

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2000

# SMOKEJUMPER



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*Ten Seconds over Birch Hill, "The Lesson of a Lifetime" ..... 12*  
*The Sheepeater Fire, "Getting the Jump on Deer Season" ..... 6*

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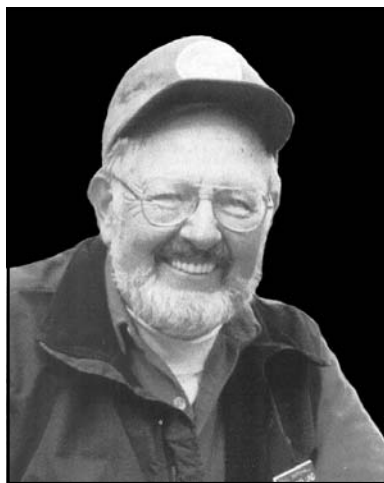
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Cover: *Bill Eastman being checked by  
Francis Lufkin during the 1956 fire sea-  
son.* Story on page 4. (Photo courtesy Bill  
Eastman)

## The Prez's Perambulations



**By Carl Gidlund**  
(Missoula '58)

PRESIDENT

### *Fellow Jumpers and Associates:*

We hope you're pleased with  
your Association's progress. This  
quarterly magazine and our  
website are constantly improv-  
ing, and we're happily engaged  
on a number of other fronts.  
That engagement includes

- our forest trail rehabilitation  
program;
- preservation of smoke-  
jumper records, memorabilia  
and history;
- establishment and mainte-  
nance of a data base that in-  
cludes all U.S. smoke-  
jumpers;
- maintenance of a "hall of he-  
roes" for smokejumpers  
killed in the line of duty;
- staying in touch with ill  
jumpers;
- and expressing our regrets to  
family members when one of  
our "brothers" or "sisters"  
dies.

All this wouldn't be happen-  
ing without some darned hard

work on the part of the Direc-  
tors, our Office Manager Shirley  
Braxton and a few other very  
dedicated volunteers. But  
there's plenty more to be done,  
and this is a plea for you to de-  
vote your talents and a bit of  
time to the betterment of your  
fellow jumpers through the As-  
sociation. Consider this a help-  
wanted column, and here are  
the skills we're looking for:

**Planner.** NSA member Bill  
Ruskin (Cave Junction '58) has  
been working with us on the  
development of a long-range  
plan to solicit from corpora-  
tions and other entities funds  
that would support our activi-  
ties. It's become apparent that,  
before we can ask with any  
hope of success, we need a  
clearer vision of what we want  
the Association to be. What kind  
of activities should we engage  
in five or 10 years down the  
trail? We need a volunteer who  
can design and lead the effort to  
define our future.

**Advertising Manager.** Ow-  
ing to improvements in this  
newsletter and to our website,  
we believe we're finally in a po-  
sition to begin soliciting adver-  
tisers. However, no one on the  
current Board of Directors has  
the skills or the contacts to do  
the job. If you do, please step  
forward and help prevent (we  
hope) a future dues increase.

**Artist.** Notice all the "gray  
space" in this and past issues of  
the newsletter? That's because  
we usually don't have pictures  
to illustrate our stories. We need  
a staff artist who, with a few  
quick swipes of a pencil, could

help bring to life the articles you and your fellow jumpers and associates submit for publication. We don't need Rembrandt; Norman Rockwell would do. But even if your skills are a tad below his, we could sure use them.

**Editor.** I'm sure you'll agree that Managing Editor Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59) has made some terrific improvements in this magazine. He's responsible for this and the previous two issues. You'll notice also it's grown, as we play catch-up by printing stories that have been submitted one, two and more years ago. Because of that growth, we need additional editorial help, someone with training or experience in journalism who can help shape the stories and columns into the lilting prose to which you'd like to become accustomed.

One terrific attribute of smokejumping is that no one was ever drafted into the job. We were all volunteers, and that means a lot when you're on a fire line, depending on the jumper next to you to watch your back. And, we're jumpers because we like a challenge. The jobs described above don't produce the adrenaline rush rendered by a wilderness parachute jump or a "skin bubbling" fire, but they are challenging, and they produce rewards.

Let's continue to take care of each other. Contact our Missoula headquarters if you'd like to help.

Keep 'er into the wind, pard. 🍷



**Historic Photo.** Bill Dratz, Ed Eggen, Bill Hellman, Skip Stratton and pilot Bob Johnson at Missoula before taking off for Washington D.C. 1949. A jump was made onto the Ellipse

in front of the White House. More on this story will appear in the July issue of *Smokejumper*. (Courtesy Skip Stratton)

# The Eight-Mile Ridge Plane Crash

By Bill Eastman (North Cascades '54)

Shortly after 6 p.m. on June 23, 1958, a twin-engine Beechcraft crashed into Eight Mile Ridge about 15 miles north of Winthrop, Wash., killing four. While dropping cargo at a low altitude, the plane went into the ridge at a steep angle, upside-down. Investigators for the Civil Aeronautics Administration could not find a satisfactory cause for the crash. In 1958, no one had ever heard of windshear.

Lightning had ignited a fire on the ridge, and the Beech dropped two smokejumpers at about 2 p.m. I was one of them. The wind along the ridge was very strange that day. Streamers indicated no more than a breeze, but when I went out, a strong wind took my chute at a 90 degree angle from the ridge and away from the fire. For the first and only time, I pulled down lines on one side until my canopy collapsed, then fell free for about 1,000 feet. When I released the lines, the canopy filled again and I landed only about three-quarters of a mile from the fire. It was a dangerous thing to do, but had I not done it, I would have landed across the valley. The second jumper landed near the spot with no problems.

The fire was unaffected by the wind at that time and looked easy. However, the breeze became stronger a few minutes later and shifted upslope. I radioed for two more jumpers who arrived around 3:30 p.m. But by that time it had become clear we needed all the help we could get, and I asked for just that.

The wind continued strong and variable. Nineteen rookies left Intercity Airport by truck for Eight Mile Ridge. By radio, I requested chain saws and a trail grader. At about 6 p.m., the Beech returned to drop the equipment. It made one pass, dropped some food and was circling to come in again. I was on the radio with the Sweetgrass Lookout who was watching the fire from the next ridge to the east. He said the plane had crashed about a mile south of the fire, and that we now had two fires. At about that time, the rookies arrived.

The pilot was Bob Cavanaugh who had been with the Forest Service for only a few weeks. He had dropped me twice previously, but I didn't know him. Bob Carlman, who was sitting in the copilot's seat, was a timber salesman for the Okanogan Forest. I knew him distantly as a happy, friendly man in his early twenties.

I did know and respect the other two men who died in the crash. Gus Hendrickson was a smokejumper foreman, extraordinarily responsible, capable, calm and sane. It was obvious that he was to be the operations chief after Francis Lufkin retired. Gus

was 29, lived in Winthrop and left a widow but no children. Jerry Helmer was a smokejumper. He was 24, single and lived in Sweet Home, Ore. Jerry had been a paratrooper in Korea, saw the world from that point of view, but was always light and playful. He would unexpectedly say such things as "Don't bunch up! One grenade could kill you all!" During the previous season, he had broken his leg, but the next day he was working on a sewing machine in the loft and didn't miss a day of work. 🐼

*Before retiring as a publisher, Eastman had been editor-in-chief for science at Macmillan, editorial director at Harper & Row, director of Harpers College Press in New York City and director of the State University of New York Press in Albany. He walked away from smokejumping during the 1959 season after an argument with Hal Weinmann at LaGrande.*



*Jerry Helmer working in the loft after breaking his leg in the 1957 fire season. (Photo courtesy Bill Eastman)*



*Gus Hendrickson checking jumpers during the 1957 fire season. L-R : Buck Pino, Harry Neal, Jim Eagan, and Neil Zander. (Photo courtesy Bill Eastman)*

## **Help Needed for Reunion 2000 Display**

Josh Mathiesen (Redding '94)

Attention all Smokejumpers!  
Reunion 2000 is just a couple of months away and the Redding Smokejumpers need your help. We are trying to assemble Smokejumper gear and memorabilia from the last six decades. The display items will be viewed for the three days of the reunion then returned to the donors.

I'm having a hard time assembling items from the '40s and '50s. Anything you have would be appreciated. Turn in some of that gear you took home at the end of the season! If you can help, **please contact me at (530) 226-2888 or e-mail at: [jmathiesen/r5\\_ncsc@fs.fed.us](mailto:jmathiesen/r5_ncsc@fs.fed.us)**.

# The Sheepeater Fire, 1954

By "Wild Bill" Yensen (McCall '53)



Bill Yensen 1954

TOWARD THE END of my second year of smokejumping, I looked forward to starting my junior year at the University of Redlands, but I was still on the jump list Sept. 14. My brother-in-law and jump partner, Merle Cables (McCall '48) and I got our call that afternoon. When Merle learned where we were going, he took off for his trailer like a shot and re-

turned with his Winchester 30-30, deer tag, ammo and game sacks. Our spotter and project foreman, Reid Jackson, got us suited up, and we went to the airport and boarded our Travelair.

The fire was on Sheepeater Ridge, about 200 yards from Hand Cabin occupied years earlier by a miner. We jumped about 6 p.m., using a nearly dry lake behind the cabin as our spot. Two hundred yards in diameter, only 50 yards of shallow water remained. We put our gear in the cabin, then lined the fire, guessing that a scouting hunter had started it when he dropped a cigarette. We piled the fuel inside the line, watched it burn, then returned to the cabin. After eating, we went to bed in our sleeping bags rolled out on real beds!

We got up at dawn and ate breakfast. Merle went hunting while I walked over to check the fire. Mind you, even though I had only 200 yards to go, before I got there I heard Merle's gun go off. He had gone behind the cabin because he heard some water running. Now folks, there just ain't no running water in a lake. Merle had seen a big buck in the middle of that lake taking a leak. When it stepped ashore, he blew his brains out.

When I returned from checking the now-dead fire, Merle had that deer gutted and strung on a pole in front of the cabin, in which some kind soul had stashed a sack of onions and potatoes. We helped ourselves and had liver and onions for dinner, supper and breakfast the next morning.

That morning, Merle walked down the trail about a hundred yards and saw a little spike buck coming up the trail and blew him away too. About noon, the packer showed up with two big horses. We loaded deer on one and fire packs on the other, then hiked 17 miles to Chamberlain and found the Ford waiting for us. Merle gave the spike to the Chamberlain crew for camp meat, tagged the big one and loaded him on the



Merle Cables replaces personal gear bag with 30-30. (Photos courtesy Bill Yensen)

Ford. We took off at 10 p.m. and flew back to McCall. The next day both of us terminated and returned to school, but Merle had his meat for the winter! 🐾

*"Wild Bill" Yensen taught and coached in Southern California for 35 years and jumped from McCall for 30 seasons. He's retired in St. George, Utah, and doing "whatever I please."*

## Video Donors

The NSA thanks the following additional donors since the January issue:

Michael August	Boise S/J Welfare Fund	
Michael Burney	Charlie Caldwell	Wilmer Carlsen
Jim Fritz	Frank Guilfoyle	Doug Kosan
Bob McCann	Todd Onken	Ronald Pond
Gordon Quigley	Earl Schmidt	George Tranberg
	Don Wallace	

This is an ongoing project and every donation is a tremendous help. Send yours to the NSA office in Missoula.



# Sounding Off From the Editor



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

LET'S GET TO the bottom line! Jumpers have always been task oriented and have the determination to get the job done. Two jobs need your immediate attention: First, VOTE! This is the election issue of Smokejumper Magazine.

Six spots on the NSA Board of Directors, the governing body of the NSA, will be filled as a result of this election. You say, "What's the problem?" The problem is that we as NSA members have been reflective of our current national attitude and have not been voting. Individuals have stepped forward to run for these positions. They will be doing the work for their three-year terms.

Please take the time now to read the biographical sketches of the candidates, mark the enclosed ballot, and mail it to NSA Secretary "Spud"

DeJarnette in the enclosed envelope. Don't put it off; it's time to line a slop-over. Give ten minutes of time to determine who will be working for you for the next three years.

Second, REUNION 2000. If you've not already done so, complete and mail your reunion registration form. We've again printed the hotel/motel listing in this issue. Call direct and make your reservations and make sure that you mention this is for the Smokejumper Reunion so that you get the special convention rate for Friday June 16 through Sunday June 18.

I appreciate your response to the reader survey. It looks like we're providing interesting reading and we promise to continue doing so. We'll fine tune the design and make the merchandise section an insert so that we won't use pages that can contain more valuable information. One of my main concerns is the amount of time it takes for a magazine to reach the reader via bulk mailing. With that in mind, deadlines are going to be eight weeks before the date on the cover. **My goal is to get this issue to you before the middle of the published month, which, for this issue, is April 15. That means the deadline for any materials going into the July issue is May 1st.**

Please continue to submit articles. Type and check the spelling. If you send via email,

submit the document in Rich Text Format. I have directions that I can send you which will help. Pictures to accompany the article are very important. Send hard copy pictures in the mail. No digital images over the net, please!

There it is, vote and register! See you in Redding along with about 1000 other jumpers. 🍄

## SUNDAY SERVICE

When making plans for the 2000 Reunion, consider attending the SMOKE-JUMPER MEMORIAL SERVICE on Sunday. You will not want to miss this event, as it has been one of the highlights of reunions of the past.

The service is to honor all smokejumpers who are no longer with us. Each region of the Forest Service along with BLM smokejumpers have selected one smokejumper per region for a special homily to be given by a friend of the deceased.

Rev Dr. Stanton Tate (McCall '53) will again conduct the worship after an early breakfast at the Convention Center. Robert Montoya (Idaho City '62) is in charge of the musical and vocal arrangements and Leo Cromwell (Idaho City '66) is coordinating the service.

# LETTERS

## NSA as a Lasting Memorial

Editor:

As a smokejumper chaplain over the years, I've officiated at many smokejumper-related burials. Families are often searching for some lasting memorial. Floral contributions are temporary. May I suggest at such times, we consider setting up memorials to the National Smokejumper Association? These gifts would benefit everyone including those making the contribution. Here is the best address:

National Smokejumper Association (NSA)  
PO Box 4081  
Missoula MT 59806  
—Rev. Stan Tate (McCall '53)

## Once and For All

Editor:

I really enjoy the new look to the NSA *Smokejumper*. Congratulations on putting together a great magazine. Having read David Owen's letter I feel I have to respond. If his intent was to focus discussion of the issues he talked about then I am sure he has succeeded. In his arguments Square vs Rounds, he doomed his letter in the first paragraph by stating, "Let me resolve them once and for all." With this statement he most likely offended every BLM jumper who has been trained on the Ram Air system. His arrogance in making that statement shows a complete lack of understanding of why the system was developed and a blindness to the success it has had. High winds in the BLM's primary jump country (Alaska and Great Basin) is one of the reasons that necessitate the use of square parachutes. The ability to man fires that would not have been possible with rounds has probably saved millions of taxpayers' money since the introduction of the system in the early '80s. He implies that the training requirements are too hard for the average smokejumper to learn because of the cutaway system. Did he even bother to call Fairbanks and talk to the trainers up there on how they train new smokejumpers on squares or did he just assume it's too hard to learn? Squares are here to stay. You can't turn the clock back to the good old days. He did a great disservice to all smokejumpers by writing such an ill informed letter. I urge him to learn more about the square system before weighing in with "the last word."

—Mark Klinger  
Alaska Smokejumper '79-'86  
BLM Boise '86-'90

## Mann Gulch

Editor:

Smokejumper David Navon, who survived the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division's fight at Bastogne and in Normandy only to perish in Mann Gulch with 12 other fire fighters on August 5, 1949, was a friend. Attempting to locate where he died on a site visit 50 years later was impossible because, logically, there was no white cross marking it as there was for the other victims.

The reason was simple. David was Jewish and [a] white cross was inappropriate. Communication with [U.S. Forest Service] Chief Mike Dombeck, [Helena] Forest Supervisor Tom Clifford and Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman and David's sister has supplied a solution. An appropriate size white concrete Star of David will be erected at the site this summer, according to Dave Turner of the Helena District Ranger Office.

World renowned fire behavior expert Harry Gisborne, who subsequently died of a heart attack at the fire location while on an investigative exam, will also be remembered with a fitting plaque. He truly was the 14th victim.

[Forest Service] Director of Fire and Aviation Management Jose Cruz has stated that the expense of Navon's monument will be borne by the Forest Service. Payment has also been offered

by his sister and myself. Perhaps the best solution, since this is not a great financial burden, is to make participation open to all.

—Jack A. Rose  
(Missoula '49, Winthrop '50)

*Editor's Note: The Helena National Forest is accepting donations through the Helena Forest Foundation, 7653 Canyon Ferry Road, Helena, MT 59602. Cost for the Navon monument will be \$650, and for the Gisborne, \$675. A third project involves installation of a bronze cast of a smokejumper jacket and helmet with face cage, to cost about \$2,500. See the story in this issue.*

## Great Experience on Trail Project

Editor:

My feelings about the [Bob Marshall Wilderness] trail work are summed up in two words "GREAT & FANTASTIC." I hope that I can be involved with this as long as my health permits. In the crew that I was on, I only knew Cliff Dalzell from the days when I jumped, but by the end of the week, it was as if we had all known each other a lifetime. It was great to sit around the fire at the end of the day and hear all the war stories. It sure brought back memories from some of the best times that I experienced in my 35 years in the Forest Service.

Our cook, Tom Blunn, put out some mighty fine meals, and I also had a good time talking to him about Forest Service days gone by. The boss, Jon McBride, wielded a damn strong whip, but I would still work for him under any circumstances. (Just kidding of course about the whip.)

The trail we worked was called Silvertip, and one wonders how it got its name. To prepare ourselves each day for any encounters with the old griz, our fleet-footed self-proclaimed chaplain, Hal Howell, led us in morning prayer from which I quote: "Hail Mary full of grace, please keep that grizzly bear in second place!"

The only downside to this project was having to wade the Spotted Bear River twice a day, particularly in the morning. At day's end, it was a welcome adventure.

If there is any thing I can do to help, I would be glad to. One of my many tasks when I was working in engineering in the Forest Service was working with districts on trail condition surveys, trail location, surveys, preparing contract packages, and contract administration. If there is any advanced condition survey of proposed trail maintenance, reconstruction, etc., I may be of some help. Will see you next summer.

—Bill Kolar (Missoula '59)

## Smokejumper Personality

Editor,

Got the October issue of *Smokejumper*. My first reaction: very professional.

Donna has read some of the articles and comes to me with comments about the "smokejumper personality" which surfaces.

—Chuck Lundeen  
USFS Retired

## Likes the Changes

Editor,

The last newsletter/magazine was excellent, a big step up for the NSA. The format, production, writing, layout, was all professional. You guys did an excellent job.

Changing the newsletter to a magazine made it more readable. Dealing with "professionalism" topics makes it an organ for an organization that intends to stay alive. Keep up the good work.

—Norm Pawlowski (Cave Junction '57)

## Firefighter Retirement

Editor,

In May 1984, the States Forest Service, in response to an employee grievance, directed all field offices to grant an additional



six months of retirement credit to the actual number of days a permanent-seasonal smokejumper was employed during fire season. The Forest Service recognized that many permanent-seasonal smokejumpers would not be able to make the 20 years of service by age 50 if the policy did not compensate those individuals who were not able to work large portions of the years due to the lack of a full-time position. However, in making this change in direction, the Forest Service did not provide the six-month additional credit to permanent-seasonal employees who held a civil service appointment prior to May 1984. This contrasts with the Bureau of Land Management which since granted additional credit prior to 1984.

In response to this arbitrary treatment, eight Missoula smokejumpers, in October 1997, grieved the Forest Service for failure to provide those pre-1984 smokejumpers the additional retirement credit. The Forest Service rejected the grievance. In response, Craig James, a Boise, Idaho, lawyer was retained to file an appeal with the Department of Agriculture on the Forest Service decision. In early November 1999, the eight smokejumpers filed an appeal with the Merit Systems Protection Board in Denver, Colo., asking that the US Department of Agriculture and the US Forest Service grant the additional six months of retirement credit for pre-1984 employment. This appeal would affect EVERYONE who has retired as a primary or secondary firefighter or who has used his or her firefighter time to meet other retirement criteria. Any retiree or an individual contemplating retirement can quickly figure the additional retirement credit of 2 percent per year can have a significant impact over a short period of time not to mention an extended retirement.

A group of mostly Missoula-based smokejumpers has raised over \$8,000 to meet the cost appeals. However, it is estimated that an additional \$8,000 to \$15,000 may be needed to cover the appeal before the Merit Systems Protection Board.

Anyone interested in more information or willing to help should contact: Willis Curdy, 11280 Kona Ranch Road, Missoula, MT 59804. My phone number is (406) 728-0981. My e-mail is wgcurdy@montana.com.

—Willis Curdy (Missoula '71)

### Nemore Update

Editor:

Here's the latest on Steve's ongoing difficulties within the Boise BLM Smokejumper organization. I received a lot of inquiries and feedback on the Roughhousing article that appeared in the October issue. For that reason, I want to bring everyone up to speed.

We left off with the judge after hearing five days of testimony, ruling in favor of Steve. He stated that BLM's action had been "arbitrary and capricious." In his verbal recommendation he stated that Steve should be returned to his job. The Bureau responded by saying it would wait for the written recommendation.

In November, the judge sent his formal/written recommendation to the Deputy Director of the BLM. No decision was made by the Bureau and the case was referred to the Department of the Interior Personnel Department. This will require an attorney to review the case.

After an agonizing wait of nearly four months, Steve has not heard anything. In the meantime, the grass begins to green, jump season draws nearer, and Steve wonders about his chances of returning to his job as a Smokejumper. To the best of my knowl-

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### READERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO GET INVOLVED.

Send your letter to the editor:

U.S. Mail: Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln. Chico, CA 95926

E-Mail: cnkgshley@earthlink.net

send as e-mail, not an attached document

Deadline for the July issue is May 1st

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edge this is true.

What follows is opinion. In the name of justice and fair play, don't you wonder what would have happened if the judge's decision had gone against Nemore? Fairness requires a timely decision. By the time this comes out, we'll be jumping fires. I only hope that Steve is there with us.

—Murry Taylor

Alaska Smokejumpers

### Memories of Allan Graham & Wayne Webb

Editor:

I noticed in the October *Smokejumper* obits that Allan Graham (McCall '64) died. The obit said that he had fond memories of several old jumpers. I was the squadleader in charge of a six man crew the spent a 10-day project out of Big Creek Ranger Station back in '65. Al Graham was on that crew.

One day Ranger Earl Dodds (McCall '49) had us work the Lick Lake trail. We were trudging back down the road to camp after a hard day's work and Al was packing the chainsaw over his shoulder. Earl came down the road to meet us in a Jeep. Al was way behind and the five of us climbed into the Jeep. Earl told Al that he would come back and get him after he drove us to camp. We then started talking and Earl forgot about Al who was still packing that chainsaw. Al finally trudges in and asked Earl, "Where do you want me to put this chainsaw?" Red faced, Earl said "I bet I know where you would like to put it!"

That was an extraordinary crew. We had a M.D. (Dave Hemery), D.D.S. (Jack Seagraves), M.A. (myself), B.A. (Charles Hay) and the other two (Bill Donnelley and Allan Graham) were still in college. There were 32 years of college among that crew. We blew Earl's mind because we did all of his jobs in half the time he thought it would take. Best crew I ever worked with!

I went to Wayne Webb's funeral in Boise. There was a huge turnout of jumpers new and old. Stan Tate (McCall '53) did his usual superb job of officiating. Wayne was "Mister Smokejumper." He was my hero and mentor. He taught me woodsmanship, parachute rigging, cargo dropping, firefighting, spotting and about everything I needed to know to survive 30 seasons of jumping.

At least I got to do something for him. I pitched for his baseball teams in '53 and '54 and when he retired, I taught him how to play golf. He also let me engrave his knife which was the 1st of many. When I became a squadleader, Wayne was the first jumper I spotted on a fire. He was the best spotter McCall ever had. He was expert at everything he did and was always a real gentleman. I'm sure he just landed in that beautiful green jump spot in the sky. We all loved you Wayne!

—"Wild Bill" Yensen (McCall '53)

### CPS Jumper Appreciates Magazine

Dear Editor,

I received the October issue of *Smokejumper* and like the changes in format and layout that were made. As usual it is interesting reading, even though I know few of the main characters.

The Nine Mile Jump List was of special interest to me, as well as information on some of the squadleaders that were there in my day. Bill Woods was my squadleader in '44 and '45. I have many good memories of the men shown in the photo, page 7, supplied by John Scott.

After being discharged in 1946, I attended college and seminary and then went to work for the Mennonite Publishing House in 1955, first as trade manager and then as Director of Book Publishing for Herald Press, which is the trade division of the Mennonite Publishing House. I retired in June 1988 after working there 34 years.

Since retirement, I've been involved in volunteer work in a number of areas. In 1998 I was honored with recognition as the "Man of the Year" for outstanding service to the Regional Family Y.M.C.A. of Laurel Highlands.

—Maynard W. Shetler (Missoula '44)

# Jumper Recounts Yellowstone Quake Rescue

By Bob Nicol (Missoula '52)



*Bob Nicol 1974*

ON AUG. 17, 1959, the most powerful earthquake in Montana's recorded history battered the Madison River Canyon near the town of West Yellowstone. The quake, measuring 7.8 on the Richter Scale, triggered the largest landslide ever recorded in North America. An estimated 80 million tons of earth and rock

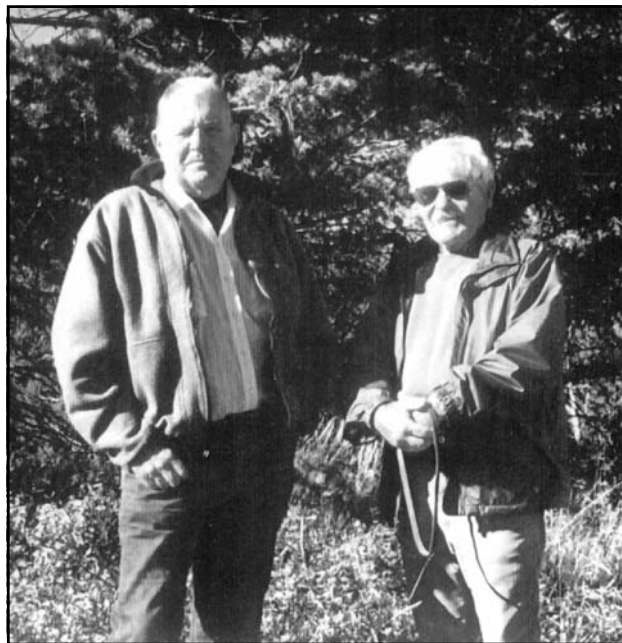
fell from the side of a mountain into the Madison River, forming a dam and creating what is now known as Quake Lake. It's estimated that 28 people were killed.

The initial large shock occurred near midnight, sending waves surging down Hebgen Lake and over the top of Hebgen Dam. A 20-foot wall of water, sloshing as if it were in a giant dishpan, swept down the narrow Madison Canyon. From the dam to the mouth of the canyon, a distance of seven miles, there were three Forest Service campgrounds and a couple of dude ranches. Those facilities were packed with campers, most of whom were in bed. About the time the surge reached the canyon mouth, half of a 7600-foot mountain crashed into the river.

Forty years later, on Aug. 18, 1999, the Gallatin National Forest hosted a memorial at the site of the disaster where many of the survivors, their families and other participants gathered to remember. Eight smokejumpers from the Missoula base, including Al Hammond and I, were among the many involved in the rescue effort who attended the memorial event.

I was called out to the Aerial Fire Depot in the early morning of that day 40 years ago, assuming it was going to be for a fire mission, but the base was gearing up for a rescue. The plan was to load the airplane with emergency medical technicians, but since most jumpers were out on fires, all available overhead were suited up, and the remainder of the load was filled from the jump list.

In the meantime, we were hearing rumors about an earthquake, a landslide, a flood and a dam break. Nobody really seemed to know what was going on, as usual. We loaded up on the DC-2 with Cookie Calloway



*Bob Nicol and Al Hammond at Refuge Point 1999*

as the pilot, Joe Roemer and Randy Hurst as spotters. The jumpers were Al Hammond, foreman in charge, "Andy" Andersen, Jim Burleigh, Lowell Hansen, Bill McLaughlin, Pat Scheid, Dick Tracy and me. We figured that the West Yellowstone jumpers would be going also but it turned out their airplane was broke or gone or something.

When we flew into Madison Canyon from the west it looked like half the mountain on the south side of the canyon had been cut in half and dumped into the river. We could see that a portion of the highway was under the slide and that there were lots of vehicles and people trapped between there and Hebgen lake, a few miles upstream. Several dust plumes were coming off the main slide, which turned out to be mini-landslides caused by aftershocks.

We made a couple of passes up and down the canyon trying to sort things out, then we got word that the Hebgen Dam had been cracked and could break at any time. Hammond said we'd better get those people to higher ground as quickly as possible.

Survivors had laid out a white SOS near the dam. Near it was a bunch of people, and another large group was about halfway down the canyon at a place

now known as Refuge Point.

We decided to split the load. Al and three guys jumped by the dam and then Andersen and the rest of us took the lower spot. The air was kind of rough and it had started to rain. I was holding into the wind but was going downhill and backward a lot faster than I wanted to. There were some real impressive parachute landing falls made right among the rescues that day. As I was thrashing around trying to get myself untangled several folks ran up and asked if I was OK. Seemed a little ironic somehow.

We found a lot of hurt people and a few fatalities. Others were missing. There was a lot of confusion too, but folks were helping each other as best they could and had mostly done what could be done at that point. We did a little first aid work while trying to get everybody to move up the hill. That was the hard part. They just didn't want to leave their vehicles, their tents or any belongings down by the river. We got most of them moved up a ways but not near far enough as far as I was concerned. Turned out they were right. The dam was cracked sure enough, but it never did break.

As I said, it was raining a little, and a couple of ladies asked "Big Andy" if they could use his parachute for a tent. He couldn't refuse, of course but was not too happy when later he saw that they had cut off all the lines right at the skirt.

It seemed like the air in that canyon was full of little airplanes, mostly news media and sightseers, I

suppose. There was probably some officialdom up there but they had no radio contact or control of any kind. Cookie, the DC-2 pilot, told me later that trying to drop our cargo in that sort of deal was something he didn't want to do ever again.

About noon, helicopters started coming in bringing some real medical types and the law. They started moving injured people out and things started to settle down. Later in the day they got the road open. The jumpers started working along the river and the rapidly rising Quake Lake searching for survivors and victims. We looked in vehicles, campers and trailers and took the license plates off everything that was or would be under water. There are probably a lot of once-new rigs that are under the surface of that lake today. We continued searching until later the following day when most of us were demobed back to Missoula. Al Hammond stayed on to help explain things to the fact-finding officials.

Many changes have been made in Madison Canyon since the quake, including a new highway above the new lake, lots of roadside markers referring to the event and a visitors' center right on top of the landslide.

The commemorative program began with people gathering in a meadow near Refuge Point. Shortly thereafter the West Yellowstone Twin Otter showed up and dropped Greg Anderson and eight of his folks on a proficiency jump. Everybody got right into the spot



*Jumpers and others at Refuge Point Memorial. Standing L-R: Matt Bower, Brad Sauer, Tom Romenello, Chuck Flach, Charlie Wetzel, Al Hammond, Bob Nicol, Bob Nicol Jr. Kneeling L-R:*

*Joel Gosswiller, Bill Craig, Cindy Champion, Timo Rova, Ashley Sites, Greg Anderson. (All photos courtesy Bob Nicol)*

and were soon mixing with the crowd answering the usual questions. It turned into a nice show-and-tell thing. From there, everybody moved up to a viewpoint above the visitors' center where a local pastor delivered a service reciting the names of each person who had died there, many of whom were entombed in the landslide below.

The folks on the Gallatin Forest and volunteers at the visitors' center did a great job of putting the memorial together and contacting survivors or their families who are scattered all over the country. And, the West Yellowstone jumpers helped lighten the

mood of what otherwise might have been a somber event. 🕊

*Robert H. Nicol rookied at Nine Mile in 1952 and jumped eight seasons, six of them on the New Mexico detail. His last jump season was 1961. Bob started flying for a living in 1962 with Johnson Flying Service and has also flown for Intermountain, Southern Air Transport, Interior Airways, Evergreen International, the US Forest Service, Empire and Leading Edge. He served 2-1/2 years in the Marine Corps. Bob's still flying and he lives near Hamilton, Mont.*

## Ten Seconds over Birch Hill

By Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)



*Jerry Dixon over Birch Hill (above). Jerry Dixon at McCall 1982 (right). (Both photos courtesy Jerry Dixon)*

**O**ur Volpar circled low over Birch Hill just north of the Alaska smokejumper base at Ft. Wainwright. It was our second practice jump that afternoon of May 14, 1976. As a fifth year jumper recently arrived from McCall, I was excited about being a BLM Alaska jumper. The winds were erratic and jumpers were scattered over the landing zone, a small depression in the birch-covered hill.

My exit felt okay, but something didn't feel right: My risers were tight against my face and there was no opening shock. I pulled the risers apart and looked up to see a streamer. Having had a Mae West and a delayed opening during previous jumps I knew what they looked like. But a total malfunction of a main was something I never thought I would have to deal with.

I'm standing in the dirt road after the 4th of July running race at Eagle on the Yukon talking with Tony Beck (Fairbanks '94). Tony says, "You're the jumper who had the double malfunction. Tell me about it."

Actually I was shocked that he had heard of it as it had occurred 20 years before. Nothing was ever written about it, and I didn't talk about it. Some members of my immediate family still don't know. It then occurred to me that my malfunction had become part of our smokejumpers' oral history.

Pulling apart the risers I looked up at the canopy. Then I said one word that to my knowledge I have only once in my life uttered in questioning disbelief: "Jesus." I reached down, grabbed my reserve ripcord, pulled and punched, turning my face away. The reserve blew past me, hesitated at the edge of the main and then flowed up alongside it. I was stunned to see it clinging to the side of the main. Immediately I pulled the risers apart, looked down and could see the trees below expanding to the edge of my vision.

Had I frozen at that point I would have bounced. There's no doubt the finest jumper training in the world then played a role in saving my life. That week I had (much to my chagrin) gone off the training tower innumerable times to practice throwing my reserve. I hadn't practiced that since "Ned" training in McCall five years before. However, the Alaska trainers had insisted that we keep at it until we got it right.

I knew I had no time to cut away the main and that I had to make the reserve work. My training told me to pull in the reserve and throw it out again. PULL IT IN AND THROW IT OUT.

The most surprising aspect of this entire event was what happened next. My mind cleared. Actually, in my entire life there have only been a few times when things were so crystal clear. All fleeting thoughts were gone. There was almost a calm. My entire world became the lines leading to my reserve, and there was not only a remarkable lack of panic but an eternity between each heartbeat. Incredibly, I was not just focused, but free.

I grabbed my reserve lines and started pulling in the chute. Either the act of pulling or the fact that my body was arched so that I could pull harder caused the reserve to deploy. It seemed to explode and I could actually see what appeared to be dust pulse from the canopy. The main started to billow and I was on the ground.

"Did you hit hard?" Tony asks me. "Yes I did, the reserve was attached in front so I was leaning back." "Did you jump again?" "Not for six years. I jumped again at McCall in '82. It was like starting over but it was great."

My back hurt and I was in shock. I left my chutes on the ground and walked away. Bob Steiner (Boise '71) who jumped right after me in the same load said, "We watched you go below the tree line trailing two malfunctioned chutes. Everyone in the plane thought you went in."

Another jumper told me, "We all went out after you with our hands on our reserves." Other jumpers had different perspectives: "I hear you almost died today. Ha." "You had a close one, I'll bet anyone on the base would buy you a beer tonight." "Death always sits

on your left shoulder. You'll get over it."

It made for an interesting learning experience for the Alaska Rookie class of '76. One of the trainers had tried to get a mannequin on board our flight with a streamer chute. The idea was to throw it out in the middle of our practice jump and give the rookies something to think about. The plane was held up for a few minutes but the prop couldn't be found. On the ground other trainers were still thinking there would be a mannequin dropped and commented that they must have found the mannequin because there was the streamer. Then one exclaimed, "Hey wait a minute. Its hands are moving."

The loft foreman examined my chute and found no burn lines. Both chutes were untangled. There was no evidence to suggest why they did not open immediately. That year experiments were started with anti-inversion netting, which I jumped with in '82. It seems to have eliminated total malfunctions.

The jumper who packed my chute and I didn't speak much after that. Perhaps I had some deep-seated need to blame someone. It took 20 years to come to grips with the fact that a poor exit and lines that caught under my backboard probably caused my malfunction. Several years ago at a wedding I ran into him. He gave me a big hug and said, "I'm sorry I packed the chute that almost killed you."

"Your chute was fine," I said, "it was my lousy exit that did it," and we continued dancing to the Mariachi band. 🌵

*Jerry left jumping in '76, flew detection for two seasons, became a Fire Management Officer at Eagle, Alaska, then returned for one last jump season. He teaches gifted students in Seward, Alaska.*

## The NSA Trail Maintenance Project— A Midwinter Update

By Dave Owen (Missoula '51)

Responses to the trail maintenance article in the last *Smokejumper* magazine indicate we have the makings of two or more six- to 12-person crews, and we're filling up fast. The enthusiasm and support is outstanding. There appears to be no shortage of projects on the Flathead National Forest, but it will take time to get a commitment (just like last year) on picking up the "grub" tab and pack support.

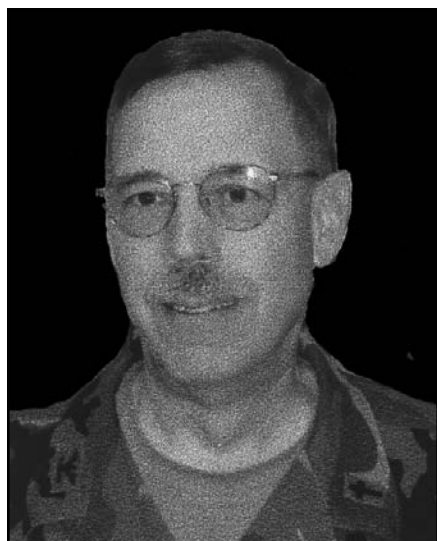
Our winter appears average in the mountains, however, we've had a couple of what we westerners call "wind events," on Oct. 31 and Jan. 9,

so we can expect more windfalls than we've had in recent years.

There are ongoing discussions within the Forest Service, apparently on accident insurance coverage for volunteers. That issue will be ironed out by summer. A potential safety requirement: One full day of horsemanship training may be required for use of the critters on Forest Service projects. We'll keep crews posted.

If you're interested in taking part, send a note to that effect to NSA headquarters. We may have vacancies if some of our current volunteers drop out.

# The Capped Toe



**By Tom Decker**  
(Idaho City '64)

REMEMBER YOUR FIRST pair of jump boots?

Mine were a pair of Whites. The year before I became a jumper, I was limbing trees on a slash project and stuck an axe where it didn't belong, into the side of my boot. The toe healed; the boot didn't.

Mr. Hill, our hometown shoe repairman just shook his head and said the best he could do would be to "cap it." He did, and I finished the season with a capped toe boot.

What Mr. Hill couldn't fix was my hurt pride at having messed up my only good pair of boots. Everywhere I went, people asked, "What happened to your boot?" Sheepishly I'd tell them the sad story about how not to limb a downed tree. The capped toe underlined the wisdom of those who had told me the "right way to do it."

I still have a picture of the infamous capped-toed boot—in mid air, so to speak—somewhere over Marble Creek in the Idaho backcountry. Julio Bilbao (Idaho City '64) took the picture when Jim Lafferty (Idaho City '63) and I made the jump.

Eventually the capped boots were replaced with another pair, which I recently had refitted at the factory, and true to the advertisement, they're good as new, now almost 35 years old.

Would that life were as easily fixed as a pair of boots!

Most of us have capped toe stories that tell of our foolhardiness in life and love. We've made adjustments here and there, capped a toe when we could, and occasionally thrown 'em away to

get a new pair.

Old Mr. Hill charged me about \$5 for the capped toe, and I thought it was cheap. The rebuild on my last set of jump boots was just under \$100.

The cost of boot repair is minimal to the cost of fixing a life. The only way a life can be fixed is with love and hard work. God invests his love for each of us in way that's bigger than we'd ever imagine in a hundred million good jumps, but it's up to us to put the hard work into life and its relationships to make them work.

A lot of us have reason to be proud of the caps on our toes! 🦌

*Tom Decker jumped from Idaho City in '64 and '65. He finished seminary in '69, then served Lutheran parishes and the National Guard before entering the Army as a chaplain in '75. He's now post chaplain at Ft. Huachuca, Arizona.*

## New Treasurer Comes Aboard

Dean Longanecker, who jumped from North Cascades from 1968 through 1973, has signed on as the NSA's new treasurer. He replaces Jon McBride (Missoula '54), who's served three years in that position and is now moving to another important job within the Association. He'll be deputy to our new Trail Boss, **Dave Owen** (Missoula '51).



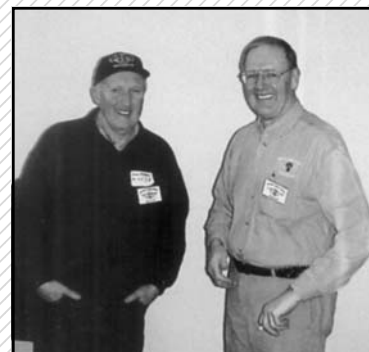
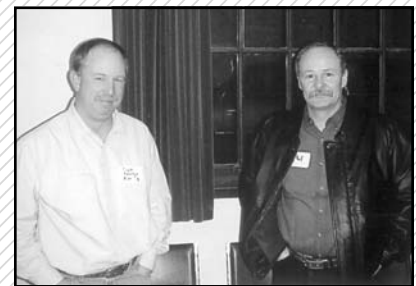
As Treasurer, Dean is automatically a member of your Association's Board of Directors and Executive Board.

Dean, who grew up in Winthrop, is president of Mid State Bank, with headquarters in Waterville, Wash., and branches in Orondo and Coulee City, Wash. He has a bachelor's in economics from Eastern Washington University. He and his wife, Joyce, are the parents of Sean of Omak, Wash., and Darby, who lives in Boise. 🦌



# Pictures taken at NSA sponsored socials in Boise and Redmond

(photos courtesy of Bob Webber and Tom Albert)



## Reunion 2000 Important Information

Fri. June 16, Sat. June 17, Sun. June 18

When making your room reservations for Reunion 2000, **be sure to mention the “National Smokejumper Reunion” for the special rates.** The Reunion Committee encourages you to make reservations now as Redding is a popular summer vacation spot and there is another big event (upscale Harley aficionados) in town the same weekend. Redding’s “Hotel Row” is just a few miles away from the beautiful Redding Convention Center which is located right next to the Sacramento River. **Call the hotel/motel directly. Do it now!**

Comfort Inn.....	Nice National Chain.....	(530) 221-6530 .....	\$59.0
River Inn .....	Walking distance to Conv. Center.....	(530) 241-9500 .....	\$50/\$60.00
Red Lion Hotel .....	Full service/Reunion Headquarters .....	(530) 221-8700 .....	\$69.00
Holiday Inn .....	Full service/nice.....	(530) 221-7500 .....	\$89.00
Oxford Suites .....	BF, beer & wine bar, pool, sauna .....	(530) 221-0100 .....	\$70/\$75/\$85
Best Inn /Suites.....	BF, pool, sauna .....	(530) 221-4472 .....	\$63/\$68*
Marina RV Park .....	On the river, close to Conv. Center ....	(530) 241-4396 .....	\$19.80

\*Lower prices indicate 1 bed (1-2 persons); next indicates 2 beds (2-4 persons); last indicates more than 2 beds.

**A complete Reunion 2000 mailing was sent during February. If you have questions or need help, contact Chuck Sheley (530) 893-0436 or [cnkgshaley@earthlink.net](mailto:cnkgshaley@earthlink.net)**

If you would like a booth or table to show your product or have a book for sale (other than authors selling through the NSA merchandising table), please contact Jerry Vice ([jvice@aol.com](mailto:jvice@aol.com)—or fax at 530-243-1251).

## Can You Help with *Smokejumper* Magazine?

As we continue to round off the corners on *Smokejumper*, I have three areas in which we need help. Read the job descriptions and let me know if you can do.

**Profile writer:** We need a person to write profiles and short stories on members of the Smokejumper Community. The writer would work closely with me and having email is a necessity in order to cut phone costs. The writer would contact the featured individual, obtain the data necessary for an article, write and edit the article and forward to *Smokejumper*. We should have at least one profile per edition. If I get several writers, each would only need to do a couple features per year.

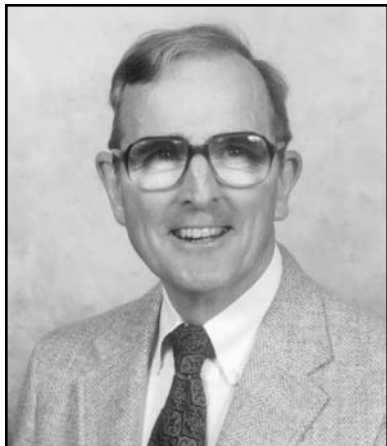
**Illustrator:** I have several leads but can always use that artistic individual. You know, the person who drew cartoons during staff meetings. Email contact would be a big help but not necessary. We need illustrations for page breaks and to go with articles that do not have pictures. Again, the more help, the less work.

**Advertising Manager:** We’re approaching 1,400 circulation and have a readership in a wide variety of occupations and locations. I would love to have a color cover, but that is an additional expense. We could print a page of NSA members’ business cards similar to a school’s annual booster program. That’s an easy and inexpensive way for a member to show support for the NSA and plug his or her business. *Smokejumper* has obtained a listing of advertisers from a magazine that directly targets wildland firefighters. We can connect those advertisers with many persons who are in management positions in the wildland firefighting.

We need a person to make the contacts, make the sale and coordinate with the editor. E-mail availability is very important.

If you can help in any of the above areas, please contact me: Chuck Sheley (530) 893-0436, [cnkgshaley@earthlink.net](mailto:cnkgshaley@earthlink.net). ☎

# BOOK REVIEW



by **Starr Jenkins**  
(Cave Junction '48)

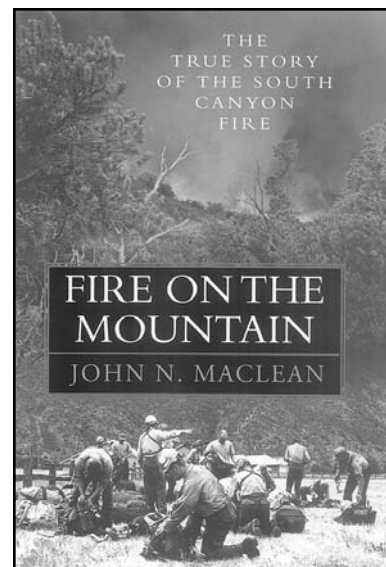
AUTHOR OF  
*SMOKEJUMPERS, '49*  
AND *BROTHERS IN THE SKY*

After five years of research and writing, John Maclean has produced *Fire on the Mountain*, with the subtitle, "The true story of the South Canyon Fire." The South Canyon Fire, of course, is really the Storm King Mountain Fire of July 2 - 11, 1994, near Glenwood Spring, Colo. That is the fire that burned 14 firefighters to death, including three smokejumpers (Roger Roth, Jim Thrash and Don Mackey), two helitack firefighters (Robert Browning and Richard Tyler) and nine of the Prineville, Ore., Hotshots (Kathi Beck, Tami Bickett, Scott Blecha, Levi Brinkley, Doug Dunbar, Terri Hagen, Bonnie Holtby, Rob Johnson and Jon Kelso, formerly a Missoula jumper). If this sounds like a near repeat of the Mann Gulch Fire of 1949, it looked that way to John, a former *Chicago Tribune* reporter and editor. For it was John's father, Norman Maclean, who wrote the definitive book published in 1992 on the Mann Gulch Fire, *Young Men and Fire*. That moving account gave the 13 smokejumpers killed and the three jumpers who survived worldwide fame and sympathy as it probed the what and why of that firestorm. Norman

Maclean was already famous for his previous book, *A River Runs Through It*, which Robert Redford made into a great movie. Norman Maclean died in 1990, so his son John felt that he should write a similar book about this similar tragedy 45 years after Mann Gulch.

So how does he do? The answer is very well indeed. Here we get the inexorable march of a searing, storm-driven fire season with routine mistakes and misjudgments leading inevitably toward utter tragedy. We see how a baking drought over the western slope of the Colorado Rockies couples with a tremendous lightning storm (5600 strikes in the first 24 hours on *one* district) set off 38 fires at once in a Bureau of Land Management fire district that normally gets just 80 fires in a whole season. The least-dangerous looking of these 38 was the one in a couple of trees on Hell's Gate Ridge, 3,000 feet above I-70 in the canyon of the Colorado River a few miles west of Glenwood Springs. Two jumpers or two helitack men or even two fire-retardant tankers could have put that one out on the morning of July 3, or July 4, or maybe, even July 5. But through bureaucratic infighting, the incompetence of the BLM fire bosses, their preoccupation with the many other fires going on in their district and their hesitancy at calling for the needed resources in time, 49 firefighters were finally, on July 6, deployed *above* a far-too-big fire on steep, worthless, tinder-dry slopes of highly inflammable Gambel oak brush on a Red Flag Warning day.

John Maclean tells the terrible story well, and the book is totally convincing as to who is primarily to blame for the disaster. John shows how 35 of the 49 escaped by desperate flight when the blow-up came. But he also shows how the fated 14, some jumpers, some helitack men and some hotshots, were trapped by the swift explo-



John N. Maclean's  
*Fire on the Mountain*  
New York: William Morrow & Company, 1999. Hardcover, 275 pages, \$24

sion of the flames below and behind them on a slope too steep to climb with the needed speed.

In this reviewer's opinion, John Maclean has written a better book than that of his highly acclaimed father. *Fire on the Mountain* is a clearer, more readable, more unified book than *Young Men and Fire*; largely because it sticks to the subject of what happened and does not get preoccupied with the author's anguish as a detective ferreting out the mystery of what happened. John's book is also much stronger as a tribute and memorial to the brave young individuals who died, for he gives moving personal sketches of each person, wonderful final photos and the sense of personal loss we feel for such tragic, needless deaths. Thus John Maclean's book, though not without flaws, is a gripping read and a major piece of firefighting lore for the last half century. 🕯

*Starr is a retired English professor from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. He graduated from the University of New Mexico in '48, received an MA from Stanford in '59, and his Ph.D from New Mexico in '72.*

# Lolo Forest Needs Labor, Money for Jumper Interpretive Trail

By Lynne Sholty  
(Ninemile Ranger District)

**H**undreds of smokejumpers trained at Camp Menard on the Lolo National Forest's Ninemile Ranger Station from 1941 to 1953. Now, all that remains of the once-busy training site are some concrete bunkhouse foundations, the grassy plot of the baseball diamond and lots of memories.

Ninemile District personnel are developing an interpretive trail at Camp Menard to tell the smokejumping story. The trail, to loop around the picnic area, will have signs that will explain not only the site's history, but also give visitors an idea of what a week of training was like.

Missoula rookie jumpers will do the majority of the trail construction during their training in June, but the district needs labor and financial contributions to finish the job.

We've received \$1,000 from the Missoula Smokejumpers' Welfare Fund and a National Forest Foundation grant, but need matching contributions up to \$4000. The money will pay for the production of the signs and a self-guided tour brochure. We've set aside the last week of August to finish sprucing up the trail. Anyone who would like to spend a bit of time on the business end of a shovel or rake will be welcome. We'll also install the signs at that time.

The Camp Menard Smokejumper Interpretive Trail will complement not only the visitor center at the Ninemile Ranger Station, but will also strengthen ties to the Aerial Fire Depot's visitor center in Missoula.

If you're interested in contributing, please contact



*Historic photos above and below from early Smokejumper training center at Camp Menard. (Courtesy of Lynne Sholty and Wayne Williams)*

Lynne Sholty or Ken Britton at the Ninemile Ranger District, 20325 Remount Road, Huson, MT 59846, phone (406) 626-5201. My e-mail address is [sholty\\_lynne\\_w/r1\\_lolo@fs.fed.us](mailto:sholty_lynne_w/r1_lolo@fs.fed.us). 📧



# "Just The Stats, Ma'am" Report On 1999 Season

## Alaska

Sixty-six jumpers were assigned to the Bureau of Land Management base, including six of the 11 rookies who began training. The crew amassed 454 fire jumps on 93 fires in the 49<sup>th</sup> State, and 233 fire jumps in the Lower 48. In addition, the Alaskans made a total of 638 practice and project jumps. Four minor injuries occurred during the season.

Four Russian jumpers on loan to the Boise BLM base were among the 108 "Outside" BLM and Forest Service smokejumpers deployed on Alaska fires.

Personnel moves included Operations Logistical Supervisor John Gould's (Fairbanks '81) transfer to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Tom Kubichek (Fairbanks '90) replaced him. Training Specialist Al Seiler (Fairbanks '85) left that position, which is currently vacant. Spotter John McColgan (Fairbanks '89) transferred to a Fuels Management Specialist job with the Alaska Fire Service, and Fred Hernandez (Redding '88) and Rick Thompson (Fairbanks '89) became fully qualified spotters.

The project used four aircraft, a Sherpa, Dornier and two Casas, one of which was shared with the North Cascades Forest Service base. In addition to jumpers, the aircraft dropped more than 100 tons of cargo.

## Boise

A total of 61 jumpers were assigned, for the second busiest season in the BLM base's history. That number includes five transfers from the Forest Service and two from the Alaska crew.

Boise jumpers staffed 173 fires, including 155 to which they jumped. Those were in Alaska, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada and Utah. All told, they made 764 fire jumps and 790 training and experimental jumps. They suffered four minor injuries.

Jumpers also filled many positions on Incident Command Teams, took part in 40 prescribed fire projects, were detailed to district fire management positions, and served as trainers for a variety of fire-related jobs.

## Grangeville

The base's 32 jumpers made 178 jumps to 57 fires plus 188 training jumps, and also "pounded" to 16 fires. They suffered two injuries, a sprained and bruised

ankle that was a lost-time accident, and a minor sprained ankle.

In addition to Idaho, Grangeville jumpers fought fire in Alaska, California, Florida, Kentucky, New Mexico, Missouri, Montana, Oregon, South Carolina and Wyoming.

Project work included a beetle suppression detail on north Idaho's Panhandle National Forests, prescribed fire work in Idaho, Montana, Mississippi, Oregon and South Carolina, a fire assignment in Kentucky, and a bug project in Chicago.

Brett Bittenbender (McCall '88) was detailed into a squadleader job, and three other jumpers were assigned to season-long details, as a pilot trainee, a squad boss in Silver City, and fire operations foreman on the Bitterroot National Forest.

Aircraft assigned were a Twin Otter and Cessna 208B Grand Caravan. Grangeville and Boise were evaluating the latter, which proved to be an exceptionally fine jumper platform.

## McCall

The base fielded 68 jumpers, including two loaned by Russia. Five of the eight rookies hired in the spring completed training, all four females and one male. McCall jumpers made 509 fire jumps and 660 training jumps in Alaska, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada and New Mexico. They suffered five injuries.

Ten McCall jumpers spent a month in Virginia on prescribed fires, and four fought fires in Florida. Another five were on late-season detail to a fire crew in North Carolina, and five bashed beetles in Chicago.

Steve Daigh (McCall '93) and Fred Pavlovic (McCall '89) spent three months in Russia participating in that nation's rappelling and fire programs, and Dan Felt (McCall '77) studied the Russian aerial observer program for a month. Several other jumpers helped promote the IMAX movie "Wildfire" in Boise, Los Angeles, Orlando and Washington, D.C.

Aircraft assigned or detailed to the base included two Twin Otters, a turbo-powered DC-3 and a Cessna Caravan. In addition to jumpers, assigned aircraft dropped 26,738 pounds of cargo.

## Missoula

The 60 jumpers assigned to Missoula parachuted to 137 fires and made 479 practice jumps. Only one injury occurred, a hairline wrist fracture. Base person-

prescribed fires and eight to Chicago for the beetle suppression project.

Three Missoula jumpers conducted a review and audit of the Smithers Smokejumper Base in British Columbia. Twenty jumpers and a Twin Otter are assigned to the Canadian base. Its personnel use excess Forest Service parachutes. Four Canadian jumpers were integrated into the Missoula jump list in August and September.

John Smith (Missoula '82) was named assistant loadmaster, and two jumpers Willis Curdy (Missoula '71) and Mitch Kearns (Grangeville '89) were promoted to squad leaders.

## **North Cascades (Winthrop)**

Twenty jumpers were assigned, including five of the six rookies who began training. They made a total of 314 training jumps and 140 fire jumps, including fires out of Redmond, McCall, Redding, Alaska and Silver City.

A Twin Otter and a Casa 212, the latter shared with Alaska, were assigned for all or part of the season.

Project work included roofing bunkhouses and warehouses, climbing trees in Chicago, and prescribed fires in Washington State and South Carolina.

## **Redding**

The season was a record for the California base: 523 fire jumps to 82 fires within the region, surpassing the old record of 448 jumps to 78 fires set in 1987. For the first time ever, jumpers were used on all northern California forests and on the Los Padres National Forest.

Forty-two jumpers were assigned, including nine rookies, and they made a total of 492 training jumps. Redding personnel deployed to fires out of jumper bases in Grangeville, Missoula, Silver City, and Fairbanks and from South Lake Tahoe, Carson City,

Battle Mountain and Ely, Nev. One fracture occurred during a parachute landing.

Redding jumpers participated in details to South Carolina for prescribed burning, Silver City and Kentucky for fire suppression, and New York City for bug work. Nearer to home, they built osprey nests, banded eagles and collected wildlife genetic samples in national forests within California.

Two aircraft were assigned, a contract Twin Otter and a Forest Service-owned Sherpa.

## **Redmond**

Thirty-two jumpers were assigned to the base, eight of whom were rookies. Base personnel also provided parachute training to Special Forces personnel, and plan to continue that program in future years.

They made a total of 218 fire jumps and 238 practice jumps. Boosters included two Canadian smokejumpers, one of whom made his first fire jump out of Redmond.

The base uses two agency-owned Sherpas.

Details included 10 jumpers to a fire in Ontario, Canada and to prescribed fire programs in the Southern and Northwest Forest Service regions. Local projects included mistletoe eradication, stand thinning and helping monitor mushroom pickers.

Jumpers suffered two serious injuries, a broken back and a broken ankle.

## **West Yellowstone**

The base was staffed with 13 West Yellowstone Forest Service jumpers, one National Park jumper, two jumpers detailed from Missoula and four to six from the Bureau of Land Management.

They made a total of 69 fire jumps to 13 fires, and ground-attacked another five. Assigned jumpers also "boosted" other bases. 🌲

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# **ODDS & ENDS**

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**Tom Kovalicky (Missoula '61)**, wants to remind all that the National World War II Memorial Fund is still seeking donors. Donations are payable to WWII Memorial Fund, 2300 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 501, Arlington, VA 22201

**John Myhre (Missoula '77)**, fire management officer on the St. Joe Ranger District., of the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, retired Oct. 1, 1999. John will join his wife Lynnette in the operation of the Rusty Gate Tree Farm which produces Christmas and ornamental trees.

**Larry Wright (Missoula '71)**, retired in February after 27 seasons of smokejumping. During his long career, Larry had 450 injury-free jumps of which 247 were fire jumps.

**George Honey (North Cascades '40)**, one of the original jumpers, celebrated his 94th birthday on Feb. 10. George is being treated for rectal cancer. In addition, he has a replacement hip and recently broke an arm in a fall. However, he still carries on. He'd appreciate cards at Bell House & Home, 8419 Entiat Valley Rd., Entiat, WA 98822.

### **Helena NF Seeks Funds to Erect Smokejumper Bronze**

The Helena National Forest needs \$2,500 to erect a bronze casting of a jumper jacket and helmet at a landing on the Missouri River near the site of the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire that killed 13 smokejumpers.

Helena District Ranger Duane Harp said the casting would be put on permanent display at the



Meriwether Picnic Area, one drainage west of Mann Gulch. He said two bronze plaques, one listing the Mann Gulch jumpers and the other dedicated to the Lewis & Clark Expedition, had been on display at the picnic area for several decades. However, he explained, they were on the canyon's wall and not accessible to persons with ambulatory restrictions.

"Following on-site inspections, a site plan was designed, a construction contract let, and a new podium with native stone facing was erected to display the two plaques. But before the Lewis & Clark plaque could be duplicated and placed on the stone podium, the Mann Gulch commemorative bronze was cast and the decision was made to remodel the podium and install the new bronze adjacent to the Mann Gulch Fire plaque," Harp said.

The ranger explained that donated funds would be used for redesign and remodeling of the podium and installation of the bronze.

The NSA donated \$1,000 towards casting of the bronze prior to the 50-year Mann Gulch commemoration last August.

Donations are being accepted by the Helena Forest Foundation, 7653 Canyon Ferry Road, Helena, MT 59602. They are tax-deductible.

#### **Region 4 Smokejumping, 1943 through 1999**

Those meticulous smokejumper records keepers of the Forest Service's Intermountain Region have compiled the following statistics. Who's to argue?

##### *McCall Base 1943-99*

Fire Jumps .....	21,441
Training Jumps .....	22,326
Rescue Jumps .....	60

##### *Idaho City Base 1948-69*

Fire Jumps .....	2,642
Training Jumps .....	2,148
Rescue Jumps .....	10

##### *Boise Base 1970-79*

Fire Jumps .....	2,010
Training Jumps .....	1751
Rescue .....	0

**Total Jumps ..... 52,388**

Jumps for trail project work and pre-suppression helispot construction are under training jumps. The data, from Leo Cromwell's records, include all jumps made by Region 4 jumpers regardless of location.

**Leo Cromwell (Idaho City '66)**, has donated a few copies of his booklet "**Who's Who in Region 4 Smokejumping 1943-97**" to the NSA. This is the most complete compilation of data that one can imagine, a must for every R-4 jumpers' library. Use the merchandise order form, write in the above title and add your check to the NSA for \$10.00 S/H included.

**For those of you who knew Tom DeJong**, his family is hosting a memorial at Snow Bowl Ski Area July 22, 2000. Call Betty Violette for information and reservations at (406) 837-6158 or check

at [mindsprint.com/~millerdh/index.html](http://mindsprint.com/~millerdh/index.html).  
**Volunteers Sought for Wilderness River Work (Tom Kovalicky Missoula '61)**

We can help the Flathead National Forest's Spotted Bear Ranger District complete the field season with a two-person volunteer river patrol team that has rafting experience on Class I, II and III waters.

The job will require eight to 10 days between the last two weeks of July and the first week of August. It's primarily for cleanup of campsites used by boaters on the South Fork of the Flathead River, site restoration and public contacts.

Here's what the trip is like: Three days' walking or two days' horseback riding to reach the launch site at the old Big Prairie Ranger Station deep in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Then, four to five days of floating and camping, and a day's travel from takeout to the Spotted Bear Ranger Station.

Horse packing experience would be a definite plus, as the Forest Service would provide a pack animal to carry personal gear to the launch site. The Forest Service will pack in a raft, camping gear and food.

The fishing and scenery are the bonuses for the "sweet sweat" and getting your hands and back muscles back into shape.

*Note: Tom has done two tours such as that described above. For more information, contact him at (208) 983-0281, or write him at P.O. Box 48, Grangeville, ID 83530-0048.*

**Tom Decker (Idaho City '64)** reports that **Tim Taylor (Missoula '60)** is doing great after recent kidney surgery. Tim works on Ft. Huachuca, Ariz., as chief of the Family Support Division. 🐾

Read the election biographies then mark and mail your ballot for six of the following nine candidates:

Jim Cherry  
Mark Corbet  
Leo Cromwell  
Bill Eastman  
John Gordon  
Tom Kovalicky  
Larry Lufkin  
Fred Rohrbach  
Ron Stoleson

**Ballots should be received by May 1**

# OBITUARIES

We want to know! If you learn of the serious illness or death of a member of the smokejumper community, whether or not he or she is a member, your Association wants to know about it. We would like to express your Associations's sentiments and spread the word

to others. Please phone, write or email our Missoula headquarters and/or our webmaster (webmaster-@smokejumpers.com) including the name, address and phone number of the subject's next of kin. We'll take it from there.

## **WALTER MORRIS SMITH (Boise '71)**

Walter, 52, died Jan. 23, at St. Patrick' Hospital in Missoula. He jumped from Boise through 1973, Missoula from 1974 to 1977, and again in '79, '80 and '84, then from Redding in '94. Born July 26, 1947, in Minneapolis, he was raised in Hamilton, Mont. After graduation from Hamilton High School he enlisted in the Marine Corps from 1966-68 and served as a rifleman in Vietnam, receiving two Purple Hearts. He graduated from the University of Montana in 1973 with a bachelor's in sociology. His love of the outdoors led to a long career in the U.S. Forest Service first as a trail crew member, then smokejumper. Walt volunteered for many years on the ski patrol and loved fishing, hiking, hunting and mountain biking. He retired in August 1997 as an assistant fire management officer for the Bitterroot National Forest.

Walt married Shirly Coolidge in 1976, and they had one daughter, Mary Elizabeth "Polly" Smith, born in 1988. He's survived by his wife, daughter and his mother, Bettye, all of Hamilton; sisters Betsy of Kansas City, Mo., and Quinty of Amsterdam, Holland; his brother Sam, sister-in-law Julie, and nieces Ella and Maize Smith, all of Helena. A college scholarship fund for Polly has been established. Donations can be sent to the Polly Smith Scholarship Fund, c/o Citizens Bank, P.O. Box 393, Hamilton, MT 59840. Condolence may be sent to Mrs. Walter Smith, 37 Ricketts Rd., Hamilton, MT 59840-9324.

## **DAROLD C. THORNTON (North Cascades '69)**

Darold, 50, who jumped from the North Cascades (Winthrop) base from 1969 through 1972, died of cancer on Dec. 31 in East Wenatchee, Wash. A college graduate, he worked as a lookout on the Okanogan National Forest for two years before joining the smokejumpers. Following that, he worked for the ERA Electric Co. in Twisp, then transferred to the Douglas County Public Utility District in 1977. He had been a line-man, wireman, foreman and, for the past five years, a power dispatcher. His brother Dell, a 1966 Winthrop jumper, preceded him in death. Survivors include three sons and one daughter, four grandchildren and his wife, Barbara, whose address is 3900 Sunset Highway, East Wenatchee, WA 98802; phone (509) 884-4553.

## **BENJAMIN MCBRIDE, JR. (Idaho City '63)**

Ben, 61, died Jan. 11 in Longmont., Colo. of complications from Alzheimer's Disease. He jumped from Idaho City through 1965, in Boise in 1971, then from McCall in 1985. He made it to the last reunion in Missoula in 1995 but began suffering from Alzheimer's shortly thereafter.

Ben was born on July 10, 1938, in Selma, Ala., and married Colleen McEwan in 1985 in Tustin, Calif. He had been the chief adult probation office for Cochise County, Ariz. He enjoyed

running, hiking, camping, dogs and jazz music.

Survivors include wife, Colleen and daughter, Katie of Lafayette, Colo., brothers, Joel of Westminster, Noel of Fort Smith, Ark., and twin sister, Dawn Quiros of Irvine, Calif.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Alzheimer's Assoc., 825 E. Speer Blvd. Suite #1, Denver, CO., 80218. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Benjamin McBride, 1053 Artemis Circle, Lafayette, CO 80026-0261.

## **CRAIG EUGENE SMITH (Missoula '57)**

Craig, 62, who jumped from Missoula in 1957 and 1958, died Feb. 8 at a full-time care facility near his home in Klamath Falls, Ore. He had been confined there several years, suffering from Parkinson's Disease and early dementia. Born Sept. 22, 1937 in Plano, Ill., he was a 1960 University of Montana forestry graduate and later earned an MBA from the University of Oregon. He worked for the Bureau of Land Management in California and Alaska for six years, then for several timber companies including the Intermountain Lumber Co., Wyerhauser, Plum Creek and the Tuolumne Corp., in Hong Kong, Korea, Montana, Oregon and Washington. Survivors include his wife, Gwen, a daughter, son and three step-sons. Memorial contributions may be made to the Parkinson's Center of Oregon, 3181 SW Sam Jackson Park Rd., Portland, OR 97201, or the Alzheimer's Association, 1311 NW 21st Ave., Portland, OR 97209. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Gwen Smith, 1195 Eagle Court, Klamath Falls, OR 97601.

## **EDGAR R. JONES (Cave Junction '64)**

Edgar died Oct. 27, 1999 from complications following cancer surgery. He jumped at Cave Junction for two years before enlisting in the Army where he served in the 101st Airborne Division's 801st Maintenance Battalion in Vietnam. Edgar attended Shasta Community College in 1964 and 1965 and was recently inducted into that school's Athletic Hall of Fame. He worked most of his life as a logger and mill worker. He was a nephew of pioneer smokejumper Francis Lufkin and cousin to NSA 1st Vice President Larry Lufkin. He's survived by his wife, Glenna, and son Roy Paul. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Glenna Jones at P.O. Box 153, Weaverville, CA 96093.

## **JAMES C. JACKSON (Missoula '44)**

Jim, 74, died Jan. 15 of a cerebral hemorrhage at his home in Stites, Idaho. He was born May 17, 1925 in Satanta, Kan. and came to Idaho with his family in 1938. He married Mary M. Potter of Orofino in 1944, then moved to Missoula where he was a smokejumper until 1947. He then moved to Kooskia, Idaho where he worked as a logger, store keeper, farmer, and motel and RV camp owner. Survivors include his wife, two sons

and a daughter. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Mary Jackson, Stites, Idaho 83552.

#### **DONALD ALSIP VOORHEES (McCall '48)**

Don, 73, died Dec. 25, 1999 of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease at St Mary's Regional Medical Center, Reno. Born in Twin Falls, Idaho, he jumped for one year out of McCall. He worked in the financial industry, retiring as vice president of First Interstate

Bank in 1985. He was an Eagle Scout, Navy veteran, attended the University of Idaho, and graduated from the University of Nevada-Reno and Pacific Coast Banking School in Washington State. His wife, Thelma, daughter Vicki Rhodes and son Bruce, all of Reno, survive him. A memorial fund has been established with St. Mary's Hospice of Northern Nevada, 3605 Grant Dr., Reno, NV 89509. Condolence may be sent to Mrs. Thelma Voorhees, 1941 Villa Way South, Reno, NV 89509.

## **Wayne Webb: A Common, Uncommon Man**

**By Lonnie "Mattress Back" Park (McCall '54)**



*Lonnie Park*

A LEGENDARY smoke-jumper and very special man and passed from our midst on Nov. 7, 1999.

Here's a brief history of Wayne Webb: A Weiser, Idaho native, he became a McCall smokejumper in 1946 after service in World War II with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division with which he fought in the Battle of the Bulge. He was a leader his entire career at McCall, a squadleader, loft

foreman and parachute specialist. He had 175 fire jumps and 300 jumps overall when he retired in 1975 after a distinguished 29-year career. In 1990, the new McCall jumper headquarters was dedicated as the "Wayne Webb Parachute Loft."

I met Wayne when I arrived in McCall in June 1954. I was fresh out of high school but had previously been "clued in" by my brother-in-law, Bus Bertram, who had helped me land the job of my dreams, that Wayne was a guy to be given special attention.

Bus said, "If you're going to make the grade, follow Wayne's lead and work hard to earn his respect. If he knows you're giving it your best shot he'll do his best by you. He's a squared-away guy but he won't tolerate fools."

I remember "clueing in" my fellow "Neds," Larry Paris and Jim Gabiola, about what Bus had told me. Larry and Jim would agree with me to this day that his advice served us well as we came to know and respect a true leader.

Despite his accomplishments, Wayne was not a man of startling physical dimensions. He was tall, slender, could do all the athletic things required, but that was not his long suit. Rather, he had an extremely high intellect, an equally high moral character and strong values.

Most of the crew was young, in college or college graduates, schoolteachers, forestry aspirants or professional jumper/squadleaders like Carl Roselli, Max Allen and "Paperlegs" Peterson. The guys weren't lacking in brainpower. I had become obsessed with riddles, committing them to memory. This was entertaining during slow times when I could "lay a test" on the guys. I had collected a pretty

good arsenal and it was fun to see them reach their solutions as the process provoked much discussion, mental machinations and swearing.

I remember vividly an event that occurred in my fourth year when I was working in the loft with Wayne and a group of about five or six. Work had slackened. Most of the chutes had been packed and we had time to shoot the breeze a little more than usual. So, I engaged our group with some of my most challenging riddles. Wayne aced every one. No one else laid a glove on him. I knew he was smart but I was astonished with the ease that he breezed through them. So were my thoroughly chagrined "heavyweight thinking type" cronies.

Wayne also had a matchless memory for forest geography, knew like the back of his hand the entire area in which we jumped. He could tell you everything, including names of previous fires, both large and small, names of creeks, mountains, divides, lakes and lookouts. For example, you could look at a place on the Forest Service map, ask Wayne where it was, and he'd tell you. That knowledge served us extremely well when we lucked out by getting him as a spotter. He knew the good spots, the ones to avoid, weather conditions and all the in-betweens that figure so importantly when dropping men.

Here was a humble fellow who was loved and respected by all. You could turn to Wayne when you needed advice and count on him to give you the full truth. He was inherently gentle but assertive, and he spoke with the confidence of his convictions. On fires his natural leadership made us all want to do a little more because we simply could not let him down.

His lovely and gracious wife Wilma was his constant companion and best friend. She always had a warm smile and a note of encouragement for "Wayne's guys."

It's extremely fortunate and quite rare to have the privilege of serving with a man of the caliber of Wayne Webb. I had this honor for five great years and his memory will always be with me. He was a common yet truly most uncommon man. 🌲

*After 36 years in banking, Lonnie Park recently retired from First Security Banking Corporation as Executive Vice President. He is a 1958 graduate of the University of Idaho with a degree in marketing. Lonnie jumped at McCall from 1954-58.*

# TRIPLE NICKLES INVITES SMOKEJUMPER MEMBERS

By Joseph L. Murchison, National President

**T**he 555th Parachute Infantry Association, Inc. invites all members of our brother association, the National Smokejumper Association, to become members of our proud association. We further recommend that members of our association who are smokejumpers become members of the National Smokejumper Association, and that our non-smokejumping members become NSA associate members.

Qualified parachutists or others who would qualify for military hazard duty pay may become regular members of the Triple Nickle Association and others who are patriotic Americans may become associate members. There is no race, creed, gender or ethnicity barrier.

**About us:** The 555th Parachute Infantry Association, Inc. was formed in August 1979 to maintain the legacy of the first and only all "colored" parachute organization in world history, The 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion.

It was nicknamed the "Triple Nickles" because of its numerical designation and the selection of 17 of the original 20-member "colored test platoon" from the 92nd Infantry (Buffalo) Division. Hence, the origin of the term Buffalo Nickles; the spelling derives from old English. Three buffalo nickels joined in a triangle or pyramid are our identifying symbol.

Seventeen of the first group of 20 colored troops completed jump training and were awarded the silver wings of parachutists in early 1944 in spite of wagers among white jump instructors, coupled with attempts to make it so, that they would not jump. Their success opened a veritable floodgate of young colored troops who wanted to join the elite ranks of parachutists.

Soon the Triple Nickles were a highly trained reinforced parachute infantry battalion, ready for combat, and stationed at Camp Mackall, N.C.

**Smokejumpers:** In early 1945, as the war in Europe was reaching a climax, the Triple Nickle Battalion received secret orders for a permanent



*Paratroopers of the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion stand at ease prior to boarding and Army Air Corps C-47 for a smokejumper fire in Oregon during 1945. The men were is-*

*sued smokejumper helmets and letdown ropes but wore sheepskin outer garments rather than canvas suits. (Courtesy Army Signal Corps)*

change of station. Feeling that they were finally going to engage the Adolph Hitler in Europe or Hirohito in the Pacific, the battalion happily prepared to fight our country's enemies. But that was not to be.

The Triple Nickle was entrained to Pendleton, Oregon, assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Services Command, trained by the U.S Forest Service, and became history's first military smokejumpers.

There were two reasons for this assignment, the first being that major commanders in Europe were leery of having highly trained colored paratroopers coming into contact with racist white elements of the time. Second, the Japanese were at the time floating incendiary devices attached to balloons across the Pacific Ocean, taking advantage of the jet stream's easterly flow, in an attempt to start forest fires in the northwestern United States.

The Forest Service asked the military for help and the Triple Nickle was ready, willing and able. The battalion answered some 36 fire calls with more than 1,200 individual jumps during the summer of 1945, operating from Pendleton and Chico, Calif. The operation covered all of the northwestern states including Montana.

During fire operations the battalion suffered numerous injuries but only one fatality. Malvin L. Brown, a medic assigned to the battalion's headquarters company, died on Aug. 6, 1945, after falling during a letdown from a tree in the Siskiyou National Forest near Roseburg, Ore. His death is, to our knowledge, the first recorded smokejumper fatality during a fire jump.

**Conclusions:** Seemingly, both our associations share a commonality in our histories as well as a pioneering spirit that pervades each individual who leaps out of airplanes. We already have cross memberships in our associations including this writer and the president of your association, Carl Gidlund.

Wayne Williams from the Missoula Base is one of our most valued life members. Walter Morris, the first individual assigned to the 555th Parachute Infantry Test Platoon and who answered fire calls from Pendleton, is a long-time NSA member. We should support each other by extending the trend.

The Triple Nickle Association issues plastic membership cards, publishes a newspaper for members, holds annual reunions, and shares a monumental pride and camaraderie. Our annual dues, whether regular or associate, are \$25; life membership is a one-time payment of \$300. Associate members (non-hazard duty types) cannot vote or hold elected office for two years. All smokejumpers are welcome and accepted.

If interested call (813) 0886-7845; write 555th P.I. A., PO Box 263127, Tampa, FL 33685; Email [triplenickle@juno.com](mailto:triplenickle@juno.com), or [the555pia@aol.com](mailto:the555pia@aol.com). An application will immediately be sent to you by snail mail.

Airborne, All The Way, and then some!! 🍄

## Missoula Base Manager Custer Retires

By Scott Belknap (McCall '83)

Dec. 31 marked the end of Dave Custer's 30-year career, one that made a lasting impact on the Smokejumper Project. His last assignment was manager of the R-1 base.

Dave began his career immediately after high school, working with the Aerial Photo Lab in Missoula. He also worked a fire assignment that year and caught the "fire bug." He spent the next two seasons with the St. Joe Interregional Fire Crew before he was accepted as a smokejumper in 1970. His second season was with the BLM smokejumper program in Fairbanks, but after encounters with Alaska mosquitoes, he returned to Missoula for the duration.

Dave became unit-training foreman in 1985 and in that capacity he worked in the off-season in the Northern Rockies Training Center's Aviation Training Section. In 1966, he returned to smokejumper operations as base manager. Until a permanent replacement is named, Dave's temporary replacement is Jim "Dirty" Linville. 🍄

**Deadline for  
articles, news and  
features for the July issue  
of *Smokejumper* is  
May 1**



Pictured attending the Mann Gulch 50th Anniversary Ceremony in Helena Aug. 5, 1999  
Standing (L-R): W.H. "Skip" Stratton, Fred Brauer, M/M Bill Wood, Jerry Linton. Kneeling (L-R): Hans Trankle, Chuck Pickard. (Photo courtesy Stella Jenkins)



# Jump List— April 2000

**By Larry Lufkin** (Cave Junction '63), VICE-PRESIDENT  
*The Jump List is a compilation of information the NSA receives from members, associates, and friends. It is intended to inform our readers, what jumpers are doing and where they reside. You can mail your information to Larry Lufkin: 7101 Alderwood Ct. SE, Olympia, WA 98503 or send e-mail to jumpercj63@aol.com. Phone (360) 459-2534*

## Alaska

**John Culbertson**, '69, lives in Carpinteria, Calif. where he retired. Previously, John worked in Israel and was a captain in the Santa Barbara Fire Department. Since retirement, he does fire-related consulting and public education, as well as hiking, fishing, surfing and writing.

**David Stevens**, '76, retired in 1983 after a career as a fireman, detection observer and smokejumper. David, who lives in Nehalem, Ore., is co-owner of the Manzanita Lumber Co., a retail lumber and hardware firm.

**Dave Whitmer**, '92, lives in Fairbanks where he has jumped for the last eight years. Dave earned a BS in Wildlife Resources from the University of Idaho in 1989.

## Boise

**Jack Hubbard**, '90, is a land surveyor for the California Department of Transportation and lives in Douglas City. He previously worked as a surveyor for the Forest Service. He is completing his senior year in Resource Management at Humboldt State University.

## Cave Junction

**Robert Moffitt**, '48, is a medical doctor and operated a family practice in Springfield, Ore. He retired in 1990 and now works on his 53-acre tree farm, skis and bicycles. He also participates in Volkssport walking and other outdoor clubs.

**Jimmie Dollard**, '52, lives in Evergreen, Colo., where he retired in 1999 as President, CEO and Chairman of MACTEC, a 500-employee environmental and energy company. He is getting used to retirement, doing home projects, bow hunting, golfing, traveling and fishing. Previously, he was an engineering manager with the Boeing space program and manager for a firm that performed research for NASA.

**John Murray**, '58, lives in Fairbanks where he

retired as a physics professor in 1990. He was also a co-owner of an oil company on the North Slope from 1990 to 1996.

**Jack Ridgway**, '60, lives in West Dover, Vt. where he built and operates Tennis Village. Jack was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam and a 707/747 pilot for Pan Am for 10 years.

**Thomas (Tommy) Albert**, '64, has lived in Vida, Ore., since retiring in 1999. He operates a family business and is an intermittent contract pilot for the Forest Service. Previously, Tommy was a lead plane and smokejumper pilot for the BLM and Forest Service.

**"Trooper" Tom Emonds**, '66, retired from the BLM in 1994 and moved to Nehalem, Ore., where he now lives. Troop was a Marine officer in Vietnam, traveled around the world, wrote a book, and worked as a fire management officer for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska. He reports that he got a life and now has a wife. They have a boy 2 years old who is Troop's main retirement project. He is also developing fire equipment with the Forest Service and BLM.

## McCall

**Dick Norell**, '51, retired in 1988 after a career as a conservation officer, big game biologist, regional game manager and state game bird supervisor with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Dick says he turned into a snowbird and now spends six months in Lake Havasu, Ariz., and six months in Boise.

**Richard Klason**, '53, retired in 1994 as assistant director of state forests for the State of Utah. He now calls Midvale, Utah, home but lives in a RV and goes wherever he wants to go.

**Douglas Bird**, '57, lives in Ogden since retiring from the Forest Service in 1990. Since then, Doug has worked as an international fire management consultant, primarily in South America and Asia.



**Michael Burney**, '66, lives in Taos, N.M. Mike hasn't retired but is currently on a one-year sabbatical from his job as a consulting archaeologist for Indian tribes in Oregon, South Dakota and Arizona.

**William Ferguson**, '70, lives in Boise, and continues to work as a smokejumper. Over the years, he has worked at the McCall, Redding, Alaska and Boise Smokejumper Bases.

#### **Missoula**

**Fred Ebel**, '57, recently assumed the presidency of the 18,000-member Society of American Foresters. A resident of Colbert, Wash., he owns a forestry consulting firm and has been timberlands manager for WTD Industries, Spokane, chief forester for Boise Cascade in Oregon and forester for the BLM.

**John Wagner**, '57, lives in Parachute, Colo. (an appropriate locale for a veteran smokejumper). John retired in 1998 after 27 years as a teacher, school psychologist and substance abuse counselor.

**Tom McGrath**, '57, travels and does odd jobs since retiring in Dec. 1996. Previously, Tom taught forest pathology at Stephan F. Austin State University in Texas and continued as a smokejumper (my real job, he says) up to 1985. During his career, he also worked with the New Zealand Forest Service and the Australian Forestry and Timber Bureau.

**James Little**, '61, graduated from the University of Colorado in 1968 with a medical degree. He now lives in Jackson, Wyo. where he works in pediatrics at Jackson Pediatrics.

**James Cyr**, '63, retired in 1993 after jumping 30 years in Missoula. He was the loft foreman during his last 10 years. He now lives in Frenchtown, Mont. where he spends his time on the family ranch. Jim says he is the fourth generation on the ranch.

**Larry Kofford**, '63, lives in Lyons, Colo. He jumped from Missoula in 1963 and 1966.

**Garry Borgeson**, '67, is a truck driver in Coventry, Conn.

**Mike Overby**, '67, lives in Dallas, Texas where he is Vice President of Excel Communications. Previously, he worked for American Express, Ernst & Young and Firestone Rubber.

**Phillip Petty**, '68, works for Productivity Point International teaching people how to use computer applications and computer networks. Phil, who has a masters in computer science, lives in

Mica, Wash.

**Edward Hotalen**, '76, earned a BS in biology from West Virginia Wesleyan and is a forest dispatcher on the Six Rivers National Forest. Ed, whose dispatching duties include 911, lives in Eureka, Calif.

**Duane Matt**, '92, lives in Las Vegas, Nevada where he works for the Bureau of Reclamation. He previously worked as a geologist in Montana and as a schoolteacher in New Mexico. He earned a master's in geology from the Montana Technical School of Mines.

**Nate Clement**, '92, reports that he is the regional managing director-Asia of Datastream Software. He lives in Singapore and asks any jumpers passing through to give him a shout at 65-9833-8409. His email address is [nathan-clement@compuserve.com](mailto:nathan-clement@compuserve.com)

**Gary Lawley**, '97, earned a Ph.D. in 1973 from North Texas State University. Gary, who lives in Anchorage, is health and safety manager for Ahtna, Inc. Previously, he worked as high school basketball coach and manager of environmental projects for two companies.

#### **Nine Mile**

**William Wallace**, '43, died in 1985 at the age of 83. His son said his dad had earned a degree from the University of California, Berkley, in 1938 as a civil engineer and worked as a general contractor. William's son can be reached by email at [rwallace@holonet.net](mailto:rwallace@holonet.net)

**George Robinson**, '43, lives in Ocean View, N.J. He retired as a building, plumbing and electrical contractor and served 30 years as chief of the Ocean View Volunteer Fire Department. He was also a trustee and dean of Calvary Baptist Church for 50 years, worked as a school bus driver, and was caretaker of the church cemetery. He and Betty have been married over 55 years and have four daughters, six grandkids, and five great-grandkids. (The Executive Committee wonders if George has any spare time he can lend to the NSA?)

**Gregg Phifer**, '44, earned a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1949 and retired in 1995 as a full Professor at Florida State Univ. Gregg, who lives in Tallahassee, is on the board of the county American Civil Liberties Union, board of Funeral Consumers Association, a member of the Church and Society Commission, editor of Retiree News, and represents retired faculty on the board of the University Club. He reports, at 81 he can't do everything.

**Ozzie Bender**, '47, retired in 1996 as an international forestry consultant. Previously, he worked as a rubber planter in Liberia, timber cruiser in Georgia and Florida, sawmill manager in Haiti and a forestry advisor in Columbia and in Rome. Ozzie lives in Tacoma, Wash. where he spends his time fishing.

**Parley (Bill) Cherry**, '47, lives in Morrison, Colo. where he is semi-retired and working part time with Colorado Forest Industries. Prior to that, Bill retired as a lieutenant colonel from the Air Force. He served during World War II and Vietnam. He has also worked for Boise Cascade, Weyerhaeuser and Potlatch Corporations.

**L.A. (Chuck) Pickard**, '48, retired in 1975 and lives in West Vero Beach, Fla. in the summers. Before retirement, Chuck was a police detective and owned and operated a private detective agency. He lives the rest of the year in Grand Rapids, Minn.

**Delos (Dee) Dutton**, '51, retired in 1983 from the Forest Service and in 1986 from the Air Force Reserve. Dee jumped from Missoula from 1951 to 1966 where he also worked as a dispatcher in the summers and in equipment development in winters. He moved in 1966 to Cave Junction where he was base manager and then again in 1975 to the Region 6 Office in Portland, Ore. Currently, he raises a large garden and fishes. He says it's hard work but someone has to do it.

**Robert Conklin**, '53, lives in Butte, Mont. since retiring in 1995. Currently, he does selective fish guiding in British Columbia. Prior to retirement, he was a high school and college teacher in English and aviation science. Robert was also flew for the Naval Reserve and the Deerlodge and Beaverhead Forests.

#### **North Cascades**

**Kay Johnson**, '54, retired in 1984 as the chief of the Division of Fire for the Bureau of Land Management in Anchorage. Kay, who lives in Chelan, Wash, started a residence construction business in the Anchorage area.

**James Cook**, '60, lives in Charlottesville, works for the Virginia Department of Forestry as operations forester and plans to retire in January 2002.

**George Marcott**, '73, lives in Naches, Wash. George was part of the Eastern Project and jumped in Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina.

**Steve Baker**, '88, lives in Boise. Steve's father Jim and brother Pat were also smokejumpers.

#### **Redding**

**Phil Collins**, '59, lives in Jackson, Calif. Phil earned a degree in biology from Chico State University and is a high school science teacher.

**Leas Dickey**, '61, lives in Ashland, Ore. Leas jumped in Redding from 1961 to 1966 and again in 1973.

**Michael Dougherty**, '67, retired in Oct. 1998 as assistant regional fire director for operations in Forest Service Region 5. Mike also worked on the Shasta-Trinity and San Bernardino Forests. He is currently chief of fire and rescue for the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. Mike lives in Shingle Springs, Calif.

**Scott Warner**, '69, lives in Redding. He works as an international forester and has served in Latin America and Europe.

**Ralph Ryan**, '77, obtained degrees in natural resource management and ornamental horticulture and works as a gardener for the City of Redding where he lives.

**Nicholas Holmes**, '79, lives in Ashton, Idaho and is a maintenance supervisor for the Madison School District in Rexburg. Nick has a degree in natural resources and previously was a maintenance supervisor for the Northern California Service Center and a grounds supervisor for the Lakeland School District in Rathdrum, Idaho.

**Edward Forrester**, '95, lives in San Diego. He jumped two years from Redding.

**Joseph Austin**, '99, lives in Versailles, Ky. where he's a teaching assistant at the University of Kentucky. He earned his masters at the University of Wyoming and is working toward his Ph.D.

#### **Redmond**

**Oliver (Bert) Mitman**, '70, lives in Fairbanks where he is a foreman with the Alaska Smokejumpers. Bert jumped three years in Redmond and has been in Fairbanks since 1975.

**Daniel Mitchell**, '78, works for the Bureau of Land Management's Carson City District. Dan, who lives in Truckee, Calif., earned his BS degree from Kent State University.

**Cynthia Lusk**, '87, lives in Terrebonne, Ore.

#### **Tanker Pilots**

**Kenneth Hoffner** flew tanker 124 in 1986 out of Billings, White River, Battle Mountain, Minden, Medford and McCall. Ken lives in Sandwich, Mass. and is a Continental Airlines pilot. 🍄



## Our “Girl” Shirl’

By Shirley E. Braxton

ONE OF THE first questions asked by friends I haven’t seen recently is, “How are you enjoying retirement?” “Retirement?” I reply, “Hey, I’m a working gal once again.”

When I mention smokejumpers, they ask, “How did you ever get attached to them?” I then relate how a friend asked if I wanted to go back to work. I adamantly replied, “no,” but asked, “Why?” She said the National Smokejumper Association was looking for someone to manage an office they had recently acquired in Missoula.

Then, I had a pleasant lunch with Jon McBride (Missoula ’54), Roger Savage (Missoula ’57) and the late Art Jukkala (Missoula ’56). Jon read me the job description: “Keep a tidy office.” My reply: “I don’t do housework.” And, “Read the e-mail messages and reply when necessary.” My comment, “I know nothing about computers.”

Before Jon could continue I told him I’d soon be having cataract surgery and also that I’d be on a week-long bicycle tour in North Dakota. Jon’s reply: “But when can you come to work?”

Most interesting of all was that I was on my own since “the boys” were off on their trail maintenance activities.

I learned a lot that first week, snooping in every box and checking out each file cabinet. I read all I could. Of course I forgot everything I read. I’d warned them up front that I had no memory. They answered, “Join the crowd.”

The computer is no longer a threat, thanks to Roger’s patient instructions, two training courses through a local school, and self-taught sessions with Manpower which I

still attend every Tuesday and Thursday.

Here’s a sketch of my life: I was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1929 and moved to Seattle with my family in 1947. Awed by the mountains, I joined the Seattle Mountaineers and climbed as many as I could: St. Helen’s, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Baker, Mt. Olympus, Mt. Adams, and smaller peaks in the Cascade, Olympus and Snoqualmie Ranges. I met my husband-to-be, Sam Braxton, while climbing, and we were married in 1950. We moved to Missoula in 1951 so Sam could complete his degree in wildlife technology.

Sam and I raised two sons, Bart, born in 1952 and Dalt, born in 1953, and we continued climbing, in the Tetons, Wind River Range, the Sawtooths, the Bugaboos, and every weekend we played on the peaks in our own backyard, the Bitterroots. We were members of the ski patrol during the 60s, but bicycling was our favorite family sport.

In 1970 we opened a bicycle repair shop and continued long-distance cycling, touring from Missoula to Yellowstone Park, Cody, Wyo., Red Lodge, Mont., over Beartooth Pass, back through Yellowstone and home.

Sam died of cancer in 1988, and my youngest son helped me run the shop until we closed it in 1996.

Sam and I had shared a dream, to cycle across the U.S. I accomplished that for us in 1994-96. Our group of 12 left Williamsburg, Va. in June 1994. A bicycle accident in Kansas sent me home in tears, and not from the pain. In 1996 two dear friends helped me complete my dream. One rode with me from “my crash scene” in Kansas to Missoula. The second accompanied me from Missoula to Florence, Ore.

My life has been blessed with family, friends and excellent health. Bart is a pharmacist and lives in Spokane, Wash., with his wife, Terri, and my two grandchildren. Dalt lives in Missoula, unable to work because of health problems. I continue to cycle and participate each spring in a 230-mile, weekend ride called Tour of the Swan River Valley. This will be our 30th tour and I’ve been fortunate to

ride in 25.

I’m now beginning my third career and am having the time of my life working with a great group of guys. My memory is even improving. I can put first and last names together and now it would be fun to match faces to these names. Hey, how about sending me your picture and I’ll start a rogue’s gallery in the office?

Do stop by. Let me know ahead of time so that I can bake some cookies. Oh, and should I ever answer the phone, “Braxton Bike Shop,” please know that old habits are hard to break. 🍪

“My first week was hilarious. Our only furniture was a table and chair Jon had brought from home. Boxes and file cabinets were everywhere. There was a phone and a computer, which hadn’t been hooked up.”

# NSA To Honor Life Members at Reunion 2000

All 1,300 members of the NSA are special, but 39 of our number bring a bit more to the Association. They've each contributed \$1,000, and the interest on their investments provides a sustaining income that benefits us all.

Those 39 life members will be honored in a special reception at the National Reunion in Redding on Friday June 16 at 4 p.m. in the Red Lion Hotel. All members are invited to help the Board of Directors honor these men. They are:

Beartusk, Keith (Missoula '69)  
Beltran, Tony (Idaho City '69)  
Bennett, David (Missoula '64)  
Blaine, Jim (Missoula '63)  
Brauer, Fred (Missoula '41)  
Clatworthy, Jim (Missoula '56)  
Cooley, Earl (Missoula '40)  
Cross, George (Missoula '74)  
Cuplin, David (Missoula '48)  
Derry, Bob (Missoula '43)  
Fricke, Chuck (Missoula '61)  
Gastineau, Orval (Missoula '63)  
Golik, Dennis (McCall '74)

Gowen, George (Missoula '54)  
Greeson, Mike (Missoula '59)  
Gutkoski, Joe (Missoula '50)  
Halloran, Donal (Missoula '53)  
Henderson, Wallace (McCall '46)  
Kovalicky, Tom (Missoula '61)  
Kreitzberg, Richard (Missoula '52)  
Linton, Gerald (Missoula '48)  
Lipscomb, Lee (Missoula '58)  
McCullough, Mike (Missoula '56)  
Murphy, Jim (Missoula '48)  
Musquez, Ben (Missoula '56)  
Poppie, Bill (Missoula '58)

Quillin, Robert (Fairbanks '71)  
Reid, Bob (Missoula '57)  
Rohrbach, Fred (Missoula '65)  
Rost, Sam (Missoula '58)  
Rotroff, Bud (Redding '67)  
Seale, Mike (Pilot)  
Stoleson, Roland (Missoula '56)  
Stratton, Skip (Missoula '47)  
Thompson, Tommy (Missoula '55)  
Tobin, John (Missoula '59)  
Uphill, Tom (Missoula '56)  
Wilson, Dick (Missoula '48)

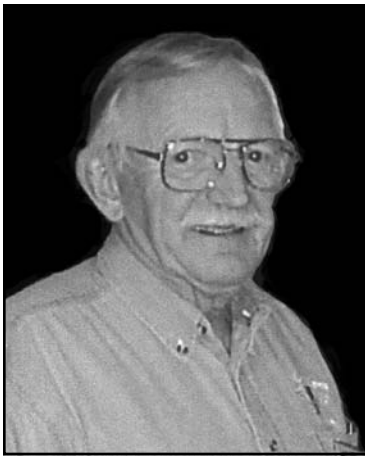
One life member prefers to remain anonymous.

## New Members

Ayling, Albert MSO '47  
Barkley, William IDC '56  
Barnes, Jeff MSO '80  
Basey, Don CJ '52  
Beadle, Scott Assoc.  
Beem, Russell CJ '59  
Bergman, Tom Assoc.  
Blunn, Tom Assoc.  
Bonnnett, Hobbie CJ '49  
Boucher, Don NCSB '75  
Bulkley, Mike Assoc.  
Butler, Geoff RDD '97  
Button, John NCSB '75  
Carnahan, Mike RAC '72  
Caward, Jac MYC '51  
Collins, Robert J RAC '69  
Collins, Stan MYC '67  
Collins, Robt. C RAC '69  
Dobberfuhl, Don MSO '58  
Dubois, Josh Assoc.  
Dumrese, Dave Assoc.  
Fisher, Jonathan Assoc.  
Foust, Tim Assoc.  
Furbish, Greg Assoc.  
Griffin, Michael Assoc.  
Haagenson, Rick RDD '79  
Harbine, Patrick MSO '51  
Harrison, Eric Assoc.

Hazlehurst, Matt Assoc.  
Horey, Michael NCSB '71  
Houston, Doug RAC '73  
Hurst, Randy MSO '54  
Hyland, Patrick RDD '88  
Imming, John Assoc.  
Johns, James Assoc.  
Jones, Adam Assoc.  
Jukkla, Mrs. Art MSO '56  
Larrabee, Dale Pilot  
Leach, Morgan RAC '83  
Leath, Lewis MSO '56  
Lindlan, John CJ '52  
Lollini, Lance RDD '61  
Madden, Clint RAC '89  
Malroy, Fred MSO '56  
Mannion, Ed MSO '54  
Matheson, Gordon MSO '47  
McCray, Bob CJ '67  
Moreno, Robert Assoc.  
Neufelder, Carl MSO '54  
Newton, Roger CJ '51  
Orosz, Frank MSO '52  
Osborne, Jack MSO '46  
Owen, Daniel MSO '53  
Patton, Rich RDD '67  
Puphal, Kenneth MSO '45  
Pynn, George MSO '49

Quigley, Tim RDD '79  
Ratcliff, Herman MSO '54  
Rea, Ken RDD '65  
Sandelin, Truman CJ '61  
Schaffeld, Chris RAC '86  
Sciara, Philip IDC '48  
Senterfit, Michael MSO '56  
Shipman, John Assoc.  
Simler, Douglas MSO '80  
Siple, Ronald MYC '53  
Slisz, Kevin Assoc.  
Speaker, Ward CJ '48  
Sprinkle, Brian Assoc.  
Tibbits, A.B. MYC '66  
Tincoff, Thomas CJ '54  
Turner, Barrie MSO '59  
Uhranowsky, John Assoc.  
Upton, Glenn MSO '59  
Vasquez, Alex Assoc.  
Wadsworth, Wayne MSO '51  
Walker, Keith Assoc.  
Walker, Mindy Assoc.  
Walton, Lee RDD '63  
Wapato, Tim NCSB '53  
Westfield, Jeffrey Assoc.  
Woolworth, Brian Assoc.  
Wright, Larry J. MSO '71  
Zwick, Dwight MSO '55



**Monroe "Spud" De Jarnette**  
(Missoula '49)  
NSA MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR.

# Membership Corner

As you know by this time, our newsletter *Smokejumper* has become a magazine with articles of interest to every reader—and feedback

from the membership. The rub comes when we must pay for the improvements. Beginning with our January renewals, we promoted a new idea in membership: the sustaining member. This member materially helps us fund the *Smokejumper*. The initial response was gratifying. We covered our initial cost and generated \$55, all of which goes to the magazine. We are indebted to those of you who chose to help. I urge all of you who can to give this \$10 extra. We'll have a world class publication.

The January, February and March renewals have seen the changes in our renewal notification. Because of the sustaining level membership, I revised the form and eliminated the postcard. President Gidlund wrote a letter

which I have been processing for first class mailing. This type of mailing by itself has produced such a wonderful and fast response from you that I am having a tough time keeping up. Keep 'em coming!

On the revised form I am asking for your legal name first. Then I ask for your name as you wish it printed on the membership card. We have received word from a number of members who want their card name to relate to their "handle" as a jumper—or as it relates to their daily life. We do need your legal name for the database. After that, it's your call. You will also notice that the form asks for the zip + 4 code rather than just the zip. It's a minor detail at present, but I imagine that it will become mandatory in the foreseeable future.

Every now and again and in spite of all of our efforts, we come up with a wrong address. If you know a friend that is not receiving his or her mailings, please let us know how to get in touch with them.

That's all for now. Thanks for your consideration and smooth sailing. 🍷



Long-time jumper pilot Robert William "Bob" Clark celebrated his 80th birthday Oct. 4. He flew for the Johnson Flying Service in the late 40s and early 50s then for the US Forest Service and later the State of Idaho from which he retired in 1986. Bob amassed 17,000 hours, most over the mountains of the Northwest, in diverse aircraft including the Ford Tri-motor and the DC-3. He and Ruth live in Anacortes, Wash.

# Thirteenth Jump Stories

By Gary Welch (Cave Junction '60)

This is not a "hero" story, but it made a life-long impression on me. My thirteenth jump, a fire jump my rookie year, was a two-manner into the Umpqua National Forest's BIG TREES, as tall as some jump stories. I hung up.

We were prepared as we carried 110-foot letdown ropes and had spent a lot of hours in training. I tied my rope to my chute and dropped the rope towards the ground, which I couldn't see for the clouds and all.

My jump buddy, Cecil Owen Riffe from Crab Orchard, W. Va., was on the ground as I started my descent. Owen yelled up, "Tex, don't come down. Your rope ends 50 feet off the ground." Doug fir doesn't



*Gary Welch summer of '61. (Photo courtesy Gary Welch)*

have many limbs the first 100 feet or so, which would leave me dangling in space with a big step down. I retrieved my rope, climbed down about 60 feet, tied off to a limb and made my letdown. No big deal. However, we had to retrieve our chutes since they cost about seven 23-hours days on the fireline.

The Forest Service wants after-action reports, including this sort of thing. Project Air Officer Jim Allen asked about the tree landing.

Keep in mind that we were mostly 21-25 years old and thought we were the roughest, toughest specimens on earth. We accepted it with humility. I gave Jim my report, mentioned that it was my thirteenth jump and that I was due a little excitement. Jim said he also remembered his thirteenth jump. "Yeah," I said, "What was it like?" My bubble burst and the wind left my sails when he said, "I was 21. It was Sept. 17, 1944, Operation Market Garden in Holland a couple months before Bastogne."

That's when I decided that humility had its place in life.

That's it. No heroes, not even funny, but true. I saw Jim at our Missoula reunion in 1995. We talked and, although I sometimes forget some facts and add new ones, he confirmed the story. 🙏

*Gary Welch graduated from Texas Tech in 1963, was an infantry unit leader from 1963 to 1965 and retired in 1993 as President of the First National Bank of Hamilton, Texas. He runs a cattle ranch near Waco.*



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