

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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OCTOBER 2004

SMOKEJUMPER

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Message from the President



by Doug Houston
(Redmond '73)
PRESIDENT

FIRST OF ALL I WOULD like to thank Ron Stoleson for his dedication, time and direction as the NSA president. He did a great job providing leadership, and then, ultimately talking me into being his vice-president. We will not talk about the grins on the other board members when I accepted. And now, I have moved up to be your president.

I am very honored to be in this position and will do my best to uphold the integrity and heritage of a great organization. My experience as a smokejumper included fourteen years at Redmond and fourteen years at North Cascades which included eleven years as the base manager. I rookied in 1973 and retired in 2001 with 535 total jumps and 213 fire jumps. My wife, Paige, jumped with Alaska BLM in 1995 and 1996. I have two sons who have both been on hotshot crews, but have not jumped. So, you can tell that many of our conversations are about fire fighting and smokejumping.

I would also like to welcome the new board members: John Twiss, Vice-President, John Helmer, Director, Jim Cherry, Director, Joe Stutler, Director, Karl Mazerluft, Director, and Nels Jensen, Director and Pilot Rep. Other board members stepped aside as directors, but will still be active with special projects or in areas that they have chaired over the years. I am very excited about the mix of expertise that these new members bring and the energy level.

We still are looking for someone to step forward as the historian which is vacant at this time. We will also be transitioning Charlie Brown in as the treasurer as Dean Longanecker steps down. I can't say enough for what Dean has contributed to the NSA and what an asset he has been.

One of the goals that I have as the president is for the NSA to continue to work together as a unified team. There is a sense that as the trails program grows, and it will, so does the "division" between trails and the NSA. I know that is not true and the NSA will continue to support the trails projects. It is a tremendous program and brings nothing but positive comments about the work being done out in the field. The program will only continue to grow with potential chapters of the NSA springing up throughout the country, such as Colorado. Keep up the great work Jon McBride, Mr. Trails, Bill Ruskin, Colo., and all of you that are volunteering to go out and work the trails.

Another goal that I have is to look at the charter of the NSA, looking at potential change, so that we can become more active in the positioning of the present day smokejumper program. Does this sound like we might get political? Perhaps, although I know as a nonprofit organization there are limits to the involvement into politics. There are, I am sure, areas where we could assist. As USFS and BLM directors retire and replacements come in who may/may not favor the smokejumping program, we need to step forward and assist wherever we can so that smokejumping will continue to be an integral fire fighting force. Those in jumpsuits, now, need a future so they can enjoy a history similar to all of us.

Before I close, I want to thank the Reunion Committee for an outstanding job. The reunion was great fun and I am already looking forward to the next one. Thanks to all that contributed in the effort.

Until next time, you have 100 yards of drift, the whole world is a jump spot and your static line is clear. 🇺🇸

Smokey Remembers Jim Waite

Recollections of Jim "Smokey" Alexander by James Budenholzer (Missoula '73)

Jim Waite served on the first smokejumper crew back in 1940. Waite continued his jumping career through the 1951 season, later working for the Air Force and NASA, where his duties included testing parachutes for the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo projects. He retired at the end of 1973 and died in Washington state in June 1999.

Also on that first squad was Jim "Smokey" Alexander. Alexander recently sat down with James Budenholzer (MSO-73) to share Alexander's memories of that first season with Waite and what it was like to make history.

I met Jim Waite out at Old Fork Missoula, the summer of 1939. We all came in from our various forests and reported for our physicals. I was the youngest guy on the squad, and Jim was the next-youngest.

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Anchorage	ANC	Grangeville	GAC	Missoula	MSO
Boise	NIFC	Idaho City	IDC	Redding	RDD
Cave Junction	CJ	La Grande	LGD	Redmond	RAC
Fairbanks	FBX	McCall	MYC	West Yellowstone	WYS
				Winthrop	NCSB

Jim Waite came off of the Clearwater Forest, with headquarters, I believe, in Orofino, Idaho. He had been a smokechaser and a lookout. He did the same thing all of us had done, whatever the forest ranger or assistant ranger wanted us to do. We strung wire, did lookout work, smokechasing, trail-building. He did that kind of work. I don't believe Jim Waite ever went to college. He came out of high school [and went] into the Forest Service. [He] may never have gone [in] to the military service.

He worked straight through for the Forest Service after our first season in 1940 and was a squad leader for the conscientious objectors starting in '42. Those conscientious objectors didn't get anything except what the churches supplied those guys with, their clothes and boots, and that's all they got for all their work. They never got any pay from the Forest Service for the work they did.

We ourselves had regular boots, generally from White Boots out of Spokane, and we'd put ankle braces on the boots; it was easy to turn an ankle, and then you were no good to anyone. Ankle braces were mandatory.

I first met Jim when we took our physicals. He was very quiet, very unassuming. He was one of the leaders and was a real nice guy. He entered into everything, all the work we were doing and the training. He was very cooperative. None of us were smoking.

In addition to being a nice guy, he was very handsome. As Dorothy, my wife, would say, "good looking!" Dorothy went to school with his wife, and [they] were close friends in high school and college.

Luckily for the rest of us, he had a steady girl back in Idaho. As you can see from the photos, he was indeed very photogenic.

After we took the physicals, we all went up to the Sealey Lake Ranger Station, where we did map reading and got ready for our first parachute jump. Frank Derry was very thorough with all the equipment, the 'chutes and all, because we didn't have static lines. The riggers, Chet Derry and Glenn Smith, showed us exactly how the parachutes worked.

Frank Derry had brought his brother, Chet, and Glenn Smith up from California to ramrod this outfit. During the time we were at Sealey Lake, Frank received a telegram from California and [learned that] one of his cargo-droppers had fallen out of his plane without a parachute and been killed. In the middle of training us, Frank had to go back down to California for the funeral arrangements for this guy who had been killed. Even without him, we kept on training, doing calisthenics. He came back, and we finished the training and took the plane down to Moose Creek. Maybe this made the danger of what we were doing a little closer.

During the training, men jumped off a twenty-foot platform [attached to the] end of a regular rope, to simulate the



Historical photo: Jim Alexander jumps from the Fairchild on Hughes Creek south of Missoula 1940. (Courtesy Jim Alexander)

jarring. Then, on a pulley, slid down the rope and practiced a roll.

Was Jim Waite worried about the first practice jump? Jim was noncommittal about the first jumps. [He] just took it all in, did what we were supposed to do. We were all the same way, didn't talk much, except for that one man, **Bill Bolen**, who didn't fit in and got washed out early. There wasn't a lot to say. We kept it inside if we had fears.

Jim Waite Makes the First Practice Jump

Another thing was, when we were making our first practice jumps on Sealey Lake, he made the first practice jump.

The night before, we were sitting around the campfire, and we drew straws. We had five guys, but Rufe (**Rufus Robinson**) wasn't there for some reason, so four guys drew straws. There was Jim Waite, **Earl Cooley**, Bill Bolen and myself.

Jim Waite got the straw. He was the right guy for the job, very nice man.

Jim Waite's Fire Jump

Jim went on the trip over to Lake Chelan and didn't jump. Only Wag and I jumped. We only made the one jump. Then we all went back to Big Prairie.

The Moose Creek Air Field was a one-way entrance. You had to land and take off one way on a short runway, because it was [on a] bluff with the Selway River right below you and

trees behind. You'd take off over the river. The field was built by the CCC kids.

We took off in the morning, so it was nice to get off [when it was] cool. ... [T]akeoff by the Travelair was easy. This was the second time we jumped on a fire. The first time, it had been hot when Rufe and Earl took off for their fire, and the plane had really struggled in the hot, thin air to gain altitude.

Dick Johnson was the pilot. He lasted for another year, then he got killed down in the Jackson Hole country, counting elk in the fall of 1941 in a snow squall. Might have been '42.

When we got to the fire, we threw our own burlaps. We were about 2,000 feet above the terrain. We'd keep our eye on that burlap, watch it float down for maybe a minute or a minute and a half. If the spotter was on the plane, he would throw the burlap, and if the spotter wasn't there, we'd throw them ourselves.

These were small parachutes, four corners of a burlap tied to about ten pounds of rocks or a bag of dirt. We made them ourselves. They were very effective. We held it by the apex and tossed it out, and the wind would immediately get it and inflate [it]. They worked very well. I don't know why they discontinued them. Things happened.

I didn't catch any wind. We both landed in this little meadow.

We were jumping thirty-foot-diameter chutes ... and the fact that you opened at different altitudes away from the plane

meant you'd get different shocks, depending on how long you waited to pull the ripcord. The longer you waited, the heavier the opening shock. Some guys got out of the slipstream and then pulled [the] ripcord. You were supposed to count to three [and] not get caught up in the tail of the plane. I heard one story, not related to us, about a guy who opened his chute in the plane and then threw it out and followed it out. But that wasn't what we did.

We had a going bet. We all tried to bring back our ripcords, [and] if you didn't, you had to buy the other guys a case of beer. Most of us just carried that ripcord in our right hands, or stuffed it in our jackets. He brought back the ripcord. I believe we all did.

Just get out, count to three, and it always worked.

The First Snag

One thing I do remember was that when I landed in this meadow, as I started to take off my suit, a little field mouse ran up the left pant leg of the jumpsuit! So I got out of that suit fast. Those little field mice were hopping all over the meadow, hundreds of field mice.

We both jumped on this fire, but Jim got hung up in this snag. Jim was the first guy that hung up on a snag. Nobody got hung up in training, and we'd all made one previous fire jump, so this was on the second fire jump.

He let himself down 100 feet, and when he ran out of rope, he had to freefall the rest of the way, thirty feet, so he was protected by his jumpsuit when he hit. The procedure was, on our right leg there was a pocket down over the right boot where we had 100 feet of sturdy rope. We had the detachable risers. It was good sturdy rope. We'd attach it to a ring on the left [or right] riser and then detach the riser, take the tension off, then detach the other side. Then having tied it to the ring, take off the tension, then let yourself down hand-over-hand, wearing your gloves, down the rope. There wasn't a rappelling ring. It was no big deal. Bad part about landing in a snag was having to chop down the tree to bring the chute back. We had to bring back the entire chute and everything we jumped in with. Every smokejumper knows about that.

If Jim was bruised or in shock from the letdown, he didn't show it. We were in absolutely top physical condition. He was in good shape.

We had one of those radios, which was a monstrosity, which was in the left calf pocket. The rope was in the right. That radio required line of sight visual contact with the plane. It weighed six or seven pounds. It worked well. It was an important part of the jump. We used it to tell the pilot that we weren't hurt and that we'd retrieved our packs and [to ask if] they could tell us anything about the fire and how to attack [it].

So we had one radio on the ground, one in the ship. We could hear the radio from the ship, but if they got over the hill or behind the trees, we were done.

We called it the Lizard Creek fire.

There was one man on the fire, a smokechaser, that had been at a lookout nearby. At the time, the Forest Service would have a lookout tower with a lookout and a smokechaser. The smokechaser would be dispatched from the lookout tower. It made a lot of sense. He knew we were coming in, because he

could see the plane and see us jumping.

The Lizard Creek Fire

This was a big fire, by that time about twenty acres.

We took control of the fire. With Jim and me, there wasn't a fire boss. We just did it. The smokechaser was a trained guy who knew what to do, too. But the fire was too big for us to contain. They didn't call the smokejumpers in until it looked like it was going to go somewhere.

Then a crew of hotshots showed up, and we turned the fire over to the foreman, and then we did what he wanted us to do. As a foreman, he seemed competent. I don't remember much about him. In all the seven summers I worked for the Forest Service, I never met anyone I had serious problems with. You had a job to do, and you just did it. We couldn't have held it with just the three of us.

We worked all day and practically all night.

The hotshot crew had two pack horses and asked if we'd take back the horses. We did. We went back to Kelly Creek Ranger Station. We got to Kelly Creek ... and flew back into Moose Creek.

A Visit from Dorothy Taylor Alexander

While at Moose Creek Ranger Station at Big Prairie, we heard that **Dick Johnson** was flying in with Dorothy [Taylor Alexander].

Jim Waite was the rigger. He got us all slicked up, so we could have lunch with Dorothy. This was a big deal, getting everyone slicked up and their hair combed, including fire crews, the ranger crew, guards, other firefighters and the assistant ranger.

"By God, you guys better get your hair combed!" he said. It was very unusual for a lady to be coming in.

The Johnson family was friends with the Taylor family. ... [Dick] called Dorothy and asked if she'd like to go as his "co-pilot." She agreed. They were bringing in a cement mixer in the back of the Tri-motor. It got loose and rolled around, until it lodged itself in a corner.

As Dick flew into the field, there was a crashed red Tri-motor that Dick had crashed earlier. He pointed it out to Dorothy as he was coming in. Dorothy said she was scared to death.

We took Jim Waite up to Big Prairie in 1941. ... Chet Derry trained him to be a rigger. So he was a "rigger-jumper," certified. He could jump, or he could rig. ... One reason Jim became the rigger was he liked to work around the sewing machine. The first year, we just had one sewing machine. The second year, each squad had a machine. With a rigger, if you had tears, or there had to be repairs, these guys had all the parachute silk, the harness materials and the hardware. The chutes were patched and repaired. I think Frank Derry saw that Jim showed an aptitude for rigging, even though all of us were interested. Later on, they kept the guys away who weren't good at it, so they wouldn't see how the 'chutes were packed and repaired.

Jim Waite stayed [years] in the Forest Service. He died a couple of years ago, had Alzheimer's, I believe.

After 1941, I went back to school. I got married. I never saw Jim Waite again. 🍄

2004 Smokejumper Reunion in Missoula

by Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)

The 2004 Smokejumper Reunion in Missoula, Mont., was a great function. I got to see many buddies that I have not seen in 30 years. **Larry Steele** trained with me at McCall in 1971, and I haven't seen him since the early '70s. **Dave Grendahl** (MSO-66) was on the Volpar when I had my double malfunction in 1976. **Dave Stephens** (FBX-76) was a rookie standing on the rim of Birch Hill. Both of them said they saw me go below the horizon trailing two malfunctioned chutes and thought I went in.

Earl Cooley (MSO-40), who made the first fire jump in 1940, was there, as was **Bob Derry** (MSO-43). **Bob Sallee** (MSO-49), one of the three that survived Mann Gulch where thirteen perished, gave the keynote speech. I got to spend almost a half an hour talking with him. It was interesting that even though they made a movie (*Red Skies over Montana*) and there is a book *Young Men and Fire* about the disaster, Bob didn't let it define him as he moved on to other careers. He was thoughtful enough to listen to me tell about one of my jumps and my Rocky Mountain traverse last summer.

I met jumpers from every decade and those who have fought in every war. It is a striking statement that for such a small group of men and women (5,000 in its sixty-five-year history), there are so many decorated veterans, like Ken Sisler (NCSB-57), who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. There were Missoula jumpers giving tours of the base who are scheduled to leave for Iraq soon with their Marine platoon.

After the Sunday brunch, **Greg Lee** (FBX-73) took me for a ride in his glider. Greg Lee is a skydiver, mountain climber, paraglider and glider pilot who had over 100 free falls when he trained as a jumper. I have flown perhaps eleven different types of planes in five different decades, but this was a first in a glider. We took off from a field at Hamilton and were towed over Blodgett Canyon in the Bitterroots. This was mountain flying in a glider. As we soared over the vertical cliffs looking for thermals, Greg gave me several turns at the controls. I loved it. We caught several thermals and got some updraft. I guided the glider across the center of the runway and Greg did a good job of landing it. We pushed the glider onto the grass to get it out of the way of the private jets that were landing in Hamilton.

Then we went to visit Shirley and Polly Smith. **Walt Smith** (BOI-71) was a decorated Marine and a jumper of merit. He died four years ago when Polly was twelve. It was good spending time with them and seeing the home that Walt built, across from his parent's home, below the shimmering mountains he loved.

The best part about jumper reunions is seeing friends that one may not have seen in a generation. **Bob Nichol** (MSO-52) was my Twin Otter pilot in McCall during the 1970s and made the rescue jump to Quake Lake after the Hebgen earth-

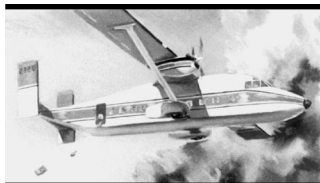
quake. Bob jumped in two decades and has flown jumpers in five decades as he is in his seventies. He is still flying jumpers out of Grangeville.

Veteran jumpers were invited to the Missoula rookie celebration where twenty-six new jumpers (one woman) were letting off steam. There I was introduced to **Jeannine Faulkner** (MSO-98), who grew up in Bethel. Her mother is an Alaskan native, her father a pioneer bush pilot, and she is in her seventh season of jumping. She owns her own Cessna 172 that she flies to her mother's native allotment forty miles south of Aniak. There she winters on a family homestead and traps beaver, fox and lynx.

Tony Navarro (MSO-82), who is Comanche and Kiowa, has dark braided hair that descends to his shoulders. He is a math teacher in a local high school and has spent the last twenty-two years jumping. I heard about him earlier from a young woman who helped fight a fire in the Bob Marshall Wilderness last summer. The woman said that they were trying to protect an historic cabin when the jump ship arrived. "When the smoke-jumpers exited the plane and the parachutes opened, it was one of the most beautiful sights I had ever seen." 🦋



Jim Brown (MSO-46) and Earl Cooley (MSO-40) at the reunion in June. (Courtesy Jim Brown)



Sounding Off from the Editor



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

IT WAS A GREAT REUNION in Missoula! Using data supplied by **Roger Savage** (MSO-57), the registration was the largest (634) we have had so far. I'm guessing that, with spouses and guests, the attendance was close to 1,000. The Missoula jumpers were by far the largest in numbers, as they constituted seventy-two percent of the attendees. I'm proud of the Cave Junction group, as they were the third largest group in attendance even though we are very small in number when you count the jumpers that trained on the Gobi. For all of you that missed the event, make a resolution to attend the next one. Boise looks like the site with the year to be determined. We want to see you there.

The new members of the NSA Board of Directors took their seats at the table at the Friday, June 18 meeting. We have always had people with many good ideas but there is a difference between having a good idea and actually following through. The new members of the board have hit the ground with ideas and also have started the planning and

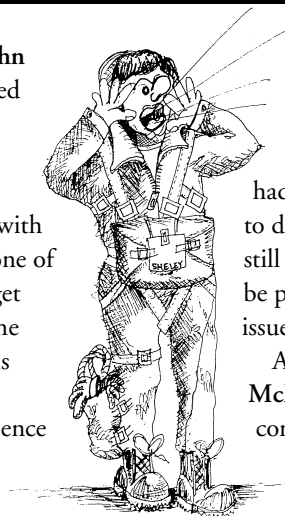
implementation phases. **John Helmer** (RDD-59) provided the best evaluation of our financial status including future obligations that we have ever had. He teamed with **Larry Lufkin** (CJ-63) for one of the most professional budget presentations I've seen in the NSA. John will be using his forty years of successful financial investment experience to help us get more return on our money.

Karl Maerzluf (FBX-67) came to the meeting with a recruitment poster that he had prepared as part of his plan to improve our membership numbers among the active jumpers. This project will take time and be a real challenge. Good luck Karl!

Joe Stutler (MSO-71) was unable to attend due to a health emergency within his family. Glad to report that his wife, Lonna, is fine. Joe has ideas on recruiting corporate sponsors for the NSA.

Jim Cherry (MSO-57) has been on the job for several years handling our Life Membership program. Jim recruited another life member at the reunion. Way to go Jim!

I mentioned the lack of current jumpers within the NSA membership. My feeling is that this will always be a problem. It is an age factor. When jumpers reach a point in life, they will realize the importance of the history of smoke-jumping and the need to recognize and preserve that history. Some of us spent Saturday interviewing about twenty-five jumpers from the 1940s as part of a history preservation project. We missed the ceremonies but recorded some important information on some of the gentle-



men who helped build the foundation of the smokejumper program.

After doing this, I wish that I had the time, money and energy to do this for all the '40s jumpers still alive. These interviews will be published in this and future issues of the magazine.

A final thanks to **Mike McMillan** (FBX-96) who contacted me and volunteered to keep the "Touching All Bases" (TAB) column going in the magazine. I'm

putting in over 130 hours a month on the magazine and merchandising and had gotten to the point where I needed to focus my efforts on what I could get done to make the best use of my time. The TAB column is difficult because you have to get contacts at each of the bases and then try to get that information together and edited in time for the next issue. Once the magazine is mailed, work on the next issue starts immediately. Even though this is a quarterly magazine, there is no "dead time." Based on best use of time, I had given up on the TAB column. Mike has picked it up. It is a very difficult task and the current due date for this issue fell on July 15 and that is right in the busy part of the fire season. Getting information into the magazine about the current jumpers is important to the NSA and will be a factor in getting them to join. Alaska is burning and Mike is out on a fire. Got a call from Mike yesterday (July 3) from "the only pay phone in this part of Alaska," and he says he will still get a TAB column in this issue. Good luck and many thanks to Mike! 🙏

Bulletin Board Burning!

by Denis Symes (McCall '63)



Gary Watts (MYC-64) with lighter fluid flame (Courtesy Denis Symes)

Boredom often leads idle people onto lesser-traveled roads. This was certainly true of McCall's '63 Ned (first year) crew. Boredom would lead us downtown, to McCall's houses of drink (The Forester's Club, The Yacht Club, The Cellar, The Alpine, etc.) Many brain cells were left on the floor of these establishments. Some evenings, we were just so tired that a quiet night at home was in order, so we'd buy a couple of six-packs and stay in the barracks.

One evening, a dimly-lit brain observed that if you filled your mouth with lighter fluid, you could blow it out in a fine mist—if a lighted match was held close to the lips and in the mist, you could emulate Puff, the Magic Dragon! Sure enough, you could—and we did. Once the novelty of the flames wore off, someone suggested putting our newly acquired skill to use.

There was a bulletin board on the wall at the end of the barracks, on which was posted admonitions about possessing alcohol in government facilities and other such official notices banning something. The floor of the barracks was covered with twelve-inch square tiles, which provided an excellent measure of flame throwing proficiency. We'd stand as far back as we could, fill our mouths with lighter fluid, light a match, hold it in front of the mouth and blow the fluid through the flame—a long fiery plume would erupt. Whoever could stand the furthest from the board and set the paper on fire was declared the winner. No record was kept as to who won, but several memories come to mind:

- It was near impossible not to swallow some of the fluid, leaving one with the god-awfullest burning sensation in the esophagus.
- Our mouths had the foulest aftertaste imaginable, even if the burn was successful. However, another beer softened the taste.

- When misting the fluid out of the mouth and over the flame, you could set your hand on fire or at least burn it!
- You also had to be mindful that you could ignite your chin as the fluid might dribble down from your lips.

This game lasted only one or two nights—**Del Catlin** (MYC-47 and our head foreman) angrily told us to cut it out and informed us of the consequences of destroying government property. It just wasn't worth the effort to aggravate Del any further, and besides, beer tastes better! ☘

The Glen

by Hal Meili (CJ-52)

Remember that hike when you flushed the quail?
We stumbled on that hidden trail.

It led us over rocky-ridge, needing the brush,
Running through a glen where the breeze whispered hush.

There wasn't a soul anywhere in sight,
Sunlit by day-moonlit by night.

When we took a deep breath, the air was sweet,
Honey suckle and morning glory tangled our feet.

It appeared to us, the place we found
Was some forgotten sacred ground.

It seemed to be a thousand miles away
From any development that day.

All too soon, the things we cherish
Become discovered and then they perish.

Recently, I returned to that hidden place
Where I could embrace nature face to face.

Sadly, I had my fill
Discovering the clear-cut hills.

There were no trees, no grouse,
Just broken down cars framing a trailer house.

The Legend of Black Water Canyon

by Walt Wasser (McCall '79)

The legend of Black Water Canyon started in 1937 when fifteen firefighters died in the canyon and many others were badly burned. It was a very dry year, and an unexpected gale arrived and trapped fifty firefighters that were on the mountain that day.

Today a large memorial to the firefighters stands along the highway, fifteen miles from the east entrance to Yellowstone National Park. A memorial trail leads five miles to the site where they died on the mountain. A beautifully engraved plaque lists the names of all the fallen firefighters.

I should have known more about this tragedy but the disaster was almost unknown to me. I'm sure I've read about it, but I couldn't recall the details of the incident, perhaps because it happened so long ago or because I was new to the area. I was about to learn all about the Black Water Canyon and the mysteries and legends that surround it.

I was assigned to the Black Water fire on August 19, 2003. It was located in some of the most remote country in which I've ever fought fires. I was appointed incident commander of this forty-acre fire. Not only was it in a very remote section of the canyon, there were endless, solid trees all the way from the fire back to the highway, five miles away. Safety zones were nonexistent and the trail only reached halfway to the fire before it disappeared into thick downfall timber. Pine beetles had devastated the forest, killing up to fifty percent of the trees. The dead, dry, red needle snags were just waiting to burn; all they needed was a start, and there would be no stopping a potential firestorm. With the right conditions, the Black Water fire was just the source that could completely burn the canyon and take anything and anybody that got in its way.

The FMO, Chris Schow, and I surveyed the fire from a Llama helicopter. Llamas are great for high altitudes, which is good since the top of Black Water Canyon is over 11,000 feet high. The more I saw of this fire and the more I learned of the canyon and its history, the more concerned I became about putting people in there to fight it. I would need a small group of elite fire fighters to cautiously approach and attack the fire. I ordered a Type 1 hotshot crew to take on the task.

The Craig Hotshots arrived that evening. The next day we would work our way to the fire and develop an attack plan. If the fire intensified at all, we would have to pull out. It just wasn't worth taking unnecessary risks.

The next morning was a carbon copy of the day before—clear, sunny, and hot. August 20 was a very significant date for fires throughout the Yellowstone area as it is the peak day for fires in the area. Over 200,000 acres burned in a single day on August 20, 1988. Also, the 1937 fire occurred in August!

The Craig Hotshots were eager to get started working on the fire. After all, it was in very beautiful backcountry, and the fire wasn't too large. I saw them drive by my campsite about

7:00 AM on their way to the trailhead. The trailhead was marked with a memorial thirty feet long and four feet high honoring the brave young men of the 1937 crew that died. It was a gruesome reminder of the last Black Water fire and reminded me to consider the fury Mother Nature can throw at you at any time.

There would be a cautious attack on this fire; we needed to get a feel for the fire and its behavior. Lookouts would be flown in, scouts would lead the way, and the crew would follow. Today's objectives would be to cut a two-mile trail from the end of the established trail to the fire. Four saw teams would be used to clear a walking path to provide a quick escape route from the fire, down the trail, and out of the canyon (if things turned bad). There was no place in the canyon that would provide survivable shelter if the fire decided to run. The only safe thing would be to run as quickly as possible down the trail. Those people not on the saw teams, being used for lookouts or scouting the fire, were helping set up camp.

The fire grew slowly over the next couple of days, and I became more comfortable being near it; I felt that I could safely bring a crew in and man the fire, which was located on the west side of Black Water Creek. Black Water Creek runs from south to north, and as long as the fire stayed on the west side of the creek, we would be safe. The top of the canyon was solid rock all the way to the ridge. The winds were pushing the fire into the rocks creating a natural barrier to stop its advance. It was also creeping downhill to the creek and that is where we planned to stop it. The second it threatened to cross the creek, we would have to leave; if it crossed the creek we would have to hightail it out of there quickly. We couldn't possibly control both sides of the creek with our limited resources, and it wouldn't be safe to remain in the canyon.

I was devising a plan for the following day with the Craig Hotshot's foreman. Like me, they were becoming more comfortable and were eager to get on the fire and do some good.

By day's end, I was feeling really good about the fire. It hadn't grown too much, and we had a great plan. We were camping in some of the most beautiful country I have ever seen, and I had a great crew with which to work. Tomorrow would be a great day on the fire! I didn't know what a difference a day could make.

I awoke early on August 21 and remembered that this date was the sixty-sixth anniversary of the 1937 Black Water fire; it weighed heavily on my mind. Everyone was still sleeping, so I walked up the memorial trail to the plaques that honored the heroic young men who died at the top of the mountain. It was a sobering walk through the old burn up to the monument. The old fire-scarred snags still stand as a testament to what can happen when fires burn out of control. I stood before the plaques and felt the presence of the firefighters from

long ago. It was an eerie feeling, and I felt as though I was not alone. I was deep in thought as I walked back. When I arrived at the camp, the hotshots had already left for the fire.

I walked to the fire and found the hotshot crew busy cutting fireline, tying off natural barriers, and prepping the indirect line for burning-out. As morning turned into afternoon, I was above the fire and I could look back and make sure conditions were stable and the crew was safe. As the day wore on, the temperature rose and the humidity dropped. I wasn't too concerned yet as the fire's behavior had not seriously worsened. There were a few single trees torching and some small runs being made uphill—but that was it. I was aware that conditions could change quickly, and I was on watch for any changes.

Then it happened! Suddenly, the wind came. It reached my lookout perch before it hit the fire. First, there was a gust of ten, then twenty, then thirty mph. Conditions had changed in just a few minutes from stable to out of control. It was time to leave. We were no longer safe with the wind pushing the fire up the canyon and spreading through the unburned beetle-killed trees. I called the Craig Hotshots foreman; they had already disengaged from the fire line and were retreating down the hill.

"Let me know when everyone is out and on the trail," I told him.

"Will do." He answered.

I needed to leave but not before I was certain everyone was safe. Shortly, the foreman called and told me everyone was out and safe. Good! Now I can leave.

Then, disaster struck. The winds shifted and pushed the fire downhill and across the creek. The fire was now on both side of Black Water Creek racing uphill, and I was above it! I felt the first pangs of panic as I watched my escape path being cut off as the fire quickly spread on the east side of the creek. I looked up; the only way out was to scramble up through the old burn of 1937. It was less dense than the rest of the forest even though it had grown back considerably. I started scrambling up the steep slope when my radio came to life and a voice called out, "Go back down to the creek. You can follow the creek to safety."

I looked back at the creek and saw it was fully engulfed in flames. I thought, "Forget that. I'll take my chances going up the hill through the old burn." I started back up the hill and the voice came over the radio again.

"You have to trust me. Go back to the creek. I've been up through the old burn and it is not survivable."

I didn't know who was calling, but he must have a better view than I had. So I turned back and ran down to the creek. I got to the bank of the creek and found it was fully engulfed in flames and heading my way. I called back on the radio.

"I'm cut off. There's no way out through the bottom of the creek."

"Go down to the water. Trust me, it's the only way out."

I was quickly running out of options. I couldn't believe I was trusting my life to the voice of someone I had never met or had never even seen. By now the flames surrounded me and I only had a few seconds left. I got down to the creek and found the flames on both sides of this steep ravine. The banks of the



*"This is why we issue longer letdown ropes at Cave Junction!"
(Courtesy Mark Corbet)*

creek were on fire and the flames were overlapping each other. They were approaching a part of the creek that was slightly wider than the rest. When I reached the wide part of the creek, I found it full of solid smoke but no flames. The smoke was like a hole through the flames.

It was either now or never, there would not be another opportunity. I took several deep breaths and braced myself. I looked one last time down the creek, took three more deep breaths, held in the last one, and then took off running for the smoky hole in the middle of the creek. As soon as I ran into the smoke, I couldn't see a thing. My eyes teared up, my nose started running, and my whole body felt like it was on fire. I put my arms over my head trying to protect my ears from burning. I ran on. I ran through the rocks and boulders along the creek trying not to stumble and fall. I ran with all my strength knowing that this might be my last act on Earth.

As I ran, I thought of my family. How would they hear the news of my death? And how would I be remembered? Would I be remembered as a hero who bravely fought the fire to the end or would I be remembered as the big idiot who foolishly got trapped by the fire? It didn't matter now because it was almost over, one way or another.

I was running as fast as I could, but my legs were weakening. My lungs were about to burst, but I continued running. I was just about ready to throw in the towel when I saw the faint glimpse of an opening in the smoke. It was getting lighter and by a miracle, I broke through. I exhaled hard and took in the clean fresh air. I greedily gulped it and continued running. I ran down the creek, gasping for more air. It was wonderful.

My strength was coming back to me and I picked up the trail. I continued running down the trail trying to put distance between the fire and myself. My legs were giving out and I needed a short break. I really needed to drink water; I was completely dehydrated.

For the moment, I was safe. I could afford to drink some water and catch my breath. As I drank, I looked back at the fire and saw that the whole hillside of the 1937 burn was burning furiously. It was just one large orange fireball making its way to the top devouring everything in its path. If I had continued up the mountain, I would have been cremated.

"I see you made it," the voice on the radio chimed in again.

"Yeah, thanks to you. If it hadn't been for you, we wouldn't be having this conversation right now," I said gratefully. "What is your name anyway?"

"The name's Clayton. Al Clayton."

"Clayton, huh. Like the mountain?"

"Just like the mountain." I could almost feel him smiling over the radio.

Clayton Peak was the tallest mountain in Black Water Canyon. It overlooks the entire canyon, and the Forest Service had installed a radio repeater on the top.

"Well, it is a real pleasure to meet you, Mr. Al Clayton. You might have just saved my life. I don't know how to thank you. How did you know that going up the mountain was the wrong way to go and going down to the creek was the way out?"

"I've been up that mountain before and I knew that if a forest fire ever came running up there, no one would be able to survive it. I am very happy you are safe."

"Well, I'm safe because of you. I owe you my life."

"Anytime, my friend."

"Well, thanks again."

"Take care."

I turned and headed on down the trail, facing an hour and a half hike out of the canyon to the trailhead. The gravity of

the situation I had just experienced was starting to sink in. I was shaking and my near brush with death was getting to me. I stopped and threw up all the water I had just swallowed. I needed to keep moving. The day's events were going through my mind. I replayed them over and over again as I moved down the trail.

It was late afternoon when I reached the trailhead and caught up with the Craig Hotshots. The crew stared at me as I emerged from the canyon. I could tell that they were relieved to see that I had made it. The crew foreman approached me.

"We thought you were a goner. After we got out, we looked back and all we saw was the whole canyon on fire. We didn't think anyone could possibly survive that holocaust."

"I wouldn't have survived if it hadn't been for a lookout or someone named Al Clayton who talked me down to safety. Do you know the guy?" I asked.

"Clayton? Never heard of him. In fact there were no lookouts in Black Water Canyon. We tried calling you repeatedly on the radio, but got no answer."

I looked down at my radio and noticed that the battery was dead. It must have died sometime when I was walking out. Funny, it was working when I was talking to Clayton.

I was confused. Who was this hero who saved my life? I walked over to the Black Water Memorial and was thinking how close I came to having my name added to the plaque. As I read the names, I truly understood the terror those young men must have felt just before they died. I was reading the names when I came to the last name. A cold chill poured through my body; the last name on the plaque was Alfred G. Clayton—Al Clayton. Confused, my mind couldn't comprehend what I was reading.

With the events of the day and now this, it was just too much to take in. An old man had been watching me, and I guess he could see the puzzled look in my face. He came over to where I was standing.

"I see you're looking at the names on the plaque," he said. I didn't say a word.

"He was a hero, you know."

I looked up at him. "What"

"I said he was a hero, Alfred Clayton."

He got my attention and I looked at him as he told the story.

"He was on the Black Water fire of 1937 when all hell broke loose. He was down by the creek and could have easily escaped by following the creek down to safety. His men chose to run uphill and try to outrun the fire that way. He turned around and ran up after them trying to turn them around. By the time he caught up, it was too late. They all died together on the mountain. A real shame. All those young men had their whole lives ahead of them. They named a mountain after him—Clayton Peak. Legend has it that he is still up there keeping watch over all the other firefighters. People say he is up there making sure the tragedy of 1937 never happens again. "Yes sir, ol' Al Clayton, he's a real hero. You ever heard of him?"

"Once," I said. "Just once."

Walt Wasser got his 300th fire jump June 29, 2004, and can be contacted at wowwasser@aol.com

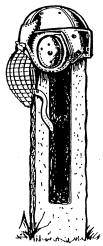
Summer Job High Valley Guard Station '62

by Tom Decker (Idaho City '64)

By the time summer was over
we all were back in school
where we studied about

God, got grades,
and graduated
cum laude.

God,
however,
had been there
all along in the cool
of the pines but we didn't
notice, God being sneaky that way.



Off The List

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. Please

phone, write or e-mail the editor (see contact information on page three of the magazine). We'll take it from there.

Robert J. Brennan (MSO-41)

Pioneer smokejumper Robert Brennan passed away on June 9, 2004, at the age of 85. Prior to jumping during the 1941 season, he worked for the Forest Service for three seasons. Bob was one of the seventeen rookies in the 1941 class. Fred Brauer and Wag Dodge were among that group. Born in Hamilton, Mont., he moved to Priest Lake, Idaho, in 1952 and worked for many years in the logging industry as a faller. A serious leg injury in 1975 almost ended his life and career. The doctors told him he probably wouldn't walk again, but Bob proved them wrong and ended up walking ten miles a day.

Virgil H. Hutchinson (NCSB-51)

Virgil (Hutch) and his wife, Sally, both died May 17, 2004, in an automobile accident. In his first year out of high school, Virgil jumped at NCSB and then began a forty-year career at Alcoa Aluminum before retiring in 1993. He was active in the Aluminum Workers Union and held positions at the local and national levels. The Hutchinsons had been married fifty-one years at the time of their deaths.

Ronald James McGinnis (MSO-68)

Ron died in his home in Napa, Calif., Thursday, April

29, 2004. He graduated from St. Helena High School in 1965 and Napa Valley College in 1969. Ron served his country honorably in the U.S. Army as a Green Beret in the 101st Airborne. A formative part of his life was spent as a smokejumper in Missoula, Mont.

Ron would return to the Berryessa area where he learned the skills to become a carpenter for the United States Bureau of Reclamation. He had a love of the outdoors that he shared with his family.

Melvin R. Northcott (NCSB-55)

Melvin passed away on April 4, 2004, in Twisp, Wash. His first job was as a smokejumper at NCSB in 1955 and 1956. He worked for Boeing from 1961 to 1971 and then on construction projects in Alaska. In 1974 the family moved back to Winthrop where they owned and operated the Trail's End Motel until retirement in 1981.

Melvin served on the Winthrop City Council and was elected mayor of Twisp in November 2003. He loved softball and played on the Over 50 team for the past five years.

James B. "Smokey" Stover (MYC-46)



"Smokey" Stover (NSA file)

Smokey made his last jump to go home to God and all his other Smoke-jumper buddies on May 20, 2004. He was born James Bennett Stover on July 26, 1921, in Weiser, Idaho. In his lifetime, he resided in Boise, Guam, New Guinea, Australia, Idaho City, and finally his beloved Waldport, Ore.

Smokey fought in World War II and was a smokejumper foreman from 1946–1972. In that time span, he worked with many young men and enjoyed all of their antics. Smokey retired in 1972 from smokejumping and was able to pursue his love of fishing until his death in Waldport, Ore.

Everyone will remember this wonderful man for his extreme patience, fairness, and sense of humor that is matched by none. His favorite enjoyment (besides fishing) was to enjoy his great grandchildren playing, and taking his daughters and grandchildren fishing and clamming. He was the "recreation director." He was the man who caught fish when there weren't any. 🐟

Remembrance of June 6, 1944

by Denis Symes (McCall '63)

June 6, 2004—Today is the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day, the invasion of Normandy. As I watched the commemoration of the invasion on television, film clips of the troops are shown as they land and move across the beaches. I am moved by the courage demonstrated by the young men as they dodge a hail of bullets and explosives. The tragedy of lives cut short and the absolute fear they must have felt (and overcame) focuses in my mind.

Some of the "older" jumpers I knew in the early '60s were veterans of the Second World War. I never heard them talk of their experiences; they were too modest to share such thoughts with guys born after Pearl Harbor. Their experiences must have been terrible and their minds indelibly imprinted with the sights and sounds they witnessed. I am proud of having known such men and working with them. I'll always remember them. Thanks guys.

Shep Johnson: A More Than Interesting Life

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

For a while now, I've wanted to interview jumpers who worked for the CIA during the so-called "secret war" in Laos, a U.S. paramilitary operation going on at about the same time as the Vietnam War. I wanted to find out more about the initial connection between the agency and smokejumpers.

Jack Mathews (MSO-48), a major player in the effort, communicated with me several times via phone, but Jack died in January 2001, and that source of information was lost. Then I located **Thomas C. "Shep" Johnson** (MYC-56). It wasn't long before I realized Shep had a pretty interesting story to tell.

A former Marine, Shep had already received a Purple Heart for service in Korea when his brother **Miles Johnson** (MYC-53) recruited him to the smokejumper program out of McCall in 1956. Shep at the time was working on an Idaho cattle ranch located not far from where he was born. As it happened, it was off-season on the same ranch when he was recruited for the CIA.

Below is his story, in his words.

Getting Involved with the CIA

I was approached in October 1959 by **Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson** (MYC-47). He told me I could have an off-season job that paid good money, but I declined. Without any details, I wasn't interested. So 1960 rolled around, and Pete and "Big Andy" [**Roland Andersen** (MSO-52)] approached me again. [This time] I said "okay." I was feeding cattle on the Weiser River at the time. I had a two and a half hour horseback ride in and out of the ranch.

A guy I was working with came in and told me that it was important to get in touch with my boss. I only thought about my mom being ill or something. My boss said to call **Ray Beasley** (MYC-52), who told me we were to report to Washington, D.C. When I told Ray that I didn't have any clothes to go back there, he said not to worry and that they had sent plenty of money.

I tied in with Ray, got the money and bought a sport coat, slacks, clean underwear, shoes and a tie. Caught a flight out of Boise, first-class, and headed for K Street and Pennsylvania Ave. in D.C. We were briefed by security and started one of the most unforgettable journeys I had ever undertaken. Beat the hell out of the Korean War; the pay was a damn sight better!

Tibet

I was hired as a C-130 crewmember, and it was my job to drop personnel and supplies into Tibet during the Tibetan revolution against the Red Chinese. The CIA referred to it as Operation Barnum. There were ten smokejumpers involved in the Tibetan operation, a 50-50 split between Missoula and McCall jumpers. I credit being on the Silver City crew and being available in the off-season for being picked for this job. Many other jumpers were in college during the off-season. I want to say that we had the best group of smokejumpers that could have been put together.

Out of about forty flights, I was on six in 1960 and one in 1962, which was the last flight that I know of. The planning for the Tibetan operation began in 1957. There were some exciting moments. One night we had twelve or fifteen Tibetans onboard. We were to drop them in one of the northernmost parts of Tibet. We had an internal fuel tank for extra fuel due to the length of the flight. As we approached the drop zone, we depressurized, and the fuel started running down the floor of the C-130. We had to turn on the lights, which was something that we never did. Flights were kept dark to prevent detection by the Chinese communists on the ground. We had to get the troops out first and then drop the cargo of weapons and food. With the fuel problems, we had to make both passes with the aircraft lights on and exposed to enemy eyes. The risk of electrical spark and fire was high, but we got back to Thailand without incident but low on fuel. **Bill Demmons** (MSO-51) and **John Lewis** (MYC-53) worked with me on this drop.

I ended up spending fifteen years with the agency, but nothing was as exciting as flying over the Himalayas at 32,000 feet and then dropping down to 15,000 feet to drop cargos of men and equipment. This worked out well for me, because I was able to do this job during the winter and smokejumping during the summer. This particular job only lasted three seasons, because the flights were suspended due to the U-2 incident, when [Francis] Gary Powers was shot down over Russia.

Laos

In the fall of 1960, John Lewis, Andy Andersen and I reported for duty in Okinawa and made several DC-4 flights into Laos in support of General Vang Pao's guerrilla army. In 1961, John Lewis and I reported to Guatemala with **Jack Wall** (MSO-48), who was in charge of training

parachutists and riggers for the invasion of Cuba. John and I were asked to return to Laos and work for Air America, but I declined and returned to McCall for the upcoming fire season.

In August 1961, John Lewis, **Darrel Eubanks** (IDC-54) and **Dave Bevan** (MSO-55) were killed in a C-46 crash while making a resupply drop in Laos. Paperlegs Peterson, [my brother] Miles and I reported into Takli, Thailand, to replace those three and continued the resupply drops to General Vang Pao's guerrilla forces. We did this until March of 1962 before returning to McCall for the 1962 fire season.

South Vietnam

In September of 1962, several of us reported to Inter-mountain Aviation in Marana, Arizona. Paperlegs, **Jack Cahill** (MSO-58), Jack Wall and I were sent to Saigon. Jack Cahill and I started dropping cargo from a C-46 aircraft. Pete and Jack Wall went up north to set up cargo-rigging sites and to work with U.S. Special Forces B-teams. Later, I replaced Jack Wall working with the Special Forces. Cahill and Wall went to work on special ops, setting up a parachutist training area out of Saigon in preparation to [infiltrate] South Vietnamese teams into North Vietnam.

Air America began phasing out dropping cargo, and the Special Forces started dropping from U.S. Army Caribous. This program was called Operation Switchback. Pete's and my purpose was to train Special Forces to rig cargo and to utilize our type of roller conveyor systems for use in the Caribous. "Our type" of roller conveyor system is the system that is designed by the CIA to dispatch parachute cargo in a matter of seconds from C-130s, C-47s, C-46s, Caribous and even large helicopters, [known as] Chinooks.

Training Tibetans ... in Colorado

After returning to the U.S., we were sent to Camp Hale, Colo., to train Tibetans. Why Camp Hale? Because the high altitude and rough terrain were as close as they could come to Tibet. The camp was set up by the U.S. Army for the 10th Mountain Division during World War II. Our job was to train them for airborne operations. We made our training jumps at Fort Carson, Colo. The Tibetans were probably the best and most motivated workers I have ever seen. To my knowledge they never jumped into Tibet, but walked in instead. Very few of these fighters survived the conflict with the Chinese. They were heavily outnumbered. No Tibetan jumped in Tibet after 1960 that I know of. There was one mission flown in January of 1962. I was a crewmember along with **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58), **Lyle Brown** (MSO-54) and **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42).

Thailand, 1966

Ken Hessel (MYC-58), **Frank Odom** (MYC-63) and I were sent to Phitsunulok Camp Saritsena to train PARUs [parachute aerial reinforcement units] and members of the Royal Thai Army. Hessel was our team leader and spent some of his time at Hauhin, Thailand, training the queen of Thailand's personal guards. Our [work] was mainly



L-R: Shep Johnson and Jerry Daniels at Hmong New Year's celebration/rodeo. (Courtesy Shep Johnson)

building helicopter landing strips and parachute training for rescue attempts by our PARU teams. However, these men were cross-trained in many other areas. ... CIA personnel had worked with the PARUs since the 1950s.

Marana Special Projects

Between 1962 and 1975, we worked on different research and development projects out of Marana Airpark, near Tucson, Arizona. Projects we tested included a para-wing with a remote control device and a parachute with a built-in guidance system that could zero in on a ground frequency system commonly known as a ground-to-air beacon device. Also, we tested the Parachute Impact System, which played a huge role in the secret war in Laos. This parachute allowed the pilot to fly high enough to keep out of range of small-arms fire. We worked with the Forest Service and BLM in ... support of [combating] wildfire. From New Mexico to Alaska, we worked with the CIA and assisted in airborne training back in Williamsburg, Virginia.

The Secret War

From 1965-73, many smokejumpers worked as air operations and case officers in northern and southern Laos. North, east, south or west, we were there. In 1969 and 1971, we supported General Vang Pao's Hmong army to take the Plain de Jars. I was wounded February 14, 1971, at General Vang Pao's secret base, known as Long Tieng, or Lima Site 20A. I always felt it was a Valentine's gift from Ho Chi Minh.

Christopher Robbins's Account

Chuck Sheley writes: A good account of the incident Shep describes is featured in Christopher Robbins's *The Ravens: The Men Who Flew in America's Secret War in Laos*. Writes Robbins:

A friendly 105 mm artillery piece at the south end of the runway kept a steady fire at the rate of one shell per minute, day and night, to harass the enemy. At 3:00 AM on the morning of February 14—Valentine's Day—the big gun stopped firing. [Enemy] artillery rounds started dropping into the compound at the rate of one every six seconds. The NVA had overrun the men firing the 105mm.

Shep, one of the CIA men, was caught outside in a shell blast and was pulled into the blockhouse with a badly cut leg. [After they got radio contact,] two Phantoms [F-4 fighter jets] out of Udorn arrived loaded with cluster bomb units (CBUs). The Ravens worried aloud that the fighters, flying into the brown haze in the half-light, would not be able to see a damned thing. The first F-4 went in, but instead of returning to make multiple passes, the pilot took the lazy course and dropped his entire load of CBU canisters at once. Shep, his leg hastily bandaged, was outside with Burr Smith and a platoon of Hmong guerrillas when the plane screamed over. Shep looked up and saw the CBU pods and watched in horrified fascination as the clamshell flew apart and the bomblets were spewed out. Shep, Smith and only a single Hmong survived.

Shep, however, remembers it differently. He told me he was already wounded and inside the bunker operating the radio, and that all the case officers were outside. What is agreed on, though, is that there were many casualties among the Hmong.

An Awesome Workload

Shep Johnson continues: T. J. Thompson (MSO-55) took my place until the ceasefire in 1973 in Laos. The workload there was awesome. C-130s and C-123s brought food, clothing, fuel, weapons and parachutes in and out. We also used Otters, Pilatus Porters, Hueys and H-34s. They probably moved between 1.5 to 2 million pounds per day. Many of our artillery positions were supplied by C-123s from Thailand. Only God knows how many pounds per day came from outside sources.

Largest CIA Field Headquarters

Chuck Sheley writes: By this time, the U.S. airfield in the Laotian city of Long Tieng was one of the busiest airports in the world, with some 500 takeoffs and landings each day. The base itself constituted the largest CIA field headquarters in the world. As James E. Parker Jr. reports in his book *Covert Ops: The CIA's Secret War in Laos*:

Tall rock formations or "karsts" dotted either end of the runway and were the cause for abrupt takeoffs and landings. The only way in was by air or down small foot

trails. Visitors were by invitation only. ... Vang Pao's stone house, surrounded by barbed-wire, was on the south side of the runway amid the shacks of perhaps twenty thousand Hmongs.

"They Ejected at Ground Zero"

Shep Johnson continues: There was one tower operator on the east side of the airfield. I don't know why rockets or incoming rounds never hit the tower. ... At the north end of the airstrip we had a barricade of barrels filled with dirt and stacked three high. The purpose of the barrels was to stop the aircraft before they hit the limestone karst. I witnessed two T-28s landing with their hydraulics shot out. Before the pilots hit the barricade, they ejected at ground zero. Out they go, and the parachute opened about 75 feet off the ground. Both pilots survived.

All Air America and Continental aircraft were controlled by our air ops, mostly smokejumpers. My job was to handle all incoming and outgoing parachute or landing cargo. The briefings were held at our para-cargo office, unless there was a special operation such as ... picking up wounded or KIA. We kept our air ops advised of where the aircraft were going.

The day we lost the C-130 with **Billy Hester** (MSO-58) onboard, he and all the crewmembers were killed. Gary H. was running air ops, and I was working the ramp. We had three C-130s coming in at fifteen-minute intervals. Some time had lapsed without hearing from Hester's plane, so I advised Gary, and he called the outgoing C-130. Gary was told that the plane was making an approach about fourteen miles out. ... It never arrived, and the search was on. We spotted the wreckage that day in a rugged area [at] about 8,500 feet. The next morning we left by helicopter and landed about one mile east of the wreckage and walked down to the site. Because of the terrain and jungle, it took some time to get to the crash site. We saw someone, and not knowing who it was (maybe Pathet Lao and the NVA) felt it better not continue to the crash area. Air ops ordered a Jolly Green and air cover while air commandos repelled into the site. People seem to think the pilot ran into the cloud with a mountain in it. The site where the C-46 was lost in 1960 with John [Lewis], Yogi [Eubanks] and Dave [Bevan] was about five miles down the ridge.

The Ravens

Chuck Sheley writes: The Ravens were a special and elite group of U.S. Air Force pilots who acted as spotters for American air strikes. Of the 160 men who were Ravens, 31 were KIA. (**Gene Hamner** (MSO-67) was a Raven and will be featured in a future issue of *Smokejumper*.) Robbins reports that at Long Tieng, the Air Force had an air operations center staffed with ten Ravens.

The Ravens Lost a Bunch

Shep Johnson continues: This operation did not come without a price. In the overall operation from 1961–73, we lost several smokejumpers. [See *Smokejumper*, January 2004; pp. 30–31.] Most were parachute dispatch officers who

worked for Air America. There were also many Air America, Continental and military pilots who flew the spotter aircraft who were killed in action. Air America lost somewhere around 241 [men]. The Ravens also lost a bunch.

After I was wounded, the family and I went on home leave and returned to Laos for another two-year tour. My job was to coordinate airborne operations between the logistics central base and outlying sites. ... One goal was to set up a better way to expedite the loading of aircraft. Most of the people at the outlying sites were smokejumpers, so everything went smoothly. We had local soldiers and third-country people to assist in rigging and loading aircrafts. All of our cargo had to have a load manifest, which told the pilot exactly how much cargo was onboard. In a tragic Porter crash, Cotton Davis, several Hmong soldiers and two American Army officers were all killed. It was the last flight of the day, and air ops had to get this last load out. The plane crashed and killed all on board. We think he was just heavy, or maybe the pilot was shot by a sniper on the ridge. From that day on, we fashioned a manifest called SOL, meaning souls on board.

“Buddy, We Got Seven People Here Who Don’t Know How to Jump”

Chuck Sheley writes: Parker describes Shep as “a lean former smokejumper” who helped train the seventy or so commandos. Parker goes on to say:

[Shep] was standing in front of them at the end of the dirt airfield near the back of an idling Air America C-130, when someone yelled that it was time to go. They were wet to the bone, some less than 15 years old and none taller than their M-16 rifles. Shep checked the equipment and continued down the line to count off the men. Seventy-seven! He knew there were only seventy commandos trained to make the jump. Seven Hmong, who had probably been support staff at the airfield, had picked up parachutes and joined the group. Shep yelled to the Hmong commander, “Buddy, we got seven people here who don’t know how to jump. I don’t know what they’re trying to prove, but it didn’t get by me.” There was no way to determine who the seven were, and the commander didn’t seem concerned, so the plane took off. Twenty minutes later, all seventy-seven men ran out the back of the C-130 and parachuted without injury on top of the pathfinders’ lights at the edge of the Plaine de Jarres.

Shep, the rigger, was scheduled to leave in the fall. This was Shep’s second tour. He was our special person, and we loved him. He worked hard every day, out of the ramp before the sun came up, rarely talking, always working, rigging things exactly right and then checking and rechecking. He absolutely refused to have anything go out from his rigging shed that wasn’t perfect—the right supplies rigged with the right parachutes on the right planes in the right order. It was an uplifting experience to work with Shep because he was so conscientious. Like “Hog” [Jerry Daniels, MSO-58]

and “Bag” [Frank Odom, MYC-63], he had come from the hills of Montana [*sic*] and was, for the most part, a silent frontiersman. Like the rest of us, General Vang Pao liked Shep and admired his work ethic. He planned a large farewell party—a “baci.” All of Sky was invited. The war stopped for Shep’s baci.”

Shep, incidentally, takes slight issue with Parker’s account, noting that you don’t address officers as “Buddy.” He says he would have called them by their rank.

Silent Helicopters

Shep Johnson continues: In 1972 I managed heavy-lift helicopter operations out of Lima 16 or Vang Vieng. We supported the Thai mercenary soldiers with fresh food brought in from Thailand. We also moved heavy weapons, bulldozers and road graders. I did this until my brother Miles came over to manage and supervise that project. I then went to an outpost or a site called PS-44. [The chief of operations] put me in charge of training eight selected commando raiders. They were of the ethnic tribe Lao Touoq. The plan was to put wiretaps into North Vietnam. The tap was put in by a Hughes 500 helicopter. ... It was virtually silent, hence [its] nickname, “Whisper.” The operation was successful, and the information the CIA received gave us the edge between the NVA and U.S. negotiators on the ceasefire in Laos and South Vietnam.

The jumpers who worked directly with the CIA were from Missoula and McCall. Those who worked for Air America were from all the bases.

Getting the Job Done

My association with the jumpers from all smokejumping units found us working very well together. We enjoyed one another, we partied together, we looked out for one another. We had our disagreements, but we always came up with a solution to get the job done. When it came to jumping out of any type of aircraft, helicopters included, there was no fear. If we wanted to sit down together and figure out how many types of aircraft we jumped and repelled out of, I would say between thirty and forty. Many of these were experimental jumps with experimental or peculiar types of equipment. When we left the outfit, many of us went to the Forest Service, Department of Interior, Indian Affairs or Department of Veterans [Affairs]. I think all of us ended up okay.

Later Years

Chuck Sheley writes: During his fifteen years with the CIA, Shep worked five years in Thailand and Laos. For his service, he received the Exceptional Service Medal (The Star). From 1976–82, he worked for the BLM Interagency Fire Center helicopter operations in Boise. He retired from the BLM Alaska Fire Service in 1990. He is now living in Payette, Idaho. If you’d like to reach him, he can be contacted at 2090 NE 10th Ave., Payette, ID 83661. His e-mail address is freezeoutarabian@hotmail.com. ☯

NSA Exhibit Dedicated at Evergreen Aviation Museum



NSA exhibit at Evergreen Aviation Museum, McMinnville, Ore. (Courtesy Fred Cooper)

On July 12, sixty-four years after the historic first fire jump at Marten Creek on the Nez Perce National Forest, the NSA smokejumper exhibit was dedicated at the Evergreen Aviation Museum in McMinnville, Ore. Located beside the Ford Tri-motor, the exhibit captures sixty-five years of Forest Service and BLM smokejumping history through pictures, video, life-size jumpers in vintage jump gear and fire fighting equipment.

The exhibit, a product of four years of effort, was financed by Evergreen Aviation Museum, the NSA and private donors. Jump gear, pictures and memorabilia were donated by individual jumpers, their families and by the North Cascades, Redmond and Missoula jump bases.

Steve Smith, producer of *Smokejumpers: Firefighters From the Sky* (NSA documentary), donated his time and skills to produce the exhibit's twelve-

minute smokejumper video.

The exhibit dedication program was spearheaded by Joe Stutler (MSO-71) and museum curator, Ben Kristy. Program speakers included Ben Kristy, Fred Cooper (NCSB-62), representing the NSA, Mike Fitzpatrick (RAC-78), representing the USFS Pacific Northwest Region, and Fred Brauer (MSO-41), representing the pioneer jumpers of the 1940s. Fred gave a historical perspective of the establishment of the smokejumper program and of those pioneers who gave the program its foundation.

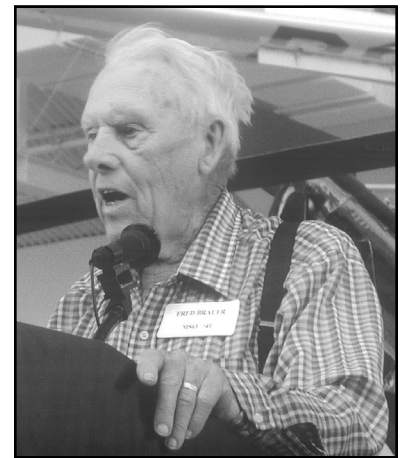
Penn Stohr Jr., former Johnson Flying Service smokejumper pilot, now with Evergreen International Aviation, made a Ford Tri-motor flyby and dropped drift streamers near the over 100 dedication guests.

A special thanks to Mr. Del Smith, CEO/chairman of Evergreen International Airlines, for allowing the NSA to be a part of the Evergreen Aviation

Museum—truly one of the finest aviation museums in the world. And a special thanks to Curator Ben Kristy and Katherine Huit, director of collections, for their dedication and commitment to making this a first class exhibit. NSA Exhibit Committee members included Mark Corbet (LGD-74), Fred Cooper (NCSB-62), Troop Edmonds (CJ-66), Wayne Williams (MSO-77), Dennis Golik (MYC-74), Tom Uphill

(MSO-56), Ron Stoleson (MSO-56) and Bill Moody (NCSB-57)

The Evergreen Aviation Museum hosts 200,000 visitors annually—what an opportunity to share our sixty-five year legacy! 📺



Fred Brauer (MSO-41) speaking at Evergreen Smokejumper Exhibit dedication. (Courtesy Fred Cooper)

Air America

by Barry Reed (Missoula '60)

I enjoyed John Kirkley's (CJ-64) story in the October 2003 issue. In August of 1966, I said my good-byes to Fairbanks, Alaska, and went home to pack for Air America. I worked for them September 1966 to June 1974 as a "kicker" like John on C-46s, C-47s, Caribous, Twin Otters and C-130s.

As a continuation of John's story, I was based in Udorn Thani (Udorn Air Force Base) on May 2, 1969. There were six of us kickers based there for some special projects and night drops. Bill Buzard (ex-Special Forces) and I were scheduled for the C-123 food run for the Thai Mercenaries at Long Tieng, Laos, that day. When we arrived, the "customer" met us on the loading ramp and said that we had taken Xieng Khouang on the Plain of Jars; that we were going to pick up captured wheeled weapons there and bring them back as soon as possible.

Since it was a hot area, the pilots used the usual short approach and landing procedures. I was on the headset in the rear and in control of the cargo ramp and cargo door. Bill was in charge of the front cargo area. It was a quick get in and out thing. After landing, I looked out the back and there was a four-wheeled 37 mm anti-aircraft gun ready to be loaded.

General Vang Pao (commander of the Lao Hmong) himself had his shoulder on the back of the 37 mm and shouted "1-2-3 push" in Hmong. Nothing happened! He looked left. He looked right. He did the same thing. This time there were maybe five more Hmong who pushed and the gun moved two feet. He looked left and right again and repeated his commands and that gun almost jumped ten feet on the C-123 cargo ramp as more people pushed. The next time, I thought that they were going to run over Bill in the front of the cargo area. I tied down the rear and Bill tied down the front of the gun and we were ready to go.

We pulled the landing gear pins as our part of the takeoff checklist, strapped in our seat belt, and took off in the steep climb and broke left. The copilot shouted "incoming" on the headset. Kablam! "We're hit," I shouted. There was a light mist coming from the right side of cargo area. "Where at?" shouted the pilot. "Our hydraulics," I said. "How much is left?" "It's all gone!"

After we gained enough altitude and were over a safer area, the copilot, Bill, and I looked over the aircraft carefully for any other damage. A 12.7 mm round (our .50 caliber is 12.5 mm) hit our right main landing gear blowing a four-inch hole in it. The shrapnel blew out the bottom of the hydraulic reservoir that was close by.

The pilots decided that we should go back to Udorn Air Force Base that had a 10,000-foot runway plus the U.S. Air Force crash team. Besides, our heavy fixed wing maintenance facility was there and they could easily replace the

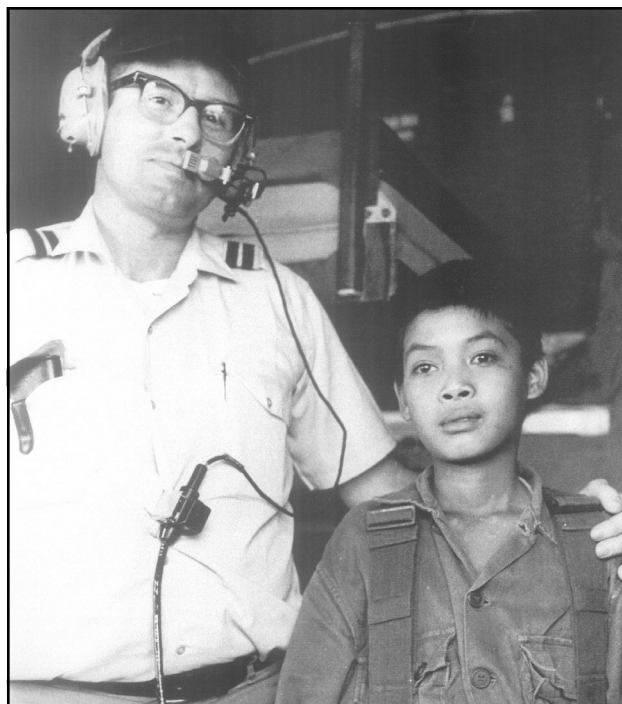
right landing gear and repair any other damage.

We got set up for a straight in approach, no flap landing. Bill and I pulled the manual release for all three landing gears that extended normally down and locked. We inserted the gear pins to keep them locked. The pilots, with great skill, touched down on the left main gear and kept the C-123 off the right gear as long as possible to prevent a ground loop. We came to a stop with the flat right tire providing most of the braking power. The Air Force Crash Team efficiently hooked up a tow bar, hauled us off the runway, and picked up any debris. One minute later, the F-4s were landing.

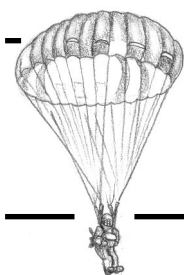
I looked over the 37 mm gun when we were on the ground. The end of one of the barrels was exploded outward. There could have been dried blood on the gunners seat and there was a shredded tennis shoe that seemed to have a part of a foot in it. As a public relations gesture, the gun was given to the F-4 Phantom jet outfit based there. They cleaned it up and proudly displayed it at their headquarters.

I wish that my memory is as good now as it was in those years so that I could give out the names of the smoke-jumpers and pilots. So it goes, keep it into the wind and don't get wet. ☔

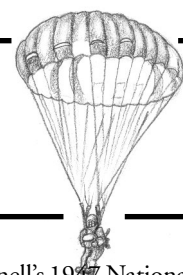
Barry currently works at the Missoula Job Service and can be reached at b-treed@msn.com



Barry Reed with young Hmong soldier 1972. (Courtesy Barry Reed)



Odds and Ends



by Chuck Sheley

A short note from **Chuck Blanton** (MYC-47) calling my attention to an article in the 1996 edition of *Evergreen* magazine. On page twenty-six of that issue is an article titled "A Logger's Wife" written by Helen Finney. Chuck points out that Helen's husband is **Don Finney** (MYC-50) who was the featured person in the film *Telephone Creek*. Don jumped the '50 and '51 seasons and is now living in Ward Cove, Alaska.

Tom Kovalicky (MSO-61) forwarded a small clipping out of a magazine advertising "Brown Bread In a Can-Wholesome, Natural, Time-Honored Fare." I'm sure that many of us can concur with Tom in that we remember it with a different description.

The NSA Exec. Committee met this weekend in Seattle (April 17). There were 44 in attendance at the social that evening. The food was good as was the fellowship. Want to thank **Polly Rohrbach**, wife of Director **Fred Rohrbach** (MSO-65), for her leadership in putting this event together.

While on the topic of the social, the good words about the magazine from **Hal Howell** (MSO-55) and Life Member **Les Domingos** (NCSB-64) on the open mike were appreciated. This operation is a labor of love for me and positive feedback is always fuel for the tank.

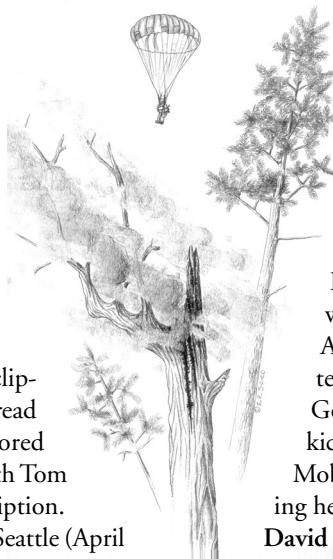
Ron Lufkin (CJ-60) sent in a note along with the obit information on **Melvin Northcott** (NCSB-55). Seems like Melvin and Ron (age five at the time) were riding the range on a wooden saw horse way back a long time ago in Winthrop. When they fell off (pre-child seats), Melvin landed on top breaking Ron's arm. Ron says he's hated horses ever since.

Dick Wessell (CJ-56) and his wife Sandy just arrived back home in Woodburn, Ore. Dick says they "slipped" away for three and a half months taking their RV as far as Illinois and also spending a couple months in Arizona.

Small world? **Joe Stutler** (MSO-71) was telling about writing a paper on smokejumping for an English class when he was a student at Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo). His professor took a keen interest in the subject, as well he should. **Starr Jenkins** (CJ-48) happened to be that professor.

"**Pic**" **Littell** (MSO-44) sent me an obit on legendary wrestling coach Dale Thomas. Thomas, although not a jumper, worked with Pic and **Ben Conner** (NCSB-48) for the U.S. Forest Service in Oregon the summer of 1942. Thomas was also a member of the Cornell (Iowa) wrestling team with Pic and Ben. I featured that team in "Giant Killers—Bigger Than Hoosiers" in the January 2004 issue.

While on the subject of the "Giant Killers" article, **Jim Beck** (MSO-75) had written in that his late father (Jug Beck)



was (also) a member of Cornell's 1947 National Championship team. Continuing on the small world thought, I e-mailed **Pic Littell** (MSO-44) with this info. Got this back from Pic: "I remember Jug Beck well, as does **Ben (Conner)**. We didn't know that he had a son (**Jim Beck** MSO-75) who jumped at Missoula.

I do know that Jug spent some time with the Forest Service fighting fires in the summer. He was with a gang from Cornell College (Iowa) headed by Arlo Ellison, a friend and high school and college teammate."

Got an e-mail that **Charley Moseley** (CJ-62) is still kicking, after having open-heart surgery (April 21) in Mobile, Ala. He had two arteries replaced and a leaking heart valve repaired.

David Bruhn (Associate) mentioned a book that might be of interest to you aviation buffs. *Flights Forgotten and Remembered* by Lt. Col. Boardman C. Reed; published in 2002 by Franklin Street Books, 6750 SW Franklin Street, Suite A, Portland, OR 97223.

Boardman is currently ninety years old and was named after his grandfather, an Army captain who served during the Civil War. During WWII, he commanded a squadron of B-17s and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Mentioned in the book is a gentleman named Warren Bullock, who had an operation in Red Bluff (Calif.) called Aero Atlas. Between 1959 and 1961 he had a contract for aerial suppression of forest fires and had a fleet of about three surplus AT-11 bombardier trainers, converted to borate bombers.

David Atkin (CJ-70) is one of the Gobi jumpers who has visited the more "well-known" place. "I just returned from a month working out in the Gobi Desert over in Outer Mongolia. It was a great trip, and I spent a lot of time riding camels. And yes, there are even Gobi stones in the Mongolian Gobi." **Al Boucher** (CJ-49) would probably say, "All those stones and nobody to dig them."

A report came out from the Government Accounting Office today (May) concerning the Biscuit fire from two years ago: "GAO investigators spent eleven months reviewing documents and interviewing officials at federal and state fire agencies in Oregon, California, Idaho and Washington, D.C."

The investigators found that when a July 13, 2002, lightning storm ignited the blazes that would become the Biscuit fire. Siskiyou National Forest fire managers requested fire fighting *smokejumpers*, helicopters and retardant bombers. *None, however, were available in Oregon.*

It's too bad they couldn't have read *Smokejumper* magazine *that showed there were available smokejumpers at*

Redmond and that a request for them never got beyond the Siskiyou N.F. So much for government investigations. Since there were 110 smokejumpers listed as available nationally, maybe it's time to develop a fire plan whereby smokejumper availability is known to all the states.

Got a letter from **Alvin Malthaner** (MSO-45) who noted an address change for his magazine mailing. Al has moved from Michigan to New York after he suffered a stroke in 2003 but is getting better. Says he bought a computer and now has an e-mail address.

Ken Hessel (MYC-58) forwarded some articles from his local newspaper concerning the GAO investigation of the Biscuit fire (2002) in which the Forest Service admits that the worst damage (high intensity burn) was done by the intentional backburns. Ken really hits it on the head: "The way I see it, there is inherent risk in fire fighting. If the feds think they can eliminate all personal risk to firefighters, they might as well get out of the business. Considering all the backburning the FS does now days, it seems obvious to me that the forest would be better off if the fed firefighters simply stayed home-building fire suppression models and fighting fire on their computers." How's that for getting right to the bottom line. Way to go, Ken!

Life Member **Don Baker** (MSO-65) in passing along information about the death of **Ron McGinnis** (MSO-68): "In 1971 when I was jumping my last year at Redmond, Missoula sent over a booster crew. Ron and I jumped a two-manner on the Willamette Nat'l Forest in some of the tallest timber on the North American continent outside of the redwoods."

Sara Brown (RAC-03), attending the University of Vermont Law School, was awarded the Pinchot Institute's Conservation Scholarship for 2004. The scholarship was initiated by Forest Service employees to help educate their offspring interested in pursuing natural resource careers.

Chuck Mansfield (CJ-59) was interviewed on KOB-TV in Albuquerque (NBC affiliate), May 2004 concerning his comments on the delayed initial attack on the Peppin fire in New Mexico (28,000 acres). The fire was lightning caused and one acre when reported. It was not manned for three days because there were no safety zones in the area.

Get used to seeing this become commonplace. Small fire becoming large ones due to "safety" concerns. I'm guessing the firefighters killed in vehicle accidents on fires will continue to be significant, but no one will figure out that quick initial attack will save lives in the long run.

The Forest Service waited until the start of the fire season to cancel the contracts on the multi-engine air tankers calling them unsafe. In a statement (June 2): "BLM Director Kathleen Clarke and Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said yesterday that they couldn't justify using the old tankers because of safety risks."

Aero Union here in Chico, Calif., flies P-3 Orions that are currently in use by the U.S. Navy. Is the Navy flying aircraft that are unsafe? I don't think so. Tell me the logic here please.

Added note: Saw in the newspaper this morning (7/3/04) that the Aero Union P-3s have been approved and will

be used this summer. Was it really necessary to ground *all* of the larger air tankers without looking at their airworthiness in the first place? More of your taxpayer dollars at work running in that tight circle again.

From **Jack McKay** (NCSB-57): Just received the July issue of the *Smokejumper* magazine. Great article about Ken (Sisler).

You put a lot of time into this article. Very well done! Thanks Tomorrow is June the sixth and I just got a great e-mail from **Denis Symes** (MYC-63) and a short piece that he did on the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day. It appears in this issue. We owe so much to that generation. About twenty years ago they built a new high school in Chico and tore down the old building. I remembered a plaque in the main hall that listed the WWII dead, and it was not put up in the new school. I went out to the school district corporation yard and climbed through the overhead storage areas and found it deep in a pile of stuff. It is now in the main hall. The impressive/terrible thing was that there were seventy-two names on that plaque and we were only a town of 12,000 at that time.

Steve Baker (NCSB-88) was featured in the "Active Profile" section of the *Idaho Statesman* in the June 3 edition. Steve is now jumping out of Boise. He has combined two careers jumping sixteen years and being a veterinarian for nine. Thanks to **Tom Kovalicky** (MSO-61) for forwarding the article.

MILESTONES

Update to July 2004 "Milestones"

"Milestones" was created to serve as both a "Hall of Records" for smokejumping and as a way to encourage you to write in with related stories. If you know of an event that relates to any of the listed categories or want to nominate someone, please send it to pegmark@juno.com or mail them to Mark Corbet, 1740 SE Ochoco Way, Redmond, OR 97756.

Number of aircraft types jumped (on the job)

15—Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67)

20—Greg Anderson (MSO-68)

Multi-generation jumpers

Father: Cecil Hicks (NCSB-62)

Son: Brian Hicks (MSO-95)

Father: Wally Dobbins (MSO-47)

Son: Jeff Dobbins (NIFC-78)

Father: Bob Nicol (MSO-52)

Son: Joe Nicol (MSO-80)

Father: Gar Thorsrud (MSO-46)

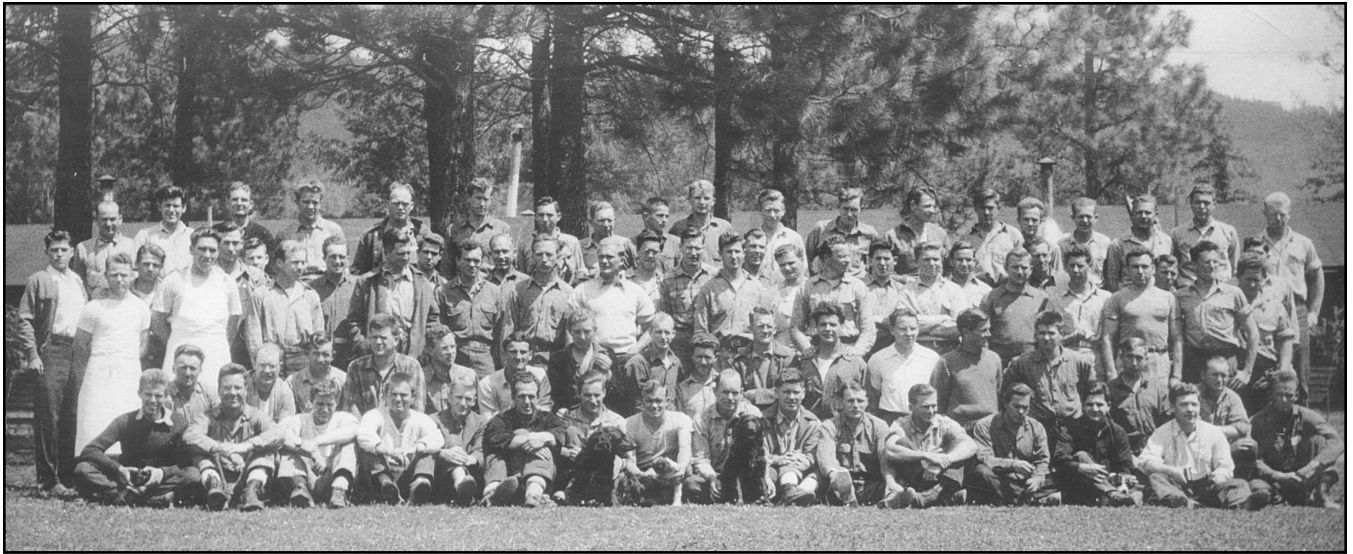
Son: Erik Thorsrud (MSO-79)

Father: Greg Whipple (MSO-59)

Son: Morgan Whipple (MSO-89)

Oldest active jumper

60—Walt Currie (MSO-75)



1944 CPS-103 smokejumpers at Camp Menard Station west of Missoula. (Courtesy Harvey Weirich)

Luke Birky (MSO-45): "I just received the July issue of the *Smokejumper*. Great job, I was a jumper only one season—1945 CPS. But it still warms my heart to read about **Earl Cooley**, **Wag Dodge** and **Al Cramer**.

"I was glad to read **Gregg Phifer's** article on the 'Rescue Jump at Cooper Creek.' It gave me some of 'the rest of the story'. I was one of the eight men who jumped in to help carry Archie Keith (the severely injured jumper) out to the road (approx. twenty miles).

"In the article Gregg mentions that a Negro Army doctor, **Lt. Charles Burks**, and his assistant, **Corporal Benjamin Brown**, jumped in to treat Archie. They had flown in from their base in Oregon. I remember their arrival well. It was such a relief to have them. Although a number of us had Red Cross first aid training, it can be a pretty lonely feeling to have such a critically injured person so many hours/miles from good health services. To have a real doctor to make a 'house call' out there in that wilderness was comforting indeed.

"I would be remiss if I did not again say what a great boss **Earl Cooley** was. I really respected him. The summer of '45 was a busy one for firefighters. About mid-season I had been on quite a few fire jumps and two rescue jumps. Earl came to me one day and said, 'Luke, you're getting too many jumps, aren't you?' Then he said he wanted to send me out on some trail work for a few weeks. I assumed I'd be off call for the evening. Then fire calls began to come in and I was on the third plane load to go out that evening and never did get out on that trail work. Earl—he was a great leader!"

Just got an e-mail (June 16) from **Steve McDonald** (associate): "Chuck: FYI I have gotten a terminal diagnosis with melanoma cancer. I wanted to let you know and be sure that you know how much I have appreciated our relationship. I don't know how much time there is but I start radiation treatments tomorrow—will see." Steve has been a friend for the last four years. Oddly, I have never met Steve face-to-face. He is retired Forest Service and the author of

Baker 30 and *Bitterroot*, two novels that we carry in our store. Steve's poems have been featured many times in *Smokejumper* magazine. Just another example of the benefits of working for the NSA and meeting and making new friends. There is not much that I can say at a time like this other than I'll be doing what I can to help and that will be praying.

From **Jay Carlbom** over the Web site: "I have been visiting this web site & reading the articles and remembering the 'good ol days' and the great people I met on the Siskiyou NF. When I first arrived on the forest back in '73, I tried to hire on as a pilot, but all they had was a WAE position, part time and not at CJ, so I signed up for a PFT pos. as Forest Radio Tech. These articles sure bring back memories!! I transferred out to BLM, Phoenix in '80 and finished my last eighteen years with the DOJ. I will always be partial to the people on the Siskiyou and especially the jumpers ... Mouse, Mick, Terry, Ron, Hal. Those were good times!"

Got a note from **Cindy Champion** (MSO-99) appreciating the magazine. Cindy is taking this season off from jumping and is located in Carson City, Nev.

Joseph Buhaly (NCSB-47) sent along a much appreciated letter: "I read 'Sounding Off' in the July issue. I usually skim through all the articles, but once I started reading your article, I continued to read every word and further discussed your work with my wife who also does significant volunteer work. The amount of time, money and effort put into this one issue (merchandising) was impressive. Most of us would have quit trying early on."

From **Brad Hughes** (NCSB-86): "Started taking care of the weather stations for the Okanogan/Wenatchee this spring. So far has me running my butt off ... 10 more years. Hope the outfit lasts that long."

Chuck Lockwood (MSO-65): "A thank you—I don't want to be pretentiously forward about my newfound celebrity, but I cannot ignore the standing ovation I received the Sat. night at the NSA reunion. I've run lots of foot races, won

few, fought fights, didn't win any, had a misspent youth, married young, and yet nothing could have prepared me for the standing ovation I received at the 2004 NSA reunion. As the tears welled up in my eyes, it suddenly came to me, that expression, 'no greater tribute can be given than one made by his peers.' "

From **Roger Savage** (MSO-57): "Stan Linnertz honored Chuck Sat. night at the reunion banquet stating he was a great American. Chuck was involved in an auto accident in the '60s while traveling back to Grangeville from Missoula. He is now pretty much confined to a wheel chair and has a difficult time speaking and yet he has an unbelievable attitude. He is truly an inspiration to all of us who have had the pleasure to know him."

From North Cascades 06/26 @ 0837: "Dropped **Dale Longanecker** and **Mark Corbet** on a 500-acre two-maner. 1,400 jumps experience in that stick!"

Just got off the phone with **Fred "Fritz" Wolfrum** (MSO-53) who is donating his painting of the Ford Tri-motor to the NSA. The painting will be located at the Smokejumper exhibit at the Evergreen Flying Museum in McMinnville, Ore. This is an excellent piece of art, and we're working on having prints made that we hope to be able to market in our merchandising effort.

Just by coincidence at the reunion banquet, I was fortunate enough to be seated at the same table as **Dick Moore** (MSO-46) and his wife **Evelyn King**. Dick is a retired Air Force colonel and the nephew of **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40). Evelyn is a retired reporter for the *Missoulian* newspaper and still does a weekly column for the Sunday edition. It was a real pleasure getting to know and talk to both of these two very interesting people.

"The reunion was great!" **Jim Brown** (MSO-46). "You are putting out an excellent magazine. Clear, concise, informative and covers the entire time frame. Always interesting and really looked forward to."

Chuck Pickard (MSO-48): "Boy, how Missoula has changed from the good old days. Happy to see the 'Oxford' still

doing business. Wonder what ever happened to Clara?"

John Marker (associate), **Director National Assoc. of Forest Service Retirees**: "**Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) introduced me to the NSA with a comp subscription last year. I have to tell you, the NSA magazine is one of my favorites. While I never was a jumper, I have worked with the program in several locations during my time with the FS. In the early 1960s, I was a district fire control officer in Hayfork (Calif.), and I wanted to get jumpers dispatched faster when we broke a fire on the district where manpower was short. I was involved in the issues at Cave Junction and trying to keep it operational while working on the Rogue River NF. While in R-4 (early '80s), I was fire operations officer for the region and spent a lot of time with the McCall crew as I looked for ways to increase the utilization of jumpers throughout the region.

"I continue to be a fan of the jumper program. I wish that the FS would use the jumper program today as a model for training all of its firefighters, especially (with) the non-nonsense requirements for meeting standards of performance and cutting no slack for the people who don't meet the standards."

All of us who have been involved in the smokejumper program surely appreciate the support of the professionals like John who have been in administrative positions where they can be an advocate of the program. Although I have not met John, his is a very familiar name as I see it in publications and with his position as national director of the FS Retirees. It's great to have a person with John's background as a member of the NSA.

Talk about milestones, **Walt Wasser** (MYC-79) got his 300th fire jump June 29. **Dale Longanecker** (RAC-74) followed with his 300th on June 30. On the same fire with Longanecker, **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) made his 299th fire jump. Truly amazing achievements.

Pat Scheid (MSO-58) concerning the recent reunion: "The organizers did a world class job. It made an emotional return to Missoula after 44 years."

Got a very interesting note from LTC **Robert T. Dunton** (WYS-88), who still gets his *Smokejumper* magazine in Iraq: "I have been in country now for almost five months. Our base is about 10 miles from the city of An Nasiriyah, the city where the 507th Maintenance Company was ambushed last year and PFC Jessica Lynch was rescued. I am deployed with the 115th Engineer Group and our mission is to rebuild and pave MSR Tampa (main supply route) that links Kuwait and Baghdad. We are also working on rebuilding sewer and water systems and many schools that have been neglected for years."

Feedback from the last issue: "Mr. Sheley: Thank you for the great article on my uncle, Ken Sisler (feature article and cover from July 2004 issue). Becky Sisler Wilson is my mother. Although I have only known Uncle Ken through stories, (he was killed before I was born) I feel like I know him, thanks to the great many articles and monuments in his name. It also gives my mother great pride to be able to tell his stories and see them published. Thanks again. Patrick Barbour, Dexter, MO 63841. 🐼

Please Tell Us When You Change Address

The postal service does NOT forward your copy of *Smokejumper* when you move or leave home for an extended time period. It is returned to us and the NSA is charged an additional first class postage fee. With 30-40 returns per mailing it gets expensive and takes a lot of time. Please let Chuck Sheley know if you have any change in your mailing address. Contact information is on page three.

The Coming of the Smokejumpers (Historical Document)

by Roy Mitchell (Assistant Forest Supervisor, Chelan NF)

Forest Service Memories edited by Gilbert W. Davies and Florice M. Frank

Prior to smokejumping as a way to place firefighters on a fire quickly, "smokechasers" were employed to locate and fight fires—older jumpers will remember the fire training film, John, the Smokechaser. Once a lookout spotted a "smoke," a crew of smokechasers was sent to locate and suppress it. Locating a fire was often difficult due to thick forest growth; often the crew had to zero onto the fire by smelling it and following smoke trails. After trudging through miles of forest and climbing up mountains, they arrived at the fire, already tired. A quicker, better way to get men on fires was needed.—Editor

During the fall of 1939, an experimental parachute-jumping project was conducted on the Chelan (now Okanogan) National Forest. The object of the experiment was to determine the conditions under which a man could be safely transported to or near a fire in inaccessible mountainous areas and the protective clothing and equipment needed to land safely in timber and other hazardous terrain.

Parachute jumping was not new. Neither was the proposal to use parachutes to transport men to fires. Various personnel in Region 6 and other regions had discussed it for several years; however, the proposals for this mode of transportation "jelled" in the following manner:

During the summer of 1939, the USFS Washington Office assigned a conventional five place, high wing, cabin type airplane to Region 6 for fire related experimental work. The plane was piloted by Captain Harold King and was used for a short time in Region 5 prior to being assigned to Region 6.

The first tests occurred at the Portland airport. Attempts were made to drop water and chemicals from various containers on dummy fires, but the small volume that could be carried by the plane and the sighting methods were very unsatisfactory. There was real difficulty in hitting the target effectively and the results were not favorable.

The assistant regional forester in charge of operations, Melvin L. Merritt, discussed the problems with Captain King and Jack Campbell, the latter being in charge of Region 6 fire control at the time. Suggestions were made that if the plane could drop a man, or men, to a fire quickly after it started and while it was still small, the plane could perhaps serve a more useful purpose. It was concluded that dropping small quantities of water or chemicals was ineffective and not worth the cost.

Soon after this conclusion, Jack Campbell and Captain



Classic picture of smokejumper Foreman Cliff Mason (Richard Widmark) from Red Skies of Montana. (Courtesy Karl Brauneis)

King entered M. L. Merritt's office and requested permission to parachute men onto fires. They noted that there were obvious and serious risks to such a procedure. Mr. Merritt said he was willing to try it if the regional forester and Washington Office would approve.

Merritt, Campbell and King put the proposition to the regional forester, C. J. Buck. Buck agreed to approve it, if Roy Headley, the Washington Office fire chief, would also agree. At the time of this discussion, Mr. Headley was visiting Portland. Mr. Headley fully considered the matter and after a lengthy discussion, approved the experimental project. The Washington Office would finance the project if Region 6 would arrange to have Mr. David Godwin, his assistant chief of fire control, present and observing during

the trials.

As a first step, Merritt asked Captain King to secure the necessary parachutes. No parachutes were available from the military, so he accordingly prepared specifications and bids for supplying an initial order of chutes. Shirley Buck, the Region 6 purchasing officer, handled the procurement. The specifications were sent to several manufacturers. A few days later, Beach Gill, representing the relatively small Eagle Parachute Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, personally came into the fire control office. He not only wanted to bid on the chutes but also offered to assist in getting the operation started by furnishing a few experienced jumpers, as well as the chutes.

Mr. Gill's bid was accepted and a contract providing for parachutes, two jumpers, protective clothing and a rigger (parachute packer) was prepared. One of the first steps was to prepare protective suits and equipment for the jumpers.

Exhibition jumps were quite common at carnivals, fairs, etc., but protective clothing for the jumper was not necessary for these jumps. Protective clothing would be necessary to land in hazardous cover and terrain. Equipment for a jumper to release himself from the parachute harness and descend to the ground (if the chute should catch in the top of a tall tree) had to be developed. The initial phase of the project required more time and funding than was first anticipated, but all actions taken to make this dangerous experiment as safe as possible were time and money well spent.

As part of the initial stage, the Regional Office decided to conduct the experimental project on the Chelan (Okanogan) National Forest.

The project got underway on October 5, 1939, after much development of the necessary equipment; it was completed by the middle of November.

Four different types of parachutes were used. The first was the seven-foot by seven-foot burlap cargo chute used to determine wind drift prior to the jumper leaving the plane. The second was a condemned military chute weighted with about 150 pounds and dropped from the plane to determine problems facing a live jumper landing in tall trees, a snag or rugged terrain. It was also used to determine damage to the silk canopies when landing in trees, snags, etc. Many dummy drops were made with these chutes prior to any live jumps in timber types. The two types of live jump parachutes, furnished by the Eagle Parachute Company, were a thirty-foot canopy backpack and an emergency attachable chest pack which, I believe, had a twenty-seven-foot canopy. The chest pack chute was to be used only in case the thirty-foot backpack chute failed to open. Both chutes were so constructed and rigged that the jumper could turn right or left by pulling on the right or left guidelines.

These chutes were very rugged and were not easily torn, even when a jumper landed in timber or got hooked on a snag. Although a chute would occasionally suffer a small tear in the silk canopy when caught on a snag or sharp limb, the crew was surprised at the small amount of damage caused in this way. Retrieving the chutes from trees caused more damage than timber landings.

The original protective suit for jumpers was made in Portland and was a one-piece outfit sewn from heavy canvas and padding. It had a stiff leather collar about ten inches high sewn to the suit's neck. It was designed to protect the jumper's face when landing in timber or being dragged on the ground by wind. One of the first few jumps made with this original suit resulted in the jumper's chin and one side of his face being skinned very badly. The ground crew at first thought the jumper was seriously injured from the looks of the blood on his face and suit. Fortunately, only numerous small blood veins were cut; however, this was the worst injury received by any of the jumpers during the initial project. This injury was analyzed and it was determined that the jumper's body was positioned such that when the chute opened, some of the shroud lines caught under the stiff leather collar and pulled its edges across his chin and face.

The jumper's suit was redesigned at Winthrop and was made into a two-piece suit of lighter material. The heavier canvas material in the original suit was not flexible enough for good movement. The redesigned suit was padded at the knees, shins, hips, abdomen, shoulders, elbows, etc. to protect the jumper. Webbing was sewed in the crotch of the trousers and also down to the cuff. The trousers of this two-piece suit were fitted with suspenders and were worn over the jacket. A football helmet protected the head. A hinged wire mask was attached to the helmet; it was fastened by a leather strap and buckle. The helmet and mask protected the head and face and yet did not impede visibility.

The jumper's outfit also included a back and abdominal brace, a wide leather and elastic belt (to minimize possible back and abdominal injuries during parachute opening), boots with eight or twelve inch tops, ankle braces, athletic supporter, and gloves.

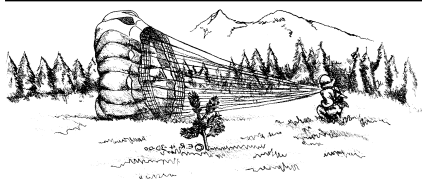
A leg pocket extending from about the knee to the ankle on one leg was provided in which a rope could be carried to enable the jumper to let himself down from trees.

It was difficult for a jumper to extract himself from the parachute when he landed in a tree, due to the bulky suit. A detachable riser with snaps was developed to permit the jumper to release himself from the parachute and descend via the rope.

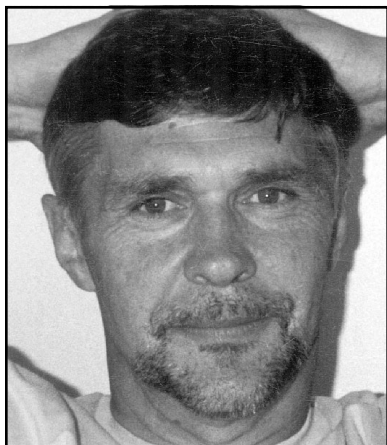
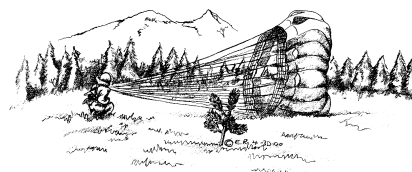
There were about sixty live jumps made during the 1939 experimental project.

Once he landed, the jumper became a firefighter and needed tools. Test drops were made by dropping a jumper's firefighting equipment to him. The outfit was wrapped in burlap or canvas and included items such as Pulaski tool, shovel, mess kit, first aid kit, canteen, rations, etc. The seven-foot by seven-foot burlap chute was used for these drops.

After these tests were finished in the fall of 1939, the entire crew felt elated that the project was completed without serious injury despite the hazards and, the test proved that smokechasers could safely land in inaccessible mountainous areas. The success of this project prompted the Forest Service to undertake "smokejumping" on an extensive scale. 🌲



Checking the Canopy



by Steve Goldammer
(Missoula '66)

Crazy Snippets: Or the ancient “chicken or the egg question”!

THIRTY DAYS AFTER my last Forest Service jump, I was sitting in the front cockpit of a Beechcraft T-34B Mentor, the Navy’s primary training aircraft. My instructor, LDRC Robert Kennedy, was in the rear seat. We were at the “hold-short line” at Santa Rosa, an outlying field near Foley, Ala., waiting for takeoff clearance, delayed by an idiotic student declaring an emergency—something about “his landing gear not coming down.” In his strong Boston accent, LDRC Kennedy (no relation) said, “Pop the canopy so we can get some air,” and then added, “So, tell me your background.”

I told him of my South Dakota farm boyhood where, for my first seventeen years, I had never spent more than two consecutive nights outside of my own bed. I told of college and my summer job as a smokejumper. He interrupted with, “What’s that?” “What’s what sir?” “A smokejumper,” he said! I quickly explained that it was someone that parachuted into remote areas and put out forest fires. “What!” he

incredulously screamed over the intercom, “You jumped out of a perfectly good aircraft into a forest fire?”

Frustrated, I tried to explain that we didn’t parachute “into” the fires. And he said, “That’s not the part I’m worried about, it’s that you parachuted at all.” Later when we were in the air, he asked in a rather quiet, cautious, probing tone, “Do you feel like bailing out *now*?”

Years later, I was sitting before a panel of high ranking Naval Aviation officers who were conducting a PPMC (Patrol Plane Mission Commander) Board to select new aircraft commanders. My fitness to handle an aircraft and crew and the responsibility that went with it was examined. As they read my PRP (personality reliability profile) folder one remarked, “Oh, it says here that you were a smokejumper.” After I explained what it was, he looked at the board and commented, “Maybe we should send him to the base shrink.” They laughed; I worried.

Many years later, I studied pastoral care as a second-year student at a Lutheran seminary. The instructor was a psychologist, Dr. Herb Anderson (he’ll like being mentioned—he always wanted to be published). Examining my family history, he discovered my smoke-jumper experience. He looked at me very seriously and announced to the class that I had a DEATH WISH! To no avail, I argued that it was really a life wish. He made an example of me before the class as to what *not* to instill in people.

On a recent family shopping trip, one of my children held up a T-shirt that read, *IF YOU’RE NOT LIVING*



ON THE EDGE, YOU’RE TAKING UP TO MUCH ROOM! and said, “Hey Dad, you should get this.”

I really liked that shirt, and would have worn it a lot, but instead, I simply said, “Oh, that’s okay, I’ll get something else.” I wondered where he got that impression of me.

Recently, I was talking to an old codger farmer about life and what we wanted out of it. He was quite content with his fifty years of farming and the resulting quiet life. When I told him about smokejumping, he looked at me and said, “What’a ya, nuts!! What’d ya do that for?”

And again, in an apologetic manner, I tried to defend the rationale of smokejumping.

I don’t understand exactly why we “jumped.” Certainly, the money was important, but it could have been for the love of being in the wild. I’m certain some jumped to conserve natural resources. And then there are a plethora of deep-seated inner desires to fulfill one’s self (whatever that means). Whatever the real reason for doing it, I have always found myself defending my love of smokejumping as if to say, “No, I’m really not crazy, I am as sane as the next guy!” But now, I’m too old and tired to defend this fanatic, masochistic form of pleasure any longer. I accept it, I *am* certifiably crazy.

And, I’m okay with that. I can live with it. I’ve humbly concluded that you don’t *have* to be crazy to be a smokejumper, or it doesn’t *make* you crazy, but, in both cases, it helps!



Sabe Creek Fire, 1945

by Earl Schmidt (Missoula '43)

It was a beautiful, clear, hot day, and I was assigned to the loft in Missoula. The loft was in an old storefront room near the railroad depot. My job was simple—keep the place clean. **Lee Ratzlaff** (MSO-43) was working a sewing machine as others rigged parachutes.

At just about quitting time the phone rang with a fire request for eight of us down near the Salmon River. On our way to Hale Field, we went by the Sigma Chi house, our summer quarters, and picked up jackets and socks. When we arrived they were fueling the Tri-motor. With **Bill Wood** (MSO-43) as spotter we headed to the Nez Perce. My chute was a silk Irvin, loved by the grasshoppers.

We soon flew over the Red River fire and were glad it was not our fire. It was big and eventually took over 500 men to control it. When we arrived at our fire, I was the first one out. I hit the side of a big pine and slid down to a soft landing. After walking a few feet up the hill, it was easy to pull the chute out.

We had jumped at 9:00 PM and were soon on the one and a half acre fire. We quickly had the fire lined and were preparing a spot for our six-pound goose down sleeping bags. The man scouting the fire said that three of us had located a dangerous sleeping spot. They reluctantly moved but no one had much to say the next morning when they found a tree that had fallen on their initial spot.

It was cool the next morning, and the fire appeared out by noon. Two of us worked on finding hot spots while the others retrieved the chutes and got ready to walk out. We found sixteen spots over the next couple of hours by looking into the sun and seeing the flying insects hovering over the warmth. We felt the charred pieces of wood to make sure everything was out and finally rechecked our fire line to make

sure that it was clean. We waited an hour and checked the burn again before starting the hike out. The wind came up to about thirty miles per hour at that time. It gave us a lot of satisfaction to know that this would have been a big fire if we did not have the ability to parachute men to it in the early stages.

The path out to the lookout was steep and had 4,000 foot gain in elevation in seven miles of trail. We left the fire at 4:20 in the afternoon with light packs, leaving the heavy things for the pack string. At 11:20 that evening we arrived at the lookout. The lookout prepared the best hotcakes and fried potatoes that I had ever eaten. After a good night's rest we hiked twelve miles to the nearest road where a truck picked us up. The driver took us thirty-five miles to the Red River Ranger Station to spend the night. From there it was another twenty-mile ride to a grass strip called Dixie where we met the Tri-motor and back to Missoula.



Earl Schmidt 1943 (NSA file)

After looking at the amount of road and trail that we traveled on the way out, it was easy to see that travel by air and parachute had put men on the fire line days ahead of driving and hiking to the fire. It gave us much satisfaction to know that we were able to save some timber for future use and enjoyment.

Earl was one of the few CPS-103 jumpers to jump all three years of the program (1943–45). He currently lives in Biglerville, Penn. 🇺🇸

Thanks to the Reunion Committee

The NSA and everyone attending the June 2004 reunion in Missoula owes a great deal of thanks to the group that did the work and spent the time to make this event a great success.

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Ted Nyquist
Ben Lowman and George Jackson
Eddy Ward and Wayne Williams
Paul May
Lowell Hanson and Stan Tate
Jim Kautz
Laird Robinson and Tim Aldrich
Floyd Bethke

A Single-Engine O-2

by Gene Hamner (Missoula '67)

During the Vietnam war, the U.S. was attempting to stop the flow of troops and war materiel that was passing down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. The trail was bombed day and night and most of the bombing was guided by forward air controllers working from Nakhon Phanom, Danang and Pleiku. More bombs were dropped on Laos than were dropped on Germany during all of WWII. The O-2s and OV-10s worked as an Air Force asset in this operation.

It was the dry season, February 1971, late at night, and I was working some fighters on (destroying) trucks moving along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The gunners were trying hard to spoil my night, and I was working equally hard to ruin theirs.

Bob Reid (Nail 210) was working the not-so-high-tech starlight scope, trying to keep everything in sight as I jinked hard to stay out of the AAA (anti-aircraft artillery), to get a mark down for the fighters, avoid the errant fast mover (jet) and kill the trucks.

Some more Tac air (fighter aircraft) were checking in, and I was getting ready to give them a target briefing when I saw a drop in the fuel pressure for the rear engine. Thinking that the auxiliary tank was about to run dry, I changed tanks and hit the boost pump switch and waited to feel the comforting kick in the butt as the engine coughed, caught and accelerated. Instead, I got the screaming whine of a runaway prop. I instinctively pulled the nose of the plane up to slow the prop before the engine came unglued. Bob pulled the scope in, looked at me inquisitively and asked, "What's going on? Let's get those A-7s on target. We have lots of movers (trucks) down there."

"Forget those movers. We've got serious problems right here."

No sooner had those words left my mouth, than the rear engine quit. I switched tanks again and hit the starter. Nothing. AAA was going off all over the place now. The gunners had heard the sound of the airplane change and they knew they had a wounded duck. Now, the intensity of the AAA stepped up several notches. Airspeed was bleeding off rapidly and I lowered the nose of the plane, jettisoned the ordinance, went through the emergency procedures for the engine failure and called the ABCCC (Airborne Control Center) to declare an emergency.

I turned toward NKP (Nakhon Phanom, Thailand) and asked ABCCC for the weather at Quang Tri (Q-T), more for backup than with the intent of going there. I tried to get the plane to settle in to level flight at the recommended best single-engine airspeed of eighty-four knots. More AAA flashed by! The plane wouldn't maintain altitude at that airspeed; instead it had a 500 foot-per-minute rate of

descent. In fact, level flight wasn't possible at any airspeed above a stall.

"Nail 68, we have the weather at Q-T," ABCCC called.

My hands were full. I was trying to maneuver the aircraft without stalling, watch out for the AAA, and talk to people, all at the same time (I had relayed my predicament to an instructor pilot in another O-2 to get his advice). Bob was

throwing out everything he could get his hands on, while trying to help me.

"Go, Moonbeam" (that was the call sign for the night Airborne Command and Control Center).

"Roger, Q-T is reporting six miles visibility in light fog."

It was going to be a long, slow flight home over some very high karst (rugged rock columns). Quang Tri was sixty miles away and I "only" had to get over the mountains separating Laos and Vietnam. It would all be downhill after that. In addition, the South Vietnamese "invasion" of Laos had just commenced and I only had to go ten miles to be over "friendlies" if we had to bail out.

We were still losing altitude, about 700 feet now. I asked the other O-2 for suggestions. Someone suggested that I throw out all extraneous material that was in the cockpit, which had already been done. Someone else suggested throwing out anything we could pull out of the radio rack, and someone else said throw out your right-seater.

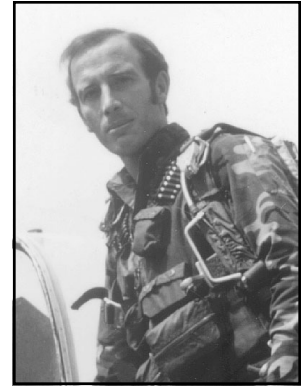
I looked at Bob and he said, "Not only No, but Hell NO."

I started making a turn back around to the east and Quang Tri. Bob, normally well composed, came unglued.

"What the hell are you doing? Where are you going? Look at that AAA!!!"

I told him that we could not maintain altitude, and that we only had to go a short distance to be over friendlies if we headed towards Q-T. If we kept going west towards NKP, it was a LONG way to a bailout over friendlies! He didn't like it, but he didn't raise a fuss. I continued my turn back to the east and the waiting gunners. Triple A here we come!

I could still see the gunners giving each other high fives when they heard us coming back. They were loaded and ready. Bright red and yellow flashes were all over the place. Several times 37 mm shells exploded close enough that we could see glowing shrapnel passing over the cockpit.



*Gene Hamner Laos 1971
(Courtesy Gene Hamner)*

Slowly, the AAA receded. Now the problem was the mountains that we had to get over. Bob was hunkered down using the dim light from his Sanyo rechargeable flashlight to search for the minimum safe altitudes printed on the map. Bob kept reading off numbers that I had seen on the altimeter a while back. There was no way we were going to get back up there. With a couple peaks showing elevations higher than our altitude, we had to detour farther, and farther south. Now I was watching the oil temperature on the front engine. It was edging higher in the yellow and I remember Bob asking, "Are those your knees or is that the engine knocking?"

We made it over the mountains, and a great sense of relief flooded over both of us. I contacted Hue/Phu Bai approach and asked for vectors to the final approach at Q-T for a surveillance approach. We were given the requested vectors, and with a declared emergency all traffic was cleared out of our way. As we began a descent toward Q-T, we were much less worried about the front engine and if it seized due to overheating. All thoughts were now on the approach, landing and beer!

As we descended and got into the fog, it became obvious that the report of six miles in light fog had obviously changed. I asked Hue/Phu Bai for the weather conditions at Q-T. The controller's reply was less than reassuring.

"Q-T is now reporting three miles visibility, and it is deteriorating."

The field was expected to go IFR (instrument flight rules) shortly. We continued being vectored but noted that we now had less than three miles visibility and actually it was worse than that in places. No problem, I thought; we'll get the surveillance approach, and back it up with the TACAN (air navigational aid) approach. All that sense of relief disappeared when RAPCON (radar approach control) called, "Nail 68, be advised that Hue radar is down. Resume your own navigation."

The sound you heard was me, swallowing hard. I headed for the TACAN and began the approach. The only backup now was the nondirectional beacon that is pretty primitive.

Looking straight down, Bob said he could see some lights from the city, but looking straight ahead, we couldn't see much. I was descending slowly to the minimum decent altitude knowing that a go-around was going to be marginal and that gaining much altitude was going to be difficult, if not impossible. Performance on just the front engine isn't the O-2's strong suit.

Nearing the end of our approach, I swapped the little bit of altitude that I had for some airspeed. We talked briefly about whether we would go for the beach and ditch if we couldn't maneuver back around for another approach.

Quang Tri was going below minimums and I wasn't sure that we had enough fuel to make Da Nang, especially considering that its weather was also deteriorating. In the seconds we had left, I thought briefly about the 110 miles I could have flown to a well-lighted, fog-free runway at NKP. Bob said in a calm voice, "I think I see the runway lights."

That might have been true at NKP or some other place where they had good lighting, but I don't think he saw those

lights on Q-T's runway. However, that was good enough for me and I started descending.

Bob reported the runway in sight and I never thought shielded runway lights could look so good. We were badly lined up, but there was no way I could circle to land. I banked hard, which also bled off the excess airspeed, and smacked the plane on the wet PSP (perforated steel plate) runway. All we had left to do was stop, but the PSP was slippery and wet. It was all in the braking action now. I thought that it would be an inglorious end to a great "save" if we slid off of the end of the runway. We went sailing down the runway, stopping just short of the end, and turned off onto the taxiway. It was hard to see to taxi in the fog, but there was a follow-me vehicle waiting. Once again the flood of relief came over us as we were led to our parking spot. We had just concluded the one thing that all pilots just out of pilot training feared the most: making a nighttime, single engine, weather penetration into a strange field. However, the number of takeoffs and the number of landings came out equal on that night and you cannot beat that.

The fog persisted for a couple days, so it was a while before we were able to get back to Nakhon Phanom. Upon returning, it seemed like all hell broke loose. I heard "well-dones," and "attaboys" from everyone. But then the second-guessing began. The biggest question was, "Why did you go to Quang Tri instead of coming back here?" I was told to report to everyone from my flight leader to the wing commander.

It seems that someone at the Tactical Units Operation Center looking at the map when I first declared the emergency, had noticed that the 110-degree radial from Channel 89 lies along a valley that leads all the way from Tchepone to NKP. Flying that radial, I could have descended to an altitude that would have allowed me to cruise to NKP without worrying about the high-rising karst along the way. However, unless we had known about that valley BEFORE we lost our engine, and BEFORE we flew through all the AAA to head for Quang Tri, there was no way that I would have turned back around to fly through that triple A again. One can only be lucky for so long.

I reported to the wing commander. After he listened to my description of the emergency, he said that, "Forever, the people sitting in the security of an office, without the pressure of the emergency, and with the benefit of hindsight will always make perfect decisions. There are always options, and some options may be better than others, but as long as everything turns out O.K., all the decisions that are made are the right ones."

Left unsaid was the obvious thought, "Otherwise, they will hang your ass."

Some time later, all of my decisions made that night were vindicated. I was presented with the Pacific Air Force's Able Aeronaut Award (PACAF's flight safety award) for making it back with the Oscar Deuce. I considered it to be an award to be proud of ... and ... I was there to receive it! 🍀

Editor's note: The Able Aeronaut Award was given out once a month to the crew in PACAF who recovered an aircraft that was

basically unrecoverable due to battle damage, systems failures or combinations thereof. This crew was selected from all the incidents and accidents reported in that month from the huge number of aircraft flying over North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia which came back shot-up or with systems failures. *Added editor's note:* In the continuing "small world syndrome." I spoke briefly to Gene Hamner at the Missoula reunion. Later

that afternoon I ran into Gene and **Bob Reid** (MSO-57) as they talked near the NSA merchandise table. Can you believe it? Bob was the Bob Reid in this story. A pair of Missoula jumpers who rookied ten years apart teaming up in a tight situation in a South-east Asian war without knowing that they both were ex-smoke-jumpers. What are the odds on that one?

Rescue in the Bob

by Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)

The Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana is a spectacular area of wild rivers and towering mountains. It is part of a two million-acre tract that includes the Great Bear Wilderness and Scapegoat Wilderness. This is all part of a six million-acre complex that grizzly bears inhabit which stretches to the Canadian Wilderness just north of Missoula. I had come to hike with Josh Burnim, who is part of a rigorous USGS interagency grizzly bear DNA study.

Josh and I hiked up the SF of the Flathead River for several days as I learned about the study. Trees had been wrapped with barbed wire at the right height so that scientists could take hair follicles from these "bear rub trees" and find out age, sex and condition of the bears. Josh hiked back to be a team leader of his study group and I continued on up the SF Flathead River through fields of flowers with elk and deer foraging above the crystal river.

On the fourteenth of June, my third day hiking up the river, I saw three young women and one man, the only hikers I had seen. At first they appeared startled to see me. I smiled, waved and said, "I'm not a bear."

They ran up to me with smiles on their faces. Never in my life had I been greeted so enthusiastically by strangers. "Do you know where we are?"

My first thought was is this a trick question. Then they asked, "Do you have a map?" I responded in the affirmative. It turns out they were

thirty-five miles from where they wanted to be. They had started almost two days earlier in the Flathead Lake Valley at Holland Lake on a day hike and had crossed the snow covered divide, at times postholing into snow thigh deep. They had wanted to come back to Holland Lake by a different route but got lost and finally had to descend into the valley. These hikers had no camping gear, no warm clothes and quickly exhausted their food. Fortunately they had a lighter so they could build a fire. It had rained during the night. They were eating Morel mushrooms which have the nutritional value of water and were exhausted, very hungry and quite lost.

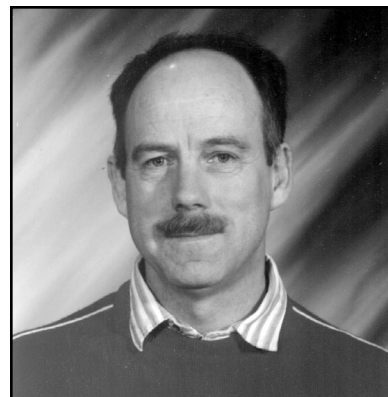
I fed them Cliff and Luna bars and what cheese I had. Then with my map I showed them where we were, the distance to the FS cabin, the trailhead and gave them info about who they could contact. Then I offered to cook them a meal right there.

"Won't you run out of food?"

"I am a wilderness ultramarathoner. When I train for the Alaska Wilderness Classic I plan to run out of food. Running out early won't matter."

Although I was considering hiking out with them, I was sure that FS personnel would help them. It turned out to be a correct assumption, they were fed and given a place to sleep.

In 1982 I jumped with **Doug Abromeit** (MYC-71), **Jerry Ogawa** ((MYC-67) and seven other McCall



Jerry Dixon (NSA file)

jumpers to rescue a lost hiker. A sixty-five-year-old man with just a shovel "to look for gold" wandered down off the ramparts of Hell's Canyon and got stuck between cliffs 4,000 feet above the Snake River. Then he started a fire that was flaming up the steep breaks. When we arrived the Idaho Mountain rescue team of six had just located him. Half the jumpers stayed to fight fire and five of us started down with the man in a litter. It was a difficult descent and in some places we lowered him with ropes. By the time we got to the river, five of the six IMR had injured backs, knees or shoulders so it was the jumpers that carried him to the ambulance. He had pills in his shirt for a heart condition but challenged us with questions like, "What took you so long to get here? Do you have any cigarettes?" He never thanked any of us.

Then there were the four McCall jumpers that parachuted in to a plane crash on the MF Salmon River

and the first three of the four were injured. One received a badly broken leg, only to find out all the passengers in the plane had died. Those were true jumper heroes.

The effusive thanks I received from the hikers was appreciated but it also brought back memories of “incidents” that didn’t go so well. Over a seventeen-year period, I was involved in three different units that did rescues. One cold night during the winter of 1987–88 a distraught couple came to my wife Deborah’s and my cabin on the Kobuk River with their six-month-old daughter who had stopped breathing. I tried CPR but could not revive her. I still have the mukluks the mother gave to thank me.

The one that still bothers me twenty-four years later, is when I was

chief of rescue for the Upper Yukon stationed at Eagle. Every year it seemed we lost someone to the silt laden waters of the Yukon, whose waters are so opaque that if you are one inch below the surface you are invisible. A twelve-year-old boy was swimming at a favorite eddy in the river and he was pulled in. None of the children in the village swam. I still believe I could have saved this youth if I had been called sooner, as I swam in the river daily. I have never stopped believing I could have made a difference by getting to the river earlier.

When the lost hikers in the Bob left me they were smiling, laughing actually. They invited me to dinner and “Do you need a place to stay?”

“Well actually there is a smoke-jumper reunion next week in

Missoula.”

We talked about what they should bring next time they go on even a day hike but I also emphasized what they did right. “You stayed together, hunkered down out of the snow and built a fire. No one got hurt, no one was left behind. With what you learned, you should think of it as an adventure, one that you will tell your grandchildren.”

For the very little I had done they thanked me again as they left. As I saw the sunlight dance on their hair, not knowing if I would ever see them again, I thought how I should be thanking them for being part of a wonderful day in the Bob. 🐾

Jerry Dixon can be reached at js2dixon@hotmail.com

A Chance Encounter?

by Rodger Vorce (Fairbanks ’82)

I was helping out in the Las Vegas (Nevada) Interagency Communications Center during a hot June. For several days, we were busy with many small initial attack fires and one large fire that had grown into a Type III and eventually to a Type II incident. Late one evening, I left the center and decided to get something to eat on the way back to my apartment. Sammy’s Woodfired Pizza beckoned; I went into the restaurant’s bar, ordered a drink and my meal. Sammy’s was having a slow night and I quickly learned that the bartender’s name was Brian. “If you need anything, let me know.” I ordered another cocktail as the food arrived and then took my time eating.

As I nursed my drink, Brian and I started talking about where we’ve lived. He’s lived in many places but mentioned he was born in Fairbanks, lived for a while in Wyoming, and eventually in the Southwest. “Yeah,” I said, “I spent some time in Fairbanks myself.” “What do you do?” he asked. I replied that I’m retired but am in Las Vegas working at a communications center helping out with some of the wildfire activity in the area. “Oh, do you know anything about smoke-jumping?” he responded.

I thought that here’s a fellow who has heard about jumping and is interested in some of the details. “Yes,” I say, “I know a little about it, I jumped for a while in Alaska.” Brian immediately asked, “Maybe you knew my dad, he jumped there. His name is **John Rakowski** (MSO-66).” I immediately replied, “No way! You’re the son of the ‘legendary Rake!’” “I sure am,” and

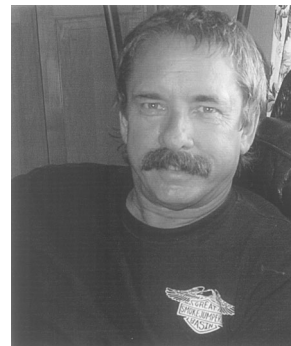
he pulled out his wallet to show me his drivers license. With over 1.5 million people in the Las Vegas region and thousands of restaurants and bars, I had walked into the one in which Rake’s son was working!

Throwing out names, we quickly discovered that we both know some of the same jumpers. I told Brian a few stories that he hadn’t heard, like the time Rake slipped unnoticed behind **Murray Taylor**

(RDD-65) at the dispatch office and had great fun, at Murray’s expense; the dispatchers were amused, but Murray wasn’t. Another story involved a hardboiled egg-eating contest with **Skip Scott** (ANC-72). It was a great sporting event and had serious consequences for the second place finisher—Rake came in first. But then, we are talking of the “legendary Rake”!

It had been five years since Rake passed, and even now his memory was still fresh in both of our minds. We made small talk and marveled at the coincidence. Then it dawned on me—damned if it isn’t Father’s Day!

Every once in a while, things line up just right in the world. I am struck by the unexpected order that can exist in the chaos of the times. 🐾



Rodger Vorce (Courtesy Rodger Vorce)



Items from the Fire Pack



It Was All a Blur

Phil Stanley had hung up about 150 feet and was at the end of his eighty-foot rope and still a good distance from the ground. It was agreed that three others would tackle the fire while I took the climbers and got my rope up to Phil so he could get down. I found **Murray Braden** (MSO-43) who was very sick on the plane prior to the jump, and he was just coming to his senses. It looked like his chute had collapsed and he fell about forty feet to the ground. He was a complete blank and didn't remember the flight from Missoula and the timber jump near the fire. Murray didn't have any broken bones and, even though groggy, assisted in putting out the fire.

Dick Flaharty (MSO-44)

Jump Spot Was a Lake

My first fire jump was with **Virgil Derry** (NCSB-40). We decided to go into a green opening in the lodge-pole. When we got real low, we could see it was a small lake covered with tules and things. So we went into about three feet of water and mud. The plane kept circling and they were wondering what was keeping us so long getting out of there.

George Honey (NCSB-40)

The Trip to Missoula Cost \$42

I was born on a farm next to the Oak Grove Mennonite Church. My father was also in charge of a milk collection route. I took over the job at age seventeen and drove the route. Our truck was one of the first in the community. It was a chain driven GM with hard rubber tires and a top speed of about eighteen mph. I was drafted into the CPS in 1942 and volunteered for the smokejumpers in the spring of 1945. When I was

chosen for the smokejumpers I rode freight truck as far as Chicago and took the Northern Pacific (train) to Missoula paying my own way at \$42!

Wayne Kurtz (MSO-45)

It Could Happen to Anybody

There was no real change in attitude after the Mann Gulch fire because that was all part of the risk and it had nothing to do with the jumping part of it. That could happen to anybody. We were a little more cautious about getting directly above a fire in that same type of situation, and we do have a lot of that type of country in the Salmon River breaks and the Hell's Canyon area.

Wayne Webb (MYC-46)

The Eight Mile Fire Crash

The date the plane crashed was June 23. It was 105 that afternoon and we had had severe thunderstorms. It was the second week of rookie training so the last loads included most of the trainers. We jumped during a severe lightning storm and hit downdrafts, which took us into the trees in seconds. The plane crashed just on the next ridge about an hour later. **Roy Percival** (NCSB-57) and **Jim Wescott** (NCSB-57) jumped the last fire out of that aircraft.

Bill Moody (NCSB-57)

The Tree's in the Softball Field

At Camp Menard we were told not to remove any of the trees. However, we had a tree that was in the center of our softball field between third base and home. I decided to take a chance and dig the tree up by the roots and cover the hole. About a day after we had the

tree out and the ground repaired, the ranger came up from Nine-Mile. We stopped to talk about fifty feet from where the tree had been. He knew the problem that we had been having and told me that if we took the tree out no one would know the difference.

The jumpers in the back of the pickup started laughing but the ranger couldn't figure what it was about. He hadn't even noticed that the tree was already gone.

Earl Cooley (MSO-40)

There Weren't Fires in 1940

Well I was with them one year. I was in the experimental work (1939) and the next year. I was in Winthrop (1940) and they didn't have anything to do. If there'd been any call for jumpers, they'd have got a plane out of Missoula. We'd just as well gone fishing that summer, there wasn't no fires.

Virgil Derry (NCSB-40)

I Could Hardly Wait to Sign Up

When volunteers for Camp 103 (smokejumpers) were requested, I could hardly wait to sign up. **Wallace Littell** (MSO-44) and I were selected. I thought that Missoula was the prettiest town I'd ever seen. After our training at Nine Mile, we spent the summer at Big Prairie in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. There were practically no fires so we built fences, painted the suspension bridge and removed trees at one end of the runway.

Marshall Jensen (MSO-44)

One Distinctive Event

I was born on a farm east of Kalispell near the Mennonite Church. We had a substantial family and when we sat down for dinner

there were seventeen of us. We farmed 320 acres and also operated a sawmill that closed in 1944, the same year I was drafted into the CPS. I volunteered for the smokejumpers and began training in the spring of 1945 at Nine Mile. The one distinctive event I claim during my smokejumping service was that I was the only one who needed to use his emergency chute while jumping on a fire.

Norman D. Kauffman (MSO-45)

A Wider Point of View

I trained with the second group in the spring of 1945 at Nine Mile.

Among the trainers were **Cooley, Derry, Lufkin, Naugle, Wood, Cochran** and **Dodge**. After training, I went to Winthrop with Lufkin as our leader. I had six training jumps and seven fire jumps that summer. When I was discharged, I returned to Hubbard, Ore., getting into the farm drainage business for seventeen years and then into carpentry and home building for twenty-eight years. CPS was an eye-opener to me. It got me away from a sheltered home and to places where the input from different people gave me a wider point of view. For that I am grateful.

Earl Kenagy (NCSB-45)

He Loved the Outdoors

Dean, the son of a minister, was born in Illinois. He entered CPS at Camp Wellston in Michigan and then moved on to the smokejumpers at McCall, Idaho. After the war he returned to college and got his Masters Degree. He taught (for over thirty years) retiring in 1982 and moved to Palm Desert, Calif. He loved the outdoors after his CPS experiences and teaching four years in Chelan, Wash.

Waiva Lehman (wife of **Dean Lehman MYC-44**) 🐾

Living the Dream

by **Michael Hill** (West Yellowstone '95)

I've been working forest fires for seventeen years with this coming fire season and, for ten of those, I've been a smoke jumper. I've also had the fortune to experience some pretty incredible adventures with my time off. Over the years I've had many friends ask me to write some of my adventures for the NSA. I'll share a story from my recent motorcycle trip around East Timor.

The high mountains and thick forest making up the center of East Timor are beautiful, even in this light rain now falling. I keep up my concentration on driving my heavy bike over the rubble of this road, washed out from the many past months of the rainy season. I've been riding for seven hours straight already, past the abandoned stone fortresses, traditional thatched-roofed circular huts, black crosses, armed UN military posts, and long, burned-out concrete homes making up East Timor today. Thinking of these sights and the stories I have heard lately of the events that once happened here, the memories of my past journeys resurface. Especially the wars and dangerous places I have visited as well: ducking socialist bullets in Guatemala, kidnappers in Colombia, interrogation in Uganda, bombers in Israel, corruption in Zimbabwe, crime in Haiti, death in Rwanda, and now the clashing cultures of Indonesia. These are just a few of the almost thirty war zones I have visited so far in my time outside fighting fires.

The dark side of mankind isn't all that I've been witness to. I've been able to interact with some amazing wildlife in their original homes. I dived with great white sharks off Africa, whale sharks off Australia and drove my rental 4 x 4 alone through vast herds of African animals. I swam with sea lions in the Galapagos, walked with Komodo dragons,

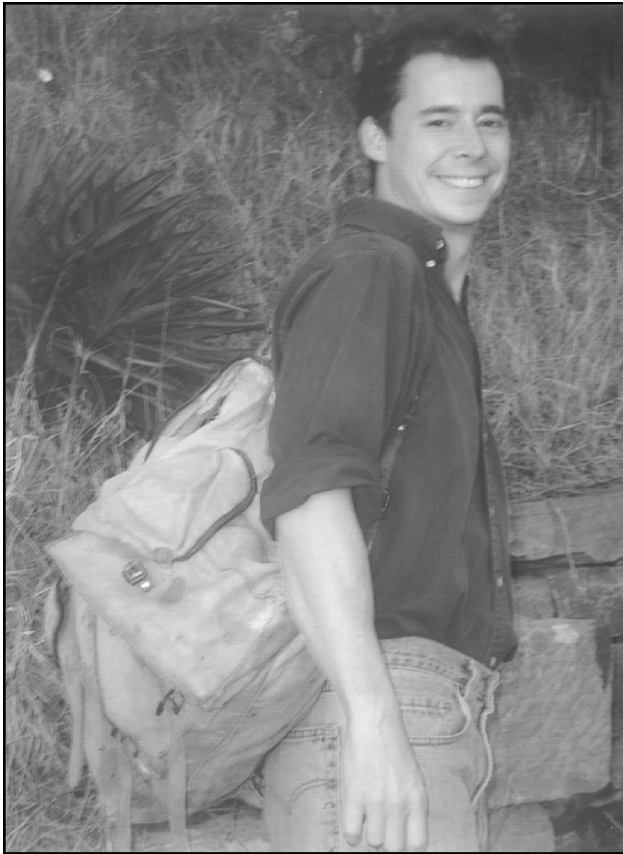
splashed with huge pods of dolphins off New Zealand, the pink dolphins in the Amazons, manatees of Belize and the dugongs in Vanuatu.

So, what brought me here to East Timor? Why am I on a motorcycle riding around the remote wreckage of twenty-five years of political violence here on the world's newest nation? I ask myself while I use the toe of my left foot to change down the gears as I break, swerving my bike's front tire back and forth between these millions of small rocks covering this washed-out road surface. Why am I here? Why have I always chosen to go to such far away places as this? Why didn't I just chose a simple life as so many of my friends in college once had, get married, buy some property, raise children and settle into a normal job?

On the back of this motorbike my camping gear is strapped down with a collection of fuel and water plastic litre bottles adding to the weight of this motorcycle. The heaviness of all of this added to the motorcycle and my own weight, cutting over this road's eroding dirt, causes a section beneath the front wheel to give way. All of a sudden, I'm on my side with the motorcycle's engine revving superfast, and its crushing weight is lying across my left leg. Is my leg broken?

I reach over and switch off the engine. There is silence now on this otherwise deserted road as I glance down at my trapped leg. I can see blood covering my bare leg underneath my shorts. I have to get that leg free so, using all of my strength, I lift the bike off me and slip out my bloody leg.

I'm hurt really bad. I can see now the blood covering my leg. I'm still not sure if it's broken, so gripping onto the big motorcycle's frame beside me, I attempt to stand and see



Michael Hill (Courtesy Michael Hill)

just how badly I am hurt. My heart is pounding hard, and I lift up my free hand to check on its shaking. I always shake, but now with all of the adrenaline surging through me after this accident, I'm really trembling. Up on both legs, I move them each to test their range of motion. They both hurt badly, but they still work. I look down at the bloody leg. The blood is only from a set of deep abrasions.

Much of the time I have been a firefighter I have also been an emergency medical technician. One look down at the back of my other leg, I see I have strings of charred skin hanging free from a large second-degree burn and a five-inch section third-degree burn, directly inside my right knee. In less than a second my life has changed. I will have to forget smokejumping for this coming fire season.

This is bad, but there is no one out here on this remote mountain pass that will be coming along to help me. The damage to my bloody leg isn't really that bad except for the pain, but the deep burn on my other sure is. I'll have to rely on myself to find a UN military unit to get it cleaned up before infection sets in. Now after seeing that burn, I can't seem to get free of its biting sharp pain. I heave the heavy motorcycle up with my pile of gear still secured tightly on its back rack. It is hard to do on my wobbly legs but I get the bike back up. It's painful as I stretch my burnt leg over the gas tank and use that leg to crank up the engine again. I know from having studied my map of this island that I have a long ways to go to find some medical attention, so by feeding the motorcycle some more gas, I

move on.

With this horrible burn, the impact of missing this coming fire season begins to sink in. This will be the first fire season I have missed in almost ten years, and I decide to try and block out the hurt instead by thinking of jumping and everything that I will miss this summer. I'll miss the enjoyment of seeing everyone again at refresher, the units, the first jump of the season, holding my reserve and sticking my head out the aircraft's open door, checking the winds by watching the falling streamers, the drone of the engines, the leap, the ride down and the excitement of landing after a really good jump, the old guys, the bros, the family, and the campfires.

Ahead, far below the mountain pass I'm crossing, I begin to see traditional huts again speckling the valley floor, and their sight causes me some relief. In my travels outside the Forest Service, I have had the pleasure of meeting many traditional people who have lived in huts such as these. Trying to block out the pain in my legs again, I begin to recall some of those special times—the San people of Southern Africa teaching me how to track and hunt with their traditional weapons, the pygmies showing me how to craft arrowheads, being invited to observe first hand the highland clan fighting in Papua, New Guinea, sperm whale hunting with harpoons from sailboats in Indonesia, swimming with Amazonian natives in the muddy Amazon, riding camels with the desert nomads in Jordan, and actually being adopted into a remote village in Fiji.

I have made it farther down this mountain pass to where the road is now in much better shape. I should be able to reach a detachment of UN forces sometime soon to start the process of getting some more advanced medical care. I feel relief at the knowledge of this, and with it suddenly the understanding of what has carried me on to so many distant corners of the world such as this.

I have always travelled, spending my fire money going to these places. I do this because I have always been fascinated by exploring living history, the excitement of chaos that I was first exposed to on fires, the extremes of human nature, the intoxication power can bring, passions of the human spirit. With this craving, I have to see what has and is happening all around the world. This is why I have crossed Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East, encircled North and South America, explored Asia and Australia, the Pacific Islands and visited numbers of other far corners of the earth.

I glance down at the inside of my burnt leg once more. Has this latest journey researching East Timor been worth it? Have any of my adventures? I know these answers too. The wars, distant lands, exotic animals I have seen and the people I have been able to spend time with are worth it. I wouldn't trade any of those times for anything. Indeed it is and has always been, a great ride living the dream. 🙏

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Tribute to Steve Nemore

by Murry Taylor (Redding '65)

Steve Nemore (RAC-69) has retired. A blowout retirement party celebrated his outstanding career and endearing, one-of-a-kind personality. Jumpers from the Midwest, East Coast, and Fairbanks attended. Several weeks following the big bash, Steve e-mailed me:

"Taylor, I thought I might lose some of my procrastinating tendencies after I retired, but I haven't. It's been two weeks and I haven't written what I wanted to. Thanks for honoring me with your attendance at the party. I truly appreciate the energy, love and respect you project to everyone. I am really pleased that you were here. We'll stay in touch. Lemme know the next gathering place."

The key words in his message are "energy, love, and respect." That's just what Steve brought to his thirty-four years as one of the finest smokejumpers ever to leave the door. It was also those things that brought so many people together to say "Hello, congratulations, and good luck in retirement."

I met Steve on a fire jump from La Grande in '73. It was a Doug load with jumpers from Cave Junction, Alaska, and Winthrop on board. The fire, near Unity Reservoir, was a hot 40-acre, midafternoon affair running in dry grass and scattered Ponderosa. There were many new faces and, there was no way to imagine how those people would contribute to my life over the next thirty plus years. Needless to say, well-placed retardant drops and head-down, ass-up line digging contained the fire. It was a typical split and dig strategy. **George Steele** (NCSB-72) was there, as were **Eric (Erik The Blak) Schoenfeld** (CJ-64), **Davis Perkins** (NCSB-72), and **Mick Swift** (CJ-56).

Just before dark, we climbed into a livestock truck rented from a local rancher and pulled onto the highway. In short order, the truck pulled over at a small country store. Three cases of beer were hauled aboard and the drinking began. Demobilization by stock truck was one of those not-so-elite smokejumper situations in which jumpers often find themselves—riding in the back of a truck, sitting on their gear, hair flying in the wind, laughing, and drinking beer. As usual, the horseshit had not been shoveled from the truck before we loaded up. When we hit freeway speed, the drying (and now crushed) horse pucky began flying around in a terrible storm. It was one of those "Man I gotta have another beer" kind of things. You know what I mean.

For the Alaskans boosting La Grande, it was typical of the fun we had on the job. We stood up to keep our faces in the wind and out of the flying horse stuff. We carried on, loving life, and meeting new friends. We turned what could have been a real downer into a great ride back to the base. That was my first fun-time with Steve. Over the years there would be many more.

Steve came up to Fairbanks in '75 and the fun continued. In '77, Steve and I jumped ten consecutive fires in Alaska's biggest-ever fire bust. We caught all of them, which was really something in a dry season like that.

Rod Dow (MYC-68—you know, he never did get that GS-7), always said, "If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right." That axiom has proven true many times for those working alongside Nemore. Steve has many fine qualities as a jumper—firefighter, spotter, and in his later years, either as a spike base liaison or assistant base Manager at Boise. The hallmark of his style was doing a good job and enjoying it at the same time. Throughout his career, he never lost sight of the core values of what makes smokejumping the great experience that it is, namely taking care of the people, seeing to it that the bros were always dealt with fairly, setting an example of good work and, protecting them from the system's bureaucracy. As some people come up through the ranks their personalities change; not so with Steve. He started out an up-front, honest, genuine, and trustworthy man, and remains so today. As **Bob Quillin** (FBX-71) wrote, "Nemore was a good hand, a man you could always count on to hold up his end of the bargain. Smokejumping will miss him."

George Steele (NCSB-72) was hammered by Nevada's high mountains in '85, suffering a broken leg, arm, fractured jaw, and some teeth rearranged. Steve stayed by his side throughout his rehabilitation as George underwent sixty-six hours of reconstructive surgery to his jaw and teeth.

A great party was held for Steve on March 20 in Boise; it was a grand coming together of the clan to honor him. I'll mention a few of the high points here, then some names. Meeting **Don Bell** (IDC-69) in Portland, we drove to Boise and stayed at **Bob Steiner's** (BOI-71) place, a beautiful pad with a redwood deck which overlooked greater Boise. Dow was there, along with our great friend Jeff Klemmer from McCall. Nemore, Steele, **Bob Mauck** (FBX-79) and, **Ron Lund** (FBX-64) dropped by and we (yep, you guessed it) drank beer until late. Some didn't bed down until 4:00 AM. The following night, we gathered in **Phil Brollier's** (BOI-71) backyard for a pre-party party. When Bell and I walked into the back yard someone yelled, "Hey Taylor, the old



jumpers are in the back.” Sure enough in the backyard, around a big campfire was the old gang, **Willy Lowden** (NCSB-72), **Erik The Blak**, **Rick Blanton** (MYC-74), **Jeff Bass** (MYC-77), **Kenny Franz** (LGD-75), and **Tom Boatner** (FBX-80). Also attending were **John Gould** (FBX-81), **Rob Collins** (RAC-69), **Bert Mitman** (RAC-70), Rod Dow, **Jim Raundenbush** (FBX-82), and both of Phil Brollier’s sons, **Justin** (NFC-01) and **Jacob** (RDD-95). All were around the fire telling stories and (you guessed it) drinking beer.

Much of the mob was closer to the house and the food. I observed that the group had divided into two—the old guys that actually knew Steve Nemore, and the younger ones that hoped to meet him. That might not have been true, but it seemed so at the time. Anyway, there were lots of good eats and then a “big flip.” Winthrop hero, **Frank Clements** (NCSB-88) won. It couldn’t have happened to a better guy; he contributed his \$400 winnings to the cost of the party, which probably means that Brollier still lost money on the deal; we did at least that much damage to his rhododendrons.

Anyway, it was another late night—most stayed until after 2:00 AM; the Blak camped out in Brollier’s yard for four days. The next night was Saturday and the big gig at downtown Boise’s Owyhee Hotel. This event represented the Academy Awards of debauchery. Many people attended, including jumpers, wives, girlfriends, pilots, and other friend-types. Bob Quillin had sent his congratulatory letter and, a check for \$200 to go toward the bar tab which, started the bros off and running in good style. The highlight of the evening had to be **Eric Hipke’s** (NCSB-90) fifteen minute video recapping Steve’s life, complete with shots of him in college, drunk and hairy as ever, acting out less than ideal student behavior. Also, there was the Tri-motor jump and the grand finale of him doing the unthinkable (but hilarious) on a big rock out at NIFC. Needless to say, the film (typical of Hipke’s sick sense of propriety) brought down the house. The attendees included **Davis Perkins** (NCSB-72), **Kent Harper** (RDD-75), **Gary (Pops) Johnson** (FBX-74), **Jeff Fereday** (MYC-70), **Gary Sexton** (RAC-78), **Danny Arnold** (RDD-86), **Greg Martin** (FBX-81), **Mark Klinger** (FBX-79), **Greg Lee** (FBX-73), **Jon Curd** (FBX-82), **Chris Farinetti** (FBX-79), **Rick Jensen** (FBX-79), **Rodger Vorce** (FBX-82), and **Bob Hurley** (FBX-87). Also attending were: **Wally Humphries** (FBX-90), **Andy Anderson** (FBX-87), **Mike Fitzpatrick** (RAC-78), **Tom Fitzpatrick** (RAC-86), **Mario Marquez** (RAC-88), **Mike Burin** (MYC-88), **Jerry Drazinski** (NIFC-91), **Clark Noble** (MYC-70), **John Hawkins** (RAC-87), **Nels Jensen** (MSO-62), **Todd Jenkins** (NIFC-98), **Ron Johnshoy** (NIFC-88), **Jason Hoffman** (NIFC-88), **Doug Swantner** (RDD-82), **Ted Mason** (NIFC-88), **Bob Holland** (MYC-82), **John Webber** (NIFC-92), **Bill Werhane** (MSO-66), **Dick Wildman** (NCSB-61), **Mark Youmans** (RDD-81), and **Mark Motes** (RDD-86).

So many attended, some I knew, some I didn’t. Other notables present were Linda Bass, Beth Grey Cloud, and Doug Shinn. Please forgive me if I missed your name.

In a moment of semi-silence Steve stood before the group reflecting on his career, barely able to hold back tears. He thanked us all for coming. If you’d like to e-mail Steve and say Hi, here’s his address: snemore@mindspring.com. Also, Eric Hipke’s video can be ordered through his Web site: <http://biology.kenyon.edu/mauck/Home%20Page/Misc/NemoreTape.html>

As I write, Steve and his good pal, George Steele, are floating the Green River in Utah. I can see it now, the quiet canyon, the campfire, and two old smokejumping buddies, remembering, laughing, telling stories, and I suppose, drinking a beer or two. Good luck, Steve. You’re one of the best. And, indeed, smokejumping will miss you. 🍷

“Paperlegs” Goes Home

by Ken Hessel (McCall ’58)

On the morning of July 7, 2004, the ashes of **Richard A. Peterson** (MYC-47) drifted silently into the lush Harlan Meadows located in Chamberlain Basin in Idaho’s Frank Church Wilderness. Richard, known to most as “Pete” and/or “Paperlegs” in jumper circles, was followed on a second pass by his wife Ridgely, whose ashes floated down in calm air to join him in their final resting place. Pete (1927-1999) and Ridge (1930-2003) met at Marana, Arizona where they were both employed by Intermountain Aviation. This event marked what would have been their 40th wedding anniversary.

Shep Johnson (MYC-56), long time sidekick of Pete’s, did an excellent job of spotting as Pete and Ridge’s daughter, Martha Gonzales, husband Frank and grandchildren Eva and Frankie looked on. In a trailing aircraft, former jumpers **Ken Hessel**, **Bus Bertram** (MYC-47), **Bill Demmons** (MSO-51) and **Dale “Rocky” Stone** (MYC-57) and friend and former Chamberlain District Ranger Val Simpson each remembered the couple in their own way as they watched the ashes descend. Later, at a gathering in McCall, several speakers including **Del Catlin** (MYC-47) and **Gar Thorsrud** (MSO-46) remembered times and events in the lives of both Pete and Ridge.

All those attending the Memorial wish to extend a special thanks to **LaVon Scott** (MYC-48) and son Dan Scott, owners of McCall Aviation, for making aircraft and pilots available for this occasion. Also, thanks to Shep Johnson for coordinating several aspects of the event.



Touching All Bases



At the deadline for this issue, Mike McMillan (FBX-96), who heads up this column, was involved in the very busy Alaska fire season. Murry Taylor (RDD-65) filled in for Mike and gathered the base reports. Thanks, Murry!

Redmond Base Report

by Gary Atteberry (RAC-97)

Work here at RAC over the spring has been fairly routine. The bros assisted in prescribed burns locally, and we had folks in R-8 throughout the spring until refresher training. Local projects and loft work kept everyone busy until rookie training started in May. Training this year was held in Winthrop at NCSB. Congrats to the rookies who made it: **Heidi Bunkers** (Prineville ICH), **Stephanie Hendrix** (Los Padres), **Craig Hingly** (Prineville BLM), **David Keller** (Los Padres), **Randall Lamb** (LaGrande IHC) and **Sean Wishart** (Sled Springs Rapellers). Big changes were announced. Our new base manager is **Bill Selby** (RAC-91) and the new loft foreman is **Jeff Robinson** (RDD-86).

North Cascades Base Report

by Matt Desimone (RAC-97)

Early spring showed signs of record drought conditions, however, five weeks of cool damp weather moved fire season back to normal. As of July 12, we have jumped a total of twenty-five fires. The first fire jump of the year out of NCSB was made on May 21 over the Colville NF and, as the story is told, it was a "good deal rain fire" complete with demob through Canada. Rookie training for Region 6 took place here, and when the dust finally settled, there were ten new boots still standing. **Andrew Mattox**, **Ryan Ebenger**, **Cameron Chambers** and **Jordan McKnight** joined the crew here at NCSB, and the remaining six other rookie bros staggered back to Redmond, beaten down but smiling.

Departing here this summer are **Neil Campbell** (NCSB-91) and **Sara Pierce** (NCSB-99). When last we heard, Neil was headed for southeast Alaska and planning to pursue a career in construction. Sara has chosen to retire from jumping and has joined up with her new husband on the northern Oregon coast where she intends to work on their new property and continue with her maniacal passion for surfing. We wish both of these friends good luck and safe travels with their next life adventures.

Back with us again this summer is **Tim Lum** (NCSB-91), who has been away the past two years on active military duty with his pararescue unit. **Scott Wicklund** (NCSB-91)



and **Inaki Baribar** (NCSB-98) are currently being detailed as GS-7 spotter trainees. Both are doing well slapping jumpers out the door, however, Wicklund is still having difficulty tying his own boot laces. The NCSB crew continues to sit in limbo awaiting the announcement of who will be the new base manager. **John Button** (NCSB-75) is currently acting as base manager.

Finally, **Dale Longanecker** (RAC-74), broke the 300 fire jump barrier. At 1730 on June 30, Dale jumped with a full plane load into Alder Creek on the Okanogan National Forest. At the time of this writing, Longanecker sits with 301 fire jumps to his name, gazing and grinning at lightning flashing on the North Cascade horizon.

Grangeville Base Report

by Robin Embry (GAC-85)

Our fire season started on February 13 with a ground-pounder out of Grangeville to a 600-acre fire on the Whitebird Battlefield. With six inches of snow lying on the ground, it was tough to find available firefighters and even tougher to find available firefighters who would believe we weren't pulling their legs about a large fire that needed attending to. We even pulled **Jerry Zumalt** (RDD-70) out of smokejumper retirement to come swing burlap.

An extremely dry March and April brought us a few more early season ground-pounders until May rains put a hold on fire season on the Nez Perce. Grangeville sent ten smokejumpers to Miles City, Mont., in early May to jump fires in eastern Montana.

Winter and spring project work found Grangeville smokejumpers in Mississippi, Michigan, South Carolina, Montana, the Idaho Panhandle and the Nez Perce NF. Prescribed fire, fuels reduction, initial attack, and timber work kept the GAC jumpers busy through the spring.

Chris Young (GAC-92) returns to Grangeville as our new loft foreman after three years in West Yellowstone. **Andy Lane** (GAC-00) accepted a fuels AFMO job on the Slate Cr. District of the Nez Perce Forest and will be leaving us July 25. Andy will be sorely missed, but if his prescribed fire skills are anything like his parachute manipulation skills, we can count on some late season fires on the Slate Creek District. (Just kidding, Andy!)

Chris Hertel (GAC-91) is currently detailed on the Slate Creek District as the operations AFMO and will be working there through September. **Ted McClanahan** (MSO-95)

detailed into a squad leader position at GAC. In addition to **Isaac Karuzas** (RDD-01), Grangeville picked up **Julie Pendleton** (RAC-03), **J.P. Zavalla** (MSO-95), **Dan Vanderpool** (GAC-01), and five rookies: **Ryan Desautel**, **Mike Dunn**, **Jason Gibb**, **Jason Junes**, and **Court Wallace**. All the rookies made it through rookie training successfully.

Leading Edge Aviation has one of their large-windowed Twin Otters in Grangeville again this year. **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52) and **Nels Jensen** (MSO-62) are sharing pilot duties. We feel extraordinarily lucky to have them here as they are both exceptional pilots.

June is winding down, and we have only one load of smokejumpers here. Four of our jumpers are in British Columbia making a little bit of history jumping with the Canadian smokejumpers. We also have smokejumpers in Silver City, Alaska, Winthrop, and Grand Junction. Another bit of history: Grangeville's secret weapon, **Walt Currie** (MSO-75), has been activated for the '04 season, and we figure at *sixty tender years*, he is the oldest active smoke-jumper in the system.

Boise Base Report

by Eric Walker (NIFC-95)

Spring is over and all training is complete. We have five rookies, two of whom are detailers. **Gabe Donaldson**, **Beau Kidd** and **Brian Cresto** are the rookies. **Jerran Flinders** and **Brad Bolen** are rookie detailers. **Deborah Yoder** (RDD-00) and the "Salty" **Frank Clements** (NCSB-88) made the move to our program this year and are doing well with the new system.

Our prescribed fire season was very busy. We doubled last year's totals in the winter and spring months of '04, having gone on twenty-seven assignments for 39,675 treated acres. We responded to six wildfires while out on assignment in the early seasons, and for the record, they weren't the assignments we were already on. The snow pack melted quickly, and spring was fairly dry in the Basin.

Detail opportunities have continued to roll our way this year. **Hector Madrid** (MYC-89) is currently detailed as the Idaho State AFMO, **Mike Tupper** (FBX-85) is detailed in the Colorado State AFMO position, **Mel Tenneson** (FBX-86) is filling a district AFMO in Grand Junction, **Dave Vining** (NIFC-97) is taking an AFMO detail in Council, Idaho, **Eric Ellis** (NIFC-01) and **Michelle Moore** (MSO-99) are out on FOS details, and **Derrek Hartman** (RDD-98) is in Miles City doing fuels. We have filled twenty detail requests, not including smokejumper coordinator assignments and the boost to Alaska.

We've had some business in the single resource arena as well. A total of eighteen assignments have been filled this year. We expect those numbers to increase with seven people committed to teams and the usual late season activity.

Our jump season is starting to "spool up" at the outstations. As of 7/13/04, we've had three boosts from our friends in McCall and seen moderate activity. We have jumped seventy-two fires, responded to four while demobing, and have driven to four while doing prescribed burns.

Alaska Base Report

by Togie Wiehl (FBX-91)

I called ops, desperate for a base report. As usual, they put me on the speakerphone, then claimed they'd never heard of me. Murry who? What was that name again? When I finally explained the problem with (Mike) McMillan being on a fire, they tossed up a few general comments about bears and wolves eating their food. So I put Togie Wiehl (FBX-91) on the project. Here's what he (and I'm sure some of his cohorts) came up with. (Murry Taylor)

Four out of six rooks made it through rookie training: **Ben Dobrovolny** (Midnight Sun hotshots), **T. J. Gholson** (Craig hotshots), **Greg Conaway** (Smokey Bear hotshots) and **Kip Shields** (Silver State hotshots).

The fire season started slowly in the Galena Zone and then moved east. By mid-June, all fires were going big and fast. Now the fires are keeping jumpers busy due to cabin and allotment protection. There are close to seventy boosters in Alaska as of July 14. Nine complex fires are taking all resources, so the FMOs are insisting that the jumpers stay on fires longer. Para Cargo is having a good year with between 5,000–9,000 pounds being dropped daily.

Chris Silks (FBX-91) and **Doug Carroll** (FBX-94) are our new spotters and, according to **Chip Houde** (FBX-88), are doing a great job in a rough fire season. Jumpers are averaging around ten fire jumps as of 7/13/04 and are still going strong.

Bert Mitman (RAC-70) had two bears and a wolf in his fire camp up on the Chanalar River. The crew jumped two early fires at the edge of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. A crew jumped a fire (first time ever) on Stewart Island out in the Bering Sea.

Brandon Peterson (FBX-01) and wife are expecting a new arrival anytime now. Acreage burned in Alaska nears three million and approaches the record of 1977, the biggest jumper action year in Alaska.

I asked if anyone was approaching 1,000 hours of overtime yet and they said, "NO!" But all were in high spirits. Just writing this stuff makes me homesick for the Alaskan bush with its red all-night skies, the blue haze of smoked-in valleys and high ridge camps, sitting under a cargo chute, drinking coffee, laughing, telling stories and feeling the joy of merely being with such good people.

Redding Base Report

by Nate Hesse (RDD-01)

Our boot soles are melting away in this heat. Still hot, dry and ready to erupt. We have had several lighting busts, which keeps the list rotating and the jumpers smiling. Redding jumpers welcomed five new rookies: **Joe Forthofer**, **Rachel Kellogg**, **Cheveyo Munk**, **Brad Shuette** and **Darby Thompson**. All the rooks just got their first fire jumps.

In addition to the rookies, we have two new permanent 13-13s: **Ryan Clifton** (RDD-03) and **Chris Joyce** (RDD-01). There is also talk of changing our current appointment to 18-8s and 26-0s. **Dan Hernandez** (RDD-85) accepted the GS-8 Captain position and is fired up to reinstate a

paracargo program here at Redding. So, if you find yourself on a R-5 fire, don't hesitate to call for a paracargo mission or two. Amongst all the upgrades, Redding is unfortunately losing **Steve Franke** (RDD-87). Steve accepted a superintendent job on a crew located closer to home on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. This will create some movement here, so get your applications ready. But remember, you'll have big shoes to fill.

The DC-3 has arrived and is waiting for a mission. **Josh Matheson** (RDD-94) and **Jerry Spence** (RDD-94) have swapped positions. Josh will be in operations while Jerry will work in training. The jumpers have taken over the ground duty at Northern California Service Center. We are getting good at the pruning and removal of some eye-sores on the base. From sprinkler systems to gardens, we can tackle it. Speaking of gardens, **Hernan Sotela** (RDD-89) has planted a few vegetable bearing plants behind the saw shop. Plans for expansion are in the works. Some of the jumpers are trying to switch days off to match those of **Casey Ramsey** (RDD-01) and **Jesse Gonzales** (RDD-02). They have the ski boats that transport recreating jumpers to and fro throughout Shasta Lake. In addition, if you are brave to take helm on the Zodiac with **John Casey** (RDD-99), he will run you down the Sacramento River to cast a line or practice SEAL-boat training. That about wraps it up.

McCall Base Report

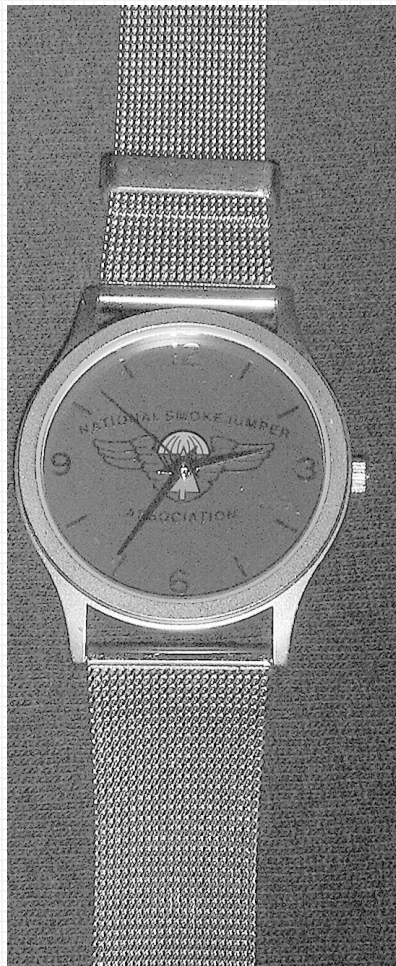
by Rick Hudson (NIFC-73)

The abundance of late spring precipitation in Idaho left a sea of green and little chance of jumper fire action for the McCall Smokejumpers until midsummer. Thanks to the BLM bros, McCall boosted Cedar City, Grand Junction and Alaska for early fire jumps. The Ogden spike base opened with seventeen jumpers and a Turbine DC-3 on June 21 and provided coverage in the Great Basin along with the BLM jump bases.

Sixty-four jumpers trained in McCall for 2004, including a rookie class of three NEDS. The NEDS have already made that important first fire jump and will never again look down out of an aircraft at the countryside without picking out jumpspots.

The retirement of **Neal Davis** (MYC-69) at the end of 2003 has left the McCall Base manager position open. **Eric Brundige** (MYC-77) has been acting base manager. **John Humphries** (MYC-79) also retired the end of 2003 as the training foreman with **Larry Wilson** (MYC-84) filling that position in June.

Kasey Rose (NCSB-89) detailed to the Payette Forest McCall District as AFMO for the summer. She and husband, **Eric Messenger** (GAC-00), are expecting their first child around Labor Day. **Shelly Lewis** (GAC-97), **Matt**



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Ganz (MYC-01) and **Hans Ohme** (MYC-01) have detailed to the Payette Forest Council District to expand their work experience. Detailed squad leaders to the McCall jumper unit are **Jim Duzak** (MYC-84), **Kevan Richards** (MYC-92), **Dan Gustafson** (MYC-98) and **Eric Eastep** (MYC-00).

Currently there are only five smokejumpers on the list in McCall, dry-lightning predicted and everyone else scattered throughout the west and Alaska. This is the dream of all jumpers, a short list and a bright future for jumping!

Missoula Base Report

by **Michael Goiciechea** (MSO-99)

As of June 18, 2004, we successfully graduated the Region 1 Rookie Smokejumper Class. Of the class, fifteen (eight detailers and seven temporaries) will be staying here in Missoula. The training for the 2004 rookies spanned five weeks. Of the twenty-six who started, twenty-three successfully completed the training and, like the 2003 class, had the distinguished honor of having **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) present them their jump wings at graduation. The rookie party was held Friday June 18, 2004, at the Elks Club and was attended by a very large crowd of new, retired and ex-smokejumpers. The flip went for close to \$1000 dollars to a 2004 rookie. In the spirit of smokejumper tradition and the overwhelming influence of current and ex-smokejumpers, the young rookie donated \$650 dollars to the bar tab. Not much can be recalled from that point on.

The weekend of June 18–20, 2004, Missoula, Mont., was host to the 2004 National Smokejumper Association (NSA) Reunion, bringing close to 1,000 ex-smokejumpers to the Missoula area for a weekend full of beer swilling, “No ___ there I was,” storytelling, and various other festive activities. According to a jailhouse source, it appears everyone escaped town without incident. However, I believe this report is still under investigation. We will keep an eye on the legal section of the local newspaper.

On June 19, 2004, Missoula hosted the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Aerial Fire Depot. The rededication celebration consisted of tours throughout the compound, a practice jump performed by Missoula smokejumpers, demonstration air tanker drops by Neptune Aviation and displays of the first generation smokejumper aircraft, including the actual DC-3 used to drop smokejumpers into Mann Gulch. The Missoula smokejumpers, led by **John Kovalicky** (MSO-88) and **Andy Hayes** (MSO-79), set up a booth where previous Missoula smokejumpers could review their jump records and make copies for themselves. Several guest speakers were present, including field representatives for Montana Senators Max Bacus and Conrad Burns, Dale Bosworth (chief of the Forest Service), Larry Hamilton and Bruce Bauck (meteorologist in charge, Missoula Weather Forecast Office, National Weather Service). Gail Kimball (regional forester, Northern Region Forest Service) performed the monument dedication, and Mann Gulch survivor **Bob Sallee** (MSO-49), presented the original Mann Gulch DC-3. What was once known as the Aerial Fire Depot is now called the Missoula Fire, Science and Technology Center or the Missoula Smokejumper Base, if you prefer.

Starting June 21, 2004, Missoula smokejumpers stormed full speed ahead into the vortex of the 2004 fire season. As of July 13, we have twenty-nine smokejumpers in Alaska and thirteen in Miles City, Mont. Sixteen R-1 smokejumpers just returned from British Columbia, giving our friends to the north support. NO, this is not a misprint. Nine Missoula smokejumpers, four Grangeville smokejumpers and three West Yellowstone smokejumpers led by **Jeff Kinderman** (MSO-74) and **Mitch Kearns** (GAC-89) went to Fort St. John, British Columbia, Canada, to boost the Canadian para-attack. Could this be the start of a new category for smokejumper records, as few rookies may get their first fire jump outside the border of the United States? Yes, two rookie smokejumpers, (**Burke Jam** and **Mike Nelson**), jumped their first fire on Canadian terra firma. The Canadian booster jumped three fires and helitacked six fires out of Fort Saint John, BC. We also have seven smokejumpers on single resource assignments to New Mexico and Colorado. The rest of the ten smokejumpers here in Missoula are filling out the DC-3 waiting for R-1 to start our fire season, which could be soon since the forecast is to be above ninety for the next week.

West Yellowstone Base Report

by **Charlie Wetzel** (WYS-92)

At this writing, the expected early season in the northern Rockies hasn't shown up, mainly due to heavy rains through the month of May. We have had a couple of initial attacks over in eastern Montana and have sent many boosters to Alaska. We are expecting to initiate our agreement with the Boise BLM jumpers soon with four of their jumpers and one spotter detailing for the duration of the fire season. Our jump ship, a Dornier 228-200, came on contract on June 10 with **Randy Leypoldt** back as pilot for the fourth year of its five-year contract. We've sent a few folks out on overhead assignments: **John Parker** (MYC-98) to Meeker, Colo., as an helicopter manager, **Cole Parker** (MSO-92) to Pueblo, Colo., as an air tanker base manager and **Billy Bennett** (WYS-98) also to Meeker, Colo., as a division supervisor. The two rookies and one rookie detailer that made it through training came to WYS and immediately went on boosters. **Burke Jam** and **Mike Nelson** traveled with **Mark Duffey** (WYS-98) to British Columbia to boost the Canadian jump center in Fort Saint Johns, BC, and **Hans Oaks** went to Alaska as a booster. Loft Manager **Chris Young** (GAC-92) took a job back in GAC as their loft manager, starting at the end of June. Our NPS jumper, **Mark Belitz** (WYS-01), was upgraded to squad leader this year and is starting to train as a spotter. We have also temporarily promoted three other new squad leaders: **Mark Duffey** (WYS-98), **Brian Wilson** (WYS-98) and **Melanie Pfister** (GAC-00) and hope to make the positions permanent. Soon we will be flying jobs for the loft foreman and training foreman. Lots of change going on around here with Base Manager **Greg Anderson** (MSO-68) (who incidentally just passed 550 jumps) leaving this coming January and plenty of new faces as we try to bring the numbers up to thirty available jumpers from the current twenty-three. 🍄

BOOK REVIEW

Author's Loose Grip on Facts Undermines Critique of Smokejumpers, Forest Service

by Fred Donner (Missoula '59)

Released last year, Douglas Gantenbein's book *A Season of Fire: Four Months on the Firelines in the American West* spawned a firestorm of controversy. Compounding the uproar was the author's piece in the June 2003 issue of *Outside* magazine, an article titled "We're Toast" that (among other things) lambasted current fire policy for being too expensive and recommended the smokejumper program be eliminated to save money. "Close the smokejumper bases—all of them (p. 274)."

Aside from any other part of the article or book, to say that smokejumpers have no place in the fire world is as absurd as would be saying that smokejumpers are the only answer to forest fires. Jerry Williams (RAC '72), the Forest Service's director of fire and aviation, responded to the *Outside* piece with a letter in the September 2003 issue. Williams defended current Forest Service policy, defining it as "suppressing fire where we must and using fire where we can."

Mr. Gantenbein, incidentally, hasn't alienated only wildland firefighters. In an article last fall for the online magazine *Slate*, he took on structural firefighters, arguing they have "cushy" jobs in a profession that "isn't that dangerous." He asserted firefighters "are adrenalin junkies" with "excellent propaganda skills" and ultimately "are just another interest group." Google "Gantenbein" and visit the book review sites of the major booksellers for loads of commentary.

His credentials are outwardly impressive. According to the book's jacket, Gantenbein has written for *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Audubon*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Popular Science*, and *Backpacker*. Further, according to *Slate*, he is the Seattle correspondent for *The Economist*. In 2001 he spent a week at a fire guardschool in Washington state, got a red card, and then spent the next four months chasing fires to gather material for this book. He was at the Thirtymile fire in Washington state just after it happened and recounts the tragedy of losing four firefighters there. Later he was at the Fridley fire south of Livingston, Mont., as well as at several other fires around the West.

After hearing a lot of controversy, I bought the book. I found many factual errors which I circled in green ink. I sent the book to a friend who has researched the Thirtymile fire in detail, and he sent it back after reading the two chapters on that fire with errors circled in red ink. The book now looks like Christmas wrapping paper.

I know a little bit about wildland firefighting and a great deal about Montana geography, two reasons why Gantenbein's errors jumped out at me. I spent three seasons with the U.S. Forest Service in Montana, one doing insect damage surveys in western Montana and Yellowstone Park and later two on the Missoula smokejumper crew with fire jumps in Oregon, Idaho,

California, and Montana. Between insect surveys and jumping, I spent a season fighting fires for the BLM in Alaska and a season on a Forest Service hotshot crew on the San Bernardino National Forest in Southern California. After jumping, I flew one season as an aerial observer on the St. Joe National Forest in Idaho.

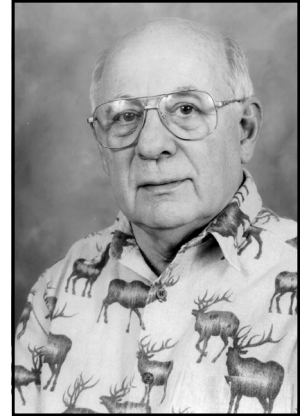
Some of Gantenbein's more serious errors concern the Thirtymile fire. There are disturbing discrepancies between what Gantenbein writes and Forest Service dispatch logs and official chronologies. My friend reports that his personal conversations with participants and eyewitnesses are often at odds with Gantenbein's version of events.

Particularly egregious is Gantenbein's sloppy reporting regarding the victims. On page 59, for example, he states that Karen FitzPatrick was 21 years old and Jessica Johnson was 22 when they died. Actually Karen was 18 years old, the youngest federal female wildland firefighter ever killed by flames, and Jessica was 19, two weeks shy of 20. Their ages, even their birth dates, were readily available in newspaper accounts and in their obituaries.

The author flubs even the most basic fact regarding the Thirtymile fire when he reports that it was named for a highway milepost. There is no Thirtymile milepost (though there is a Thirtymile Campground sign). Actually the fire was named for nearby Thirtymile Peak, a fairly easy fact to determine.

Other errors abound. On page 10, the author describes a Pulaski as a "combination hoe and pick," when of course it is a combination mattock and single-bit axe. On page 52, he talks about a big rake he calls a "McCleod." I assume he is talking about a McLeod. On page 264, he refers to "Region 6 headquarters in Missoula," when Region 6 headquarters is in Portland. (Region 1 headquarters is in Missoula.) On page 93, he talks about "Pulaskis and shovels the smokejumpers *took with them* through the C-47's door." (The italics are mine.) Perhaps this is a bit of literary hyperbole but he would have served his credibility better had he noted that tools are dropped after the jumpers are on the ground.

Here is Mr. Gantenbein on a key aspect of wildland fire fighting history: "Moreover, since the 1930s, helicopters have become a common sight on fires, dropping small teams of 'heli-attack' firefighters in addition to loads of water—and



Fred Donner (NSA file)

doing so with even more precision and flexibility than can smokejumpers dropped from a DC-3.” I am not making this stuff up, gals and guys, it is on page 160. That helicopter firefighters predated smokejumpers is a remarkable discovery—if it were true, which it is not. While some very limited experimental work with helicopters took place after World War II, the Forest Service’s first operational use of a helicopter was body recovery and supply efforts after the Mann Gulch fire disaster in 1949. It is true helicopters offer innumerable advantages but it is interesting that an author concerned about the high costs of wildland fire fighting neglects to mention that the cost of helicopter ton-miles is much higher than the cost of fixed wing ton-miles with a much shorter radius of action.

Perhaps most puzzling is the author’s ignorance regarding his surroundings. On page 26, for example, he writes that from Missoula he drove north on I-84 into “the Rattlesnake National Forest.” Presumably he left I-90 at Missoula and drove up Rattlesnake Canyon into the Lolo National Forest because there is no Rattlesnake National Forest nor is there an I-84 near Missoula. He remains confused about I-84 in every reference. On page 32, he says I-84 traverses Montana when in fact I-84 is not in Montana at all but in Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington state. Later he finds I-84 in the Bozeman area (page 198) and leaves Bozeman on I-84 bound for Livingston. Eventually he leaves Livingston on, you guessed it, I-84 headed for Seattle. But confusion about I-84 isn’t Gantenbein’s only problem when it comes to reading a map. At one point, he drives south from Missoula and over to Wisdom, Mont. When he leaves Wisdom (page 228), he drives *west* to the Spanish Peaks. Since the Spanish Peaks are a hundred miles *southeast*

of Wisdom as the crow flies, this was an around-the-world trip taken at face value.

Early in the book Gantenbein mentions the “Forest Service’s huge Romanesque rockpile of a headquarters, located directly across the Mall from the White House.” I have lived about twelve miles from Forest Service headquarters for some twenty-two years. It is in the former Bureau of Printing and Engraving structure known as the Auditor’s Building, which is mostly brick at the corner of Fourteenth and Independence. Only a massive amount of literary license would describe it as a “huge Romanesque rockpile.” And “directly across the Mall from the White House” is a little misleading. The White House is separated from the Mall by the Ellipse and Fourteenth and Independence—though indeed “across the Mall”—is two blocks east of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The real question is what negative point he is trying to make with his (faulty) description of the building and its location.

As a graduate student in history and geography and later a State Department and Pentagon intelligence officer, I had to read carefully with an eagle-eye for accuracy. If Gantenbein has erred regarding the “smaller” facts, what about the “larger” ones? And in at least one important case, he has woefully misreported a “larger” issue: the Thirtymile fire. The four lovely people who died deserve a better account than his.

Mr. Gantenbein teaches nonfiction writing at the University of Washington, according to the back flap. He should transfer to another department, perhaps science fiction. 🐼

Fred Donner can be reached at fredandbev@earthlink.net, 703/698-5480, or 7320 Pinecastle Road, Falls Church, VA 22043.

NSA Historian Needed

Volunteer historian needed to ensure NSA/smokejumping history is accurately represented, maintained and preserved. The position is supported by volunteer staff members for special projects, video production and research. Primary responsibilities include:

NSA Historian (Keeper of the Flame)

Position description:

1. Primary contact for responding to requests for information or NSA resources regarding NSA or smoke-jumper history.
2. Develops and maintains plan for the preservation of NSA/smokejumper program history including: vision, goals, objectives.
3. Provides overall direction and coordination of various NSA history projects.
4. Maintains liaison and coordination with institutions which NSA has existing MOUs; i.e., U. of Montana or Evergreen Museum.
5. Focal point/facilitator for collection of NSA related documents, audio-visual media, artifacts and memorabilia.

6. Maintains record of items donated to various institutions, including copy of Deed of Collection.
7. Maintains library/file of annual base reports (history) and NSA publications.
8. Serves as spokesperson for NSA on requests for historical information.
9. Coordinates/assigns history related projects to asst. historian or special projects (history) persons.
10. Provides periodic history related reports at board meetings.

Incumbents must have:

- a. complete understanding of smokejumper program and its components.
- b. passion for preservation of smokejumper history.
- c. ability to work with variety of people within smoke-jumper community, academia and the media.

For more information or to express interest in the position please contact: Doug Houston (contact information on page three of this issue) or Bill Moody, PO Box 262, Twisp, WA 98856, e-mail: bmoody@mymethow.com, phones 509-997-5971 or 509-860-0216 cell.

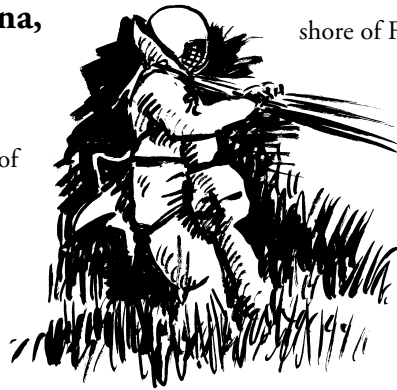
Blast from the Past

The Daily Inter Lake, Montana, Sunday, Aug. 4, 1968

FRANK DERRY DIES

Graveside services will be conducted at 10 A.M., Monday for Frank Derry, 64, innovator of the Derry chute, utilized primarily by smokejumpers fighting forest fires. Rev. Paul Jones, pastor of the Little Brown Church, will officiate. Mr. Derry died Friday morning in Kalispell General Hospital.

Mr. Derry was born July 27, 1904, the son of Norman and Amy Derry. His interests were many and varied and he was widely known all over western Montana. In this area, he was perhaps best known for his marina at Woods Bay on the east



shore of Flathead Lake.

In 1939, a small group of professional jumpers, with Mr. Derry in charge, conducted a number of tests and approximately 60 live jumps. Derry's close friend, Earl Cooley, presently stationed at the Missoula Aerial Fire Depot, made the first actual smokejump. In 1942, the Derry slotted chute, a maneuverable easily opening parachute, was developed.

This chute made it possible to convert any standard flat type chute by adding the slots and guidelines. Mr. Derry worked extensively with the Forest Service and was also known as a "barnstorming parachuter." 🦅

The Final Malfunction?

by Mark Corbet (LaGrande '74)

Prior to the late 1970s, Forest Service smokejumpers experienced one malfunction in every forty jumps. Most of these were "line-overs" or "Mae Wests" and resulted from the canopy skirt inverting or inflating between two suspension lines, pushing one line over the canopy as it inflated and forming a double bubble (ÇÇ), rather than the normal semi-hemisphere (Ç).

The British first experimented with Anti-Inversion Netting (AIN) as a way to prevent malfunctions and began to use it operationally in 1973. AIN resembles volleyball netting sewn around the skirt of round parachutes, and it prevents the canopy skirt from inflating between two suspension lines. By the end of 1973, the Brits had made 112,000 malfunction-free jumps with net-modified canopies. In May 1974, Canadian and U.S. Army personnel jumped round parachutes with three-inch mesh netting 4,831 times without any malfunctions.

Prior to AIN, round parachutes had a malfunction rate of approximately one in every forty jumps. Between 1966 and 1974, U.S. Army jumpers experienced 59,380 malfunctions in a total of 2,324,728 jumps on T-10 parachutes. Of these malfunctions, 56,430 or ninety-five percent were semi-inversions and 2,950 or five percent were total malfunctions.

In late 1974, the U.S. Army conducted tests on mesh-modified T-10 canopies (the same basic 'chute the Forest Service called the FS-10). A total of thirty dummy and

2,392 personnel jumps were made with no malfunctions. By April 1977, the U.S. Army had made over 81,000 jumps on modified T-10 parachutes without a single malfunction.

During the 1976 fire season, the Forest Service tested a small number of FS-10 parachutes equipped with AIN; the netting had three-inch square mesh extending eighteen inches down each line. The addition of AIN to round parachutes lowered the malfunction rate from an average of one malfunction every forty jumps to an unbelievable zero malfunctions over many thousands of jumps! It advanced parachute safety far beyond even the wildest dreams of round 'chute users.

The USFS 1976-77 tests of AIN parachutes were so successful that a June 1978 target date was set for the total conversion to AIN-modified FS-10 canopies. Since then, round parachute malfunctions have become a memory. Few of today's Forest Service smokejumpers have ever seen a malfunction. It might be premature to claim that the last malfunction of a round parachute occurred in the 1970s but since then, round chutes with AIN installed have been virtually malfunction free. 🦅

I experienced a "line-over" or "Mae West" on one of my first training jumps with the FS-2 parachute. I freed it by pulling down the offending line and working it off the canopy, as trained. For the younger crowd, Mae Wests were named after a well-endowed actress of the '40s. —Denis Symes, ed.

Fire Call

by Ken Perkins (Redding '77)

Most days are spent hanging around waiting for the fire "call," the call being a two-horn blast that sounds something like a foghorn. A better description would be a sound more akin to an air horn on a large semi truck that can be heard over a wide area, unmistakable in its character and significance.

Hanging around is what we refer to the daily routines and mundane jobs we do while waiting for that horn blast to send us off on wild adventures. These adventures lead to stories and tall tales that are told with exaggerated gusto and embellished heroic deeds. The best of all are the tales of near disasters that, after the fact, are humorous in the telling while sitting around a campfire at night or bellied up to a local pub talking story while trying desperately to impress the local bar bunnies, babes, lasses and most important, your bros.

After roll call, I find myself at my usual daily assignment, working in the parachute loft. The loft is where we masculine macho types spend most of our time sitting behind Singer, Phaffs, and Dressmakers, all of which are sewing machines. Darning and patching parachutes, stitching harnesses, mending various jump gear, manufacturing jump equipment, designing and inventing alternative ways to make the day go by with as little hassle as possible. Every now and then you hear a bro shout out in anger or agony as they stitch their finger through with a runaway sewing machine. You just have to laugh knowing that you once did the same exact thing. You know that it hurts like hell, blood all over the piece you were sewing. Everyone is laughing, jumping up and down and yelling inane sounds in the frenzy of the moment. The distraction is good for a little while, then everyone settles back into his or her own funk. Others in the loft are doing the finer points of fixing and repairing the parachutes. It takes

a seasoned and adept person to be allowed to do this particular job, usually a senior rigger watched over by a master rigger. It's a time-consuming and a tedious job.

There are riggers who pack the parachutes and are trained by master riggers and certified by the FAA. They emit a constant thump, thud or pounding noise as they batter, stuff, grunt and fart their way through the process of rigging a parachute, all the while constantly rapping to one or the other. The atmosphere is clean and bright and altogether very professional, even considering the diversity of the jumpers and their specific job skills.

Picture if you will, a smokejumper whose job it is to wheel a Pulaski, climb a tree to get their gear out, or cut down trees four foot in diameter with a twenty-eight-inch blade chainsaw. We scrape, cut and dig bent over, elbows and assholes hour after hour sucking smoke, snot hanging down to your knees, sweating profusely, guzzling quarts of water. Hot! I mean really hot! Not only from the exertion of your labors but also from the megaheat radiating from the fire. Eyes burning, throat so raw from exertion and smoke that one can hardly swallow a cap full of water. Cutting, sawing, scraping, cutting, sawing, chopping, scraping. The

sound of your own breathing hammering in your ears with every breath you take. Listening constantly to the sounds of the fire as it consumes the timber and shrub. Listening for that telltale sound that means the fire is about to make a run, gobbling, churning, boiling, cracking and exploding into that unforgettable sound of a runaway freight train. Hour after hour, day after day, even weeks, fighting fire.

Sometimes, when it's all said and done, one has to pack up all their gear and start walking. It may be anywhere from a short distance of a mile or two up to twenty plus miles, carrying packs that weigh an average of a 110, to a 120 pounds. Huu raw! We say, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

Eventually we return to the base. Soon I'm back at work in the loft sitting at a sewing machine in a nice air-conditioned building listening to the Rolling Stones or Pink Floyd. Shooting the shit and talking the talk, prefacing each tale with "No, really!" "There I was." "No shit man!" "I'm telling you straight." "You won't believe this one." And on and on. Waiting, knowing, that any minute the horn will go off, relieving you of this drudgery and that your turn has come to live the dream, once again. Fire call! 📞

Don't Leave Us Hanging

NSA merchandising is an important contributor to the funding and public awareness of the association. Under the volunteer direction of Chuck Sheley, the merchandise business has grown steadily. After many years of hard work, Chuck is ready to dedicate more of his time to other NSA interests. ***WE NEED YOU*** to "hook up" and help the NSA continue the success of this important revenue producer.

NSA is looking for a motivated volunteer who can manage all aspects of the merchandise store. A great volunteer would have the motivation to grow the business and continue this important function of the NSA. You would need to: receive and fill customer orders, manage inventory and forecast merchandise needs, develop merchandise flyer, work with webmaster on web store, track and record all sales and shipments. Computer work is necessary. Volunteer work can be conducted from your home.

For information please call Stan Linnertz 1-800-288-8504x3218, or 402-560-3226, or e-mail Stan.Linnertz@usis-csd.com

Interviews with Smokejumpers from the 1940s

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

In an effort to record more smokejumper history, I wanted to film short interviews with as many jumpers from the 1940s as possible at the national reunion in Missoula June 2004. There were fifty of these gentlemen registered, and I sent out letters to all of them asking for some of their time. Jill Leger (NSA associate and copy editor for Smokejumper magazine) from National Geographic agreed to fly in and handle the filming while I did the interviewing. Jill's flight out of D.C. was cancelled due to inclement weather leaving me to go to another plan on short notice. I was able to get help from Larry Lufkin (CJ-63), Jim Cherry (MSO-57), Denis Symes (MYC-63), Karl Maerzluf (FBX-67) and John Helmer (RDD-59). The interviews were done the old fashion way with pen and paper. Chris Sorensen (associate and Smokejumper magazine columnist) stood by all day and took the "mug shots." Thanks to all of these gentlemen for taking time out of the reunion to help the NSA perform one of its basic goals—the recording of smokejumper history. Following are some of the interviews with more coming in future issues of Smokejumper.

Howard Wayne Betty (NCSB-48)

by Larry Lufkin
Howard "Howbet"

Betty rookied at NCSB in 1948 and continued jumping there until 1954. Judd Longmore, then supervisor of the Okanogan National Forest, told Howard about the job and he applied after graduation from high school. It was 1948, right after the big flood in the Methow Valley, and the Forest Service was taking anybody who applied.

Howard fought many fires for the Forest Service while in high school and had lots of fire experience by the time he started jumping. He lied about his age to get on fire crews. On the Goat Wall fire, he saw a plane fly by every day and drop hot food to some jumpers on the top of the fire.

Howard's first fire jump was on Fawn Peak. Elmer Neufeld (CJ-44) was the spotter and his jump partner was Gordy Wood (NCSB-48). Gordy threw up in his mask during the jump and almost suffocated before Howard could unbuckle the straps to the mask and get his helmet off. After that, they took the buckles off the helmets and used elastic bands to close the mask. Howard said his first year jumping was very traumatic. His second year was more fun because he knew what was going on by then.



Howard Wayne Betty

A helicopter that was on contract for flood cleanup flew to the Fawn Peak fire and transported the jumpers home. He thinks that was probably the first time a helicopter was used to pick up jumpers.

Howard's most memorable fire was in 1949. They had just heard about the Mann Gulch disaster about the time he jumped a large fire in Hells Canyon. Several McCall jumpers were working on the other side of the fire when it blew up. It burned up the canyon between the two groups of jumpers and burnt their chutes. His group didn't know what happened to the McCall guys. As it turned out, both groups were OK, but for a while they were scared something bad might have happened to the other.

Howard believes the best thing he got out of jumping was the lifetime friendships he developed. Of all these folks, Rod Snider (NCSB-51) wins the "character award" for running a 100-yard dash. Except this dash wasn't run on a racecourse. Rod ran across the Twisp River Bridge, on top of the outside railing. Rod was also well known for his rock climbing and repelling stunts.

Howard learned all about hard work with the smokejumpers, especially when he was assigned to install phone line. His partner, Jim Putnam (NCSB-48), spurred himself and was taken to the doctor by Jim Allen (NCSB-46). Howard had to finish the job himself.

In 1954, with a second child on the way, Howard quit jumping and went to work for a Swiss Skyline logging outfit. He thought he would make big money falling timber but nearly starved to death. Howard took over for Paul Duffy as manager of the Methow Valley Lumber Yard and bought the business in 1961. He retired from the business in 1976.

Since retirement, Howard has kept busy with a number of projects. He ran the tanker base in Omak one summer and was acknowledged by the *Methow Valley News* for teaching at Liberty High School. Howard earned a degree in teaching and woodshop at Eastern Washington University in the 1950s but didn't do any teaching until thirty years later.

Smokejumping has stayed in Howard's family. His son Ned (LDG-77) jumped five years, earned an engineering degree, and now lives in Kirkland, Wash. His son-in-law, Steve Reynaud (NCSB-65), also jumped for many years.

Jack Dunne (MSO-46)

by Chuck Sheley

Jack started his Forest Service work during WWII in 1943 on the Libby Ranger District. He went into the Army Air Force (later in '43) where he was a tail gunner on a B-29.

The 29s flew out of Guam and were involved in those dangerous missions over the Japanese mainland. Early on, the bombing was done from high altitude but the extreme high winds (jet stream) forced the planes down to 5–6,000 feet and the dangers of the lower level operation. Jack flew 30+ missions and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and several other air medals.



Jack Dunne

Back from the war in 1946, Jack and a friend applied for smokejumping and were accepted. Both were sawyers and that probably helped as he was the “tool man” at Missoula during his career there. He jumped four seasons (1946–49) while attending Western Montana College at Dillon and getting his teaching credential. Jack taught fifth and sixth grade for thirty-three years, mostly in Whitefish where he has been living since 1952. He was married for thirty-one years (his wife died two years ago) and has three daughters and six grandchildren.

Jack named **Bob** (MSO-47) and **Lee Gorsuch** (MYC-46) when I asked about names from the past. The Sheep Mountain fire in 1947 stood out in his mind. There were Missoula and McCall jumpers on that fire which blew up. There was some doubt as to the status of the McCall jumpers but they made it into the burn and were OK.

To show that jumpers are the same, whatever the generation, Jack recounts the time when a circus moved into town at the fairgrounds. There was a baby elephant that was “borrowed” and taken to the barracks. When the late night drinkers arrived, some of them must have sworn off the bottle when they opened the door. Was it a big mouse? Later at Nine Mile, they parachuted a gopher on a drift chute. The gopher hit the ground, was released from his “harness” and disappeared; didn’t show up for another jump the next day.

Robert (Bob) “Rigger” Snyder (CJ-48)

by Denis Symes

During World War II, Robert (Bob) Snyder served as a civilian in France during D day, the Invasion of Normandy and the beginning of the end of the war in Europe. He was in the Merchant Marine as a seaman on a liberty ship and manned a 20mm anti-aircraft gun during the invasion. Immediately following the D day landings, Bob and six other “civilians” went inland on their own, searching for Germans. In 1987, Congress classified the Merchant Marine seamen as military personnel and made them eligible for full military benefits.

The Merchant Marine (even though a civilian organization) suffered the highest casualty losses of any of the services during the war. The liberty ships were expected to

make only one or two transatlantic crossings before being sunk. They suffered especially high losses while transporting supplies to the Russians in Murmansk. Submarine wolfpacks searched constantly for these convoys; one of the Murmansk convoys (PQ17) lost twenty-four



Robert (Bob) “Rigger” Snyder

of the thirty-four ships that departed carrying war material!

Upon returning from the war, Bob worked as an ironworker, erecting high steel buildings. The best way to learn high steel work is to start at the ground level and work up; if you’re not comfortable by the fourth or fifth floor, find another line of work.

During a lively weekend in Tijuana, Mexico, Bob, also known as “Rigger,” met **Ed Adams** (CJ-46) in a bar. While outdoing each other’s stories, Adams described the smoke-jumper program and Bob said, “Anything you can do, I can do better!” Ed told Bob to contact **Cliff Marshall** (CJ-46) to apply.

He was hired at Cave Junction in 1948. After jumping out of Cave Junction between 1948 and 1951, Bob’s knees were “pretty much busted up.” He searched for new employment opportunities and became superintendent of the Garage and Pit Area of Pocono International Raceway. Ultimately, Bob became the director of security for the International Hot Rod Association.

In addition to the above positions, Bob was elected vice president of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union. Currently, he is president of the Pocono Karters, Inc., a go-kart racing organization.

Bob learned a strong sense of independence and self-judgment from his years as a smokejumper—“You have to develop a plan quickly and, if it doesn’t work, come up with plan B.” Cliff Marshall taught him the best lesson he ever learned: how to handle a crew and get results. When asked what his best experience was, Bob replied, “Jumping was the best time of my life. They were all great experiences!”

His most memorable jump was on a plane crash in California. The plane went straight in and made a very small hole in the trees. The plane was just a bundle of metal in a small hole. The fire extinguished itself and required very little work. “We did find two bodies,” Bob said. “They were just lumps of charcoal.”

His WWII experiences, high steel ironwork, smoke-jumping, and racing have given Bob a strong sense of confidence and an interesting life. Bob currently lives in Easton, Pa.

Donald A. Dayton (MSO-48)

by John Helmer

Don met some jumpers while working on a Forest Service blister rust control crew out of St. Mary’s, Idaho. He

applied to Missoula and was accepted, jumping one year. Don trained at the Nine Mile Ranger Station, a large and historic facility best known for its 100+ mule packing station.

His most memorable jump was his fourth. First out on a three man stick, he heard trouble develop between the other two.

"There was a whole lot of cussing," recalls Don.

One jumper came in on top of the other, and then swung into his lines. Both men landed on the lower chute.

An ROTC graduate of Ohio State (wildlife management), Don entered active duty and was assigned to Wheelis AFB in Tripoli, Libya. After the Air Force, he began a thirty-five-year career with the National Park Service, retiring in Santa Fe as deputy regional director. Married fifty-two years, Don has three children and four grandchildren.

Don's most memorable tour of duty in the Park Service was as a ranger at Glacier NP, 1956–61. He was a sector boss on the 25,000-acre Coal Creek fire, which blew up every afternoon for two weeks.

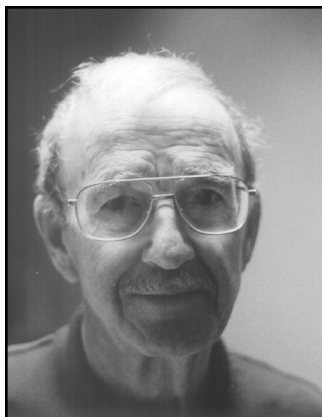
Late one day in the summer of 1959, a frantic young man rushed into the Many Glacier Ranger Station pleading for help. His eighteen-year-old hiking companion was being attacked by a grizzly. Don grabbed a 30.06 with a history of jamming on the fourth round. After climbing up the steep mountain for half an hour, Don found the 300-pound animal lying on top of its scalped victim, chewing on the calves of the young man's legs. From a distance of thirty-five yards, Don fired twice past the still-living boy, shattering the bear's spine with the second shot. Evacuated to a Canadian hospital, the hiker eventually recovered fully. Don received the Department of the Interior's Valor Award.

Dick Strong (MSO-48)

by Karl Maerzluf

Dick's start with smokejumping was rather rocky. After high school he applied to the Forest Service for a position in fire control, but was turned down. Undaunted, he tried again during 1948 "for the money" and, this time, was accepted.

He was on the jump list for three years, but did not get many jumps. The late '40s was part of a mild decade in terms of forest fires. Six fire jumps in six years was not uncommon in those days. He did manage to be a part of the Payette River fire and looks back on it with vivid memories. Half of his jumps were with **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41). On a fire near the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, he missed the jump spot and landed in the river. The novelty of this event is only in his mind.



Donald A. Dayton

After his time as a jumper, a real job came along and he applied at Potlatch Forests, now Weyerhaeuser. Then there was a two-year hiatus when Uncle Sam requested his services.

Civilian life continued in 1954 when Dick went to work for the Forest Service as an engineer.

Nothing was routine in that position and he

enjoyed it immensely. However, promotions meant more money and so, when the position of forester came along, he grabbed it to "try a new thing."

Dick retired from the FS in 1987 to begin his new career—caretaker. His wife came down with a debilitating stroke that requires his full time attention. He seems to be attending to that task with the same enthusiasm he displays with every other task. Taking care of the community, the forest, and the family, seems to be the underlying theme in his life as with most old jumpers.

He and his bride of many years make their home in Hamilton, Mont.



Dick Strong

Lloyd J. Brown (MSO-49)

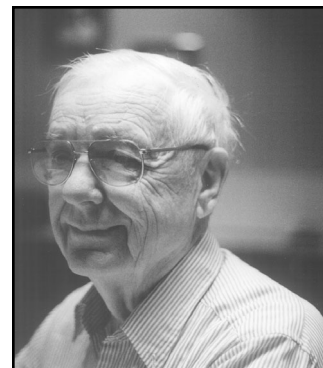
by Chuck Sheley

Brownie worked for the Sula RD on the trail crew and as a lookout for four seasons before applying for the smoke-jumper program. In one of his stints as a lookout, he saw the jumpers in action and figured it was better than walking into the fires. I wonder how many guys that went into smokejumping had the same thoughts? The 1949 rookie class was large

(seventy-one), but he remembers **Leonard Piper** and **Henry Thol**, who were later killed at Mann Gulch. He spent six seasons as a jumper (three as a squad leader) working in the logging industry during the off-season. **Max Allen** (MSO-48) is remembered as a close friend.

Brownie says that he handled all aspects of logging during his forty-two-year career and retired from Boise Cascade in 1992. He has lived in Council, Idaho, since 1959 and has two sons, one daughter and five grandchildren.

Lloyd remembers a fire in the Salmon River area where they jumped four jumpers to handle two fires. When they were done they walked to a lookout and were helicoptered off,



Lloyd J. Brown

which was probably one of the earlier jumper retrievals by that method. The chopper was working a forty-eight-jumper fire nearby. When those jumpers were taken off their fire, a forty-eight-passenger bus showed up to transport fifty-two jumpers back to Missoula. The four jumpers (including Lloyd) from the smaller fires had to ride in the luggage racks for the trip home. That was the bad part. The good part was only those four were asked to fill out time cards for the return trip since they did not have a seat in the bus.

Bob Crowe (MSO-46)

by Denis Symes

As Yogi Berra once observed, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." Robert "Bob" Crowe has certainly taken many forks in the past eighty-one years and continues to seek new ones.

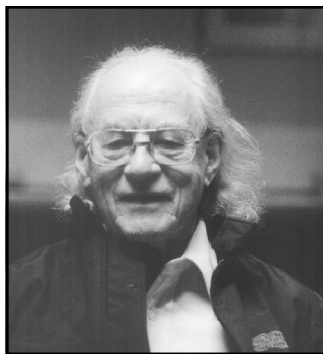
Originally from Pennsylvania, Bob enlisted in the Army and served in the Army Parachute Infantry (101st Airborne, 501st Regiment), jumped into Normandy and fought through France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. In 1944, he participated in the Battle of Bastogne and was encircled by the Germans during an extremely cold period in December of 1944. Between December 16 and 27, the 101st was completely surrounded and very low on food, medical supplies, ammunition, and warm clothing.

While in Europe, Bob read an article in the Army's *Stars and Stripes* magazine about a Forest Service activity called "smokejumping" and thought he'd like to try it. Returning from the war, Bob enrolled in Pennsylvania State University and studied forestry. In 1946, he was hired as a smoke-jumper in Missoula and jumped through 1949.

Following college graduation, Bob worked for the Missoula White Pine Sash Company and was responsible for lumber sales. Window sashes require only the highest quality lumber (no knots or faults). Bob sold the lumber not meeting specifications to other wood processors. Based on his experience, Bob was later employed by the Montana State Forestry Department as director of Utilization and Marketing. He identified wood processors and utilizations for lumber waste products—this pioneered the recycling movement for lumber waste. After ten years with the state, he retired and now lives in Miles City, Mont., a great jumping-off location for riding his Harley-Davidson motorcycle around the state (remember now, he is a youthful eighty-one!).

Bob enjoyed parachuting, fire fighting, and the "good times had by jumpers. They were great experiences!"

In early August 1949, **Bill Hellman** (MSO-46) was the first squad leader on the jump list; Bob was the second



Bob Crowe

(Hellman had served in WWII as a Navy corpsman assigned to the Marines and took part in the island-hopping invasions in the Pacific.) Hellman's wife had come to Missoula and Bill wanted to spend some time with her. Bob agreed to switch positions on the jump list with Hellman so Bill could see his wife.

On Thursday, August 4, Bob led a crew on a fire in Idaho, returning on Monday, August 8. A second fire call came in on Friday, August 5, for a fire in Mann Gulch, north of Helena; the overhead on this fire were Bill Hellman (squad leader) and the foreman, **Wagner "Wag" Dodge** (MSO-41). The rest of this tragedy is well documented.

Bob returned to Missoula on Monday, learned of the tragedy and wired his mother that he was OK. When asked how the aftermath of the Mann Gulch fire compared with his WWII combat experiences, Bob noted, "Shocked, I was not prepared for that."

A widower for thirteen years, Bob has two sons, four grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. His Harley-Davidson comes in handy for family visits!

Ray Goss (MSO-46)

by Karl Maerzluff

The more interesting part of Ray's life began in 1943 when he joined the U.S. Navy. He promptly was sent to the South Pacific where there was plenty of excitement. When the shooting stopped and the war was over, he left the service in 1946.

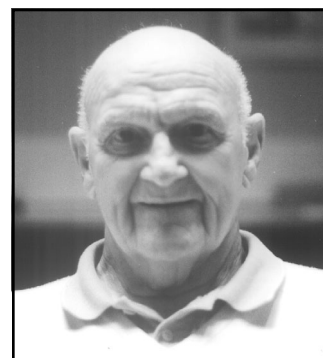
Now unemployed, he found work with the Forest Service in the

Okanogan area as a roadsider. Just a month later, jumpers were needed and Ray "jumped" at the chance and trained at Nine Mile. He was stationed at Winthrop, jumping mostly from Ford Tri-motors, Twin Beeches, and the venerable C-47.

Ray's most memorable fire started with the jump spot at 10,000 feet. When the airplane left, they discovered that no tents had been dropped. After enduring rain, snow and wind until the fire was declared out, the trek out was a mere twenty-seven miles.

Ray majored in vocational agriculture at Pullman (WSU) and later obtained a PhD in agronomy. This led to a career of being a researcher of turf grasses. Although this had little to do with smokejumping, he considers jumping to be the postgraduate training of the military. Individualism combined with leadership skills and teamwork is a tricky juggling act that is common only among jumpers.

Since his retirement in 1988, Ray consulted for three or four years, but mostly spends his time doing volunteer work and attending to community affairs.



Ray Goss

Hal Samsel (MSO-49)

by Chuck Sheley

Hal started fighting fire at age fourteen, which was not uncommon during the war years (1942–45) due to the tremendous shortage of available manpower. He was born in Missoula and his dad was district ranger on the Seeley Lake District, so it just seemed a natural progression for him to end up with the smoke-



Hal Samsel

jumpers. Hal is well known in jumper circles having stayed with the job from 1949 until his retirement in 1980. Brothers **Bill** (MSO-61) and **Kirk** (MSO-60) were also jumpers.

When he turned forty, the government made him stop jumping. That was the common practice at that time. Hal then rewrote his job description as parachute loft foreman allowing him to stay in that position until retirement.

When asked about personalities that he remembers, **Max Allen** (MSO-48) rises to the top of the list. "He was a natural leader and comedian—jumpers would follow him around just to see what would happen next." Hal was on the Silver City crew in 1950 and went down as backup in 1969, so **Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson** (MYC-47) is remembered.

Jim Cyr (MSO-63) took over the loft when Hal retired. He smiled when I asked him if he had any problems from the administration when he rewrote his job description in the loft. Said he had great support from the GS-6 jumpers—you can take it from there. I also had to ask him about a story I had read in *Smokejumper* magazine about **Len Krout** (MSO-46). Len was leading a packout in the wrong direction, and Hal sat down and waited until the line came back up the ridge and proceeded in the right direction. That was the second or third story I had read about Len's sense of direction on packouts. With a good-natured jab, he said Len was lost to some degree in most of the packouts.

Hal was detailed to just about all of the bases at one time or another during his career. He told about one time sixteen Missoula jumpers were sent down to Medford. It was the summer the airstrip at Cave Junction was closed for repairs. Being in Medford, there was no mess hall. They were on their own for food, and their money ran out quickly. They prayed for fires so they could get something to eat. The welfare fund sent down \$200 that didn't go too far with sixteen jumpers. Hal said it was a good thing there was a peach orchard nearby.

Hal has seen many changes in smokejumping during his tenure on the job. There were many veterans returning from WWII in his rookie class as well as men like **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41) and **Fred Barnowski** (MSO-42) who jumped before going off to war and were returning to that job. He has seen the jumpers go from the college types, who jumped and went on to another life, to the career jumpers.

He is now living at Flathead Lake with some time in Arizona during the winters.

Wilmer "Willie" "Bill" Carlsen (MSO-43)

by John Helmer

Times were tough in Iowa in 1936. Nineteen-year-old Bill Carlsen and an older brother decided to head west to dig potatoes. "The whole family came down to the freight yards to see us off," Bill recalls. His brother managed to climb aboard the first train, but it was moving too fast for Bill. He was able to catch

the next one, and rejoined his brother 1,100 miles down the track in Park City, Mont. From there it was picking apples in Omak, Wash., and bailing hay in Lancaster, Calif.

By this time war clouds were developing, and Bill registered with the Lancaster draft board. Returning to work, "I had a lot of time to think about it on that big hay field. Driving the tractor back and forth. I finally decided that I couldn't shoot anybody." He went back and asked for a military reclassification as a noncombatant. The board refused, and inducted him into the Civilian Public Service. "Incarcerated, really." He was sent to a CCC camp run by the Forest Service near Cascade Locks, Ore., where he gained fire fighting experience on the Deschutes River and the Olympic Peninsula.

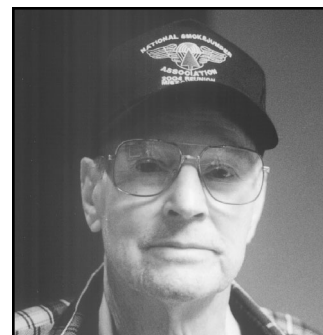
One day there was a notice posted in the camp mess hall about smokejumper positions in Montana. Out of over 200 conscientious objectors in the camp, only Bill and one other man responded.

Bill reported to Seeley Lake on May 1, 1943, ready to go. The assemblage was so large, however, that, except for early morning calisthenics, jump training was staggered through the summer. Bill was in the second group of thirty, starting in mid-June. He had only one fire jump that year, on the Madison Plateau, fourteen miles from Old Faithful.

Bill jumped two more years, jumping fires in Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. Later, he joined the carpenters union, working at that trade until retirement. His proudest professional accomplishment was the dismantling of the steel bridge at St Regis. Bill is eighty-seven now and lives in Polson, Mont.

One emotional memory from his jumping years involved a confrontation with a nonjumping USFS employee, a recently discharged Marine. "He kept calling me a yellow belly. He wouldn't shut up." Bill's foreman, **Wag Dodge** (MSO-41), heard the ruckus and came to his rescue. "He really straightened the guy out."

We're glad he did, Bill. 🙏



Wilmer "Willie" "Bill" Carlsen