if you haven't been in these ghastly situations, you simply cannot identify with them.

I had a similar reaction when I had the brief opportunity to ask Robert Standford Tuck a question. He was a famous English Ace in the Battle of Britain who flew Spitfires. He was later shot down over Europe and spent the rest of WWII in German POW camps. I asked, "I know those were

horrible times, but is there anything you miss about them?" His reply, "No." In his book *Fly for Your Life*, he recounted an incident at war's end when he was with some Russian soldiers, and they had captured a German SS soldier who happened to be an outstanding pianist. The Russians at gunpoint in an old house told him he could live as long as he played the nearby piano. The German played the piano for 16 hours before he was shot full of lead against a wall.

There are more qualified people than I who

There are more qualified people than I who can address this question about why people talk about risk and others don't, and the potential therapeutic advantages of doing so. Here's my two cents: ...

can address this question about why people talk about risk and others don't, and the potential therapeutic advantages of doing so. Here's my two cents: It's because war and killing, and perhaps other tense lines of work, are about life and death, while smokejumping was largely about life and risk, and a little humor – and the best humor is spiced with risk. Admittedly and sadly, there have been significant tragedies associated with wild-land fires across many different categories of fire

suppression professionals, but I think these people before their deaths would have admitted to occasional humor on the job and maybe a practical joke or two before their last sunset.

Risk, it seems to me, often has a sense of humor in the shade, but there are other factors that can dull risk and push dopamine into our brains. Take Percy Harrison Fawcett, the rambunctious, intrepid Amazon explorer who searched for the Lost City of Z in 1925. Fawcett disappeared and many believe was likely killed by a violent tribe of Indians. He once commented: "Music was a great comfort in the wilds, and might even save a man from insanity." Fawcett carried a ukulele which he played and never met insanity as far as we know. However, he was not known for blissful humor or tolerating those of less physical ability.

Or maybe the answer is somewhere in between. I remember reading an interview about a gentleman who had survived the Bataan Death March on Corregidor in WWII (many were from New Mexico, incidentally). His name was Dwight Cable. He died when he was 99 years old. Anyone who has read the accounts will agree that this forced march after the fall of the Philippines in 1942 was sheer, living, horrid hell. Over 5,000 Americans and Filipinos died, mostly the latter. Many were executed with bayonets by the Japanese to save bullets. Indeed, after the war it was classified as a War Crime. Mr. Cable's problems didn't stop there. After he survived this, he was sent to Japan as slave labor. Mr. Cable's nephew, Gary Cable, said his uncle's only comment on his POW experience was: "You had to keep your sense of humor. Those that didn't, didn't make it."

One can't help but defer to Dr. Viktor Frankl. He was a famous psychiatrist who incidentally survived *four* German concentration camps in WWII (including the notorious extermination camps of Auschwitz and Dachau) and lost his parents and pregnant wife as well in the camps. His number, the one tattooed on him, was 119,104. Dr. Frankl reached the following conclusion about life and a search for meaning: "**To develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living.**" So, perhaps it is about accepting risk and death and keeping a stiff upper lip of

humor. And perchance, humor in such environments is audacity and audacity often lends itself to a positive attitude and hope.

Charles Lindbergh, no stranger to risk and death and who, by the way, shot down a Japanese Zero when he was 42 years old said: "What kind of man would live where there is no daring?" I might add in my own words, and "maybe the prospect of no humor." I wonder if it is a lack of humor that spirals lives into depression. Clinical research suggests exactly this. Mr. Cable's conclusion above about "Those that didn't make it" seems astute.

A recent issue of *Outside* magazine (August 2017) had some case studies on the science of survival. They included being hit by lightning, and various close calls involving paragliding, mountain climbing and avalanches, almost being eaten by a jaguar, almost being burned in a forest fire (that seemed particularly relevant), and getting whacked by a tornado.

Outside did not mention the importance of humor. 💡

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Picture Legends

- Jumpers loading into a Volpar, Fairbanks, Alaska, 1976 or 1977. By Bill Mader
- B-17 slurry bomber. Probably Missoula, Montana, 1975. By Bill Mader



SOUNDING OFF from the editor



by **Chuck Sheley**
(Cave Junction '59)
MANAGING EDITOR

ONE MIGHT THINK that producing a magazine every three months might not be so difficult. Wrong! Deadlines appear quickly. I'm asking **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) to hurry on his President's Message, and I haven't even done my own column.

It is track season around the nation, and I still work over 20 meets a year as a Clerk and Starter. I've been in the sport for over 56 years now and still love the sport. The problem is age. It takes me 2-3 days to recover after working a large invitational meet. Anyone got some age pills out there?

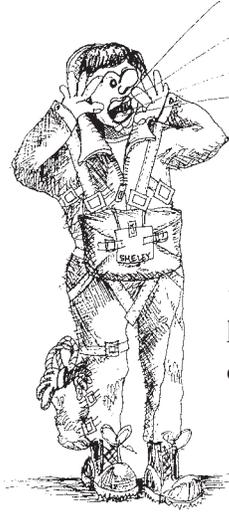
Time is an important factor to me. It is short and nothing to be wasted. There are three main factors that go into running a good, efficient track meet: The Starter—has to be someone who will fire off that gun and knows how to reload.

The Timer—has to be quick and efficient—because we have timing systems now—days, no more individuals standing at the finish line. Lastly, the Clerk—the most forgotten part of the meet. This is my crew and myself.

I have five highly trained individuals on my crew. We get the athletes organized, put them on the proper lines, and point to the Starter telling him/her, "Fire that gun!"

In 2017 **Dan Tinnel** (Associate) and I drove south to Stockton, California, to run an early season meet. There were eight schools. I combined events, organized heats, and cut four hours off the meet time from the previous year. Students came out at 12:30 with our lunches—I told them the meet is over. The year before, it went to 4:30 in the afternoon—still a good time for an invitational.

So what happens this year? The word got around that Edison High School in Stockton runs a really good meet. It went from eight teams to 28 teams! We had 1,224 individual athletes at that meet! There is a price to pay for doing a good job that works against you.



I know most of you have never worked a track meet or an athletic event. Bear with me, as this is a lesson in life.

The numbers were overwhelming. You can't imagine walking into a stadium with over 1,000 athletes. I had two parts of the triangle of a good event necessary:

A great timing system that turned around results in about a minute. Dan, who fired that gun every two minutes.

Bottom line: It was necessary to work straight through, balls to the wall, for eight hours. Dan fired more rounds than the start of the Civil War. What happens when you cannot leave the track for eight hours? Just what we were taught to avoid on the fireline. I didn't drink fluids for that time because the bathrooms were 200 yards away in the gym. No time to eat, so I didn't eat.

When I got home late that night, the bedroom started spinning. Strange, as I was lying still. It didn't quit for a day and a half. I had increased the pain pill I was taking for the bum ankle replacement during the meet. Later, I looked up the possible symptoms and found "vertigo," etc.

There will be some major changes for that meet in 2019. Time for some of the younger people to step up, learn the method, and take over the re-

sponsibility. I have the knowledge and the system. They have the youth and energy.

Time to pass on the baton.
Can you relate this to the current wildfire fighting situ-

ation? Problem is, there has been no one willing to receive the baton. 🔑

Five Carloads Of Brave Jumpers Set Out For The 1959 Redding Rookie Party – Three Make It Back

by John Helmer (Redding '59)

“Hey, look! There’s another car down there!”
“Where?”

There were four of us sitting in the dirt at the top of the embankment on the edge of the Igo-Ono Road, waiting for the ambulance. The headlights on the overturned 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air below us were still on, and pointing directly down the steep slope.

The Chevy, owned and operated by **Dave Nelson** (MSO-57), had failed to negotiate a particularly vicious curve on the winding, contour-hugging mountain road, losing traction, sliding sideways off the edge, flipping over and coming to rest against the only green tree on the slope below.

We were only a short distance from the Clear Creek crossing, site of the Redding jump base’s just-ended 1959 rookie party.

In the short history of the Redding base, the annual rookie party had become the undisputed highlight of the jumper social season. Refreshments consisted of a 15.5-gallon keg of beer. Warmth and illumination were provided by a roaring campfire. Improbable jump stories competed with filthy drinking songs for entertainment. It was fun.

We had traveled to the crossing in five or six cars, each jammed with Redding jumpers, perhaps two dozen in total. A large group, but not nearly enough as it developed, to empty the keg.

Not that we didn’t try. Some of us did more than their share in the effort. **Buster Moore** (RDD-57) drove his car to the party, but **Warren Webb** (CJ-54), one of our trainers, drove it back.

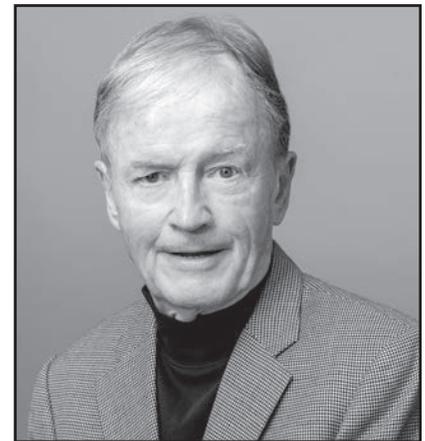
Dave’s Chevy was the last car to leave the premises. We carefully extinguished the fire, just like

Smokey Bear taught us, drowning the embers with recycled wastewater, warmed to an estimated 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

We had removed the beer pump in order to fit the keg in the trunk of the car, then realized that the open bungalow made it necessary to keep the keg upright, which is why it was sitting in the back seat between **Roy Murchison** (RDD-57) and me, along with the pump and an acoustic guitar that my fellow rookie, **Jack Howard** (RDD-59), had unwisely entrusted to my care.

It was a tight fit. Roy was a big man. Somehow he had made it through training with the 28-foot FS-2 candy-striped canopy, the rationale for the Forest Service’s upper weight limit of 180 pounds for new applicants. Training over, he was allowed to use the 32-footer with the rest of the big guys.

Roy’s real first name was Roary. It was seldom used. He also went by “Murch,” and, starting that year, “Big Murch,” to distinguish him from his younger brother, **John P. “Phil” Murchison** (CJ-58), a transfer from Cave Junction. That made Phil “Little Murch” notwithstanding a slight height advantage.



John Helmer (Courtesy Alex Akamine Photography)



John Helmer and Mick Swift (Courtesy Peter Carpenter)

Roy was a pre-med student at Cornell, and not the only Ivy Leaguer on the Redding roster. My fellow rookie, **Peter Carpenter** (RDD-59), had just completed his freshman year at Harvard, majoring in Chemistry.

Later that summer Roy and Pete found themselves adjacent to one another on a spike camp jump list, and jumped a two-manner on the Stanislaus, a first. Two very bright guys, equipped with 150-foot letdown lines, jumped a national forest best known for containing some of the tallest trees in Creation.

When the car turned over, Roy was squeezed between the keg and Jack's guitar. Something had to give, and it was mainly the guitar, which had strummed its last Kingston Trio sing-along. The keg was now bunghole-end down, and the remaining beer swiftly discharged on me and every stitch of clothing I was wearing. This would prove to be a problem later that evening/early morning, but at the time I was pleased it was cold beer and not cold gasoline drenching me from above.

"At the very bottom of the drainage. See it?"

"Oh, yeah. Now I do. Looks just like Ted's car."

"Ted" was **Ira Kittel** (MSO-49), a quiet, competent guy who had replaced Alaska-bound **Orville Looper** (CJ-49) as the assistant Redding base manager earlier that year, and had overseen rookie training for 1959, climaxed by the much-anticipated

timber jump the day before. Ted drove a small brown station wagon.

Eldo "Mick" Swift (CJ-56) was Dave's front seat passenger. When the car flipped, he had somehow punched out the Chevy's windshield, probably with his head, without cutting himself, thereby providing the only means of exit for the four of us.

Mick was one of the four trainers in 1959, and I was one of the six rookies in only the second class actually trained in Redding (the 1957 Redding rookies trained at the Cave Junction base).

I was in awe of Mick. He could do anything and everything with agility and grace. Just the previous day, for example, during our seventh and final training jump, other than having his static line attached, he was caught unprepared to be the second of two jumpers on the first stick from Burt Train's Twin Beech.

Rather than send the rookie ahead of him out all alone, he jumped anyway, holding his helmet in one gloved hand. I watched in fascination as he calmly donned the helmet, lowered the facemask into place and secured the chinstrap, all before his canopy deployed.

"And it's got Montana plates, too, same as Ted's car."

Except for the still-strong beam of the Chevy's headlights, no one would have noticed the second car below us, a wrecked brown station wagon, nose-first in the drainage, a sleeping bag and other loose contents piled on the back of the front seat.

Montana license plates are easy to spot. An outline of its borders is stamped on it. Canada to the north and the Dakotas to the east are straight lines, as is much of the southern border with Wyoming. What gives both Montana and its western-southern neighbor Idaho their distinctive shapes is the crooked mutual border between them.

There was no mistaking the provenance of this small, brown, totally wrecked station wagon.

"Hey, that's Ted's car!"

We were horrified. We had just experienced our own wreck. This looked far worse.

Who was in Ted's car with him? **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42), Redding base manager, and **John Schlegel** (MSO-54), a squad leader and another of my trainers, that's who. Virtually our entire overhead, in other words.

Where were they? Were they alive? Mick and Roy

were on their way down to find out.

I held back. My excuse was that someone should stay with Dave. I was also deathly afraid of what I'd see if I went down there, too.

We could hear Roy and Mick, as they got closer to the front of Ted's car.

"There's a lot blood down here." (*gulp!*)

And then (*Praise the Lord!!*) ...

"Nobody here!"

Ted's car was one of the first to leave the party and head back to Redding. Fred had put his head through the windshield, cutting his nose badly in the process. The three of them had managed to exit the station wagon, climb the embankment, and flag down the second or third car leaving the party. Fred had his nose sewn up at the emergency room and went back to the Fire Cache.

Meanwhile, a passerby stopped to find out what kind of trouble we were having and was persuaded to stop by the hospital in Redding, report the second accident, and request an ambulance.

We knew that something was wrong with Dave. X-rays would later confirm that he had broken his shoulder. He would spend the rest of the summer packing parachutes with his left hand. He got pretty good at it, but it was a financial setback for lack of much overtime.

Dave's later career with the Forest Service was

spectacularly successful: a stint as base manager in Redding and the ultimate in red cards, incident and area commanders of some of the truly massive fires and fire complexes in Southern California.

In due course the ambulance arrived, followed by two tow trucks and two units of the California Highway Patrol. The ambulance left with Dave, Roy and Mick, leaving me to explain how the Chevy and the station wagon were each involved in single-vehicle accidents at the same location at almost the same time.

I should have blamed the lousy road conditions at that particular curve, but didn't. On reflection, I've wondered why the Chevy, and presumably the station wagon, lost traction as quickly and as completely as they did. It's almost as if Dave and Ted were attempting to make that turn on a bed of ball bearings or marbles.

Or small round rocks. Such as are found in creek bottoms.

It's worth mentioning that Clear Creek has a significant history of dredging and hydraulic mining dating back to the 1850s. What was done with the vast amounts of tailings, the detritus composed chiefly of *round* rocks, big and small? As little as possible, certainly, but if some of it were bulldozed to an unfilled section of an unpaved roadbed nearby, it could ultimately cause problems, especially at



Redding Crew 1959. Back row, counting from left: 1-Fred Barnowsky, 6-Mick Swift, 7-Bruce Engstrom, 9-Dave Nelson, 10-Pat Brady, 11-Phil Murchison, 12-Pete Carpenter, 14-Roy Murchison. Front row, counting from left: 1-Ted Kittel, 2-Warren Webb, 4-John Schlegel, 7-Jack Howard, 8-John Helmer, 12-Buster Moore. (Courtesy Howard Colby)

the first major curve.

There were other, less-charitable theories.

“Wow! That must have been one helluva party you guys were having.”

The speaker was a uniformed CHP officer, making a response awkward. Was he just trying to strike up an innocent conversation, all friendly-like? Nah, I didn't think so, either.

A rhetorical question, perhaps? I dithered for a while and ended up saying nothing.

“Hey, I'm talking to you, mister.”

I finally explained that while I appreciated the importance of his investigation and wanted to assist him in any way I could, I just couldn't quite remember exactly what had transpired and didn't want to speculate or guess in response to his questions, thereby putting myself or my friends at the risk of undeserved criticism.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders would have been proud.

He warned me that I'd better not talk back to the judge like that. Oh, and did I know that the judge wouldn't be available to deal with the likes of me until Monday at the earliest? This meant of course that I would be spending the rest of Friday and all day and night Saturday and Sunday in jail.

He escorted me to the back seat of his cruiser, giving me plenty of time to consider my situation. I didn't mind. I had become uncomfortably chilled from the beer bath I'd received from the upended keg, and was happy to escape the late-night breeze. The cruiser was warm, roomy and comfortable.

Periodically, he would check back. Was my memory getting any better? He would tap on a side window and motion with his hand. I would roll it down only a few inches, so as not to allow too much cold air inside.

What I didn't fully appreciate at the time were the warm, beery odors that must have been rolling *out* of the window at the same time. This must have convinced him that I was not only an uncooperative witness, but a liar, too. This is because I had previously looked him straight in the eye and asserted that I had not consumed any beverages containing alcohol that evening.

But it was the *truth*, more or less. Rookie training had concluded the previous day, Thursday, and I had relaxed that evening with **Pat Brady** (RDD-58), **Bruce Engstrom** (RDD-58), and several others

at a roadside pizza parlor that served beer by the pitcher. We all had a grand time, but I awoke to a monumental hangover Friday morning. When the official celebration commenced that evening at the Clear Creek crossing, I was there from beginning to end, but had consumed a negligible amount of beer that evening.

Eventually, the two cars were hauled up the slope and dispatched to the junkyard, the keg and splintered guitar still in the back seat of the Chevy. (While waiting for the ambulance, we had tried and failed to remove the keg through the windshield opening.) The two CHP cars followed the tow trucks into town and then stopped for coffee at an all-night diner.

At the diner I was told by the other CHP officer that I could either stay in the cruiser or come inside – my choice.

I took that as an invitation to join them, followed both inside, and plunked myself down on an adjacent stool at the counter.

This infuriated my interrogator/chauffeur, the one with the sensitive nose. What the hell was I doing there? I was banished to the far end of the counter.

Eventually we got back on the road. The other CHP unit took off.

I was beginning to think that my guy was going to drive me around for the rest of his shift. The novelty of riding in the back seat of a police car was beginning to wear off. At one point we drove by the Fire Cache, and I made sure he understood that was where we bunked, just in case he was ready to call it a night.

Big mistake. He kept on going, drove across the Sacramento River, continued into downtown Redding, and then stopped the cruiser abruptly.

“Get out.”

“Whaddya talkin' about? Didn't I just show you where our bunkhouse is? About 2-3 miles back, at least. Just drop me off there, okay?”

“Get out!”

I thought it over. My clothes were drying out. A leisurely walk in the dark might actually be enjoyable. And this was not a nice man.

I got out. He drove off in a huff. I began my stroll back to the Fire Cache.

It was a great day in a great month in a great year. I was a smokejumper. 🔦



RECORDING SMOKEJUMPER HISTORY



Into A Burning Tree

by **George Tranberg** (Missoula '52)

Originally published The Static Line January 1995 edition.

In the summer of 1955, I was a smokejumper on the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. At 3:50 p.m. July 4, 1955, **Max Allen** (MSO-48) and I were dispatched to a fire on the North Fork of the Mimbres River in the Gila Wilderness Area.

As our old DC-3 with its fabric-covered control surfaces rumbled down the dusty blacktop airstrip of the Grant County Airport, the cargo and crew almost sliding out of the open door, I thought of my previous fire jump. I had "stacked up," spraining my ankle severely. There were no helicopters capable of picking me up, so I had to endure a painful three-day horseback and truck trip out of the backcountry to a hospital in Silver City.

For nearly three weeks I had to limp around the parachute loft waiting to heal and get back on jump status.

I was ready!

At 4:40 p.m. we were over the fire. The "Doug," as we called the DC-3, jinked and danced in the high, hot air of the Mimbres Mountains, where the elevation often reaches 10,000 feet or more.

On our first pass, I could see that the fire was confined to the top of a gigantic yellow-pine snag with branches that reached out like some prehistoric monster. **Herb Oertli** (MSO-48), our spotter or jumpmaster, gave Max his instructions. "Land on the north side of the ridge that the tree is on, in the dense willow thicket." Max was to jump on the first flyover and I on the second. Max jumped and landed.

He signaled back that his landing site was a bad one. Herb told me to try the south side of the ridge, which looked good from 1,000 feet up in the air. Herb told the pilot of the changes. The plane circled wide and came back on a new tack.

I stepped into the open door and felt the rush of

cold air. My gloved hands were on the sides of the door, one foot was back and the other tested the wind. Over the jump site Herb told the pilot to cut the engines. There was a moment of quiet. A slap on the back of my leg and I stepped out into the smell of avgas exhaust that had become so familiar.

"Hut thousand-one, hut thousand-two." "Hut thousand-three" was driven from me by the opening shock of the parachute. I looked up, saw I had a fully inflated canopy, tugged on the right guideline and began my descent. About halfway down I realized the landing "spot" that had looked so good from the air was strewn with rocks and boulders hiding in tall grass. I made the decision to try to cross the ridge and land in the north side willows. I did not know that at that very moment a weather front would choose to hit. As I turned my 'chute to cross over, I realized I was being blown into the burning snag. I was caught in the outer limbs.

As I hung there I remember thinking, "I've got a problem." Chunks of burning bark, hot pitch, and "widow-makers" were whistling by my head. Were it not for the design of the jumpsuit, with its high, wide collar and padding, I would have been seriously burned.

Instinct and training took over. I started a let-down, a procedure that allows jumpers caught in trees to escape by means of a rope. Into the pocket of the right leg of my jumpsuit went my right hand. Out came the snake-coiled rope.

Quickly I threaded it through the "D" rings of my letdown belt, now up to the risers, then under my jump boot. I released the safety strap and turned the single-point mechanism – the device that releases the parachute harness – to the open position and punched. The straps of my harness swung free, and I was suspended 50 feet in the air on my rope.

My descent was flawless until partway down when a line from my hung-up 'chute caught in my gear and brought me to a sudden stop. With the fire heating up, things were looking rather grim. Struggles only tightened the line. More burning chunks whizzed by and landed in a spray of sparks in

the tinder on the ground. If it went up, I was fried!

I hung on with one hand and clawed for my folding belt knife, desperately groping for it under the folds of the heavy jumpsuit. I found it. I opened it practically one-handed, slashed the offending line and was free. On the ground I used the letdown rope to keep the harness and reserve chute from burning.

Max ran up and asked how I was. "Fine," I said. "Let's get busy and knock this sucker down."

We fought the fire for two days.

That fire was one of the most dangerous that I ever fought. Max and I could not get close enough to the tree to bring it down with a crosscut saw, as "widow-makers" were constantly falling and could

have killed or injured us. After the tree burned and fell we were able to ring the fire and put it out.

Wearily we began a walkout that took us through country that was as wild as the day when Billy the Kid and Pat Garret roamed the badlands of New Mexico.

We returned to our base in Silver City. I had been able to save all of my jump gear except the main parachute. I do not think my foreman was too happy when I dropped the riser webbing on his desk and said, "Here's your chute." 🔦

George Tranberg served as a U.S. Border Patrol officer in Washington state for many years and is retired in the northwestern part of that state in Blaine.

Nicholas Becomes Oldest Living Former Smokejumper

by Ed Booth (Assistant Editor)

Seniority certainly has its perks, as former smokejumper and current Dayton, Ohio, resident **Paul Nicholas** (MSO-42) has found out.

Nicholas, who jumped from Missoula for the 1942 season, became the oldest former jumper following the Sept. 19, 2017, death of 101-year-old **Lloyd Johnson** (MSO-43). Nicholas, now 97, was born in Kansas but moved to Missoula in 1940 to attend the University of Montana. He studied Forestry and excelled in basketball, for which he earned a scholarship.

Knowledge of jumping served Nicholas well as he entered military service in 1942 as a parachute rigger and certified mechanic for the U.S. Army Air Corps. He became certified to fly the PT-17 Steadman, BT-13A Vultee, AT-6, and the B-25 aircraft. He went on to receive a commission as a pilot in the U.S. Air Force and later became a certified helicopter pilot.

Nicholas was a veteran of World War II and Korea with Air Sea Rescue – later known as the Air Rescue Service – stationed on various islands in the Pacific Theater and the West Coast of the U.S. flying bombers, amphibious planes, cargo planes and helicopters as the missions required.

Nicholas earned the rank of major, retiring

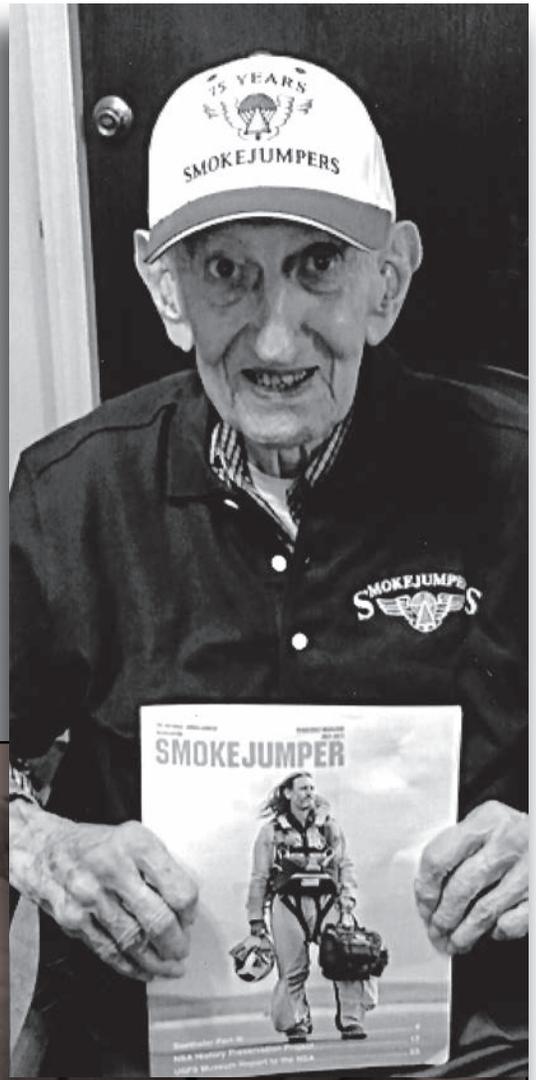


from the Air Force in 1964, whereupon he began a 20-year career in civil service. During that span, he specialized in logistics and, among other areas, worked on the F-16 fighter jet program in equipment guidance. Nicholas also helped in the development of aircraft simulators. 🔦

Previous page: *Paul Nicholas, Missoula 1942 (Courtesy P. Nicholas)*

Right: *Paul Nicholas at age 97—Oldest smokejumper (Courtesy P. Nicholas)*

Bottom: *Paul Nicholas (officer with cap) surrounded by his Air Rescue group 1951 McChord AFB, WA. (Courtesy P. Nicholas)*



A Salmon River Story

by Bob Shackelford (Missoula '52)

When I was district manager at Magruder in 1964-69, I knew a few men who lived year-round on the Salmon River, several miles from the nearest road.

This story is about Dan Carlson, smokejumpers, and a few other things. Dan was another Salmon River resident – a.k.a. savage – who never owned a cabin or camp spot. He cooked for outfitters and watched their camps. Dan got to town maybe once a year. He said he “could not stay in town” because he would either be “put in jail or shot.”

Joe Scoble and other jet boaters – outfitters – would give Dan a ride up and down the river. The outfitters did not pay him much, and Dan did not need much; some \$200 or \$300 a year for basics, flour, sugar and bacon would allow him to survive fairly well on the river. Dan was an eccentric, but he had a good heart for those he trusted.

After steelhead season was underway, the river would often get very icy in spots in January or February, and the boats would stop running the river with steelhead fishermen. Dan would then go up on the high ridges and catch a few marten.

Somehow Dan got out of sorts with most of the outfitters by 1967. He was a good cook; dedicated to the task, overly clean with lots of boiling water, but up all hours of the night banging pots around. The primary problem was his poor relationship with the hunters – the paying guests of the outfitters.

I felt a bit for Dan. He was in his mid-60s and reminded me of a family friend my mom and dad had helped. I figured if he could just earn a couple hundred dollars, he could survive another winter. A job opened up in 1967 for a camp cook at Paradise for a Job Corps crew that would be working on trails in the area.

Paradise Work Station is located at road's end on the Upper Selway River; it is a long way from town.

I thought Dan would be the cook for this job. Dick Leonard was our fireman on the Salmon

River. During the worst of the fire season he made three jet boat patrols each week, talking to almost all of the float boaters who made the trip down the main Salmon. Leonard knew all the news along the river.

When Leonard checked in via radio, I asked him to find Dan Carlson, and if Dan wanted to work, bring him to Lantz Bar. In a couple of days, Leonard let us know Dan was ready.

I asked Jim Vogan, a chopper pilot for Johnson Flying Service, to go down to Lantz Bar and pick up Dan. Jim was a super flyer but with no brains left over for anything else. He could outfly an eagle with a rather poor helicopter. He flew a small chopper in 1970-71 with a shot gunner who killed eagles in Wyoming for certain paying ranchers.

Jim reached Lantz Bar, loaded Dan, and put Dan's two duffel bags in the chopper baskets. Jim

One duffel bag bounced out and was never found. It contained at least half of Dan's life treasures, including a couple of short guns, a dozen marten traps, marten stretch boards, winter coats, etc.

never used a bungee cord or tied them down. He never tied anything down.

They hit some really rough air when flying over the Selway-Salmon divide at the head of Sweat Creek. One duffel bag bounced out and was never found. It contained at least half of Dan's life treasures, including a couple of short guns, a dozen marten traps, marten stretch boards, winter coats, etc.

Dan traveled with all his belongings close at hand, and was really upset about his loss. He still had half his belongings, though, and decided to make the best of the situation.

Dan was at home at Paradise. He really cleaned up the Paradise cabin and had everything under control. The wood floor was never so clean, and all the pots and dishes were neat and spotless.

I learned a week or so later that when loud talking or arguments arose, Dan just got his gun and laid it out on the windowsill above the sink in full view of the 20-man crew. Everything got very quiet with “please” and “thank you” as key words. The crew just thought he was part of this crazy, wild backcountry environment.

Black bears became a big problem in 1967. It was dry and they became very hungry and a major problem around all our camps. One moved in at Paradise. I went down and dispatched the bear. Dan hung it up, cleaned and skinned the bear, and nailed up the hide in full view. This activity also impressed the Job Corps crew.

But after a couple of weeks, I knew I had to remove Dan from Paradise. Tension was building. Then God provided another need for a camp cook.

We had a timely fire bust with lots of lightning-strike fires. One jumper-manned fire near Paradise grew to 60 acres. It was on a very steep, south-facing ridge. Fire debris kept rolling down the steep hill, requiring new fireline construction.

There were about 16 hungry men on the fire, a dozen jumpers supplemented by a few men the district supplied by chopper. The jumper foreman was fire boss.

There was only a skinny ridge top and no room for a real fire camp, so they made a spike camp, and the fire was supplied from a base camp about a mile below the fire.

They were not totally isolated. They needed an experienced ridge top cook, so I sent Dan. He lasted and did fairly well with the jumpers for two days and two nights. I believed he might just fit in well with the smokejumper psych. Jumpers, more than any other of God’s creatures, would understand a mountain man.

At the first demobilization on the third day, the jumper boss sent Dan out to Indian Creek with the first load. While we were debriefing, Dan somehow got separated from his duffel bag. It was unloaded at the helicopter spot with the other gear being sent down from the fire.

When he went to get it, the bag could not be

found. I felt that I was now responsible for losing all of his life belongings. I was district ranger, so the burden was on me. Dan did not single me out, except to point out all my help was a disaster.

Evidently an inexperienced but eager cleanup crew had loaded Dan’s bag on a truck headed to Missoula with the jumper gear. I was sure I, or someone else, would not survive the loss of his second duffel bag. We searched the Selway River area from Paradise to Magruder without finding the bag.

After a couple of difficult and very stressful days for anyone near Dan, the fires on the district were finally under control. I made a long-shot trip to Missoula, praying for a miracle. The first jumper I saw at the loft said he had a rack for all unclaimed gear. He took me to the rack and, sure enough, there was Dan’s gear, all safe and secure in his big bag.

Knowing about the jumper operation was a real asset for a backcountry ranger.

I headed back to Magruder, very relieved. I found one more cooking spot for Dan at Sweat Lake Cabin, cooking for our own Magruder crew that was working on the cabin and trails. That did not last long. At the end of their first 10-day hitch, wilderness ranger Bob Oset said I had to let Dan go.

I knew that Bob was right on. So I sadly explained to Dan that his Forest Service career was over. Since he was not a Forest Service employee and had no way to get his 60-pound bag back to the Salmon River, I took Dan in my own pickup and made the long drive to road’s end on the main Salmon River. There he caught a jet boat back to his haunts along the river.

A winter or two later, Dan evidently became harassed by all the people – three or four – coming down the river in a February warm spell. These intrusions just upset the beautiful balance of the silence of winter. After shooting all around a jet boat, he shot himself.

He died in his environment, the only place where he was at home. I felt badly, but Dan made his own decisions. With some help, Dan might have lived a few more years, but he was not on the list with the salmon, wolf, grizzly or caribou. He was just a man who lived winter and summer in the backcountry on the Magruder District. 🕯

The City's Cowboy

by John Doran (North Cascades '72)

Now I grew up on the land, the family ranch up
in the hills.

I fixed fence and worked with cows and calves, broke
colts for the thrills.

But ranch life has lost its glow – too many days
working in the sun.

When I left school I wanted more, more excitement
and fun.

So I left to go fight fires – a smokejumper was my
new trade.

It beat ranch work all to hell; oh, the money I made.

To step out of that moving plane, the wind would
toss you like a leaf.

Like an eight-second ride on a bucking bull, the
Earth spins beneath your feet.

And you're snapped upright as the chute fills out,
senses keyed right to the core.

The adrenaline pumping through your veins, you've
beat the odds once more.

But odds are odds and when you gamble such,
someday you're made to pay.

And my luck ran out high in the Cascades one day.

I knew it was bad when I left the plane, like a bronc
rider who's lost his seat.

The ground was wrong; I was upside-down; the
plane was at my feet.

The Earth was rushing toward me – like wild horses
my chute raced on.

When I hit the trees I heard bone snap, and my
jumping days were done.

But I healed up that winter; by spring I could walk
just fine.

So I took a job fighting city fires in a town just
down the line.

Each day when I would report for work, I'd check
my gear and make it right.

Like a rodeo hand before he rides, this could be
the night.

I answered that call so many times, to the floor that
pole I'd slide,

Climb on the back of that big red truck, hang on
for a wild ride.

And I made that ride, and I fought the fights; I beat
the clock time and again.

But when you run on luck, it might fail you in the
end.

Then one night an arsonist's torch changed my life
like that.

The building blew; I was thrown across the street,
hit and broke my back.

But I was alive by the grace of God, a gift I'll treasure
to the end.

And as time went by, the doctors cut and fused, but
I'll never fight a fire again.

Like a cowboy who's rode one too many broncs, and
too many times lost the fight,

I was broken up – my career was done; eight times
I faced the surgeon's knife.

So I went back to my old home, the ranch in that
place so grand.

The city's cowboy, broken now, returning to the
land.

And I spend my time now riding stock, and packing
in the mountains high.

But I've slowed down some and I thank the Lord
for each day that passes by.

See, the life is good; I've no complaints; I savor each
and every day,

For I've been to the edge and I've stared at death –
the price I did not pay.

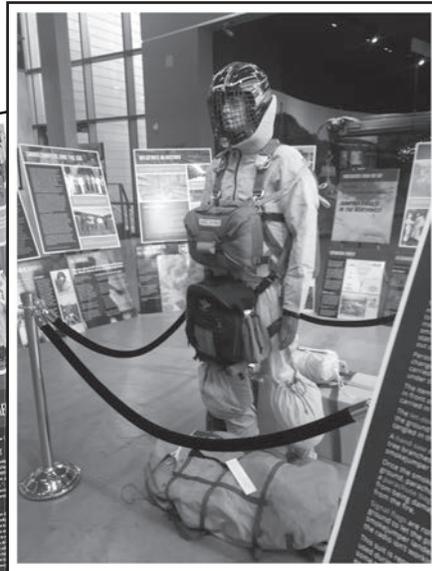
So the next time that you're in the big town and
those fire trucks sweep past your side,

Say a prayer of hope that this won't be the start of
some last ride.



Turtle Bay Exploration Park

November-December 2017
 Redding, California
Photos Courtesy Chuck Sheley



Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

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You know the feeling when you have so many excellent options that it's hard to decide. This is one of those times!

Choose from the smooth nylon of the **navy blue SMOKEJUMPERS cap** (top), the dignified **khaki twill U.S. Forest Service Smokejumpers** (right) and the **Trail Crew cap with NEW design** (left). All three combine stylish looks with superior comfort!

The SMOKEJUMPERS cap offers gold embroidery and trim with a velcro strap, while the U.S. Forest Service cap has a brass buckle and green-and-white "sandwich"-style bill. The Trail Crew cap is black and is made from super-lightweight High-Dry material, with four top vents but no button.

Visit our online store at smokejumpers.com to see the colors and styles!

SMOKEJUMPERS cap \$20 • USFS Smokejumpers cap \$13 • NEW Trail Crew cap \$20



Take your pick: NSA publications, all-time directory ... or both!

Choose to receive **every edition of The Static Line (1993-99) and Smokejumper magazine (1999-present)** ever published. You can also select an **electronic directory of every smokejumper from 1940 until 2015** (names, bases and rookie years). Or choose both! Makes an excellent, environmentally friendly gift! Indicate choice on order form.

NSA publications treasury \$24 • 75-year directory \$15 • Both items together \$35

Pin up this great new style

Stylish SMOKEJUMPERS logo pin with our new logo looks fantastic on a cap or lapel. Double-post fasteners with shiny chrome finish.

You get FREE shipping! \$3



New decal lets you make a bold statement

Designed for use on the outside of your vehicle window, this adhesive decal will really grab people's attention! Measures 3½ by 8 inches.



\$5



Historical bases coin makes an outstanding gift

This challenge coin features images of the "round" and "square" parachutes to signify the types of canopies jumpers have used over the decades. The 1¾-inch coin also features the names of all permanent bases around the edge. Inscription on back reads "The greatest job in the world." Order some as gifts for friends!

\$5



Movie inspired many dreams of smokejumping for young men

Loosely based on the Mann Gulch Fire in which 12 jumpers and a firefighter died, "Red Skies of Montana" was released in 1952.

Starring Richard Widmark. **\$15**



Exhaustive DVD tells the story of smokejumping from beginning "Smokejumpers: Firefighters From the Sky"

is a definitive record of smokejumping, featuring 120 minutes of history from 1939 to 2000. Interviews with many former jumpers. **\$10**



BLAST FROM THE PAST



by Jack Demmons (Missoula '50)

The Daily Missoulian,
May 9, 1969

Parachute Rigger Cited

A PARACHUTE TECHNICIAN at the Forest Service Aerial Fire Depot has received a special citation from the FAA for “his contributions to aviation safety.”

John E. Nash (MSO-42) was notified of the award by the FAA area manager. Lee Mills of the FAA’s Missoula office made the presentation.

“Nash has contributed significantly to aviation safety,” the FAA said. “The Aviation



Mechanic Safety Award Program is designed to recognize persons making significant contributions through safety maintenance practice.”

A veteran of 27 years of federal service, Nash first worked

for the Forest Service as a smoke-jumper in the summer of 1942. He served as a parachute rigger in the U.S. Navy and took further training with the Forest Service.

For 23 years Nash has conducted Red Cross first aid training for the Forest Service. He started his civilian parachute rigging work in 1946 at the Forest Service smokejumper operation.

Nash has packed more than 5,300 parachutes during his career, not including parachutes packed during instruction and training programs. For six years, Nash has been conducting special 10-day rigger schools for FAA inspectors. 🧠

Some Stats From 2017 Smokejumper Program

At the NSA Board of Directors meeting in Boise, March 2018, Roger Staats (MYC-86), National Smokejumper Program Manager, presented a summary of the 2017 fire season. Some statistics that you might be interested in:

Fire Jumps—1588 (168 above 10-Year Average)

Fires Jumped—288 (36 above 10-Year Average)

Fires Jumped at each Base

Redding—367, Redmond—229, McCall—188, Missoula—166, Grangeville—132,

North Cascades—119, West Yellowstone—110

USFS program was down 43 jumpers due to “hiring process, attrition, and unsuccessful rookies.”

They have a goal of 320 jumpers for the 2018 season.

The “Spike Base” at Miles City, Montana, jumped 99 jumpers on 17 fires.

Todd Jinkins (NIFC-98), Chief Smokejumper Great

Basin: Fire Jumps—484 Fires Jumped—80. The BLM jumpers were at approximately 145 during the 2017 season with a goal of 154 (Boise and Alaska) for the 2018 season.

The “Spike Base” at Winnemucca, Nevada, jumped 80 jumpers on 20 fires.

Bill Cramer (NIFC-90), Alaska Smokejumper Base Manager: Fire Jumps—399 Fires Jumped—45 🧠

Notes From The Editor

Life Member Caps—We have added a lot of Life Members over the past two years. If I have forgotten to send your Life Member cap or your old one is worn out, please let me know.

Marketing Books on Amazon—I would like to market a couple of our NSA books on Amazon. If you have done that process, I would like to get some help and tips.

My contact info is on page 3.



Alaska Smokejumpers

Photos Courtesy Mike



Al Seiler (FBX-85) & Rene Romoro (FBX-86)



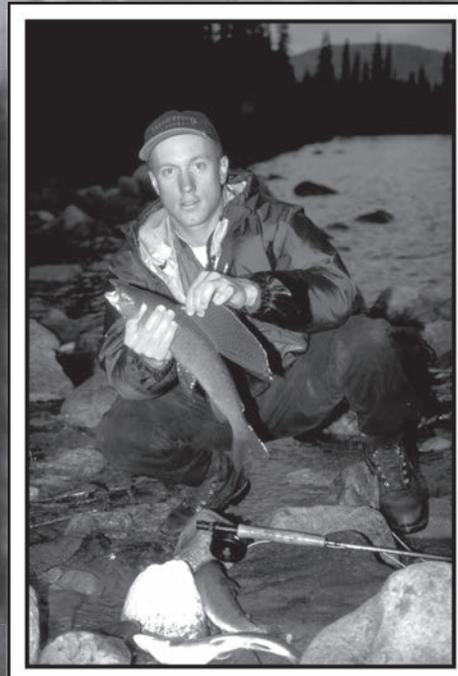
Spotter Dropping Streamers



Jumper Ex



Mitch Decoteau (GAC-78) & Paul Lenmark (FBX-96)

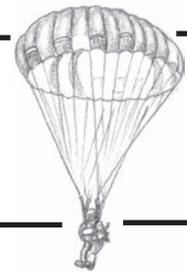


Robert Yeager (RDD-92)



Mark Musita

Layout Design: John



ODDS AND ENDS

by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to **Mike Troeger** (MYC-81) and **Ken Hessel** (MYC-58) who just became our latest Life Members.

Ben's Smith's (MSO-64) response to **Perry Rahn** (MSO-61) who had kudos for Ben's article on the Whetstone Ridge Fire in the April 2018 issue of *Smokejumper*:

"Thank you for your comments on my article. I have been receiving a lot of positive feedback on the article which keeps me in the fight. I was introduced to the Beaverhead-Deerlodge FMO and the BDNF Safety Mgr. via email. Both are former jumpers. I emailed them with a request to communicate but have not heard a peep from them. Very frustrating."

Howard Chadwick (MYC-52): "I was sad to read of **Lloyd Johnson's** (MYC-43) death, although at 101 he led a long and adventurous life. He was foreman at McCall when I rookied. On a training jump, as I was turning to face the jump spot, I was suddenly up to my knees in another guy's canopy. Lloyd's advice on the bullhorn: 'Chadwick, get the hell off that man's parachute.'

"Lloyd was tough. I remember him running up and down the road pushing a wheelbarrow load of rocks. My first fire jump was some 12 miles from the land strip. Lloyd led us on the walk out. Fortunately, a packer took our gear—Lloyd never stopped once."

Condolences to my long-time friend from Cave Junction, **Dave Towers** (CJ-60). Just heard that his son, Kevin, 56, passed away January 30, 2018. Many of us remember Kevin in his younger years. In later life he became one of the youngest General Managers in baseball taking over the San Diego Padres in 1995 and staying with that club until 2009.

In 2010 he was hired as GM for the Arizona Diamondbacks wh*ere he took the team to the



National League West Division title one season after the team had finished in last place.

The Sawtooth Society recently recognized Crew 1 (**Ron Stoleson**—squad boss) and Crew 2 (**Tom Kovalicky**—squad boss) for their work on National Recreation Area projects. Tom says that each squad has been in place and working for 20 years. Congratulations to Ron and Tom and their crews.

Brad Willard (MSO-58) has an excellent article in the April 2018 issue of *Vietnam* magazine titled "Paving The Way For America's Fighting Forces." Brad, a retired Army Lt. Col., served in Vietnam as commanding officer of C Company, 19th Engineer Battalion (Combat). Brad is a VMI graduate and is currently living in Shelton, WA.

NSA Life Member **John McIntosh** (MSO-60) is living in Cayce, SC, and is presently serving as Senior Counsel to South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster.

Larry Haffner (FBX-63) is currently living in Corbett, Oregon. After jumping in Fairbanks, he served in the USAF as a Para-rescue man for three years and five years as a pilot. Larry is employed as an independent salesman, raised four boys and has five grandchildren.

The Washington (state) Legislature recently approved legislation which was meant to circumvent a recent court ruling that found out that state lawmakers were fully subject to the state's public disclosure laws.

"The Public Records Act allows news outlets to find out what our lawmakers are doing, because the reality is, sometimes they do not want us to know what they are doing," KREM-2 in Olympia said.

"After the Carlton Complex wildfire in 2014, there were a lot of questions about who knew what and when they knew it." The Dept. of Natural Resources Commissioner said there was

never an instant where state firefighters would not put out a fire.

KREM-2 obtained an audio recording saying that smokejumpers were “expressly told not to jump on a fire, which was small at the time, but then grew out of control and eventually burned through the town of Pateros. Hundreds of homes were just gone.”

The state made changes in their response to wildfires, but only after the mistakes were made public. Now the legislature wants to limit the public’s ability to get this information.

Mike McMillan (FBX-96) recently competed in the Idaho Entrepreneur Challenge with his vehicle roof rack company, Rev Rack Inc. Of the 90 teams entered in the competition, 24 teams pitched their products to judging panels in mid-March. Out of 11 teams in the Technology-Consumer Goods category, McMillan was named runner-up, winning \$5,000 of seed funds. 🔦



Historic photo. Frank Derry giving prospective smokejumper instruction in letdowns, August 1941. Note absence of “D” rings. (National Archives)



Historic 1957 West Yellowstone. L-R: Larry Brown, Jim Manion, Glen Marlowe, Cole MacPherson, Lyle Brown. (Courtesy G. Marlowe)

Surviving An Australian Firestorm – February 1983

by Dave Blakely (Missoula '57)

Project Leader Chuck George and I had been working with the wildfire research division of CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Org.) on a prescribed fire project near Busselton, Western Australia. We had been there about four weeks measuring the effectiveness of fire retardant chemicals on local wildland fuels. We were also perfecting methods for more retardant tests using the delivery system in a DC-6 air tanker a year later in southeastern Australia. We were now starting our trip back to Montana with a couple of stops along the way. We flew into Melbourne and were met by David Packham, one of Australia's renowned wildland fire researchers.

We knew from newscasts that there were high winds and numerous wildfires in progress all across southeastern Australia. It was very hot. Driving from the airport in Packham's car was an experience. His air conditioner did not function and the outside temp stood at 114 F. Rolling the windows down for cooler air was out of the question because it was like a blast furnace in your face, so we rode with the windows up. You would think that we would get wet with perspiration, but it was so dry the moisture just evaporated as it oozed into our clothes.

After checking into a motel outside Melbourne, we proceeded toward David's home on the outskirts of Upper Beaconsfield. The going became increasingly slower because of traffic backed up along the highway. We soon stopped completely because all thru traffic was being diverted less than a half-mile from where a major fire was crossing the highway. After creeping along for several minutes, Packham realized that we were going to be diverted, so he pulled to the side, parked, and walked a short distance to speak to the patrolman who was directing traffic. It wasn't long before he was back and said we would have to wait because the fire was crossing the road just ahead. Packham

was worried. His wife, Helen, was at home and would not know of the lingering danger, even after the fire front had passed the house. Packham knew there was the chance of a sudden, dangerous wind shift, characteristic of SE Australia extreme fire weather situations.

Packham decided to approach the patrolman again, but this time he had a better story. He had me dig my Forest Service uniform shirt from my bag, put it on, and step outside the car to stretch my legs so that I was visible to the patrolman. Packham then approached the patrolman and told him that he was a CSIRO fire researcher and was doing a study of wildland fires with two Yank forest fire specialists, and we needed to get into the fire area. Looking up the road and seeing the badges and patches on my shirt, the patrolman was convinced and we were allowed to proceed. We drove into the area where the fire front had just passed. This fire had been burning for several hours and had consumed a path about half a mile wide and eventually 16 miles long. There was still a lot of smoke and fire from houses and outbuildings that had been mostly consumed. We passed completely across the fire area and, after several



Dave Packham dealing with Police (Courtesy D. Blakely)

minutes, arrived at Packham's house and met a very concerned Helen.

The fire was still a few miles west of us and moving toward the southeast, but on the side of caution, we began to do some preparation for a fire arriving. Chuck and I used shovels to cover the exposed plastic water pipe that ran downhill from the cistern, the only water source for the house. I was amazed at how hard it was to walk through the thick, meter high grass that covered the area. The inside bathtub was filled, and the outside hot tub was already full. To cool off after working, the four of us had a beer as we sat on the roof of the house. From there we could see a small town not too distant being totally consumed by another fire. Sometime during that period, a neighbor came over to talk with fire expert Packham. The neighbor's house was about 200 meters away. It had a metal roof and window shutters. The neighbor was somewhat troubled because he had brought his wife and newborn baby home from the hospital that day. Packham assured him that if a fire came this way, he could button down tight and they would be just fine.

Packham was anxious about the fire we had driven through earlier in the afternoon, so we all drove up the hill to an open area. There were several cars and a lot of people watching the glow from the distant fire. We all stood around discussing what we were seeing and what we had seen. When we arrived at the open spot, it was light enough to see cars and people because of the distant glow all across the horizon. Suddenly it was as though a window shade was being pulled from the ground upward, and the bright glow rapidly turned into darkness, so dark we could hardly see



Front Packham home after firestorm (Courtesy D. Blakely)

the people around us. Packham knew what was happening. Of all the people there, he was probably the only one who knew that there had been a cold front passage! He exclaimed to everyone in earshot that the wind had changed direction and the distant fire was now coming directly at us. The thick smoke and dust was now being blown toward us, and it blocked the glow of the flames behind. We all started stumbling back to our cars that were difficult to find until someone switched on headlights. We jumped into our car and sped back to the house to await something like we and few people have ever experienced and lived to tell about. This troublesome fire had suddenly changed from being a half-mile wide and 16 miles long to an ugly monster that was 16 miles wide and furiously burning its way to several miles deep.

We had not been back at the house long when we started to hear a low rumble and small embers began falling. Very soon it was raining embers. Chuck and I were outside with shovels trying to extinguish all the spot fires that were starting in the tall grass. We had no concept of what was about to happen. The embers were getting bigger and bigger and more numerous. Spot fires were all around us, and the rumble had become a rapidly increasing roar. I asked Chuck about the wisdom of our staying where we were, and he said he trusted Packham and his knowledge of the apparent situation. At that time, I was not very acquainted with Packham's background. Besides, it was probably much too late to run to safer places. Those were wise decisions that we would soon appreciate.

Finally, the embers were fist size, and we could no longer attend to the numerous and growing spot fires. The sound of the approaching fire was also getting much louder, like several freight trains rolling down the track. When we finally decided to get into the house, it was almost too late. Suddenly, there was fire all around, and as we ran onto the deck and to the door, hand-sized fire embers were falling on us. I went through the door and Chuck followed. As he came through the door opening, embers were swirling in all around him. So I tried to minimize the invading embers by pulling the door drape across the opening. About then, Chuck shut the glass door on the drape and



Packham house from uphill view (Courtesy D. Blakely)

the glass cracked. When we opened the door to clear the drape, fire blew in and he quickly closed it. We both felt bad about cracking the glass, not imagining the same was about to happen throughout the entire house.

Happy to be inside, we watched as the entire outside world became red and yellow with flames. The noise was so loud we could hardly hear each other speak. Packham started, and we all helped, to rip down the fabric drapes and move the fabric covered furniture as far as possible from the large picture windows. Shortly afterward, these large windows started cracking because of the extreme outside heat, but fortunately they stayed in their frames. Had they broken into pieces the four of us would probably have been incinerated in short order. It became very hot inside, but the radiant heat, having been reduced by the windows, was not enough to ignite the flammable materials inside the house, including us homo sapiens. During some of this time, Chuck and I were snapping a few photos.

We were all together in the living room, rather startled at what we were experiencing and surprised by the increasing inside temperature. As the tall grass and trees flamed, it was very bright inside the house. We were beginning to think everything might be okay, but suddenly acrid smoke filled the room, and the four of us began desperately trying to find a place with clean air to breathe. Breathing was almost impossible; it was so painful. We choked and coughed, and our eyes burned so much that we had to keep them almost closed as we wandered about. David and Helen went to a low area in the living room and lay on the floor,

Chuck went into the bathroom, shut the door and put towels under it to block the smoke. I ran around the divider into the kitchen and grabbed a handy dishtowel, wet it, and tried to breathe with reduced pain. I soon found that breathing fast through wet cloth is sorta difficult.

During this time, I was looking through the kitchen windows. I saw an 8N tractor about 40 feet from the house in total flames. There was no vertical component to the flames. They were totally horizontal because of the 60 to 80 mph winds. The magnesium alloy frame ignited and the tractor collapsed into two pieces. This is also about when the brass caps on two large propane bottles melted away, and the bottles spewed flames uphill. They sounded like jet aircraft engines taking off. Had the bottles fallen, as the shed collapsed, and spewed flame downhill, large holes would have been burned into the side of the house, starting fires inside that we probably would not have been able to control.

As I looked out at the raging flames, I had serious thoughts about whether or not we were going to survive. I wondered exactly why I was there? I thought of my family and that my wife had no idea where I was. (No cell phones in '83.) She knew that I was in Australia, but she had been sending mail to Busselton, Western Australia, not Upper Beaconsfield in southeast Australia. More thoughts went through my mind about us being burned to a crisp, and no one would be able to identify the extra two people in the house, much less identify them as Yanks from Montana. (Perhaps my FS Badge would survive and give someone a clue.) And Chuck's wife in Missoula was newly pregnant with their first.

After ten minutes or so, the acrid smoke was diluted and replaced by just wood and grass smoke. We were able to breathe easier, but still with burning throats and lungs. We determined later that the noxious, acrid smoke came from a black plastic tarp that covered a pile of lumber near the end of the house. The smoke had come through a window that had cracked and part of the pane fell out. Every window in the house was cracked, but fortunately only the one in the bedroom fell out and let smoke into the house.

As breathing became easier, David and Helen started searching for the Yanks. They found

Chuck leaving the bathroom because it was becoming untenable. They found me with my head under the kitchen sink still looking for fresher air. We all were in the kitchen now and finally discussing our options. To our surprise, a flame began to appear in the roof ridge above the kitchen sink. Packham's house was built purposely to withstand a wildfire. The floor was made of bricks set in sand, the walls were stucco in and out, and the roof was metal with no ceiling. The flames were from burning leaves that had blown under the metal roof cap. I climbed onto the kitchen cabinet, dipped water from the sink with a small plastic cup, and threw it at the flames. It took half a dozen cups to extinguish.

Our plan now became preventing the house from burning down around us and surviving this bizarre ordeal. Packham checked the inside of the house, found the broken window and covered the hole by taping foil-wrapped cardboard over it. We then started carrying water from the bathtub with a mop bucket to quench the fire in the woodpile. I remember filling a bucket from the bathtub, going to the door, taking in as much breath as possible and holding it. Then I would then squint my eyes, follow the side of the house to the burning woodpile, throw the water onto the flames, and run back for more breathable air and water. It was very hot out there and impossible to close my eyes enough to stop the irritation and still see in the very thick smoke.

This went on for several minutes. When we ran out of bathtub water, we started dipping from the outside hot tub. We had gotten that fire nearly out when Packham discovered that another pile of lumber, lying against the house on the kitchen side, was burning fiercely and was about to burn through the kitchen door. The fire brigade then began a new mission with similar procedures. This time it was David who opened the door as the water bucket arrived, and we did not have to go outside to apply the liquid. In fact, as we applied the first few bucketsful, the flames and smoke were blowing into the house.

By now the flame front had passed, and all the tall, thick grass was totally gone. Standing eucalyptus tree trunks were still burning and giving off a lot of smoke. Then very inconveniently, I began to have a dire need to go to the bathroom

- a number two. There was no water for flushing the toilet. Despite all our efforts to bury the plastic water pipe, it had melted and burned. I definitely had to quickly find a latrine. I rolled off a handful of tissue paper and went off into the smoking countryside. It was 2 a.m. I wanted to get far enough away from the house so I could not be seen squatting there amongst the flame and smoke. I stumbled amongst the glowing logs wondering that if I succumbed to the smoke or fell into a hot stump hole, how long would it be before my charred remains were found? I rapidly did my deed there amongst the burning embers. I do not know for sure, but strongly suspect that all that excitement and breathing and swallowing smoke got to my digestive tract. (Things like this really aren't supposed to happen to an ex-smokejumper/ex-navigator/pilot who had survived flying at low levels with dead and/or dying engines through heavy turbulence in thunderstorms, typhoons and mountain passes. Must have been the meat pie and Emu Bitters I had on Qantas.)

We had all survived! We stood around assessing the fire's damage, giddy with the knowledge that we would live to see our loved ones again. Packham was still a bit worried so he went off through the glowing countryside to check on the neighbors' wellbeing. On David's return, we learned that the neighbors had survived the fire without a scratch. They had closed the windows and shutters, and no smoke had even entered their house. Newborn baby and Mom were fine. While David was gone, the three of us kept extinguishing small



Surviving hot tub (Courtesy D. Blakely)



Car with little damage (Courtesy D. Blakely)

fires, smoldering boards, and embers around the property.

At some point during the fire passage, Chuck had the foresight to take a few more pictures. The pictures he took through the large picture windows are no less than spectacular! Bright flaming and glowing of individual fires with the bright glow of the fire front as it proceeded beyond us and into other homes and lives with death and destruction. Chuck regretted that he had not taken pictures as the fire was surrounding us with 200 feet high flames, but during that time we were just trying to stay alive. Pictures taken later show the badly scorched house and hot tub in a landscape completely devoid of anything besides blackened tree trunks. Packham's car that we arrived in was parked on the downwind side of the house. Surprisingly, it had survived the heat with only some scorching and one melted plastic tail light cover.

The three of us went for a walk around the neighborhood to check out the destruction. We found no people. All had left in time and were safe elsewhere, or they left their houses too late and were caught and overcome on the roadways. We saw houses and outbuildings that were burned completely to the ground, ones that were burning furiously, and those that were just starting to burn. Had some of the occupants stayed and survived, as we had done, they possibly would have been able to save their house with a few pails of water or shovels of dirt. At one place, we took time to try to extinguish a small fire that was burning into the side of a large, very nice house. We found nothing to use to fight the fire. Beside

the house was a large propane tank that was being threatened. Understandably, once knocks on locked doors went unanswered, we did not stay long. The next day when we drove by, that house was completely burned to the ground.

After our survey of the damage to the neighborhood, we returned to Helen's house where she had discovered that the pancake batter she had mixed for dinner had been cooked by the hot air in the house. David and Helen wanted to stay with their house for several reasons, but Chuck and I decided to go back to the small town where we had checked into the motel after our arrival. Thank goodness Chuck had made this trip before and knew where we were going, because I was totally lost in the dark and totally changed landscape. On our way out, we saw several burned-out cars that had been abandoned beside and in the road. We never found out the fate of their occupants.

It was getting along toward daylight when we arrived at the motel. The owners were quite concerned about our condition when we checked in and told them what we had been through. They had heard much from the newscasts and understood the seriousness. They told us about the loss of human and animal life and property. We learned later that 75 people had died that day in fires in South Australia and Victoria, plus thousands of livestock and hundreds of destroyed homes. Twenty-one people had died in the Upper Beaconsfield Fire.

We tried to get some rest, but our eyes were burning so badly and we were coughing so much, sleep was near impossible. Finally, we gave up on sleep and headed back to Packham's. On the way, we stopped at a special aid station that had been set up to treat victims of the fire(s). We got the spirometer test, which indicated we had severe loss of lung function. We also got some medicine that helped lessen the difficulty of breathing, and eye drops made it easier to see with severely irritated eyeballs.

We were with Packham for three days. He had planned this but had not, in his wildest dreams, thought it would be under these circumstances. We were treated like honored guests many times because we were known as survivors with the Packham's in their house. We were given guided

tours by fire officials in several areas where other fires had done similar property and forest destruction, but not nearly as much loss of human lives. Some of the larger fires were still burning, but OUR fire was mostly out. It had made its big run in a matter of a couple of hours or so. The wind had died after the front passed, and the extreme fire behavior was over. And over (almost) for two Yanks that had just been in the right place at the right time. Chuck and I used to say we would do it all over again if we knew our outcome would be the same. The only difference - take a lot more pictures. Nah! I don't think so.

After leaving Australia, we had scheduled an enroute trip to Tahiti for two days. We got to Tahiti at about 7 a.m., checked into the motel, ate breakfast, and headed for the beach. We had not slept much in several days. We went down and lay on the beach and with the sound of the waves and wind in the palm trees, we finally slept. One

problem - big problem. Palm trees do not give a lot of shade and shade moves, and two very light-skinned Yanks from Montana with sun-sensitive skin got toooooo much sun. We spent two days touring the main island with road maps blocking our burned bodies and bare legs from the beating sun. We bought out the city of Papeete of all the Solarcaine in stock. When we were not touring in the rented Citron, we were under the motel air conditioner applying more Solarcaine! The beach and swimming had totally lost their luster.

Arriving back in Missoula, we were met at the airport by our wives, who had not heard from us in more than a week. They had many questions - why our feet were so swollen, why we arrived with no shoes on, why the whites of our eyes were so red, why we couldn't give a hello kiss without coughing, and especially, why we didn't want hugs with loving, welcoming arms wrapped around our shoulders and touching our backs? 🧠



Historic photo. Medical unit to support Triple Nickle during 1945 season at Pendleton, Oregon. L-R: Capt. Charles Burks (Surgeon), Capt. A.R. Tweed (Medical officer), Capt. Irvin McCaine (Dental officer), Lt. Donald Tyler (Assn't Surgeon), T/5 Emanuel Harrel, T/5 Willie Lewis, T/4 Lorenzo Leathers. (Courtesy Edgar Weinberger)

BOOK REVIEW

Attention To Detail Gives Corbet's Work Extra Punch

by Murry Taylor (Redding '65)

I truly enjoyed *Between the Dragon and His Wrath*, especially having known Mark Corbet (LGD-74) and jumped a few fires with him over the years. It's a great read.

Mark is one of those jumpers who is normally quiet, reserved, and not at all given to blow his own horn but always there, doing the really hard work and then some. His remarkable career lasted 31 years. We had many good hands like Mark in our ranks, and I'm sure you worked with some of them.

Mark always struck me as shy and not one to tell a bunch of jump stories but after reading the ones in this book, I can see another Mark: a perceptive man with a keen eye for detail and a natural sense of what makes good story. He also happens to be a good writer overall, and an

excellent writer in some instances.

For example: *As the morning light shone through my blue tarp, I was pleased to discover that the rain hadn't returned. It was one of those tranquil wilderness mornings that felt as if nature had cast a spell of silence on the world. Not a breath of wind could be heard, not a bird broke the silence. I lay there savoring my last few moments of rest.*

There are many passages like this. As a jumper, you'll remember what it was like to be lifted up and transported across the sky to destinations and destinies unimagined.

There are the small two-man-ners that become nightmares of long, hard days of agony. There are the dangerous river crossings, killer packouts, near-miss landings in big timber, and one particularly harrowing jump where Mark had to fly across a fully-involved forest

filled with fire in order to miss landing in it.

In addition there are a couple fires where Mark and his jumpers face the bureaucratic nonsense of modern fire – the back off and slack off – dealings with local forest people. In both cases they interfered with the jumpers' plans and inserted their own. In both cases they were dead wrong and the fires went big and cost big money – in one, \$8 million, and the other, \$800,000.

I'm glad Mark put that in since I hear so many stories, year after year, of the same thing. Beyond that, jumping was for Mark what it was for most of us: the most defining experience of our lives. In *Between the Dragon and His Wrath*, he lets us return again to the work we loved so much. 🔦



Historic photo. L-R: Unknown, John Marsh and Ken Smith 1968 (Courtesy National Archives)

Two Acres

by Mark Corbet (La Grande '74)

This feature article is from Mark Corbet's book Between the Dragon and His Wrath. (Ed.)

"Alas, poor world, what treasure hast thou lost!"

– Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*

As our DC-3 lifted off and climbed east out of Grand Junction, Colo., the day's mission was to make a patrol flight over the forests of central Colorado. There had been lightning the previous night, so everyone on board was hopeful we would locate a fire.

Patrol flights usually range from tedious to boring so at least half the crew was napping while the rest scanned the mountains and valleys below. In time someone hollered over the roar of the open door that they had a smoke in sight.

It was located on a north-facing slope high in the mountains of the White River National Forest. It wasn't a very big one, but the steep ground and heavy fuels in the area suggested it could quickly spread if action wasn't taken right away.

The ground directly above the fire was nearly flat and covered by a large stand of aspen trees interspersed with small, grassy openings that would serve nicely as a jump spot.

When our spotter threw streamers to test the wind speed and direction, they blew far out over the fire and the deep drainage to the north. It was clear that the wind would do the same to us under a parachute so we wouldn't be able to safely jump there. We began to circle, looking for a more suitable location.

A few minutes later we found a large, gently sloping opening about a mile to the east. Being so much larger and not so close to the edge of the fire, this one would suit our needs admirably. The walk over to the fire would take some additional time but our first priority is always getting people safely on the ground.

Seeing as the ground was at more than 10,000 feet above sea level, we could look forward to harder-than-normal landings due to the thinner air. Everyone was mentally preparing himself to

do his very best landing roll. The wind at this new location was blowing as briskly as it had been above the fire, so the jump would still be challenging.

As if that wasn't enough to deal with, the spotter pointed out two bears wandering across the very spot where we intended to land. By the time we were ready to jump, the bears had moved back into the trees.

Few of us had ever jumped at 10,000 feet and all reported noticeably harder-than-usual impact with the ground, but being able to prepare for a more severe landing rather than having it surprise you, makes all the difference.

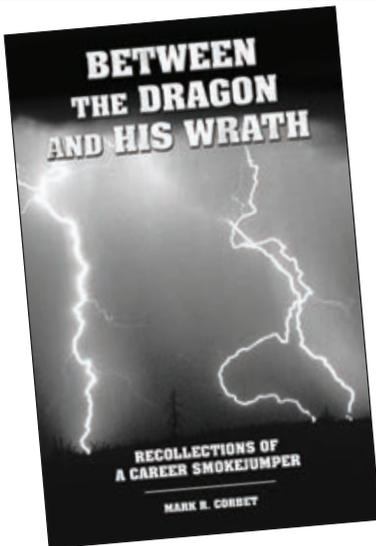
I recall hearing a few extra grunts and groans as those who touched down after I did made contact with the terrain. Our cargo was dropped and with tools in hand we hiked over to the fire.

It was burning on very steep, timbered ground with heavy accumulations of dead wood beneath the green canopy. Trees were occasionally crowning out, throwing burning embers into the sky, starting new spot fires as they floated back to earth.

We hustled down to the bottom of the fire and began building line up the left flank, which held the heaviest concentrations of fuels. We repeatedly had to drop back and build new line due to frequent spot fires. We built and lost line well into the night but finally got ahead of it as the winds subsided and the burning conditions slowed.

By 1 in the morning, we had line up the left flank of the fire to the grassy opening where we had originally wanted to jump and where we had left our excess equipment upon arrival at the fire. We also had a light scratch line up the right flank. Sleeping bags were deployed and soon everyone was fast asleep despite the cool nighttime temperatures at that elevation.

The next day we improved the line up the right flank and were able to use two helicopters with buckets to douse occasional spot fires popping up outside our line. We also built a helispot amid the



The Recollections of a Career Smokejumper **BETWEEN THE DRAGON AND HIS WRATH**

by Mark Corbet



A rare glimpse, from Virginia to Alaska, into the world of Smokejumpers as they combat wildfires, work to exhaustion, laugh out loud at themselves, and witness nature's astonishing beauty. Experience the struggles and hardships of this grueling job and gain insight into why so many consider it the best job they ever had.

Mark Corbet worked as a Smokejumper for 31 seasons, training hundreds of rookie Smokejumpers and making 305 fire jumps.

\$20 a book including S/H.

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aspen grove at the top of the fire.

Later in the afternoon a 20-person crew was flown in. We were relieved to finally have some help but soon came to realize they might not be giving us as much assistance as we had hoped.

When we asked them to spread out down the right flank and help us improve our line on that side, they said they didn't feel comfortable going down the line. This side of the fire had almost no smokes remaining but in their eyes it looked too dangerous. We offered to escort the crew supervisors down the line so they could evaluate the situation without putting their crew in harm's way.

Two of them eventually agreed to walk around the two-acre fire with us. When they had seen the entire fire perimeter, they rejoined their crews to talk things over. They still weren't comfortable doing any line improvement or mopping up anywhere below the top of the ridge.

I couldn't understand why they would be so reluctant to do any work or even come close to the edge of a fire that was so docile.

Later, it occurred to me that they, like nearly every other firefighting crew in the country, had spent a good deal of their refresher training learning about what had gone wrong on the South

Canyon Fire that had resulted in 14 fatalities in 1994. On that day, the Prineville Hotshots had been delivered to a helispot directly above the fire. This crew had just arrived at a helispot directly above the fire.

The hotshots saw a fire that wasn't very active. This fire wasn't very active. The hotshots faced steep ground with some hand line already in place. This ground was steep and some hand line was already in place. The fact that those deaths had happened only nine air miles southeast of where they now stood probably contributed to their discomfort.

Eventually, we did get them to dig a little line along the edge of the helispot and aspen trees at the very top of the fire. Other than that, we got no real help from them.

Some of our crew spent the second day seeking out the occasional little spot fire out beyond the east flank. We had two helicopters with buckets at our disposal, so all we did was crisscross the hillside looking for any smokes smoldering in old logs or stumps. When we found one, we would call for a helicopter bucket drop, consisting of several hundred gallons of water, and literally wash it off the hillside.

For us, it was a comparatively easy day. The rest of our crew spent the day improving the fire line and putting out anything they found smoking near the edge of the fire, eventually working their way into the interior of the burned area. By the end of the day the fire looked to be on its last legs.

The new incident commander, who arrived via helicopter on the second day, confirmed our estimate that the fire had been stopped at two acres. He also requested that the eight of us stay through the next day just to be sure it would hold, and to line the 20-person crew out on what to do once we left. We spent the rest of the day and the next morning explaining what they would need to know to maintain control of the fire, but we could see they were still uncomfortable getting anywhere off the top of the ridge.

As we were leaving the fire, several of us harbored doubts about how much the crew would really do once we had gone. In our minds it would take very little effort for 20 of them to hold this little fire that the eight of us were able to corral two days earlier. There were no flames visible anywhere within the fire line and almost no smoke.

The following morning we departed the fire and were on our way back to Oregon that same afternoon. Two days later, while looking at the National Daily Fire Situation Report, to my surprise, I saw our fire was now reported to be 1250 acres. Four days after that it was 7,339 acres. A month later the fire was contained at 13,500 acres.

It had cost \$6.98 million before it was finally called out. It had burned nearly 90 percent of a nearby town's watershed.

I do not know the details of what happened on that Colorado mountainside after we departed that caused our nearly cold, two-acre fire to escape more than 20 people with the support of two helicopters. Maybe it was "the ghosts of Storm King" that John Maclean refers to in his book *Fire and Ashes*. Whatever the reason, their inability to keep the fire from escaping resulted in hundreds and hundreds of other firefighters being exposed to a month's worth of far more hazardous conditions than they had faced, to combat a fire that went on to consume over twenty-one square miles of Colorado forest. 🔦

Reader Feedback

Between the Dragon and His Wrath is an engaging leap into the fascinating world of smokejumping. Veteran jumpers will fondly reminisce about afternoons spent fighting wilderness fires and flying into thunderstorms. Neophytes will discover just what it is that makes smokejumping such an enjoyable and interesting calling. A witty and unpretentious narrative of parachuting into wild places in the West.

—Steve Dickenson (LGD-78)

I read it in the first two days after I received it - a big accomplishment for someone who reads about four books a year. I love the format of the 3-5 page vignettes - the stories really brought back a lot of memories for me.

—Mike Lysne (RAC-82)

Get *Smokejumper* One Month Earlier

NSA members are signing up for the electronic version of *Smokejumper* that is delivered via email. It is sent in a PDF file that contains everything that is in the hard copy issue.

The advantages are: early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings. If you like the hard copy, you can download and print it at home.

NSA Director **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) says: "I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing. I think I mentioned in an earlier message that I'm having other magazines/newsletters delivered electronically. It takes less space to store them electronically and if I do want a hard copy, it is easy to print using the *Fast Draft printer option* which allows printing 48 pages in less than two minutes on my printer and uses a lot less ink."

If you want to be added to the electronic mailing, contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59): cnkg-sheley@earthlink.net. 🔦

Remembering Ray Beasley

by John Driscoll (Missoula '68)

The following remembrance was given at Ray Beasley's memorial by John Driscoll. (Ed.)

Ray Beasley (MYC-52) was a McCall smokejumper. Previous to our meeting, I had only two experiences with McCall jumpers.

In 1967, when I was 21 and walking cross country from a fire in the Salmon River Breaks, I saw two McCall jumpers floating gently onto the treetops of a mountainside five miles ahead of me. I decided that was for me, and arrived at my very next fire the following summer, hanging from a parachute.

Ten years after that first jump, three other jumpers and I were barely holding our own against a fire in regrowth under 300-foot sugar pines, when a DC-3 load of McCall jumpers came out of nowhere, digging and cutting their way up a bone-dry mountain to meet us coming down. We were glad to see them.

What's more, Ray was 17 years older than I was. He last jumped five years before I first jumped. The world he told me about was populated by iconic friends like **Miles Johnson** (MYC-53), whom he called "a lothario," and Miles' younger brother, **Thomas "Shep" Johnson** (MYC-56), a Korean War Marine Corps veteran, deathly afraid of jumping out of airplanes but motivated by wanting to escape his life of cow punching for a mean uncle.

There was also **Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson** (MYC-47), a leftover World War II Airborne soldier, truly loved and respected as the best mentor those three could ever want.

On detail to Silver City, N.M., they met and mutually respected a Missoula jumper named **Roland "Big Andy" Andersen** (GAC-52), who was scouting for new hires for the chief of the CIA's Far East Air Operations, a University of Montana graduate named **Gar Thorsrud** (MSO-46).

Gar entered covert action during the Korean War when 10 Missoula jumpers were recruited by the CIA for its first proprietary air arm. They left

Missoula in two groups, and Gar's group worked behind enemy lines, in and over China.

Gar was the man who studied travelers' photographs of Tibet from early in the last century. He located two high-altitude jump spots for inserting two-man Tibetan radio teams which, in March 1959, provided essential communications for the Dalai Lama's party to escape from Chinese forces into India.

I think the credit for the meeting between me and Ray belongs to the smokejumpers' non-denominational higher power. Big Ernie's always at work, but in this case, so was Big Ernestine. Here's what happened.

"There I was!" enjoying the positive energy of Birds and Beasley's just after we formed that human chain to move inventory to the new store on Last Chance Gulch. When I saw this other gentleman, wearing bright suspenders and sitting next to Jane, I asked Kathy, "Who's that?"

"That's Jane's husband, Ray. He used to be a smokejumper."

So I went over and introduced myself, and we started visiting for the next few years. Initially, I kind of wondered what kind of B.S. artist I was dealing with in this smokejumper. They come in all shapes and sizes. My active duty was as an infantry and combat intelligence officer.

So when Ray told me a couple of things, it caused me to check open or unclassified sources, where a person can usually find everything anyhow. From that I was able to show Ray abundant details about his past activities. It was especially enjoyable for me to show him the same jump gear worn by **Ken Travis** (MYC-55) in the baseball hat, being worn by Hmong about to be inserted as trail watchers along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Our visits and the related research inspired me to interview 39 former smokejumpers from Whitefish and Chinook, down to Wickenburg, Tucson, Silver City, Las Cruces and San Antonio. They were great storytellers with amazing life stories that are now available as oral histories in the National Smoke-

jumper Archives at the University of Montana's Mansfield Library.

On those road trips, I interviewed Shep Johnson in Payette. I showed the interview to Andy Andersen in East Wenatchee and Ray back here in Helena. In Tucson I had a good exchange of views with Gar Thorsrud.

All three asked about Ray, just as Ray asked me about his old friends. With Ray, now, all have passed.

Off camera I talked with a dozen other jumpers who worked for the CIA. From what I can see, it seems there were about 100 over time, with fewer than half still living.

Our world really is divided into people who do things and people who seek the credit. I was encouraged to find that everyone I met was a doer.

After some years, I wrote two articles for the National Smokejumper Association, which published them in its magazine and in the book *Smokejumpers and the CIA*. You can find it at smokejumpers.com.

How did I do that first article titled "Beas"? It started when I asked Ray to be the 40th and final interview of the smokejumper oral history project.

When he consented, I prepared a series of questions for his interview, quickly realizing that I already knew his answers. Sandy called the morning of the scheduled interview to say Ray had the "shakes" all night and wanted to reschedule. By then, I'd already written the story, heavily footnoted from all the unclassified sources.

When Ray reviewed what I had written, he only asked that the title be changed from "Bees" to "Beas."

Regarding Thailand: Ray told of how Big Andy, as navigator, relayed their position by keying his microphone at every preplanned course change; how they sometimes returned to base with empty fuel tanks; how the heavy cargo once jumped the tracks and forced them into a prohibited second pass, while they physically lifted the tonnage back into place to make the drop; how a terrified Tibetan ranger dropped his weapon on the floor of the aircraft, and Ray saw the unforgettable look on his face when he handed the young fellow back his weapon; and how an Air Force major back in Thailand chewed out their crew for making that second pass.

Ray never forgot that terrified Tibetan, who he said "never had a chance."

Gar Thorsrud and his wife commissioned a painting about the Tibet missions and had it dedicated in the CIA headquarters gallery. Ray was appreciative; so was I.

Regarding Cuba: Ray enjoyed training Guatemala's first airborne unit, composed of soldiers shorter than their rifles.

Ray did not like French-trained officers mistreating their men, but said he and Shep enjoyed kicking those same men out of both sides of the jump plane over the soccer stadium at "Guat City." He said, "God, that was fun."

After daily training of Cuban paratroopers for the Bay of Pigs, he would walk to a rusty cantina at the end of the secret runway and be greeted by a monkey holding an empty martini glass, waiting for the next person inclined to fill it. That monkey punctuated Ray's nights by dragging its chain leash back and forth on the cantina's tin roof.

In nearby Rhetalahuleu, he entered a bar one night and spotted the Air Force major who faulted the second pass over Tibet. After a few words, Ray decked him with his fist.

When given a chance to fly for R&R to Miami, Ray accepted a small package from a Cuban trainee for delivery to "The Greek" at the Fountainbleu Hotel. After that small favor, The Greek introduced Ray to three men, each representing a different mafia family in a different American city. They had lots of questions, which Ray refused to answer because the men "gave him the creeps."

When The Greek offered Ray the choice of any woman in the hotel's lounge, Ray said, "No, thanks." He told me he was able to withstand temptation because he already had a date with a stewardess. Since Ray left for Laos ahead of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, he was left to wonder for the rest of his life about the fate of one Cuban friend, who he thought died alone in a small boat at sea.

Regarding Laos: Ray carried a Browning automatic rifle for personal protection instead of an air crewman's shoulder-holstered pistol hung inside the aircraft. He and Shep rigged and dropped cargo. Separately asked, both told me how the yellow parachute with the 300,000 Indian rupees for the Dalai Lama's escaping party was rigged.

The parachute came out high to avoid ground fire, "squidged" rapidly downward with a heavier "foot" leading below by 100 feet. When the foot

hit the ground, it detonated an explosion of the main parachute into an open canopy still a few feet in the air.

They delivered rice to the Hmong by free-falling it double-sacked. When the inner burst on impact, the looser outer sack captured the rice. Ray tried, within modest means available to him, to interest national media in the poisonous “yellow rain,” which the Pathet Lao used to kill Hmong not able to come here but who were forced into the jungle.

Ray was bothered by our country’s treatment of a CIA man named Tony Poe, known for his unsound methods. Perform a Google search for “Tony Poe” and you’ll be horrified by his methods deep in the jungle along the Mekong River.

Ray thought Poe was the model for Marlon Brando’s character, Col. Kurtz, in “Apocalypse Now.” Like Capt. Willard, the officer sent to assassinate Kurtz, Ray sensed the hypocrisy of cutting a man in half with a machine gun, while offering a Band Aid.

Willard, Martin Sheen’s character, observed that with so much murder all around, having him terminate Kurtz was like “writing a speeding

ticket at the Indy 500.”

In truth, “Apocalypse Now” was Francis Ford Coppola’s portrayal of the American experience on the Mekong River, overlaid onto the European experience along the Congo River. We have to look inward for the heart of darkness.

Romans brought their darkness to the English in the Thames River Valley; the English brought their darkness to Ireland, Africa and India; the Europeans brought their darkness here to Montana; and we Americans brought our darkness to Asia.

Thinking about Ray’s comments regarding Tony Poe made me read Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” and watch “Apocalypse Now,” possibly the best gift Ray left for me as his friend. I encourage you to do the same, if you are concerned about our culture’s constant warring.

That an Irish Catholic fellow like me has been given the honor of remembering Ray in this Anglican Church is amazing. In Ray’s memory, I ask each of you, no matter how comfortable or isolated you might feel in your life, to connect with someone who seems new and strange. Doing so will generate more light that shines in the darkness, which darkness has not overcome ... yet. 🕯

REMEMBERING ROLAND “BIG ANDY” ANDERSEN

(GRANGEVILLE '52)

by **Lee Gossett** (RDD-57)

I first met “Big Andy” in Vientiane, Laos, in January 1964 when I reported in with Air America as a kicker. Andy was a C-123 co-pilot at the time.

My next meeting with Andy was when he briefly paid me a visit in New Zealand in 1965 when I was crop dusting.

Next encounter with Andy was when I reported in to Intermountain Aviation at Marana, Arizona, in 1973 for a summer flying job. It was like old home week seeing all the fellow former smokejumpers from Laos when I walked through the door. Andy and I, along with **Bob Nichol** (MSO-52), rounded out the season in McCall, Idaho, dropping smokejumpers. I shared an apartment with Andy in McCall and that is where I learned he was a “master

chef” and could put on a meal fit for a king.

We had a real “barn burner” of a fire season in Montana that year, and Andy and I did a stint in Missoula on the Intermountain Caribou doing all night flying, supporting the different bases.

Memories Of Andy

by **Bob Nicol** (Missoula '52)

The first time I met **Roland “Andy” Andersen** was at the Nine Mile smokejumper base about 20 miles from Missoula. It was in June 1952 and we were both rookies.

He was a tall and kind of skinny guy, about 6-foot-4 and 180 pounds. He told me later that he had grown up in Chicago, spent two years in the Army in Oklahoma, and had worked on a blister



(Courtesy Julia Anderse)

rust crew in Northern Idaho the past two summers.

About six weeks later we finished our training, he was assigned to the Grangeville spike base and I moved to the jumper barracks at Fort Missoula. 1952 was a pretty slow fire year and I did not see him again that summer.

Andy had been selected in early May 1953 for the Silver City, N.M., detail and left right after refresher training. This turned out to be a very active fire year, both in Forest Service Regions 1 (Missoula) and 3 (Silver City). The fire season in R-3 normally winds down in mid-July due to the summer monsoons, and I assume the Silver City crew returned to Missoula about that time.

I saw Andy around the jump base a few times but don't remember if we ever went on the same fire. The base was located at the old Hale Field airport on the south side of Missoula with Johnson Flying Service operating the aircraft. We jumped out of Travelairs, Ford Trimotors, a Twin Beech and DC-3s.

Hale Field was fairly short and surrounded by houses, so the DC-3s were based at the Missoula Municipal Airport about five miles west of town.

Everybody was busy and Andy had an early start in Region 3. By the time the season ended, he had made 21 fire jumps, which was a record for the

Missoula jumpers. I don't know how it compared with the other bases. I enlisted in the Marines that fall and Andy stayed in Missoula, as far as I know.

When I returned in the spring of 1956, it was a whole new deal at Missoula. They had moved the entire smokejumper unit to the municipal airport. Big new parachute loft, standby/ready room, dispatch offices, barracks, mess hall and training units.

They had also constructed a regional fire warehouse adjacent to the jumper buildings. The whole thing was now called the Regional Aerial Fire Depot. Johnson Flying Service had moved their entire operation there also; it was renamed the Johnson-Bell Airport.

The Silver City crew had already left by the time I got hired, and I went out on project until being sent down there on a booster crew. Andy was a squadleader by then and did a lot of the spotting.

After about three weeks the monsoons started, and the booster crew was sent home with the regular crew following a couple of weeks later. He and I had talked about wanting to get our pilot licenses and when we got laid off in the fall, he went to California and I enrolled at the University of Montana.

I received a call later that year from the base manager, Fred "Good Deal" Brauer (MSO-41). He asked if I would be interested in going to Silver City and helping Andy convert a big truckload of surplus military parachutes to cargo chutes that could be used by the Forest Service.

Since I had about depleted my funds taking flying lessons, the timing was just right and I drove to Silver City about the first of February 1957.

Andy had also been taking flight training in California and had bought an older, 75-horsepower Aeronca Champ. He had flown that airplane from the San Francisco area to Silver, and it must have been quite a trip. There were no navigation radios and only one old VHF communications radio in the Aeronca. He had some aeronautical charts and a bunch of highway maps that he used for navigation. Avoiding the larger, tower-controlled airports because of the undependable communication radio, he would land for fuel only at rural airports.

On the final fuel stop at Wilcox, Ariz., his tires got caught in some tire ruts crossing the dirt runway and he ended up in a ditch. He didn't get hurt, but the airplane had a broken propeller and a big rip in the belly.

Using duct tape, he patched up the rip and went looking for a propeller. With the help of a local auto mechanic, they finally found one that would fit. He was happy with the increased RPMs the new prop was giving him, and took off for Silver a few days after the crash.

It was necessary to fly over a low range of hills on the flight, and he noticed that the airplane was not climbing very well. After some detours and gaining a little more altitude, he landed at his destination without further incident. It turned out that the propeller had come from a 40-horsepower airboat engine and was not intended to be used on airplanes.

We spent the rest of that winter and early spring in the Silver City sewing room converting cargo chutes and returned to Missoula in May for refresher training.

Andy was promoted to foreman and put in charge of the Region 3 smokejumper crew. He held that position for the next three or four years. About that time the Silver City detail started to be shared with jumpers from all the regions. They were integrated on the jump list and many lifelong friendships developed.

Andy and a couple of Missoula jumpers went on leave without pay from the Forest Service sometime in 1958 and left for a job in Southeast Asia. I was told that they would be working as "air cargo specialists." They returned after a few months but didn't say much about what they had been doing. Pretty soon, guys from all the bases were going to the Far East (or elsewhere) and some were not coming back for the fire season.

Andy resigned from the Forest Service in 1960 and left the country. I would hear stories about his escapades from time to time, but did not see him again for more than 10 years. Those stories should be told by people who were working with or around him during that time, and I hope they will provide the National Smokejumper Association with some information.

My last year with the jumpers was 1961. A company named Intermountain Aviation was starting up at an old Army Air Corps training base near Marana, Ariz. Former smokejumpers, **Gar Thorsrud** (MSO-46) and **Jack Wall** (MSO-48) were heading it up.

Gar asked if I would come and help set up the parachute loft. In my mind this was going to be a temporary deal, so in January 1962 I went on leave

without pay status with the Forest Service and headed for Arizona.

There were already a couple of other jumpers there, with more showing up every week or so. We spent most of the winter building packing tables and a drying tower. The Skyhook program was just getting started; most of us were involved with that.

One thing led to another and I ended up taking a full-time job and resigning from the Forest Service.

Andy hired on with Intermountain as a pilot in 1971, or maybe 1972. He checked out in the Twin Otter and Caribou and spent the next few summers flying smokejumpers on contracts we had at McCall, Grangeville, Redding and Silver City.

1974 was the last full year that Intermountain was in business as Evergreen had bought the company and many of its assets. The sale was finalized in March 1975, and they started moving their management team to Marana.

As part of the deal they took over the existing contracts, and some of the pilots and maintenance people stayed on through the fire season. Things really started to change, and by the end of the year only a few of the original Intermountain people stayed on with Evergreen.

Andy took a job as a contract pilot with what I think was a USDA division that worked to protect livestock from disease. Anyway, he ended up flying a Twin Beech, dropping sterile flies along and south of the Mexican border, and was based in Douglas, Ariz. He worked on that job for a couple of years before being hired by the Forest Service in Region 6 in Redmond, Ore., I believe.

After he became qualified as a lead plane pilot, he was transferred to Wenatchee, Wash. He would fly people around in the winter and fly lead plane in the summer. He eventually took over the annual lead plane detail to Silver City, which had been held by the legendary Gar Leva for many years.

I have forgotten the date of his actual retirement from the USFS, but did see him at Grangeville in the summer of 1991, when he was working a fire in Idaho. His retirement party, which I attended, took place in Wenatchee on May 9, 1992.

Andy was big on reunions. He would travel to almost every smokejumper, Air America, and other get-togethers until his health really started to slow him down.

So long, big guy. You had an incredible life. 🙏



Off The List

Remember and honor fellow jumpers with a gift to the NSA Good Samaritan Fund in their name. Hard times can fall on many of us at any time. The NSA is here to support our fellow jumpers and their families through the Good Samaritan Fund. Mail your contribution to:

Chuck Sheley
10 Judy Lane
Chico, CA 95926

Capt. Leonard LeSchack (Operation Coldfeet)

The NSA was notified of the passing of Leonard LeSchack on December 15, 2017. Project Coldfeet was featured in the January 2010 issue of *Smokejumper* in an article by **Toby Scott** (MYC-57). Len and Air Force Major Jim Smith parachuted to an abandoned Soviet research station in the Arctic. They were retrieved by a B-17, equipped with the Fulton Skyhook System, in an operation involving a number of smokejumpers working from the Marana, Arizona, facility.

Len graduated from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, in 1952. He was an officer in the U.S. Navy at the time of Operation Coldfeet, for which he received the Legion of Merit. Len had a long career with the military and with private businesses, retiring to Bonners Ferry, Idaho, in 2011. He will be buried in Arlington, internment May 8, 2018.

Glenda Jean Marchant (Cave Junction)

Glenda, 86, died January 20, 2018, at her home in Coos Bay, Oregon. She worked 20 years at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base in Cave Junction where she was a Master Parachute Rigger. Glenda was very respected for her skills and friendship to the Gobi jumpers.

William A. Payne (McCall '59)

Bill died November 19, 2017, of cancer. He graduated from Meridian (Idaho) H.S. in 1953 and enlisted in the Army, where he served with the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team until 1957. After leaving the Army, Bill attended the University of Idaho and graduated in 1963 with a degree in Electrical Engineering. He jumped at McCall 1959-62.

Bill worked in the aerospace and defense industry on projects that included the radar systems

for the SR-71 Blackbird. He worked in southern California and Arizona and was living in Phoenix at the time of his death.

Robert Otto Brandenberger (Missoula '48)

Bob, 92, died January 26, 2018, in Bozeman, Montana. He graduated from high school in New Jersey and served in WWII as a Naval Aviator from 1943-46. Bob jumped out of Missoula during the 1948 season, the same year he graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in forestry. He then received his master's in forestry from Yale in 1950.

Bob worked for the USFS for 35 years in Northern Idaho and Montana and was instrumental in the planning and development of many ski areas, campgrounds, marinas and other recreational facilities. He continued his work as a ski area consultant after retirement and was an avid skier until age 90.

Ray G. Beasley (McCall '52)

Ray, 88, died February 1, 2018. In 1948 he went into the Air Force upon graduating from high school. He was a Winter Survival Expert and trained crews for deployment to Libya and the Korean War. After his enlistment was up, Ray jumped at McCall 1952-63, at Idaho City in 1964, and was a spotter and squadleader at both bases.

Using the G.I. Bill, he received his bachelor's degree in Zoology from the University of Idaho in 1958. Ray went to work for the CIA during the winter months. "Beas" had a long and interesting career with the CIA working in Laos, Guatemala (Bay of Pigs Operation) training Cuban paratroopers, and the Tibet airlift program. Ray co-commissioned a painting, Khampa Airlift to Tibet, which now hangs in CIA headquarters.

In 1964 Ray became a textile engineer for the

USFS and his work included inventing the fire shelter. He was also involved in designing fire shirts and making improvements to smokejumper parachute technology.

Ray moved to Helena in 1984 where he and his wife started the Birds & Beasleys art gallery/birding store.

Roland H. Andersen (GAC-52)

Andy died December 12, 2017, in East Wenatchee, Washington. He left Chicago at age 17 to join a blister rust crew in Idaho, followed by a year in the Army. Andy joined the smokejumpers in 1952, jumped at Grangeville that season and at Missoula 1953-60. He received his pilot's license in 1953 and was a foreman for the Silver City crew during some of his time with the smokejumpers.

From 1958 to 1963, he worked for Civil Air Transport and Air America dropping supplies to guerrillas in Tibet and Hmong forces in Laos. In 1963 Air America hired him as a pilot.

During the years 1964-68, Andy worked at a variety of jobs, tried homesteading in Alaska, then returned to Thailand and started a charter boat service. In 1968-69 he worked as an Army contractor in Vietnam. Andy returned to the U.S. in 1970 and flew for Inter-Mountain Aviation and the USFS. He retired in 1992 in Wenatchee, Washington.

F. James Clatworthy (Missoula '56)

Prof. Emeritus F. James "Jim" Clatworthy (MSO-56), Life Member, died January 10, 2018, in Port Huron, MI, at the age of 82. He worked two summers ('54 & '55) under Ranger Skip Stratton (MSO-47) on the Canyon Dist., Clearwater N.F., Idaho. Jim jumped at Missoula in 1956, but was injured (cement burns nearly severed both Achilles tendons) just before his '57 season. He joined the Michigan Air National Guard's 107th Photo Recon Squadron in April 1958 and served six years with Honorable discharge in 1964.

Jim helped organize a MSO-56 class 50th reunion as part of the 2006 Trail Project to renovate the Double Arrow Lookout, Seeley Lake Ranger District, Lolo N.F. Somewhere under the support beams, you'll find the signatures of the magnifi-

cent seven 56'ers, if they haven't been covered with paint.

The magnificent seven: Jim Clatworthy, Don Courtney, Larry Nelson, Bill Murphy, Roland Pera, Ron Stoleson and Bob Whaley.

His article, "The Legacy of Skip Stratton and the Ridge Runner," appeared in the July 2012 issue of *Smokejumper* magazine and provides an extensive biography, so check it out in the magazine's archives. Jim said he will enjoy his "high mountain two-manner" after he passes and will check in from time to time at the Double Diamond Lookout to replenish fond memories of a great workweek and smokejumper fellowship.

Lowell L. "Lucky" Scalf (Cave Junction '49)

Lowell, 89, died January 8, 2018, in Coupeville, WA. He was born in Canada in 1928 and jumped at Cave Junction 1949-50.

Richard J. Courson (Cave Junction '46)

Dick died February 20, 2018, in Pendleton, Oregon. He was a retired Umatilla County district attorney and district court judge. Dick entered the Marines before finishing high school, volunteered for the Paramarines and went into combat Feb. 19, 1945, when he landed on Iwo Jima at age 19. He spent 30 days in combat before being evacuated due to illness and wounds.

Back from the war, Dick used his military jumping experience to hire on at Cave Junction, where he jumped from 1946-50.

Although he never finished high school, he enrolled in Willamette University for two years before entering Lewis & Clark Law School, where he obtained his law degree. He moved to Pendleton in 1956 to practice law and was later elected Umatilla County district attorney. Dick was appointed to the district court bench in 1967, where he served 25 years.

Virgil "Max" Glaves (McCall '47)

Max died February 18, 2018, in Escondido, CA. He grew up in Ontario, Oregon, before going to the University of Idaho on a football scholarship. After graduation he joined the Marine Corps and was deployed to Korea. After two years of active duty and eight years in the reserves, he left the Corps as a Captain.

Max settled in Escondido and made his living selling insurance. He had a close bond with his smokejumper buddies. His kids thought that his last jump in 2018 should have been with Lloyd Johnson, Wayne Webb spotting, and Kenny Roth and Bob Fogg in the cockpit of a Trimotor. Max jumped at McCall 1947-51.

Gasper G. Blea (Boise '78)

Gasper died January 8, 2018. He lived in Monument, Colorado, and served 14 seasons with the USFS as a wildland firefighter. Gasper also served as a firefighter for the Woodmoor-Monument Fire Dept. He jumped with the USFS Boise Base in 1978.

David W. Hargas (Missoula '64)

Dave, 74, died March 17, 2018, after a battle with cancer. He was born in Missoula, graduated from Sentinel High School, and attended the University of Montana. Dave was a pipefitter with Smurfit-Stone for 25 years. In 1980 he won the International Sled Dog Championships in the seven-dog category and competed in many competitions in the U.S. and Canada with his black labs. Dave jumped at Missoula 1964, 65, and 1967-74.

William C. Brennan (Missoula '50)

Bill died in March 2018. He started working for the Forest Service at age 14 and attended Montana State University before he was drafted into the Army. Bill served in Korea as a medic for the 187th Airborne. He had many jobs throughout life but enjoyed being fleet manager at T&W Chevrolet in Belgrade, Montana, the most. Bill jumped at Missoula 1950-51 and 1954.

John Kevin Hughes (Cave Junction '76)

Kevin, 64, of Eagle, Idaho, died March 30, 2018, after a battle with cancer. After his father passed away due to combat-related injuries sustained during the Korean War, he was raised by his mother and stepfather in Oldtown, Idaho. Kevin was a graduate of Whitworth University and jumped at Cave Junction 1976-77. He was the co-founder of the Spokane Rugby Club and played at Gonzaga

Kevin began his career in restaurant manage-

ment in Seattle and moved his family to Boise, Idaho, in 1993. For the past 18 years, he was the regional manager and proprietor for the Goodwood Barbecue Company in Idaho and Utah.

Patrick H. Daly (McCall '51)

Pat died September 20, 1984, following a massive stroke. He lied about his age and joined the smokejumpers at age 16 in 1951. After a good season in 1951, he had to lay out for a season once his age was discovered. He returned in 1953 and jumped through 1957.

Pat graduated from the University of Idaho in 1957 with a degree in Finance and Economics. He entered the Marine Corps and took officer training at Quantico, serving in Southeast Asia and Camp Pendleton until his discharge in 1961. He returned to McCall and jumped the 1961 season. That fall he went to work for the First Security Bank in Boise and served with the Idaho Marine Corps Reserves. In 1965 he suffered a serious stroke and was diagnosed with an inoperable brain aneurysm. Several strokes followed over the years until his death in 1984.

Daniel J. (Tex) Schroedel (Missoula '57)

Dan, 82, died April 5, 2018, from cancer. He grew up in Pampa, Texas, and, at age 11, went on vacation to Green Mountain Falls, Colorado. It was the first time Dan had seen mountains, and he knew then that mountains would be an important part of his life. He jumped out of Missoula in 1957 and 1958 while attending the University of Montana. Following graduation in forestry in 1959, Dan went to work for the Forest Service in California, where he became the Pinecrest District Ranger high in the Sierra Nevada mountains. After retirement Dan went to work as a sawyer until his knees gave out on him in 1995. Dan and his wife, Susan, retired in Plains, Montana. They lived on 86 acres looking down on the Clark Fork River. Dan left behind the following message: Lived free, died well!

Richard S. Gregory (Cave Junction '51)

Dick died December 14, 2017, in Walla Walla, Washington. He graduated from the University of Idaho in 1954 with a business degree. Dick's career included time as an auditor for the IRS and

the State of Idaho, as a real estate broker and time working as security and shuttle driver in Jackpot, Nevada. He jumped at Cave Junction during the 1951 season.

Stephen Paul Nelson (Grangeville '58)

Paul, 78, died January 31, 2018. He grew up in Clinton, Oklahoma. After losing his father at

age 12, he worked many jobs helping support his mother and younger siblings. Paul served in the Air Force as a jet engine specialist and mechanic 1962-66. Following his time in the service, he worked as a heavy equipment mechanic. Paul then worked offshore gas and oil rigs in many foreign and domestic locations. Paul jumped at Grangeville during the 1958-59 seasons. 🕯

NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions

Donor	In Memory Of/Honor of
Bob Aliber (MSO-51).....	Scholarship Program
Terry Hale.....	Glenn Hale (MYC-57)
Tom/Marieta Hauser.....	Ray Beasley (MYC-52)
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Bill Tucker (MSO-50).....	James Anderson (MSO-58)

Contributions since the previous publication of donors January 2018
Total funds disbursed to smokejumpers and families since 2004 – \$151,140.

Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:
 Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico CA 95926

Good Sam Fund At Work

by **Chuck Sheley** (Cave Junction '59)

As NSA members, your generosity has been amazing in funding the organization, our Scholarship Program, and the Good Sam Fund. I want to continually update you on two of those items.

The scholarship update is done annually in the October issue of *Smokejumper*. Good Sam Fund updates will be done on a regular basis as they are requested and fulfilled.

Dave Colbert's (NCSB-88) son, Brendan, was recently diagnosed with brain cancer and underwent surgery at the University of Washington Medical Center. Not all of the tumor could be removed, so he will be undergoing radiation treatment in Seattle for a period of six weeks.

The GSF will help the Colbert family with expenses during their stay in Seattle with Brendan.

Dave gives us more information in the following email: "The next step is for Brendan to undergo radiation treatment in Seattle. It is going to be a six-week course of proton beam radiation therapy. Proton beam radiation allows for a very targeted dose of radiation to the remaining por-

tions of the brain tumor, with less spillover, and thus with less potential harm to the surrounding brain tissue. We had a series of appointments at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance Proton Therapy center this past week in preparation for treatment. Treatments will be daily, Mondays through Fridays, until a total of 30 treatments have been reached.

"Our plan is for my wife and me to trade off being with Brendan every other week during treatments.

"Brendan's recovery from surgery continues. Headaches have diminished, as well as the frequency of seizures. Once radiation treatments are underway, there is a chance that he will experience an increase in headaches and seizures, as well as fatigue, but we all know that undergoing the radiation treatment holds the best outcome. Brendan continues to be generally positive about the process."

Many thanks to all of you in the NSA. Since 2004 you have helped smokejumpers and their families to the tune of \$140,000 plus. 🔦

Remembering Dave Laws

by **Lance Stryker** (Redmond '67)

I was a rookie in 1967 at the Redmond Air Center when **Tony Percival** (NCSB-54) introduced **Dave Laws** (RAC-66) to us rookies as our PT instructor. Initially, we did not know what to think; Dave was short, slight of build, soft-spoken and smoked Marlboros. But when he took off his t-shirt, he obviously had no body fat – only muscle and bone, covered by taut skin.

On our regular afternoon runs of several miles through the sagebrush and volcanic sand at the base, Dave always had a Marlboro tucked behind one ear and always finished first. One of us rook-

ies, **Tim Brown** (RAC-67), was the captain of the Lewis & Clark College cross country team, and vowed on one of these afternoon jaunts, to run Dave into ground. On this particular run, Tim and Dave were both on a dead run at the end, except that Tim finished at least 20 yards behind Dave.

When the rest of us met up with them at the finish, Dave had lit up the Marlboro from behind his ear and was offering a drag to Tim, who was bent over, coughing, trying to catch his breath. No one ever ran Dave to the ground.

After rookie training, we rookies were interspersed with the veterans on the jump list. By chance, I was paired with Dave.

My first fire jump was with Dave on a small cinder cone just north of Mt. Jefferson. It was a quarter-acre fire of no particular consequence except that we had been on our knees for three days, digging through the cinders bare-handed, searching for burning roots.

Late on the third day with the sun setting behind us, I was sitting on a stump, eating miniature Vienna sausages when Dave suddenly exclaimed, "Look," and pointed to what I thought was a tree.

I responded, "Yeah, Dave. Tree." Dave grabbed me hard by my neck muscles, pulled me to my feet and said, "No, there," pointing again.

When I saw what Dave was pointing at, the hair on my neck and arms stood on end. I saw an object moving soundlessly at about 45 mph on a downward angle; it eventually disappeared behind the cinder cone and the trees below. It was shaped like two saucers with their tops together like a fat cigar.

It appeared like liquid mercury shining in the setting sun with no other features. It was about 200 yards away and about 100 yards long – huge.

Dave and I stood there, speechless, for a while until a flight of five military jets appeared on the same path and disappeared behind the cinder cone and trees, as well.

I then told Dave that I wanted him to get on the radio and get a helicopter to get us the hell out of there immediately. Dave said "No," that it was too late and anyway, he was going down off the cinder cone and see if he could find them. He asked if I wanted to come along.

I said "No," that he was crazy. Dave took off and was gone most of the night. He returned at sunrise and said he had found nothing.

It was only later at the base when I heard Dave relate the story. I learned I had only seen the last of a flight of five of those soundless, huge, silvery, slowly flying objects. 🦉

"With heavy hearts we must announce the recent passing of Dave Laws who has been the caretaker at museum for the past three years. He was an enthusiastic host and tour guide, an excellent gardener and had the strongest handshake of anyone here. His spirit lives on in his family and friends and he will be sorely missed by all." —Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum



**NSA
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National Smokejumper Archive Established

NSA has established a Smokejumper archive to reside at Eastern Washington University. The archive will be **the prime national record** for Smokejumper history. NSA needs your help to gather any form of record that involves you and your knowledge of smokejumping: films, photos, articles, books, oral histories, personal jump records....

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