

THE NATIONAL SMOKE-JUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

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OCTOBER 2006

SMOKEJUMPER



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## Message from the President



by Doug Houston  
(Redmond '73)

### PRESIDENT

GREETINGS TO ALL. You all probably expected a new face in the magazine; however, with the board approval, I have signed on for one more year as your president. **John Twiss** (RAC-67) will assume the duties in July 2008.

In the last issue, I talked about **Buck Pino** (NCSB-66) and the fact that three Pino brothers had jumped; however, that was not true. There were four Pino brothers (Buck, Robert, Frank and John) that jumped and, if times had been different, I don't doubt that their sister Patty would have also been a jumper. My apologies for that mistake. Within a three city-block area of the Pino's home in Omak, I count nine jumpers: The Pino's, **Ben Hull** (NCSB-64), **Greg Hillyer** (NCSB-67), **Barry George** (NCSB-73), **Terry McCabe** (NCSB-58) and myself. There must have been something in the city water.

Our last board meeting was in Cave Junction during their reunion. It turned out to be a lot of fun and was attended by quite a few who had jumped there. Stories were flowing and **Larry Longley** (NCSB-72) was able to interview several individuals for video documentation, and these will be added to the smokejumper archives at the University of Mon-

tana. The next board meeting is October 7<sup>th</sup> in Wenatchee, Washington, and the next reunion is the National Reunion in Boise, Idaho, in 2007. Don't miss that one. There will be a NCSB reunion in September 2007, and we are planning for the first-ever Redmond reunion in 2008.

On this July day of 2006, many volunteers are out with their pulaskis in hand improving trails, cutting water bars, restoring structures and stretching the stories of old. More than 140 volunteers are working on the trails projects this season. Many thanks to all of you and especially to **Jon McBride** (MSO-54), who is the force behind this great program. It just continues to grow. Way to go, Jon and crew.

Lastly, the National Smokejumper Center Board of Directors met in West Yellowstone last week and are diligently working on a non-profit status, an operations and business plan, facility location and other concepts that are going to make this a huge draw for the three million tourists that visit Yellowstone National Park each year. The emphasis for the center will be on youth programs and exposure to the "smokejumper story" to heighten awareness of the past and to the future of the program. The site was selected because of the numbers that go through the park each year and will incorporate information on all of the smokejumper bases, old and new. It will not be a museum, but an exhibit sharing the story that made all of us become jumpers and will continue to share those stories and adventures. More information can be found on the [www.smokejumpercenter.com](http://www.smokejumpercenter.com) website.

Until next time, the door is yours, you are hooked up, there is no drift and the whole world is a jump spot. Get out there and enjoy it. 🪂

# Lost but Not Lost

by Robert Hough (NCSB '51)

A storm went through the California/Oregon area in 1953. Cave Junction put out a call for help and North Cascades came to the rescue. **Jim Allen** (NCSB-46), the new Cave Junction foreman, met us at the field as we landed. He matched us up with local lads and we were on our way out after a minimum delay. My partner (I don't recall his name) and I jumped deep in the Shasta Forest area. I don't know what the Cave Junction lad was doing, but he terminated his descent way up the side of the only giant sequoia on the entire ridge. He used all but about five feet of his 150-foot letdown rope reaching the ground. The fire was a small, easily extinguished lightning strike, and we had everything under control by nightfall.

This was the first year for the disposable paper sleeping bags. Some manufacturer made a mint from the Forest

Service on those bags. We were told they were as warm as the old, previously supplied down bags. Ha, what a laugh! The flannel flap at the top was all that gave even a hint of fabric warmth. Usually someone had to keep a fire going to keep you from freezing. One big advantage of the paper sleeping bag was you could leave the bag and not pack it out. Anything to make a pack lighter was an advantage.



Bob Hough (NSA file)

We survived a very cool night on a ridge top near Mount Shasta. In the morning we finished the mop-up and packed the jump gear. My partner's chute was a stumbling block. I took the let down rope attached to his parachute, climbed an adjacent fir tree, cinched the line super tight and attempted to pull the chute from the sequoia. The fir tree bent way over, applying a tremendous force on the chute, but it would not budge. The only thing left was to climb the big sequoia. A minor problem: the first limb was 40 or 50 feet above the ground. We tied rocks to the end of my letdown rope and, after many attempts, finally got the line over that first limb and back to the ground. I made a boson's chair to pull my partner up to the first big limb. He got in the sling and I pulled. Yep, it worked. I had pulled him up about eight feet when he said he was afraid of heights and he was not going up the tree. I could not believe what I had heard. After all, it was his chute in the tree.

Recently I read Jill Leger's article about **Stuart A. Roosa** (CJ-53) in the July 2005 *Smokeyjumper*. In the article **Jim Dollard** (CJ-52) confirmed that Stuart was afraid of heights, yet he became a jet pilot and an astronaut. Jim Allen confirmed Stuart had two jumps in northern California. So, my partner must have been Stuart A. Roosa. You don't find many jumpers afraid of heights.

Anyway, I was the one in the boson's chair going after Stuart's parachute. After getting on that first big limb, the task was easy. I pulled up a saw, climbed up to the chute and started cutting limbs. All at once the 12 inch diameter fir tree snapped upright, popping the limbs, chute and harness free of the sequoia. Our efforts took about six hours, so we quickly packed and got out the map. The Forest Service map showed a trail in the canyon below the ridge. We laid out a course and headed downhill, where we hoped the pack train would meet us. We chucked our paper sleeping bags as instructed. Three hours later we were standing at the bottom of the canyon next to a beautiful rushing creek, but there was no trail to be found. In fact, the creek plunged down a

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### *Smokeyjumper base abbreviations:*

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

canyon with granite rock sidewalls 50 to 100 feet straight up. We looked at the map again. If the fire had been spotted correctly, the map was certainly not accurate as far as trails went. Dusk was closing in so we made a fire, warmed up some grub and had a peaceful meal, each deep in his own thoughts about what lay ahead. Of course the sleeping bags were back on the ridge. What should we do now? Out came the parachutes and we rolled up in them. Frankly they were warmer than the sleeping bags anyway.

Early the next morning we wolfed down some chow and decided the only way out was up. We tackled the southwest ridge. Manzanita brush was thicker than hair on a dog's back, and the ridge was so steep you could touch the ground by putting your arm straight out. This is one time I'll admit that an 85-pound pack really got heavy. After many hours we reached the sparsely covered ridge top. The question was how far do we go down this ridge before dropping down to the trail? We observed lots of bear sign as we traveled a mile or so on the ridge and then dropped over the side. We came to a good trail at dusk. Yep, there are the horse tracks, but they are going out, not in. What should we do? We are about out of grub and the sign at the trail fork says we have eight miles to go to reach the ranger's camp. Let's leave the packs and walk on out of here. They can pick up the stuff tomorrow with the horses. We started hot-footing it down the trail as darkness fell. Our night vision really got a work out, but we stumbled into the ranger's quarters about 10 PM. They seemed really glad to see us as the

packer had been up the trails looking for us for two days. A fine plate of hot food was prepared and we ate like kings. The next morning we climbed on horses and headed for Lake Shasta. At the lake we got in a boat and rode the entire length, where a truck took us to the Ranger Station at Redding.

We stayed there for a couple of days waiting for other jumpers to come out of the wilds. **Ed Mays** (NCSB-53) and **Louis Stevens** (NCSB-53) came in with a group that had many raw back sores from poorly packed/balanced packs. One of these jumpers fell from a log while crossing a stream. He almost drowned before he could shuck his pack. He was saved, but the equipment went down the canyon. We even got to go into town to see a movie before the plane trip back to Medford and finally home to NCSB. All in all, it was quite a trip. I had traveled by plane, by parachute, on foot, on horseback, by boat, by truck and by plane before arriving back at home station. I inquired about the packs we had left on the trail. The ranger said during the night, before the packer got back to pick them up, a bear (or was it a Big Foot?) had ripped everything to pieces. The chutes were totally destroyed. I felt really bad, as we could have camped out one more night and maybe even had a good bear story like **Jim Ransom's** (NCSB-65). 🐻

*Retired Lt. Col. Bob Hough and his wife live at 4940 SE Hovgaard Rd, Olalla, WA 98359 and he can be reached via email at DadHough@aol.com*

## Missoula Nightlife

by Chuck Pickard (Missoula '48)

**A**s you walked north on Higgins Avenue toward the Northern Pacific Railroad Depot on a Friday or Saturday night, you could hear brash music coming from the west side ... another weekend at the Silver Dollar bar. A fun place!

The bar occupied one corner of an intersection and a band occupied the sidewalk. The band, all in concert, sat perched on boxes, kegs or whatever, and, as you approached, the din became louder. As always, there was a crowd standing around sucking in the pure country/western music; some fine tunes to soothe a tired smokejumper's head.

A rough and ready senior played an old-time steel guitar. A tall, slender wrangler in Levis and cowboy boots handled the big guitar. Beside him stood a short fellow wearing a tall black hat, making his fiddle talk. A lean washed-out looking gent, wearing a flannel shirt, black jeans and logging boots, picked away expertly on a silver-trimmed banjo. There was a bass player, apparently from the other side of town, much younger, and dressed in jeans and a white shirt. Perhaps he was there to gain some playing time with some tried and true musicians. They all played with open bottles of beer and drinks at their feet and made some of the finest music I ever heard.

As you entered the bar the bartender might pull the cord that was strung across the ceiling to a locomotive bell hung overhead. The "alert" would turn the eyes of the customers to the newcomer. The walls were lined with slot machines, more than other bars in the area. The name of the bar told the story; the slots were mostly silver dollar machines. No problem, the coin of the realm in those days was

the silver dollar. It was not uncommon to break a twenty dollar bill and get all hard dollars in change. Frequently you could find a smokejumper on Higgins wearing a heavy pouch in his jeans and trying to trade for paper money to return to camp. That was not always the case. The Silver Dollar was a great place to use and lose those shiny dollars.

Between the good music outside, the slots inside and whiskey at 40 cents, by midnight the patrons were dancing on the bar. A sign near the door warned all comers, "No Corked Boots." The policy was not always followed and



*Chuck Pickard (NSA file)*

many local bars had floors riddled from corked boots. The patrons were a crusty bunch; a mix of lumberjacks, railroaders, hobos, cowboys and a few smokejumpers. Drinkers often provided entertainment and some sights to remember, especially when an altercation took place and spittoons went rolling across the floor. Jumpers who frequented the place stood off by themselves and were mostly known by the bartenders. Hence the old saying, “Ya must be a jumper, I know ye by yer White boots.”

Nearby, in the next block, stood a hotel and close by there was a two-story rooming house. There was a parlor of sorts on the first floor of the rooming house where as many as five ladies of the evening sat waiting. As nights wore on, foot traffic between the bar and the rooming house parlor increased. That’s another story for another time. 🍷

*Chuck can be reached at: 1971 Shell Ln W, Vero Beach, FL 32963, 772-589-2758.*

## New from the University of Oklahoma Press

### *Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line* *Conscientious Objectors during World War II* by Mark Matthews



*Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line* tells the story of one important group of World War II conscientious objectors: the men who volunteered for Civilian Public Service as U.S. Forest Service smoke jumpers.

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# Profile—Valery Alexandrovich Korotkov

by Bruce Ford (Missoula '75)

**V**alery Korotkov just turned 50 years old. He was a paratrooper in the Russian army 1974-76 and started smokejumping at the Petrozavodsk base in 1976, eventually becoming the head jumper there. Since 2001, he has relinquished those duties to pursue his passion of photography, both still and video. He often films smokejumpers with a helmet cam, and for years his photos and videos have graced many fire and forestry publications.

He spent summers working in the US in 1994 with the Redmond Hotshots and in 1999 with the Elko, Nevada, helitack.

Valery is married to wife Elena, and has a daughter Katya, black terrier named Baron, cat Klepa, and no dacha or car to complicate his life.

*Valery is the source of the excellent Russian Smokejumper photos and Bruce is the author of the informative articles that Smokejumper magazine has printed over the last year. Thanks to both of them.* 🍷



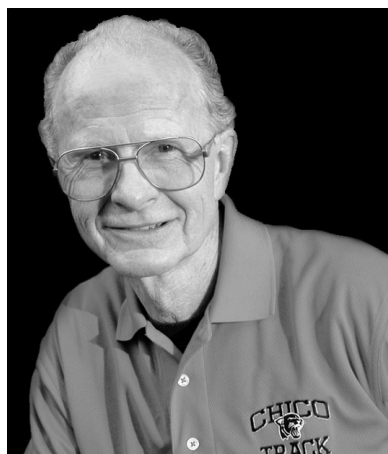
(Courtesy of Valery Korotkov)



(Courtesy of Valery Korotkov)



# Sounding Off from the Editor



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

ON JUNE 17<sup>TH</sup>, THE NSA had its board of directors meeting at Cave Junction, Oregon, in conjunction with the Gobi Reunion. We met in the old administration office in fairly cramped quarters while reunion attendees and locals toured what is left of the base. **Roger Brandt** (Associate), **Wes Brown** (CJ-66) and **Gary Buck** (CJ-66), the driving forces behind the effort to save the base as an historic landmark, had, along with others, set up an amazing display of photos for the event. The atmosphere created by the people there brought back good memories from the past.

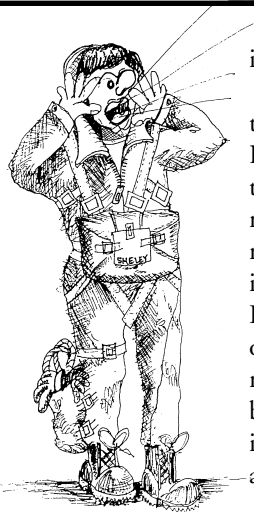
The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base, established in 1943, ceased operations after the 1981 season. The Siskiyou N.F., which burned about 800 acres annually during the Cave Junction jumper years, has had a couple of multi-million dollar fires, including the most expensive fire in history (Biscuit Fire), since the closing of the base. It was supposed to be covered by the Redmond jumpers, but smokejumper use has declined steadily over the years. Out of sight, out of mind.

The Cave Junction Base was

located south of the town on Highway 199, which is the major highway linking I-5 to the coast and the Redwoods. Thousands of tourists drove by the base each year when the training area was still standing and the base functional; many a tourist would pull over and wonder what was going on just a scant 50 yards off the highway. The letdown and jump tower areas were in plain view and rookie training would attract a number of roadside spectators. The infamous "Snake Farm" and its billboards hid the barracks and mess hall.

The Saturday evening dinner was eaten at tables in the old volleyball area where many of us had done thousands of push-ups. Weak volleyball skills made strong arms and thin wallets. Those little trees had grown and the area now is a nice park-like setting. The "old barracks" has been removed, but the loft, mess hall, new barracks, and administration building still remain. The parachute loft building is thought to be the oldest smokejumper loft in the U.S.

The airport is now owned by Josephine County, and the County Commissioners have plans to develop the airport along the



industrial line.

Roger Brandt is leading the effort to save what is left. Buildings can be restored and the base turned into a national landmark that records smokejumper history in a unique part of the U.S. It would not take any stretch of the imagination to see a restored historic landmark become a major source of income to an area that has always been short of dollars.

I admire the dedication and vision of Roger, Wes,

Gary and others. I wish I were independently wealthy or a good friend of Bill Gates. I live in a town where we tore down a high school because it was not earthquake safe. Trouble with that theory was that it was built so well, they could hardly tear it down. In retrospect we now see that the building was a unique and rare architecturally designed structure. Only one other town in California had a similar building and that community chose to put the bucks into the original building and save it. Now Chico just has memories and pieces of bricks.

What are the chances of saving the Gobi—probably slim and next to none? Know anyone who wants to run for Josephine County Commissioner? 🐼

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# Prisoner in Laos: A Story of Survival-Part I

by Phisit Intharathat (Associate Life Member)

*Editor's note: On September 5, 1963, five people, including Phisit Intharathat and Gene DeBruin (MSO-59), parachuted from a flaming Air America C-46 over Laos. All were captured and became prisoners. Phisit was a prisoner for three years, four months and four days. He was rescued on January 9, 1967. His story of survival is one of the most amazing and inspiring accounts of hardship and courage I have ever read. Gene is still missing.*

*You can't condense three years into a single article without losing the feel and detail of an event. Therefore, this story will be told over two issues. — Chuck Sheley*

## A Straightforward Account

This is a true story, one that has never before been revealed to anyone in writing. It is being told at the urging of my subordinates, and being published in the funeral memories of my mother.

This story is a straightforward, unembellished account. I will use the real names of all the friends who were part of my fate, in memory of the brave spirits of all these beloved people. I will take this opportunity to thank my former instructors and commanders from the Naresuan Airborne Police Camp, who taught me to endure hardship like a man and, most important, taught me how to survive in the jungle. I'd also like to thank the Air America personnel who packed the parachute and made my 80th jump a safe one, enabling me to survive and write this story.

## The Day Before

On September 4, 1963, I had just come off a C-123 after completing the daily mission of delivering supplies to Northern Laos. After taking my parachute and survival bag back to the supply room, I went to the air-operations room to log my hours for that day. Next I checked with flight scheduling and found out that I was scheduled to fly on a C-46 the next day with the following crew: Joseph C. Cheney (pilot), Charles G. Herrick (copilot), Y.C. To (radio operator) and Air Freight personnel including Gene DeBruin, Prasit Prahmsuwan and Tran Than. (I was part of this Air Freight team.) We were scheduled for three re-supply trips near the Vietnamese border, where Laotian Rightist forces were operating. After dinner I got ready for bed, because we had to board the aircraft before dawn the next morning.

## The Omen

At 2100, Tran Than came to see me and told me that he did not want to fly the next day. I could not dissuade him, so I advised that he make his resignation to Frank Janke, the American section chief.

When I arrived at the airport on September 5 at about 0530, I saw the C-46 parked in the area near the Air Ameri-

can restaurant. After picking up my parachute and survival kit, I went to the restaurant and told Cheney that Tran Than was not going. Cheney told me to find a replacement. Prasit Thanee was in the standby room, because his flight had been cancelled and said that he would go.

All personnel were aboard the aircraft by 0655. I corrected the flight log with the names of the personnel aboard and read the warning forbidding us to fly lower than 8,000 feet as there was enemy AAA along the flight path. Cheney read this, laughed and said, "If the plane gets hit, Y.C. To will probably have difficulty reporting to Vientiane, and they will probably want numerous corroborating reports." Y.C. To was from Hong Kong, about 40 years old and quite superstitious. He told Cheney not to talk about the flight, as that was a bad omen. Cheney did not answer him but laughed, started the engines and taxied to the runway.

## The Flight

We took off from Vientiane Airport and headed over the Mekong River to Savannakhet Airport. The flight took a little over an hour and was the normal flight path taken by Air American planes from Vientiane to Savannakhet and other provinces in southern Laos. After completing the loading of our supplies, we took off at 0830 for Ban Hoen San about 40 minutes away. We flew at 8,000 feet at all times in accor-



*Phisit Intharathat: Thai PARU (Police Aerial Recon. Unit) late 50s. (Courtesy Phisit Intharathat)*





*Crewmates on another mission, L-R: Prayuth (Kicker), Dick Jones (Pilot), Joe Lopes (Copilot) (Courtesy Johnny Kirkley)*

dance with the warning. The left door had been removed, and I looked out and saw jungle and mountains. This was repetitious to me, as I had been one of the first Thais to do this work in Laos and had spent several thousand hours working aboard aircraft and on the ground. There was not a province in Laos where I had not been.

I stopped reflecting as we began to drop altitude and entered the Ban Hoeui San area, a valley surrounded by mountains. We completed our cargo drops and retraced our flight path to Savannakhet. There was no sign or hint of enemy AAA.

## **The Second Drop**

After reloading, we returned to Ban Hoeui San for a second time. All went well until the final drop. We were dropping two bundles of rice, each one weighing over 600 pounds. The second bundle sort of floated and hit the left tail fin, causing it to vibrate menacingly. When we got back to Savannakhet, the pilot told the mechanics to check out the aircraft; if they found anything wrong, we would cancel the next flight. The mechanics found everything in working order. It was almost 1600, but we had time to do the job and still return to Vientiane before sunset.

## **The Shootdown**

We took off from Savannakhet Airfield, climbed to 8,000 feet and flew the same route as we had done on the first two trips. Y.C. To was sitting in the radio operator's seat behind the pilots. As for the others, we were either sitting in the passenger seats or lying down. I took off my jacket and wore only a shirt and my brand-new jeans that I had just bought in Bangkok. An eight-inch jungle knife and a compass were attached to my field belt.

It was about ten minutes before we reached the drop zone. I was lying down eating a piece of fruit. A violent explosion happened close to where I was lying near the right wing of the aircraft. We abruptly lost altitude, and I floated to the ceiling

and fell back to the floor. I was certain that we had been hit by enemy AAA fire, and when I looked out the window, I saw puffs of smoke from AAA rounds as they were fired and exploded not far from our aircraft.

I hurried to the cockpit and found Cheney disengaging the auto-pilot and turning the aircraft toward Savannakhet. At the same time, I noticed a large fire coming from the right engine, engulfing the whole wing and emitting a long stream of black smoke. Cheney turned off the right engine, and the fire went out for 10 to 15 seconds before starting up again, worse than before. I hurried back and put on my parachute and tried unsuccessfully to find my survival bag, now covered by the bags of rice that were scattered all over the floor. The fire had now spread to the body of the aircraft and into the cargo area through a hole in the fuselage. I returned to the cockpit and helped the pilots put on their parachutes. Cheney ordered me to abandon the aircraft. I urged the pilots to go with me, but they refused and continued to try to maintain the plane's altitude.

I put a parachute on Y.C. To and pulled him to the door. He said he'd never jumped before and that the parachute he'd checked out required him to pull the handle to release the chute. Gene DeBruin had parachute experience as a smokejumper, but the others had little or no parachute experience. I solved the problem by taking our safety straps that we used when dropping cargo and making a static line with them. I then attached one end to the handles of the parachutes. I had Y.C. jump first. I would jump last. I saw all four chutes open. My parachute was lower than the others, probably because the aircraft was rapidly losing altitude.

Before we jumped, heavy flames engulfed the plane, and I was unable to see through the curtain of smoke into the cockpit. It was so hot I felt as if I were burning alive. After I jumped, the plane exploded, and I saw a giant fireball falling to earth.

## **I Scanned The Earth**

I saw the parachutes of my friends above me. While I was floating, I scanned the earth and saw a wide plain at the base of the mountain. I could see that the others were heading for that area. I tried to turn into the wind that was blowing toward the plain and landed in a tree. I climbed down to the ground and left the parachute in the tree as a marker for search aircraft. It was 1630 in the afternoon, and the rescue aircraft operated until 1800. I found a small trail that did not look to be used very much. It was the rainy season, and footprints were easily noticeable. I hurried across the trail and hid in the dense jungle about 110 to 160 yards away from where the parachute was hanging.

While I was sitting, I felt a pain in my right knee and felt that my pants were soaked below the knee. There was a tear of about two inches in my pants. I took off my pants and found the wound just above the kneecap. Yellowish flesh oozed out, and it was still bleeding. I tried to push the flesh back into the wound. I had some gauze with me and wrapped it around my knee. Then I poured tincture of iodine over the gauze. I put my pants back on and waited for help from the rescue aircraft.

At about 1745, I heard the sound of an aircraft in the distance. I came out of the bush and climbed a tree. The sky was



about to darken, but I could see four AT-6 aircraft flying in a line over my parachute and flying toward the plain area. A light rain began to fall, and I could hear the AAA start to fire. At the same time, the sound of 50-mm machine guns, hand-held automatic weapons and small arms fire filled the air. The aircraft quickly climbed for altitude, and I was able to see the emblem of the Laotian Rightist (friendly) Airforce on the planes as they flew away.

## A Platoon Of Soldiers

In the open area I saw a platoon of soldiers dressed in khaki uniforms. They were wearing caps, had their arms slung and were carrying full issues of ammunition and other equipment. They were walking single file directly toward where I was hiding. I got down from the tree and hid again as they walked closer and closer. I could hear them talking in Laotian and Vietnamese, which meant that the Laotian Communists were operating with the North Vietnamese soldiers. They found the parachute and scattered out and started to search the area. The rainfall began to increase at dusk. They regrouped and headed back to the open plain area.

I quickly came out of hiding and walked along the trail until I saw some light and heard a dog bark. As I moved closer, I saw four or five bamboo houses in the area. Around one house were seven or eight soldiers and two men wearing loincloths. I snuck along the tree line around the village until I found the main trail used by the villagers. I went into the jungle and traveled parallel to the trail until I ran into a small stream. The water wasn't deep, but the current was swift. It was night and difficult to travel.

I swam out and grabbed a hold of a log floating with the current in order to save time and keep from getting too tired. All I had to do was endure the cold water. I floated downstream for a considerable time, when I felt the stream getting shallower and the current starting to run faster. I couldn't see anything ahead. The stream quickly curved to the right, and the current became even stronger.

## Captured

As I came around the corner, I saw a campfire on the bank in a clearing. I immediately let go of the log and started to swim to the opposite bank. The current was so strong that by the time I got to the bank, I had been pushed closer to the campfire. The opposite bank was steep and provided no cover. I saw five men at the campfire. Two of them held muskets, two had long-handled sickles and the other one held a crossbow. They saw me from the light of the fire and shouted for me to stay put; otherwise, they would shoot. The two aimed their muskets at me. One of them began signaling with a wooden signal clacker. A couple minutes later, about ten Laotian Communist soldiers ran out of the jungle. They were armed with Chinese rifles, and two of them had hand-held French machine guns.

They waded across the river, tied my hands behind my back and slipped the rope around my neck in a noose. All the time they pointed their guns at my head and poked my body with the barrels. I was extremely frightened and thought that they were going to shoot me. It was the first time in my life that I

had been so afraid of dying.

I was taken to another village, where I saw my four friends, who had also been captured. They were tied like me, with the end of the rope attached to a pole in the ground. They let us sit there all night without being interrogated. My watch and lighter were taken, but they allowed me to keep a sewing needle. I was also able to keep some parachute cord that I had tied around my waist in place of my belt.

## September 1963: First Prison

On September 6 at about 0800, we were marched to a house across a wide dirt field. We were taken inside and untied. They started questioning the three of us who were Thais. The questions were mostly meaningless, but I was hit in the head once. The soldiers then ganged up on us and beat us badly. After that they started to question Y.C. To, but Y.C. couldn't understand, and the interrogator couldn't speak any other language, so he stopped.

At 1100, we were marched through the jungle until we reached a big road on which cars could drive. I found out later that this road was National Route 9, stretching from Savannakhet to the Vietnam border. After a while, we reached three ancient buildings with a brick wall around them. The insides of the buildings were covered with bullet marks, and the windows had been replaced with barbed wire. We were put into a room about five yards square.

After about two days, my wound began to get infected. My whole knee was swollen, and I could barely walk. I squeezed the pus out of the wound and tried to clean it, but the wound itself was still spread wide open. I decided to sew up the wound using my sewing needle and threads from inside the parachute cord. Using my fingers to close the wound tightly, I pushed the needle through and my friends tied the thread. It hurt more than anything I had ever endured in my life, but I had to do it to survive. Four days later, the wound started getting infected again with lots of pus. I honed a bamboo sliver until it was sharp and used it to cut out the stitches and the dead skin around the knee. I then put in three new stitches. The wound got better and within three months had disappeared.



*Johnny Kirkley inside a C-123 hauling drop tanks for T-28s (Courtesy Johnny Kirkley)*

We were imprisoned here for 27 days and had just two meals of rice and one cup of water a day. One at a time, we were allowed to go outside and dump our excrement dish. Our weight began to disappear, and we could notice the looseness of our clothes.

### October 1963: Second Prison

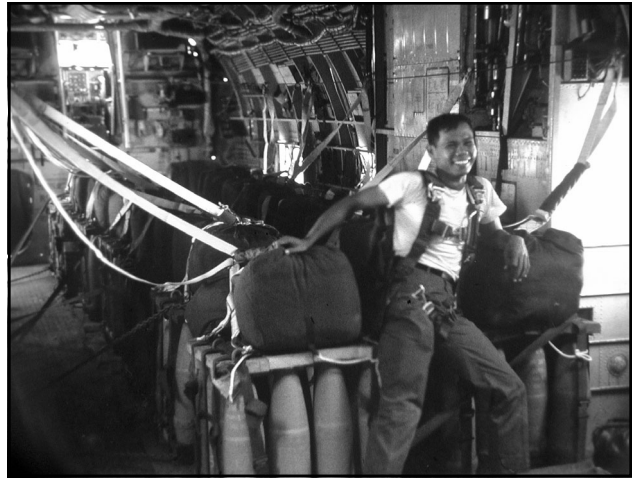
We were marched along National Route 9 for three days, all the while meeting Russian trucks carrying Laotian and Vietnamese soldiers. There were machine-gun nests and bunkers at numerous spots along the route. I saw a military camp completely constructed of bamboo that must have been the location of several battalions. We were put in a second prison with a dirt floor. The roof was tin and covered with barbed wire. There were no windows or air vents, and just a little light was able to penetrate through nail holes in the tin roof. This cell was out in the open with no shade, and it was as if we were being baked in an oven. The floor was bamboo, raised about 18 inches off the ground. We were not able to stand up but had to be bent over all the time we were not sitting. The food was the same as before, one cup of sticky rice twice a day. After a month, all of us had dysentery and were passing blood. We had bowel movements many times during each day and night.

One night we heard what sounded like a mouse squealing. Prasit Thaneek picked up a stick and struck at the noise. The next morning we awoke and found a dead snake with two round lumps just below its head. Prasist cut the snake open and found two mice. We rubbed bamboo sticks together, started a fire, cooked the snake and the mice, divided them up and ate them. We stayed here for three full months.

### January 1964: Third Prison

We next traveled on foot five hours to Muang Ang Kham Prison near the Vietnamese border. The prison was made of logs buried in the ground. It was rectangular, with thatch covering the logs on the roof. This place had a stream nearby and was cleaner and better ventilated than the others. There were three tall watchtowers made of bamboo. For 24 hours a day we were placed in stocks or "foot traps," as they were called by the Laotians. The stocks were made out of a single bottom board and a single top piece that was wedged at both ends. All five of us were forced to lay shoulder to shoulder with our ankles fixed in the holes of the foot traps. In a couple hours I felt numb all over. In order to defecate or urinate into our bamboo container, we had to break the bamboo flooring so that we could get the container below us.

Every morning at 0800, the guards would come in and take the top board off and let us out, one person at a time, to empty our excrement containers. They had four guards watching the person who was emptying his bucket. We took as much time as possible to empty our buckets in order to keep our feet out of the foot traps. It was winter, and we had only the clothes we were wearing. It was so cold that I couldn't sleep at night, and the foot traps kept my feet so numb I couldn't feel them. In addition to the foot traps, the guards put nooses around our necks at night and tied the end of the rope to a post outside the cell. When the guards came around to check at night, they



*Thai Kicker with cargo (Courtesy Johnny Kirkley)*

jerked on the rope and we had to call out in response. We began to worry about the foot traps; if we remained like this, we'd be crippled for sure.

### Out Of The Foot Traps

The eighth day in this prison, I saw a metal piece of a machine-gun clip on the way to dump my excrement bucket. On the way back I pretended to drop my bucket accidentally and bent over and picked up the metal and a small rock. After the guards had put us back into the foot traps, I straightened out the piece of metal and ground it on the rock. It was several hours before I had produced a knife the size of my little finger. Using the knife, I slowly bore out the openings in the foot traps to give me room to move my feet. After three days, we had the openings widened enough that we were able to pull our feet out of the traps without the guards knowing. Thereafter, we were able to sleep comfortably, but we had to be alert and quickly put our feet back into the traps when the guards came.

Throughout this time, even though our mental state was confused, there wasn't anyone who could not control himself. No one was so dejected that he considered suicide. We still had hope that if we weren't killed, we might receive help from Air America, the U.S. government or the Red Cross. We started thinking of escaping, but there were no opportunities, as the guards were very strict.

### February 1964: Fourth Prison

During the middle of February, we walked to Lang Khang Prison deep in the interior, adjacent to the Vietnamese border. We split off Route 9 into dense jungle. There we encountered Vietnamese soldiers building a road. They had a full complement of road-building equipment, even large tractors. After five days, we arrived at Lang Khang Prison. There were high guard towers along the rectangular fence. The floor was dirt, and the walls and ceiling were made of trees about the size of a person's arm. There were long thorns in the wood, so one could not lean against the walls or touch the low ceiling. The cells were complete with foot traps.

At about 1600 on our first day, the guards led us outside

the cell to a small stream, where we were allowed to bathe and wash our clothes for the first time. Before dark, the guards put us in the foot traps but also added some old-fashioned, heavy handcuffs. There were two ways of wearing them. One way was to have the hands together, as if praying. The other way was to put the wrists together with the fingers pointing out to the left and right. No matter which way they were worn, they were extremely agonizing. The first night was especially tortuous, trying to sleep in handcuffs and foot traps in the cold in wet clothing.

We used the knife to whittle away the foot traps as before. They didn't put us in the handcuffs during the day but did so only at night. Again, a rope was connected to the handcuffs and tied to a post outside the cell. The sleeping quarters of the guards were located about 30 yards away, and we were able to build a fire, although we had to work together to fan the smoke away so they would not see it. Every day when we went to empty our buckets, we tried to pick up pieces of wood and tin to bring back to the cell. We molded dirt around the tin and used it as a cooking oven.

### **Eat Anything That Moves**

At this prison, grasshoppers and crickets, lizards and chameleons came into the cell in large numbers to escape the cold. When we woke up each morning, we would lie there motionless with our eyes open while we located any critter that had come close to us. We would quickly jump and grab it, squeeze the head to kill it and put it in the pile with the others. We

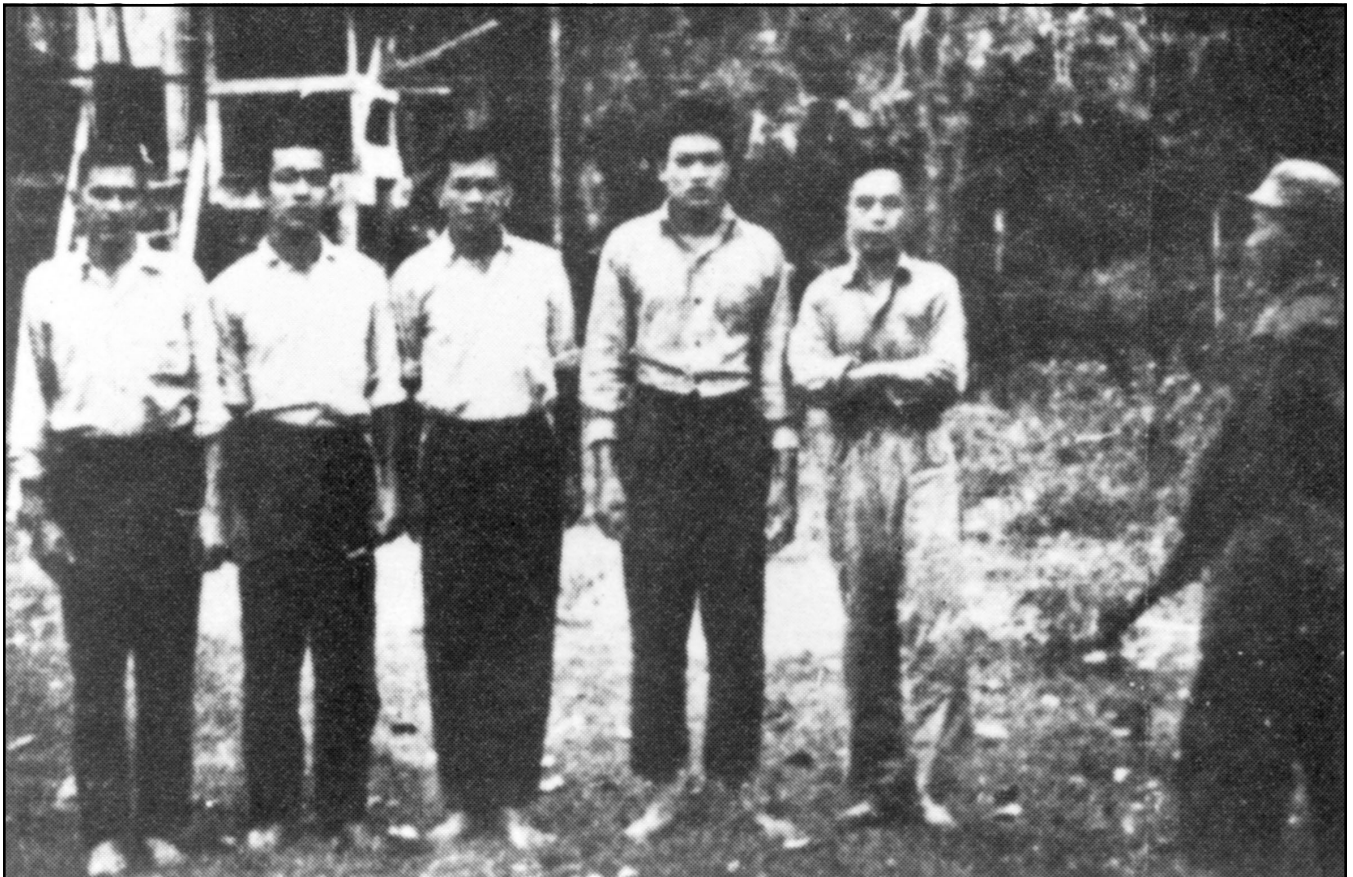
then would make a fire and cook the catch, divide and eat. We did this every day in order to survive. When we first started to eat these insects and animals, DeBruin and Y.C. To were squeamish and declined to do so. But after seeing us Thais eating every day, they gave it a try and then ate it every day—not because it tasted good, but because they had to. How can a person who once weighed 150 pounds exist on two lumps of sticky rice a day? In five months, we each had dropped over 20 pounds, but we were still alive.

### **Planning An Escape**

When we first arrived at Lang Khang, we were guarded very closely. Later the guards became more relaxed, probably thinking that there was no way we could escape. Sometimes the guard who had watch duty would climb up on the cell roof and sleep until his replacement came. The replacement would do the same. We saw this but had to find a way to get our handcuffs off. The handcuffs were attached at one end and, when folded over one's wrists, were locked by a spring mechanism at the other end. We knew how to make a key, but we were lacking the material with which to do it.

### **Opening The Handcuffs**

One morning when I was dumping my waste bucket, I picked up an empty toothpaste tube. Now we had something to work with. I used dirt to make a mold the size of the keyhole for the handcuffs. We melted the tube and poured it into the mold. It turned out to be a little large, but I used the small



*L-R: Prisoners Gene DeBruin, Phisit Intharathat, Prasit Prahmsuwan, Prasit Thane, and Y.C. To 1964. (Courtesy Jerry DeBruin)*

knife to scrape and shape it so it could be inserted into the keyhole of the handcuffs. The key worked with all the cuffs, and from that time on, we took the handcuffs off every night. We tied the cuffs to the bamboo flooring in case the guards came and pulled on the rope. We were about ready to make our escape. The next problem was figuring out how to get out of our cell.

## Escaping The Cell

The cell was made up of tree trunks about eight to ten inches in diameter. The roof was made of logs covered with thatch. One day when there was no guard nearby, we tried moving the largest log on the roof. After a while, we were successful and were able to create an opening large enough to put one's head through. We put the log back in place. Now we were ready to break out and were just waiting for the right time and opportunity. During this time, we tried to be on our best behavior with the guards, so they would feel more at ease with us. Some of the guards were talkative, and we found out there were no mines around the camp. We had been here three months. We didn't have a map, a compass or even a destination, except that we would head west. The height of the dry season was at the end of May, and we chose that time, thinking that traveling would be easy. That's what we thought. Y.C. To used pieces of bamboo to make a Chinese-style calendar so we always knew the date.

## The First Escape

On May 28, 1964, the time had come to make our escape. Each night, the guard would climb up on the roof and sleep, often snoring loudly. It would be a big problem if he slept on the log that we had prepared to move. That night the guard took over at dusk. He laid his weapon down on top of the cell, smoked a cigarette and climbed up on the roof and reclined on the opposite side from where we had prepared the log to move. After about two or three hours, we heard him snoring, so we moved the log. I climbed out first, followed by the others. The guard was still snoring loudly. I moved to the outside fence, pulled in wide enough to squeeze through and signaled for my friends to follow. We sat motionless to see if there were any guards along the outside of the fence. There were none. We moved in a direction that would avoid military quarters and headed toward a dry streambed where the walking was much easier.

After about three or four hours, we tried to find water but couldn't find a drop. When it started to get light, we hid and rested. We tried to sleep, but it was hard because of the many small bugs that swarmed around our faces trying to get moisture from our breath. Later we heard shouts from the soldiers who were tracking us. Their voices got close and then went away. That happened several times during the day.

That night we walked west. We were very fatigued and thirsty. The sweat was pouring out, and we had no water to replace it. We were very weak. We cut down jungle banana trees with hopes of finding water in the heart—to no avail. Our travel almost came to a halt as we tried to lick dew from the leaves.

On the third day, we had to catch our urine and drink it.

The smell was bad; it tasted salty. We weren't concerned about food; the lack of water was the biggest problem. On day four, all of us felt as if we had sores in our throats. We traveled a very little distance. On the fifth day, DeBruin went into convulsions. My friends were unable



*Gene DeBruin (NSA file)*

to bring him out of it, so I tried another method. I urinated into his mouth. It worked! He choked, got up and ran away. We had to catch and hold him until he regained his senses.

## Captured Again

I believe the soldiers weren't far behind, because we had left a lot of tracks. Near daylight on the sixth day, we heard the sound of frogs, indicating there might be water. We increased our pace in the direction of the sound. I walked ahead and found a water pond about four yards across and knee deep. When I scooped up the water into my mouth, I saw the reflection of a person in a Laotian military outfit standing on the cliff overlooking the pond. I jumped for cover and shouted for the others to beware. It was too late. Y.C. To and DeBruin had plunged into the pond. At the same time the sound of gunfire was heard in all directions. They had us surrounded. They shouted that we would be killed if we tried to flee. We all walked out and sat down in the pond. We didn't care if they killed us or not.

After they pulled us out of the water, they handcuffed us and put nooses around our necks. We walked about two hours to a small village. They beat us incessantly along the way. They wanted to know who led the escape. After some preliminary interrogation, they tied my legs to DeBruin's and hoisted us up a tree with our heads hanging about six feet off the ground. Not satisfied, they had the villagers find a red ant nest and beat the nest over our bodies. The ants bit us all over, but that pain was nothing compared to the pain in my ankles. I passed out and came to about dusk. I saw DeBruin laying beside me with his eyes closed. Our three friends had already been taken away. That night they brought us one ear of boiled corn to eat. We ate it all, including the cob. The next morning we were herded along a trail until dark, at which time I knew that we were back at Lang Khang.

## Back At Lang Khang

We were put into a barbed-wire pen and learned that our friends were being held in a corrugated tin cell. Three days later we changed places. All five of us were black and blue from the beatings. After three more days, they put all of us back into the cell from which we escaped. They weren't suspicious about how we got out of the foot traps and handcuffs. They thought that they had forgotten to lock us up on the day we escaped. The guards were replaced by a new team that was a lot stricter than the other teams.

On August 22, 1964, a truck pulled up in front, and sol-

diers carried a cardboard box to our cell. They told us it contained things that were sent to us by a "neutral party." In the box we found a Christmas card from Frank Janke, our boss at Air America. There were also canned goods, soap and cigarettes. Based on the date of the Christmas card, these things had probably been held for eight months before the package got to us.

Before dawn the next day, we boarded a Russian military truck and traveled through the jungle, mountains and valleys. There were 12 soldiers guarding us. We slept in the truck that night. We continued throughout the next morning until about four in the afternoon. They marched us into the mountains to the village of Ban Pha Tang. We then walked five days to our next destination.

### **The Fifth Prison**

We were taken to a large prison built in a cave, and it contained many other prisoners. I don't know how long they had been there, but they were all skinny, weak and dirty. We were herded into a cave with water dripping down, and it was cool and stunk. The floor was stone, but they had made a raised floor of split bamboo for sleeping. We were there only three weeks and moved again across the river. From there we walked another full day. We found out from the soldiers that this prison was new, especially built for foreign prisoners. We were told that no one had been held here before.

### **The Sixth Prison**

We arrived at Ban Tham in the evening. It appeared that it was a large village, as many villagers gathered around to look at us prisoners. This prison was like some of the others and located in a mountain pass covered by large, thick trees. A stream ran by in front, and there were tall guard towers at two corners of the fence. It had been almost a year since we were captured. We still hadn't been interrogated in any official way and had no news of the outside world.

We talked about escape every day. We clearly saw that our first escape effort had derailed because of the lack of drinking water. The Laos we had seen from the airplane seemed full of rivers and streams. We knew that our next escape would be during the rainy season, when we would have plenty of drinking water. We guessed that we were being held near the Vietnamese-Laotian border.

### **Eating Dogs**

Ten days after our arrival, we saw the guards kill a dog to eat. They tied the dog on a long bamboo pole with a couple cross poles so the dog was in a spread-eagle position. It was tied tightly and could not move. It was then immersed in water for two to three minutes before being removed. The dog would then vomit the food and water from its stomach. They did this three times, until the dog vomited clear water. The dog was killed by a blow to the head and then, still tied to the bamboo, roasted over a fire. They roasted it until all the hair over its body was burnt to a crisp. After scraping off the skin, they washed the dog with water, cut off the legs and head, and slit the stomach. One of the guards tossed the four legs into our cell. There was only bleeding skin on the bones, and no one

dared taste it until that evening. Each one of us, with the exception of DeBruin, picked up a leg and started to nibble it. It was tough and had started to smell bad.

### **Interrogation**

Fourteen days later we were marched back to our fifth prison and put in the same cell we had occupied before. In the morning, soldiers cut our hair for the first time in over a year, and we were allowed to bathe in the stream. The soldiers gave us Laotian military uniforms to put on. We were taken to an old house, where a big man stood. He was wearing a khaki uniform and a sun helmet and wearing a pistol around his waist. Five soldiers carrying AK rifles were behind him. He had us line up and took a few photos of us. When he finished, we were again handcuffed and taken to the porch of the house where the interrogation began. The three of us Thais were questioned first. We were asked our first names, last names and ages. They inquired about various aspects of our personal history. They asked our rank and unit. We replied we were civilians working for Air America Company. He didn't believe us and warned us not to lie, or we would be shot. He asked how we knew how to parachute from a plane if we were not soldiers. We again affirmed that we were civilians and were forced to jump from the plane when it was shot down. They began hitting us immediately. The soldiers in back of us used the stocks of their weapons to hit us from behind until our chairs fell over to the floor. They pulled us back up again and had us lay our handcuffed hands on the table. He asked me where do the Thai soldiers do their parachute training? I answered that I did not know. He grabbed the AK from one of the soldiers and slammed the stock down onto my right hand breaking the bones on the spot. My hand hurt, but I had to endure it. He yelled, "If you guys don't tell me the truth, I'm going to shoot you." When the interrogation began, he spoke Laotian, but as it progressed, he started clearly speaking Thai. He pointed the gun at my head and had me write, "The [Thai] government sent me to invade Laotian territory and to kill Laotians." I had to write this and sign my name.

The interrogator was finished with us three Thais and started on DeBruin. He interrogated DeBruin in English with a French accent. DeBruin had to endure more pain than I did and fell out of his chair many times. The last time, he passed out. They threw water on him and continued the interrogation when he regained consciousness. In the end he was forced to write a confession just like us. We were taken back to Ban Tham.

### **The Cruellest Prison**

On March 4, 1965, we were moved to Pa Kuen Prison. It was the cruelest of them all. It had swarms of mosquitoes and horseflies and was crawling with all sorts of strange insects. The jungle trees were so large that we never got any sun. Our bodies looked like we had dermatitis, and the malaria attacks were more frequent. We got only one small meal a day and were short drinking water. There were aircraft passing over 24 hours a day, and we heard bombs dropping and AAA. The Laotian soldiers were more afraid of the aircraft than anything else, and we were beaten often because of it. 🇹🇭

*The final part of this story will be run in the January issue.*

# I Remember Gene DeBruin

by Lee Gossett (Redding '57)

Gene and I first met in Seattle in the spring of 1961. The Alaska smokejumpers were told to report to Boeing Field where the Bureau of Land Management DC-3 would pick up the crew and fly us to Fairbanks. Memory tells me that there were about 16 of us gathered on that dreary May morning in the old terminal building. Many of us were returning Alaska jumpers and knew each other, but there were a couple of new jumpers on the roster in 1961. One of the new jumpers was Gene DeBruin (MSO-59), a quiet fellow about my size, 5' 8". As we were all shaking hands and renewing friendships around the cafe table, I remember the waitress coming over to take our orders. She then went to the next table to wait on the fellow seated there and he said, "I'm with those guys." I turned around, shook Gene's hand, and introduced myself and the other jumpers. That was my first time to meet Gene. Gene had jumped in Missoula prior to coming to Alaska and prior to that had been in the U.S. Air Force. He had attended the University in Missoula and graduated with, I think, a degree in forestry. I'm not sure what drew Gene to smokejumping, but perhaps attending the forestry school at the University had something to do with it. There were many jumpers there.

Our flight to Fairbanks took all day with at least two fuel stops. When we arrived at Fairbanks, a local newspaper photographer was there to greet us, and we all posed for a photo with the DC-3. Jerry DeBruin, Gene's brother, still has the newspaper article and photo taken that day in Fairbanks. Over the next day or so, after we had signed the employment papers, we started our refresher training that included the jump tower, letdowns and concluded with several practice jumps.

During the summer of 1961, a lot of jumpers were assigned to loft duty, which is where Gene and I started to get acquainted. My recollection of Gene was that of a quiet person who didn't have a lot to say at first. Gene and I would do our assigned duties or sit in the sun outside the loft and share our backgrounds. It was a good summer from the standpoint of a smokejumper. We had quite a number of fire jumps all across the interior of Alaska, and Gene and I had several fire jumps together. As the fire season drew to a close in late August, the Lower 48 was having a big fire bust. Some of us took an early-out to head south to catch a few more fire jumps before winter set in. I don't remember Gene coming south, and I think he elected to remain in Alaska until the fall rains.

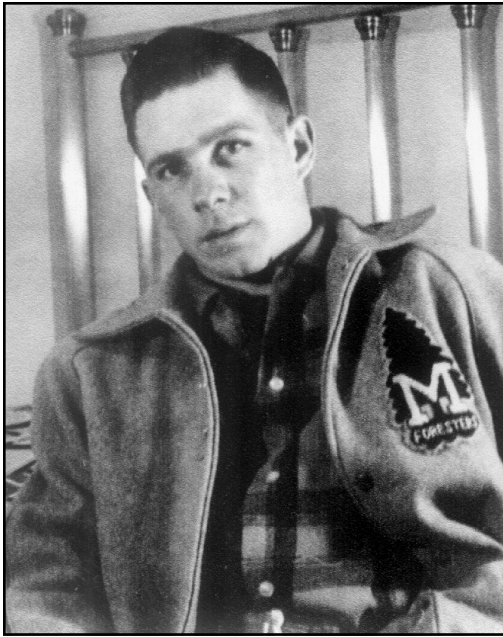
Gene and I exchanged addresses and wrote each other during the winter of 1961-62. I returned to college at Southern Oregon in Ashland, and Gene went to work at Sun Valley in Idaho, where he may have worked in the bowling alley. Gene was an avid skier and, by working at the

bowling alley may have received free lift tickets. I was only in college for a matter of weeks when I received notice from good old Uncle Sam that I was needed back in the Army Reserve for a 12-month hitch due to the Cuban missile crisis. My recall dashed all hopes of a season of smokejumping back in Alaska in 1962.

After a starving winter in Oregon, I returned to Alaska and met up with Gene again in May 1963. Gene had moved from being a "fire" smokejumper to being an "engineer" smokejumper. Several jumpers had shifted to engineer jumper status and were based out of Big Delta, about an hour drive east of Fairbanks. The engineer jumpers were assigned to jump into pre-designated spots and clear heliports, where helicopters could land to bring in survey crews and return the jumpers to Big Delta. The engineer jumpers would rack up a lot of jumps in a season, and we saw them every couple of weeks at the loft picking up a new supply of parachutes and leaving their used ones to be repacked. I would see Gene off and on all summer. We always found time to sit down and have a chat about what we had been doing.

As the season was drawing to a close my roommate and fellow squad leader, Gid Newton (CJ-55), was preparing to leave for Air America. Gid was very secretive about who he was going to work for and where. Lou Banta (CJ-51), our other roommate, and I pestered the hell out of Gid until he confessed as to just what he was up to and gave us the all important address for Air America in Washington D.C. Lou and I decided Gid was on to a good deal and we wanted a piece of the action. Before long Lou and I received our employment applications from Air America. We were very anxious for a new adventure. Gid, unfortunately, was only with Air America two weeks before he was killed in a C-46 rice drop in northwest Laos. The news was devastating to all of us back in Alaska. Within a couple of days of the news of Gid's death, Gene showed up at the loft and informed Lou and me that he, too, was heading for Laos with Air America. Lou and I had a long talk with Gene and told him we were to the processing stage with Air America and would, hopefully, be following in a short time. I saw Gene off at the Fairbanks International Airport on his departure for Laos. This would turn out to be the last time I would see my friend, Gene DeBruin.

I think Gene was with Air America about two months when he was shot down and captured in September 1963. Gene and I had corresponded and the last letter I received was postmarked the day he was shot down. Gene's letter mentioned that Lou Banta and I were processing and he was looking forward to seeing us in Laos soon as finally he had landed a job that made some real money. Lou Banta and I were all geared to go, and it was just a matter of time until



*Gene DeBruin (Courtesy Jerry DeBruin)*

we received the final word from Air America to head for Laos.

During the summer of 1963 in Alaska, a Missoula jumper crew flew up to give us a

hand with the fires. These crews were known as bumper crews and were called in if it looked like we were going to have more fires than the Alaska jumpers could handle. The Alaska and Missoula crews became one and they were a great bunch of guys. Five or more of the Missoula jumpers from that Alaska bumper crew went on to work for Inter-mountain Aviation, out of Marana, Arizona, and the "Agency" after the fire season. One of the jumpers was Bruce Lehfeldt (MSO-54), a best friend since 1963. It was Bruce who first informed me of Gene's fate. We were talking on the phone and I mentioned Gene had said the Air America kicker thing was turning out to be a good deal. I remember there was a pause in the conversation. Bruce asked when I had heard from Gene, and I told him the date. Bruce went on to say that Gene had been shot down and captured, and they were awaiting word on his fate. This news was devastating as I had seen Gene off at the airport just 60 days prior. As I reflected on my conversation with Bruce, I realized this was the third Alaska jumper I had known that had gone to Laos and never returned. The first was Dave Bevin (MSO-55), who I met in Alaska in 1960. Dave didn't return to Alaska in 1961 but went on to work as a kicker in Laos. He was killed on a C-46 rice drop along with two other smokejumpers, Darrel "Yogi" Eubanks (IDC-54) and John Lewis (MYC-53).

Lou Banta arrived in Vientiane, Laos, in late 1963 and I arrived in January 1964. As soon as I arrived in Vientiane, I asked about Gene, but there was no word on his fate. I think the first evidence of Gene being alive was in the famous photograph that surfaced several years later. Gene was pictured along with three Thai kickers and a Chinese radio operator. This photograph gave all of us a bit of a lift; at least we knew Gene was still alive. I was a kicker for all of 1964, trying to worm my way into a pilot's slot. Lacking the experience Air America required, I decided to leave, gain

more flying experience and reapply as a pilot. I returned in late 1966 as a pilot for Air America, first in Saigon for five months and then on a reassignment to Vientiane. Shortly after arriving in Vientiane, I contacted Bob Herald (MSO-55), an ex-Alaskan smokejumper and now Chief Air Freight Specialist, or "Chief Kicker" as he was called. I'd known Bob in Alaska in 1960, and he was one of the early kickers with Air America. Bob and I were fellow kickers in 1964. Unfortunately, he had no current news on Gene's fate.

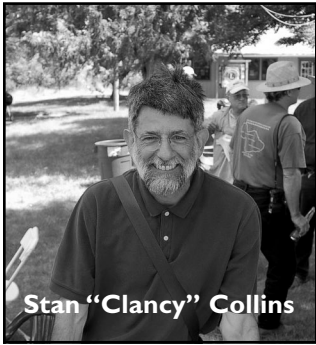
Fast forward to 1969. I'm now flying for Continental Air Services, also based in Vientiane. One day a Braniff Airlines Boeing 707 landed at Vientiane. This was the first time an aircraft of this size had ever landed there and it caused quite a stir. I inquired as to why it had landed there and was told it had been chartered by a fellow named Ross Perot, a wealthy Texas businessman. The 707 was loaded with care boxes from family and friends back in the States that were, hopefully, to be delivered to American POWs held in North Vietnam. Upon hearing this, I darted home and put together a care package for Gene, on the off chance it might reach him. I remember putting in a Life Magazine along with tooth brush, tooth paste, soap and whatever else I could find. I gave my package to one of our managers and he in turn gave it to Ross Perot. The 707 was never allowed to fly on to Hanoi, so I have no idea what became of the care packages.

Somewhere along the way, I acquired the address of Jerry DeBruin, Gene's brother. Jerry and I started writing to each other and shared what little information each of us had on Gene's fate. Jerry came to Laos in 1971 and spent two weeks with us as a house guest. When I was flying during the day, my wife, Mary, would take Jerry around town to meet with the likes of the Pathet Lao, North Vietnamese and Russian diplomats in the hopes of obtaining information on the fate of his brother. The North Vietnamese and Russians listened to what Jerry had to say and informed him they had no knowledge of Gene. The Pathet Lao, on the other hand, opened a book and produced the same photo we had of Gene and the others taken in captivity. The Pathet Lao Colonel offered no further information on Gene's fate.

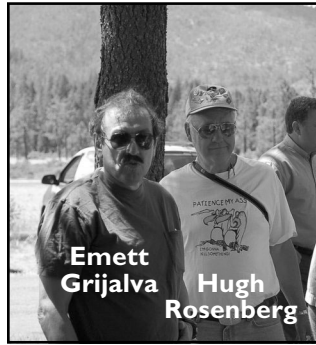
It wasn't until the prison escapes [became known] that we had any idea as to the fate of Gene and the others. Two of the prisoners actually made their way to freedom. One was U.S. Navy pilot Dieter Dengler, who was rescued after a number of days on the run. The other prisoner, one of the Thai kickers, was later captured and eventually freed from prison by a joint CIA/Lao Military assault. Phisit, or PI as we call him today, eventually returned to work for Air America in Udorn, Thailand, and was kind enough to hop a flight from Udorn to Vientiane and meet with Jerry and Mary in the Air America restaurant. I was not able to attend the meeting as I was flying up country at the time.

I hope this will give you a glimpse into my relationship with Gene DeBruin. I have fond memories of a rather quiet guy, soft spoken, very honest and down to earth, with a snippet of a sense of humor, but most of all, my friend, and I miss him. 🙏

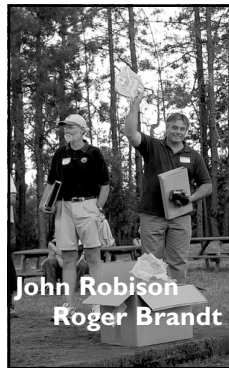




Stan "Clancy" Collins



Emmett Grijalva Hugh Rosenberg



John Robison Roger Brandt

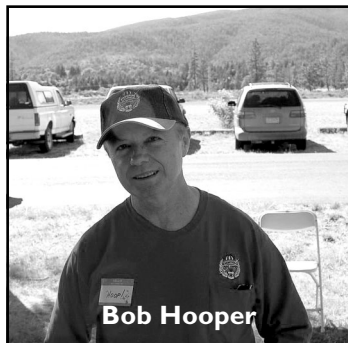


K.G. Sheley Johnny Kirkley Cliff Hamilton

## The Gobi 2006 Reunion



Ray Farinetti



Bob Hooper



Gary Joe Buck Hal Ewing



Doug Crippen Terry Egan



LeRoy Cook Alex Theios



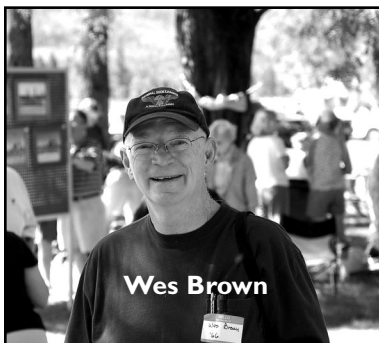
Mike Apicello  
Sandy Wessel Dick Wessell



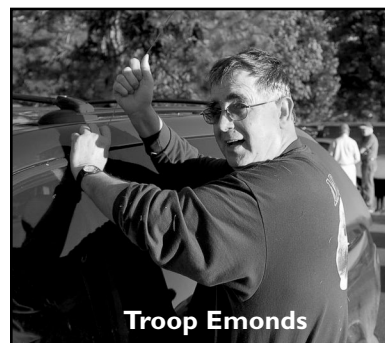
Chuck Sholey Johnny Kirkley



Sharon Westcott  
Garry Peters



Wes Brown

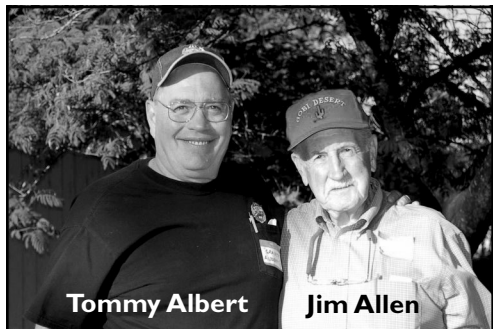


Troop Emonds



Mary and Lee Gossett

## June 17, 2006 Cave Junction, Oregon



Tommy Albert Jim Allen



Larry Lufkin Dave Ward



# The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**  
(Associate)

I HAVE STATED IN THIS column in the past that I have not taken a stance on the highly politicized subject of global warming, preferring to take a long-term view, but a new study, titled "Warming and Earlier Spring Increases Western U.S. Forest Wildfire Activity," might be enough to convince me that global warming is real, at least in the short term.

The study, which was published this summer in the peer reviewed journal "Science," found that global warming is affecting fire activity in the Rocky Mountain region. According to the study, in the past 20 years, longer, hotter summers have caused large wildfires to quadruple compared to the 1970s and early 1980s.

The greatest increases were in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, where mid-elevation forests seemed especially susceptible to rising temperatures. The average wildfire season in the West is now 78 days longer, and the average large fire burns longer, increasing from 7.5 days to 37.1. This change corresponds with a 1.5-degree Fahrenheit increase in the region.

"Lots of people think climate change and the ecological responses are 50 to 100 years away," said co-author

Thomas Swetnam of the University of Arizona. "But it's not 50 to 100 years away—it's happening now in forest ecosystems through fire."

Steve Running, a professor of ecology at the University of Montana and part of the International Panel on Climate Change, stated, "To me, this is kind of the wake-up call that the Gulf Coast got with the hurricanes last year."

With summer temperatures forecast to increase 4 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit over the next 50 years, wildfires are expected to become more severe. "What we know we have is clear evidence that global warming is at least partially causing a significant increase in fire activity in the West, and there's every reason to believe it's going to accelerate further," said Running, who wrote a commentary accompanying the paper in Science.

"When you think that we're starting to get these fires earlier in the year and lasting later into the year, it's all an illustration that our window of vulnerability has gotten wider and is going to continue from everything we expect."

Running said the 1988 fires in Yellowstone National Park "seemed to inaugurate this new era."

"It raises the specter of us getting a summer when all hell breaks loose and burns out areas we couldn't even imagine right now," he said.

The study examined 1,166

Western wildfires of at least 1,000 acres that burned between 1970 and 2003. They compared the fires with climate conditions, the timing of melting snowpack each spring and summer temperatures.

Tom Wordell, a Forest Service fire analyst at the National Interagency Fire Center, said the results, for the first time, lend scientific credence to long-suspected links between changing climate and fire conditions and the importance of trying to mitigate the effects of fires near places where people live.

"It certainly doesn't paint a pretty picture," he said. "In my mind, it kind of implies that the cards are stacked against us."

Global warming, drought, privatization, the growing wildland-urban interface, bark beetle infestation, cancellation of the air tank contract, the leadership vacuum ...

I had the chance to spend a day at the Missoula Base in the spring looking for story ideas, chasing down leads and getting feedback on the magazine. Had the opportunity to meet Base Manager **Ed Ward** (MSO-80) and **Keith Wolferman** (MSO-91) for the first time.

**Tim Eldridge's** (MSO-82) assistance, candor, honesty and sense of humor are always greatly appreciated. It is a productive day when you can spend time with such high-quality people. 🌲

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## Where Are These Guys?

Please send any information to: John McDaniel/NSA Mbrship, P.O. Box 105, Falun KS 67442, email: jumpercj57@hotmail.com

James T. Austin ..... (MSO-52)  
Paul S. Carpino ..... (MSO-52)  
Alfred Casieri ..... (MSO-52)  
Howard Chadwick ..... (MYC-52)  
Robert E. Chrimer ..... (MSO-52)  
Bill Clarke ..... (CJ-52)  
Durwood E. Coats ..... (MSO-52)  
Gordon Cook ..... (CJ-52)  
Jack M. Dyson ..... (MSO-52)

Fredrick Eichenberger ..... (MSO-52)  
Thomas A. Elwood ..... (CJ-52)  
James C. Emerson ..... (IDC-52)  
Arnold (Bill) Fritz ..... (MSO-52)  
Leonard T. Gavin ..... (MSO-52)  
Joseph Georgic ..... (MSO-52)  
James E. Gilchrist ..... (MSO-52)  
Thomas Givins ..... (MSO-52)  
Charles Goughnour ..... (MSO-52)

# Black Range Rescue

Edited by Bill Fogarty (Missoula '57)

On May 18, 1963, in Washington, D.C., the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual U.S. Department of Agriculture Awards Ceremony honored 75 employees for superior service. Among those honored were two smokejumpers. **Richard S. "Dick" Tracy** (MSO-53) and **Kirk Samsel** (MSO-60) received a joint award "for heroic action in parachuting under extremely hazardous conditions to a crashed airplane, saving the life of the critically injured pilot with effective first aid." Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson was the featured speaker, and Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman presented the awards.

Dick and Kirk were Region 1 smokejumpers assigned to the Gila National Forest during the 1962 fire season. On May 2, 1962, they made a dangerous rescue jump at dusk to the scene of a Forest Service observation plane crash in rugged terrain near McKnight Canyon. Their first aid training enabled them to save the life of pilot Wendall Schroll and aid Bob Ingraham, an injured passenger. Previous to this Super Service Award for heroic action, Dick and Kirk had each received a \$300 performance award from Southwestern Region 3.

*Bob Ingraham's account of the events leading up to, during and following the plane crash are well documented on his "Ephemeral Treasures" website at [www.ingraham.ca/bob/crash.html](http://www.ingraham.ca/bob/crash.html). The following version is taken mainly from the report he wrote for the Forest Service. We have included excerpts from his introduction and additions from his later recollections to add more detail. It is printed here with his kind permission and our thanks. Readers can contact Bob at [b.ingraham@shaw.ca](mailto:b.ingraham@shaw.ca).*

As a 19 year old correspondent for the *El Paso Times* of El Paso, Texas, I was working on a feature story concerned with forest firefighting tactics in the Gila National Forest. On May 2, there appeared to be considerable air activity of Forest Service planes, so I decided to drive to the Grant County Airport where the Gila Forest air support facilities are located. I arrived there about 1:00 p.m. and soon after contacted Fire Control Staff Officer Jack Foster. He gave me permission to talk with any persons concerned with the operation and to take any pictures I wished. I really didn't want to join the smokejumpers on a drop. Call me chicken, but the glory of smokejumping ends with the landing; from then on it was the hardest, hottest work on the planet, and very dangerous. In regard to my request for a flight on the Forest Service aircraft, Mr. Foster said it was not possible at the time but suggested I keep in touch with him. I spent the early part of the afternoon gathering information and taking pictures.

About 3:15 p.m., I was talking with Foster and jumper foreman, Dick Tracy. A yellow F.S. T-34 Beechcraft Mentor pulled up on the apron near us and Mr. Foster said he might be able to arrange a flight in this aircraft later in the day if



1963 Awards Ceremony L-R: Richard S. "Dick" Tracy, Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman and Kirk Samsel (U.S Forest Service)

fire conditions would permit. After our conversation, I went to meet the pilot, Wendell Schroll, of Redding, California. About 4:00 p.m., Schroll told me we were to take off immediately on an observation mission for a TBM borate plane that was to douse a small fire. Our destination was in the Black Range, a heavily forested region of tumbled mountains and deep, dry canyons northeast of Silver City. It was aptly named, at least on this particular day; the towering cumulonimbus clouds that had boiled skyward earlier in the day had solidified into an inky mass which covered half the horizon. Brilliant lightning occasionally lanced earthward. Thunder grumbled in the distance. I estimated our take-off time at about 4:05 p.m.

The flight, contrary to the weather conditions, seemed to be smooth with only occasional turbulence. The sky ahead of us was just about the blackest sky I had ever seen. I conversed with the pilot at intervals via the plane's intercom. Most of my questions were concerned with the relative positions of us, the fire, and the TBM. On arrival at the fire, a small one confined to one pine and some ground area, we made two passes over the fire.

On our third pass we flew in "formation" with the TBM so I could get a picture of the drop. Through an error of mine, I was unable to get a picture of the drop. Then we started to turn for another pass over the fire to check the

effectiveness of the borate. I was occupied with something to do with my camera when I sensed that the plane had gone into a steep bank. We were, in fact, upside down. I looked "up" and saw nothing but trees — and then we hit the trees.

I believe I was conscious for most of the time during our sudden arrival, for I remember what seemed to be a long period of violent bucking and interminable noise. I also remember thinking that I was not going to die in that way. The next thing I remember was not knowing whether I was dead or alive. Then my eyes popped open and I saw my own blood dripping from some place onto the dust. There was no sound, no dust in the air. I was hanging upside down in my seat and, when I realized this, I started kicking and pawing at the restraining harness. Then I remembered the buckle assembly and released it. Out I tumbled and up the hill I scrambled, not really knowing what I was doing. I had only one shoe on, and that was half torn off. When I reached the ridge top, I stopped to try to think. Although I was a bloody mess, I thought I had only four wounds — one on my head, two minor ones on my left hand, and a bad one on my left knee.

I soon decided I was not having a bad dream. Nevertheless, I knew, or thought I knew, that the pilot was dead. Then the thought came to me that if I were alive, he could be too. Back down the ridge I went and halfway down I heard him moan. I found him against the engine, out of his seat and helmet, with his left arm quite out of position. He opened his eyes and asked me who I was. I told him as much as I knew, but he couldn't remember. I did as much as I could to make him comfortable, but I was unable to move him from the engine, which was burning him. He weighed 220 pounds.

Shortly we heard a plane and back up the ridge I went. It was clearer up there, and I also had a red shirt which I thought the pilot might see. I saw the plane, but it must have been a good two miles distant. It soon disappeared, and I went back down to Wendell. He was complaining of the cold when I got back. At his instruction, I found his flying suit and jacket in the wreck. (Sometime in this period, more planes started flying much nearer to us.) I covered him and started searching for matches to build a fire. I knew full well the ground and trees were soaked with about 300 gallons of fuel and oil, but I didn't connect my hoped-for small fire with that potential inferno. While wandering about the wreck site, I found my glasses. They seemed undamaged, so I picked them up and put them on. Only later did someone point out that they didn't have any lenses in them. I wasn't thinking too clearly.

Planes were still flying all around; they would fly close, then zoom far away. Actually, another Silver City based T-34 had spotted us on his first pass over the wreck, but no one bothered to signal us in some manner. We did not know we'd been spotted until smokejumper Dick Tracy yelled at us. He and another jumper had jumped from a Twin Beech.

Tracy arrived on the scene first. I told him I was not seriously hurt, but that Wendell was. He made Wendell more comfortable and gave us both a shot of Demerol.

Then, more supplies, including first-aid equipment, water and paper sleeping bags, were dropped from a Twin Beech. I drank quite a bit of water. Kirk Samsel, the other jumper, arrived at this time. I soon became sick, probably from the Demerol. I believe Dick and Kirk were patching Wendell up at this time. I was getting quite sleepy when Dick gave me his radio. He said he wanted me to tell him if anyone called. He didn't tell me that we couldn't receive any transmission in our canyon. Anyhow, I was happy knowing I was helping in some small way.

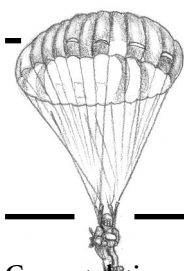
Through the night I woke about every half hour. Early in the evening one of the boys told me the rescue party, including Dr. Claran C. Cobb, was on its way in overland. I occupied my time when I was awake by listening to the night birds and watching for shooting stars.

At about 2:30 a.m., May 3, we first saw the lights of the rescuers. A little later we could hear them talking, but it was a good hour and a half before they reached us. They finally did arrive with more blankets. I was glad for that, because it is cold at night any time of year at 8,000 feet elevation. Dr. Cobb was among the first to arrive. He worked with Wendell for about an hour, and then did a little work on me. Jack Foster arrived shortly after Dr. Cobb, and I don't believe that ever before was anyone so glad to see me. He asked if I thought the crash was due to engine failure. I told him I was sure it was not that.

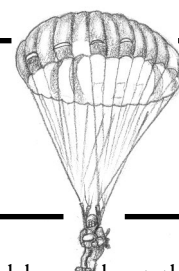
I did little, if any, sleeping from then on. The men started clearing the helispot in earnest, and it soon started growing light. Awhile before sun-up, I was carried piggy-back fashion to the helispot by Dick Tracy. There we waited for the helicopter to come. The Alouette was the first to come. Wendell was loaded into it. I was protected from the rotor blast by a smokejumper. After a short wait, the Hiller came to get me. I got in with assistance and sat in a normal position. My first helicopter ride took only about 10 minutes. We landed in front of Silver City's Hillcrest General Hospital where I was carried into the emergency room. Fortunately my hospital stay only lasted a week. Wendell had multiple injuries, some of which were serious.



*T-34 Beachcraft Mentor crash site. Pilot and passenger survived! (U.S. Forest Service)*



# Odds and Ends



**Congratulations and thanks** to **Cliff Dalzell** (MSO-61), **Ernest Reesing** (MSO-61), **John Magel** (MYC-58), **Greg Kreizenbeck** (IDC-69) and **Bill Fredeking** (MSO-52) who just became our latest Life Members.

**Kirsten (Pietila) Wardman** (GAC-99) and her husband **Geordie** (GAC-98) were featured in the May 2006 issue of *Coastal Living* magazine. They have started "Bermuda Styles" dealing in Geordie's version of the classic shorts.

**T.J. Thompson** (MSO-55): "As I promised in Reno (Air America Reunion), I will write some stories for *Smokejumper* magazine. Last year I have been writing the history of aerial delivery operations (CIA/SEA), dating back to the late 1950s. Classified as of now, I hope it will be declassified soon, and then we can publish excerpts for *Smokejumper*. Lots of history of operations filled with old smokejumper names."

**Bill Fogarty** (MSO-57): "Looking for a copy of *The Wide World* magazine, February 1957 issue. Feature article 'Smoke Jumpers of Silver City.' Contact me at 360-532-5367 or [bandkfog@comcast.net](mailto:bandkfog@comcast.net)."

**NSA Website** in response to *Smokejumper Awarded Medal of Honor* (*Smokejumper* 7/04): "Mr. Sheley - Thank you for the story about my father. He left for Vietnam when I was two weeks old, so I never had a chance to talk with him. Your story about his youth is something that I will pass on to my children." **Lt Col Jim Sisler, USAF**

**Harvey Weirich** (MYC-44): "Made a static line jump at our local airport on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Now ready for another one."

**George Cross** (MSO-74) and his wife, Marietta, were featured in the June 5, 2006, issue of the *Lewiston Tribune* Golden Times section. Both have successfully competed in the Senior Games, involving athletic competition in many areas, for the last ten years.

**Chuck Mansfield** (CJ-59): "My son and I had a good expedition (hiking in the Siskiyou N.F.). We took another 50 or so photos of the Biscuit Fire area. The trail is in horrible condition. On our way home, we overnighted at Cedar City, Utah. We visited the loft and talked to the jumpers for some time. They asked if I wanted to hire on, and I replied, 'In a heart beat.' The jumpers at Battle Mountain, Nevada, are also jumping round the clock."

**Jerry Dixon** (MYC-71): "I was in a small café in Anchorage, waiting to pick up a satellite phone, when a woman asked me if I was a smokejumper. She saw the shirt I was wearing and commented that her husband was Airborne and that

she lived in Fairbanks and knew about the jumpers. She was interested to find out that Anchorage once had a jump base. As I got up to leave, she said, 'When I saw the smokejumper under a parachute (on your shirt), it made my heart beat faster.' "

Got a phone message from **Earl Schmidt** (MSO-43) that 23 members attended the July CPS-103 smokejumper reunion held in Indiana. Although their numbers are getting smaller, their reunions are continuing.

**Craig Lindh** (MSO-59): "The April 24, 2006, issue of *The New Yorker* magazine has a story on film-maker Werner Herzog. It's more about his craft than the film he's making ('Rescue Dawn') based on 'Little Dieter Needs To Fly.' I jumped with Gene (DeBruin) starting in 1959, and I've always wanted more info on his disappearance. I just tracked down a used copy of Dieter's book." 📖

## Springtime Lakeside

Spring is when the woody returns.  
You prune your trees, rake-n-burn.

Buttercups ignite the basalt slope,  
Fruit trees blossom, inspiring hope.

Lily pads surface, as if over night,  
Shading homes of turtle, catfish, hellgrammite.

Goldfish chase in shallow bays.  
Blue heron stretch in morning haze.

Bullfrogs emerge from hibernation,  
Barking nightly their insubordination.

At dusk when the sky turns pink,  
Migratory waterfowl pause for a drink.

You see the eagle, osprey and swan,  
The reptile, amphibian, the fawn.

Fish Lake was created by an artist's hand,  
Like the Rocky Mountains, the desert sand.

Most of us find nature had to conceive,  
But as is life, you first must believe.

—**Hal Meili** (Cave Junction '52)

# A Little Piece of String

by Charley Moseley (Cave Junction '62)

**W**e were headed home to Vientiane late one evening in our old Caribou when the call came to land at 20 Alternate for an emergency air drop of ammo to some outpost about to be overrun by the bad guys. What the hell!?

The plane was not rigged up or prepared for an airdrop. No necessary assistant kicker, no nylon cut straps or parachutes. And it was getting close to dark.

The *man*, Tony Poe, and his crew swarmed us on the ramp. He yelled out a demand, "Don't cut the engines." He was in a hurry. Heck, I don't think I was ever around Tony when he was not in a hurry. Yelling, cussing, demanding, begging, patting on the back, getting the job done—right now! The *man* was not right, smelled like month-old laundry—and that ugly, old, dirty, floppy hat he wore was a plain disgrace. We loved him!

The Hmong crew was quick and efficient. Even though we couldn't speak the same language, it didn't matter. Tony spoke many languages and could coordinate, praise and kick butt in all of them. It was loud, profane and hectic organization, but they could really get the job done—right now!

The roller system quickly came off the walls, was securely bolted to the floor and filled up with old, rotting, plywood pallets from previous airdrops. Dozens and dozens of rope-handled ammo crates of various types from .223 to mortar rounds were just as quickly stacked waist high on the pallets and tied down.

"Let's go—take off!" yells Tony and, right back, I yell, "Where are the parachutes?" That stopped him—briefly. He gave me a big apologetic grin, even as he was giving his crew ole "Blue Billy" in their language.

While the crew was racing back and forth loading the tightly packed bags of old condemned military parachutes, Tony pulled a piece of cotton string out of a pocket and quickly wrapped it several times around my right wrist. As he bit the ends off, he looked me right in the eye and said, "You might need a little luck." "Yeah?!"

Tony and all the Laotian soldiers wore string bracelets on their wrists for good luck. It was pure voodoo to my Baptist-trained mind and about as effective as "The Holy Ground" at Horseshoe Bend for the Creeks or bulletproof "Ghost Shirts" for the Cheyenne. But something in Tony's beady, dark eyes compelled me to leave the string alone. "Can't hurt."

As we began to taxi, our pilot (Rick Byrne, I think) calmly asked some most poignant questions into my headset. "Moseley, how much weight do we have? Are those chutes any good? How many drops are we going to need?"

Improvise, make an experienced guess, blend into the situation and persevere. That "get the job done attitude and ability to do it under tough circumstances" was what made Air America tick and stand out from the rest—we liked to think.

Rick is testing the mags and other things on the takeoff list as I calculate weight and check the chutes. Our normal takeoff weight is 7500 lbs. of cargo, but the amazing Canadian built Caribou can do things that make other aircraft look puny. The load looked and felt heavy, and who packed those chutes? Tony? While sipping Phu Bia joy juice?

The ammo crates weighed about 75 lbs. each, 14 per pallet; 8 pallets = 8400 lbs., more or less. A tad heavy. Being a licensed smokejumper parachute rigger, I pop and examine all parts of one of the parachutes and find no problems.

"OK, leader. This is the situation back here in the working end of this thing. We've got about 8400 lbs. on 8 pallets and need to split it into at least two drops. The chutes look fine, but I'm going to need your copilot on the drops. Do you want me to kick off a pallet right now?"

He studied my info and ideas for a few moments before coming back with what wisdom and decision-making ability he got paid for.

"Naw, Mose. That pallet might be the one they need the most. Two drops sounds about right, but set up that first drop with a cut strap for takeoff—just in case we need to lose it. Leave the ramp down and the door open. OK? And I'm gonna loan you Joe for the drop, but don't get his hands or clothes dirty."

"10-4, Boss. Give me a few secs to rig up something." We don't have any cut straps (slick nylon belt like material). I find a piece of grass rope in one of the panels, flip off the criss-crossed chains from the back of the first four pallets to go out, and stretch the rope as tight as possible across the cargo hold in a half moon angle to keep the two-ton-plus load as stable as possible on takeoff. "OK."

Rick is watching and begins to roll, even as I pull my sharp cutting knife and give him a thumbs up. Burning daylight! Everyone is pleased with the operation and their part in it—so far.

20 Alternate is down in a bowl, surrounded by mountains, and requires a fairly rapid gain in altitude and/or almost 90-degree bank to the right thru a narrow canyon carved out by a creek. It had a fine long runway and the late evening air was wet and heavy providing perfect lift. Even with the cut rope stretching and allowing the cargo to slide several feet to the rear, Rick kept adjusting and stroking that fine machine into a no-sweat climb out. My kind of pilot. No heroics—no show boating—gentle on the equipment and crew.

The DZ was a high point northeast of 20A and close to the Plain of Jars. A zigzag red earth trench system enclosed about two acres and a lot of nervous soldiers.



Charley Moseley (NSA file)



I had the first load re-positioned, chutes attached, and the very uncomfortable copilot checked out on handling the front cargo chains by the time Rich inquired, "You ready?" "10-4."

The flickering welding machines in the darkening jungle around the fort clearly showed that the interior of the fort was our only DZ. Rick was gonna use a tough lazy V drop pattern by diving down and pulling up as sharply as possible.

When Rick stood the aircraft on her nose, the lack of gravity plastered me and the copilot to the ceiling and shifted the load forward. I clawed my way back down to the slack cut rope, cinched it tight with my left hand and held the big knife ready with my right. "Coming up on final," came over my headset. "Ready Here."

The sound of "On final" followed soon thereafter. The adrenalin flowed. A few seconds later he pulled the yoke back into his belly and yelled, "Cut." Too late! The G-forces slam my face, body and knife to the floor. The rope is only partially cut, is wedged deep into the rough crates, and holds taut as a piano wire for a couple of moments before the two tons of cargo prevail and hurtle down the ramp and out into the gloom. Damn! Lost load!

Some folks claimed that we supplied both sides in this war. We certainly did tonight if a .223 round would work in an AK-47. Four pallets left. "Got to do a better job." It is really getting dark in the plane, but we are not about to light up a target for Charlie. He needs no help.

On the last drop I decide to improvise, and when Rick called out, "On final," I cut the rope, dropped the knife, wedged my right foot against the aircraft frame, and grabbed the cut rope with both hands. "Manhandle the mother." It worked—mostly.

On "Cut," I flipped the rope away from the load and towards the open door. Mistake! A rough edge on one of the ammo crates caught my leather banded watch as the G-forces hit and jerked me and the cargo toward the yawning door. Big mistake! I have never worn a leather band on my arm since.

The microsecond of blurred action took my watch, knife, headset and the cargo into the DZ and left me with peeled-back fingernails, but still in the plane. Well, half of me was still in the plane. The top half had a perfect bird's eye view of the multi-colored chutes collapsing into the fort. "Good Job."

Rick now had the empty aircraft standing on her tail as he

sought altitude and distance from those flickering jungle lights. Charlie might just get lucky. Unlike the DZ action, we were now plenty high enough to get my personal chute open, if needed. Sixteen or so months since my last parachute ride and I loved it so, but not tonight. It would require a long walk home. Not my idea of fun. My sore fingers hold a death grip on the ramp edge.

The G's and the severe angle of the climbing plane would not let me back up one inch as Rick hammered down—looking for 12,000 feet. My mind is trying to reach him. "Please look back before you roll over."

Now, I'm not much into begging and certainly not into praying, but there was plenty of time to remember Tony's piece of string on my wrist and to send him a million thanks. And to remember that at the top of a climb out from a cargo drop, the pilots executed a "roll over" to level flight. Some rollovers are more severe than others. Everybody in the back had better have a firm grip on something stable because they were going to float around for a few seconds, and the open door is close—too close. My backwards grip on the ramp would not get the job done. We had lost at least one kicker that way. He just floated out the door, with no chute on, long ways down. Gives you time to think. "Where is the copilot? I need some help!"

Being the pro he most certainly was, Rick did look back at my ridiculous situation and with those surgeon like hands, ever so gently eased the aircraft over into level flight, allowing me to crab my way back on board. "Thanks!" I still owe him a beer.

The copilot was sitting down with his back against the forward bulkhead. He was a genuine first-class mess from having thrown up and being slammed around the dirty cargo floor by the G-forces. We were both totally worn out, but he insisted on apologizing for not coming to my aid. "I just couldn't stand to get close to that door."

"No sweat, Joe. I ain't never met a pilot yet who could stand to get close to that door. To each his own. Let's go home. I need a beer—or two." Tony's little piece of string eventually rotted off my wrist.

Now, there was nothing even approaching semi-heroics on that flight. Taking care of our people and being able to overcome a little adversity was part of the job description. Anything less would indicate some fraud in your hiring process. At least the flight was not boring—and that's enough. 🦋

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## Help Needed-Finn Ward Fund

Finn Ward is the son of Edmund Ward, current Missoula Smokejumper Base Manager, and Pam Ward. Finn was injured on the night of May 23, 2006. Following his injury he was in Intensive Care for about two weeks on life support. As of June 21, 2006, Finn is out of ICU and breathing on his own. He still has a feeding tube in the abdomen, has been able to sit up and stand with support, and continues to make progress.

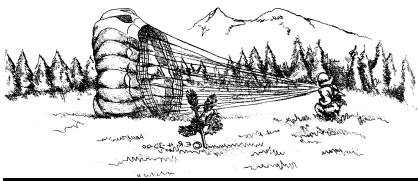
Starting on June 20, Finn began Hyperbaric Chamber treatments where he is exposed to high concentrations of oxygen. His first treatment went well. A nurse has to be in the chamber with him during approximately two-hour treatments. If things go well, he will receive two treatments a day over the next 20 days. There is every expectation that Finn will recover from his current situation.

Finn's medical expenses have exceeded \$100,000 above what the insurance has covered to date. Any financial help you can give can be sent to: **Donna Morris**, 21427 Conifer Dr., Huson MT 59846

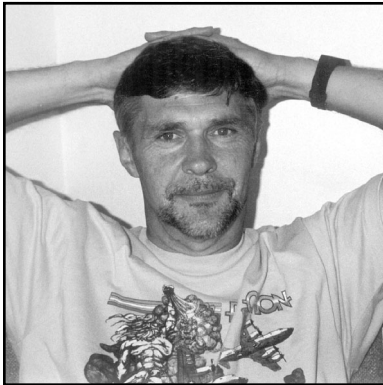
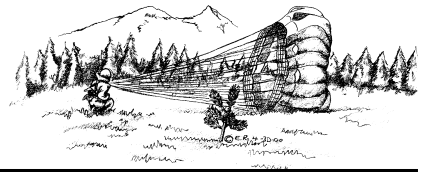
Make the check payable to NSA and note that it is for the **Finn Ward Fund**. Funds will be used for medical and recovery expenses for Finn Ward. This can be considered a tax-deductible donation. 🦋



*Finn Ward*



# Checking the Canopy



**Steve Goldammer**  
(Missoula '66)

I Kings 19:11-13 ...there came the sound of a gentle breeze...

Disclaimer: This is not a bible study, but if it were, it might be entitled, "Where you find/hear God as a Smokejumper."

There are many moments that I remember, significant moments, as a jumper that will live in the deep recesses of my mind until I die. Many of these had to do with wild and crazy times. The roar of a DC-3 as it barreled through the thermal of a raging forest fire in Alaska. The thunder of a wind-driven crowning fire, that no human could out run, and still it came on like a freight train. A violent earthquake in Anchorage that shattered the large glass window before us, and certainly put that city on notice.

For me, as awesome and beyond verbal description as all of these events were, there was one place that I always saw/heard God the clearest. That was in the dramatically quiet moment when the roar of the airplane had left you, the speed of the wind had subsided, and you looked up in the comparative silence and saw that your chute was open. In that silence you knew you were safe.

The first time I experienced this silence was, of course, the first practice jump that I made. It was a clear beautiful June day in the forenoon. We were all going out to the big field, the

one that nobody could tree up in, and we were fifty green-jumper wanna-bes just completing training.

Our DC-3 was the second to drop these rookies. The throaty sound of those big engines was only secondary to the pounding of my heart and the knot in my guts that told me that today I would die! We circled for what seemed an eternity. Finally we begin to make our approaches, ever circling, ever passing, closer to the time of my demise. Now I don't remember what number I was in that sixteen-man jump group. I don't remember if I was the first or second in the stick, I don't remember hooking up, getting into position, a hand on my toe, hands on the door, looking out, none of that. I don't even remember if I had my eyes open or closed as I fell into that slipstream tumbling and turning. What I do remember about that jump and every one after is the deafening silence that I heard when I came back to the world of reality, the awesome and beautiful lack of sound as I, yes, looked up to check the canopy and say thanks.

That moment has taught me a lot about where to find God, and no, I have not gone through my life listening for voices. But I do think we all look and listen for God each in his or her own way, no matter what that God is. And perhaps we are in danger of missing Him at times. It is my contention that we want to see our God in the big and bold and noisy because somehow that makes Him bigger and bolder and more awesome. There have been many times in life when caught with either the grandeur or incomprehensible, that is where He seems to be. I suppose to some degree that is not incorrect. But if we get right down to it and remember the experience "of just after the chute opened," then perhaps we will have the experience of Elijah. God is not in the roar of the wind, or not in the earthquake, or (for us jumpers) not even in the fire, but

He is in that "gentle breeze" that we heard as we looked up and knew that He had provided a safe canopy. Then maybe we have come to hear God. Speaking for myself, that will be the closest experience in jumping that I have come to hearing God.

One more word and this is a confession. I have read the Smokejumper magazine for years now and in writing this article I have made a great discovery, admittedly, one that I should have figured out before. This column called "Checking the Canopy" may have some faith and even spiritual overtones! Yes, I am dense, and the elevator doesn't go all the way to the top, not the brightest bulb on the tree, or sharpest tool in the shed, etc.(insert your own aphorism). It was a truth that I had always adhered to, that is, checking the canopy meant that you were looking up (I suppose we paved the way for the pro-football player in the end zone), but I had not connected it quite so literally. It was only in the writing of this article that I remembered that, yes, I was looking up and giving thanks as I was "Checking the Canopy." 🙏

## Where Are These Guys?

Please send any information to: John McDaniel/NSA Mbrship, P.O. Box 105, Falun KS 67442, email: jumpercj57@hotmail.com

Carl Gregory .....	(NCSB-52)
William R. Hatton .....	(MSO-52)
Carter B. Hearn .....	(MSO-52)
Al Hebrank .....	(NCSB-52)
Carl L. Holton .....	(MYC-52)
William Hoskinson .....	(MSO-52)
Axel A. Johnson .....	(CJ-52)
James E. Karr .....	(MSO-52)
Douglas J. Kosan .....	(MSO-52)
Paul Lukens .....	(CJ-52)
Robert McCallister .....	(NCSB-52)
Robert S. McGiffin .....	(MSO-52)
Dick Merrill .....	(CJ-52)
David Miller .....	(NCSB-52)
Odis D. Powwll .....	(MSO-52)
Bob Ramsey .....	(CJ-52)



# NSA Trail Crew

by Carl Gidlund (Missoula '58)



## The Silvertip Roofers

TALK ABOUT A DEDICATED crew! Why, our safety officer tumbled from two roofs just to demonstrate how to land safely and to provide first aid training. That was typical of the Silvertip Spirit exhibited by each of our party.

It's not as if **Roland Pera** (MSO-56) had no business up there. Our job was to re-roof the Silvertip Cabin and storage shed. So there we were, a gang of eight, right at the edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and I'd selected the most-trustworthy member of the group for that important safety job.

Prior to starting work the first day, Roland gave us an excellent lecture ("Don't hit your hand with a hammer or trip on anything.") Then he climbed to the cabin roof and strode to its peak. It wasn't but a few seconds later that he came thumping down, screaming some unintelligible Kansas battle cry.

His fall was about 10 feet, lots less than the 1,200-foot jumps he'd made in the '50s and '60s, but it was every bit as impressive. He'd barely stopped bouncing when he leaped to his feet, dusted himself off and said, "That was an Allen roll, and I want everyone to practice it like I did, just in case."

Our cook, Associate Member **Phyllis Geddes**, is a long-time friend of **Jim Anderson** (MSO-58), who recruited her – then promptly volunteered for another crew.

Until we tasted Phyllis's made-from-scratch flapjacks, we thought she was probably Anderson's practical joke: a cook who couldn't. But it turned out she is very experienced at camping culinary arts and pretty darned good with bandages, too, as we learned later.

We were lucky to have two-and-a-half experienced roofers with us. **Bob Sallee** (Missoula '49) and **Hank Jones** (Missoula '53) knew what they were about. They were also patient enough to teach Roland and **John "Mike" Mackinnon** (Missoula '57) how to hold shingles while those

journeymen nailed 'em down.

The shingle-holders obviously took great pride in their new skill, for after work they'd debate for hours the relative merits of the traditional forehand hold versus the innovative wristy-flip single shingle grip.

The debates were inconclusive, for after hours of discussion each night, the pair would sulkily cease their arguments to choruses of, "Shut the hell up!"

Nevertheless, we all admired their dedication.

Our half-experienced roofer was **John Payne** (MSO-66). The other half of his skill was that of a plumber, and he demonstrated his worth at that trade during the first two days, helping a district technician dig up and patch up the busted fresh water pipe. It was good to finally get a drink by Wednesday.

**Bob Reid** (MSO-57) brought all of his expertise as a career Air Force navigator to his tasks as an old-shingle-picker-upper-and-burner and nailing assistant. You sure could tell he'd been an officer!

Along towards the end of the week, Roland took another header, this time from the storage shed roof. He showed us another landing technique: first spearing himself on scaffolding, then executing a parachute landing fall.

He said this dive was to exercise the crew's disaster preparedness staff, EMT

Hank and cook Phyllis. Indeed, they got the valuable experience of staunching his bleeding, and those of us watching learned a lot about first aid.

The paperwork that comes with the squad leader job is overwhelming, and the best time and place to accomplish it was during hot afternoons inside the cabin. That wasn't either easy or pleasant, what with the incessant banging of hammers on the roof.

My duties weighed heavily. I also had to make a radio report each morning to the Spotted Bear Ranger Station on the crew's whereabouts, and keeping track of the gang was trying. Sometimes it was, "They're on the cabin roof." On other days it was, "They're on the shed roof."

I also had to monitor the boys' work progress. This was especially difficult because I did it from ground level. Somehow, I'd developed acrophobia in the years since last I fell from an airplane.

However, I believe my good example will be of great help to the trails program. The crew decided that my kind of leadership is much preferable to hammering shingles in the hot sun. I'm certain all of them will volunteer to lead future squads.

I don't know where we'll find actual workers, but that's Jon McBride's problem. 🍷



# Smokejumping Sold to Hollywood

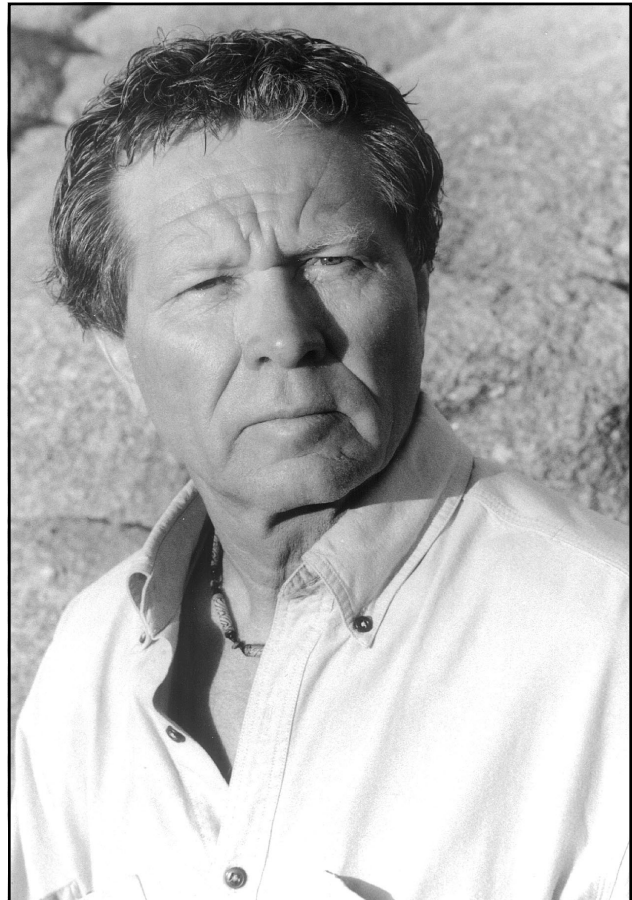
by Murry Taylor (Redding '65)

In November 2004, my agent received an inquiry about the movie rights to my book, *Jumping Fire*. It was a bit mysterious since their agent wouldn't tell us who it was or any details, only the initial offered purchase price. Still, things went fairly fast and, within two months and a series of counter offers, we firmed up the money and terms for a major motion picture. The contract was 31 pages long, impossible for a regular human to read, and included all kinds of things like DVD sales, TV rights, coffee table books, and even an action figure doll. Imagine, an action figure doll that stands around scratching its head, playing pocket pool while mumbling, "It's dry out West." "No pain, no gain." "How much overtime do you have?" "This is my last year?"

After the contract was agreed upon, things got funny and slowed down. For various reasons, we weren't able to find out who we were dealing with. Then, things went completely stale and my agent and I got nervous. In June we were told to forget the whole thing. I nearly fell apart I was so disappointed. After two weeks trying to pull myself together, I decided to write one of the producers and tell him why I thought their decision to drop *Jumping Fire* as a movie was a mistake. I pointed out that at this particular point in American life, when we are distracted by so many make-believe heroes, the country needed to see a real-life drama, played out by larger-than-life characters in unforgettable scenery. I told him smokejumping was all that and more. Apparently the letter had some effect. At least that's what their agent claimed. Suddenly the deal was back on and, by August of 2005, I had signed the contract.

In September I contacted the screenwriter, Colman Dekay, and we planned a trip to smokejumper bases in the Northwest since it was too late to catch the action in Alaska. I felt it essential that Colman get around smokejumpers and jump bases before he began writing. In ten days we went to Redmond, Boise and McCall. We went to pubs (imagine that) and bought the boys pitchers of beer and just listened. Colman heard jump story after jump story. It was great! We had a fine time with **Mark Corbett** (LGD-74) and the crew at Redmond, went through jump ships, had a backyard barbecue with **Scott Dewitz** (FBX-82) and friends, dinner with **John McColgan** (FBX-89) and his family, and, on our last day, attended a beautiful early morning practice jump in the Ochocos in a big meadow nestled between giant ponderosas. Colman filmed the whole thing.

From Redmond we made our way to Boise, stayed at **Steve Nemore's** (RAC-69) and visited **Tom Boatner** (FBX-80), **Tom Romanello** (FBX-88), **John Gould** (FBX-81) and **Jim Raudenbush** (FBX-82). We had another beer bash at the Ram's Horn with several current and retired jumpers showing up. From Boise we went to a big fire camp near



Murry Taylor (NSA file)

Stanley, Idaho, ran into **Dave Zuares** (RDD-91) and got a first rate tour of the helibase operations. Colman got to sit in the front seat of a Bell 212 while the pilot filled him in on the ship. From there we went to McCall and had three good days at the base, saw another practice jump, toured a P3 Orion retardant plane, more jump ships, and Colman even got to talk with "**Wild Bill**" **Yensen** (MYC-53), smokejumping's one-stop shopping mart for jump stories. Another jumper had a house warming one night and we went. The party had a Western theme and so **Mike Cooper** (MYC-86), **Eric Brundidge** (MYC-77), and **Rick Hudson** (NIFC-73) and several others showed up in cowboy hats and boots. The guests had a life-size cut-out of John Wayne in the backyard standing by some hay bales, and the next thing I know, Colman is back there taking multiple photos with all the pretty young cowgirls. Believe me, by midnight he'd had an ear full of "And this is no . . ."

At the end of our trip, I encouraged Colman to try to make it to **Rod Dow's** (MYC-68) for his work party in late October. Although he met many interesting jumpers on our

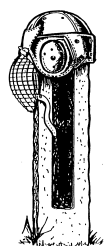
trip in September, I told him at Dow's he would meet the "old, old-timers," many who are in the book. And so, after some arm twisting and quick schedule changes, he flew to Portland. The next day Colman rode to Dow's with **Don Bell** (IDC-69). I wanted him to be around Bell for obvious reasons. At Dow's he met **Eric "Eric The Blak" Schoenfeld** (CJ-64), "**Trooper**" **Tom Emonds** (CJ-66), and several other babbling dinosaurs of the trade. Man, did he get a blast of jump stories then. It was perfect seeing him join right in, standing around campfires with his notebook, listening to story after story. The movie *Firestorm* came up repeatedly as in, "Please, please, please. No *Firestorm*!"

As we drove off the hill from Dow's on our way to the airport in Yakima Colman turned to me and said, "That was great! Really great!" He proceeded to tell me how impressed he was. "I had no idea smokejumpers were that intelligent . . . that funny," he said, dismayed. As we pulled up to the airport terminal in Yakima, I turned to Colman and said, "Colman, this is the deal. I've sold smokejumping to Hollywood. It's 65 years of hard work, extraordinary people, and the best adventure life has to offer. Look at it like this:

we're on final, you're in the door and you're clear. Make us proud, will you?" Colman looked me hard in the eye, firmly shook my hand and said, "I can do it."

The studio is Warner Bros. The producers are Nu Image, previously New Millennium, and have done many films. The project is in Phase One, writing the screenplay, and I've worked with Colman on that—actually wrote the opening scene. Phase Two will be selecting the director. Then, on to Phase Three, selecting the cast and production assistants. I get paid the purchase price when they begin the actual filming. In the meantime I've been paid for the three year option that ends in August of 2008. I have no idea what the screen title might be, but I doubt it will be *Jumping Fire*.

That's it. My fingers are crossed. Hopefully the film will actually become a reality. The budget is impressive. They've indicated they will film in Alaska and Idaho. I've done all I can to help make sure they get something of which smokejumpers will be proud. Time and again Colman impressed the jumpers he met. He is a man's man, unpretentious, conscientious, bright, and savvy. Still, it is Hollywood, so you might keep your fingers crossed, too. 🍀



## 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.

### John C. Neeling (Missoula '85)

John, 53, died May 14, 2006, of natural causes in Klamath Falls, Oregon. He graduated from high school in Iowa in 1971 and earned a B.S. in resource conservation from the University of Montana in 1976. After serving two years in the Peace Corps in Ecuador, he started his career as a civilian firefighter at air force bases in New Hampshire and Nevada. John spent the rest of his career working in recreation and wilderness for the U.S. Forest Service in Oregon, New Mexico, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and the Bureau of Land Management in Oregon (Burns District). He spent two summers as a Missoula smokejumper, where he earned the nickname of "Buns Up." After suffering a heart attack in 2001, John pulled out all the stops and made sure to live life to the fullest. Although only in Klamath Falls for six months, John was totally enamored with the area and had collected many new friends.

*Thanks to Mike Lysne for obit information via the website.*

### John E. Scott (Missoula '44)

John died April 14, 2006, in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. He was a CPS-103 jumper and was at Missoula for the 1944 and 1945 seasons. After his discharge, John farmed and

worked as a ranch hand in Minnesota. He enjoyed deer hunting, making his last hunt in November at age 89.

*Thanks to Dick Flaharty for obit information.*

### Jonas "Joe" Hershberger (Missoula '45)

Joe, age 80, passed away on Thursday, June 22, 2006, in Delaware, Ohio, surrounded by his loving wife of 50 years and his two daughters. Born April 8, 1926, in Holmes County, Ohio, Joe was a pioneer smokejumper in Montana in 1945 before he entered the Army to serve in the Korean conflict. He was self-employed as a heavy equipment operator for many years, and was active in church, the VFW and American Legion, The Darby Valley Conservation Club, in and around the Plain City area (central Ohio). He was deeply devoted to his family, his country, and to the mission and values of the NSA. He was very proud of his service and went out of his way to tell others of the sacrifices smokejumpers made, continue to make, in the line of duty.

*Thanks to Valerie Hershberger for obit information via the website.*

► OFF THE LIST, Page 31

# Joe Rumble Responds to Mann Gulch

Article by Carl Gidlund

I read your article in *Smokejumper*, Oct. 2005, detailing Bob Sallee's corrections to John Maclean's misinformation in *The Last Survivor*. At the outset I must admit I have not read John Maclean's work(s), and I am bouncing my remarks off of his father's book, *Young Men and Fire*. But still, I'm glad that Sallee is clearing up any errors. I have made it a point to find my official Forest Service letter (1949) on the Mann Gulch investigation and to try to recall Sallee's personal description of the events when we talked in August 1999 at the 50-year reunion of the tragedy. Bob's remarks to me in 8/99 were almost exactly the same as what he told me in 1949 after the fire, and it has confirmed my belief that (Norman) Maclean made some very significant errors that cast blame and fault on the U.S.F.S.

Crew leader Wag Dodge was absolutely competent and his escape fire, in my opinion, was not the source of the fire that overran the smokejumpers. I derived this opinion in 1949 from the personal verbal contacts I had with Bob and Walt, and fifty years later confirmed by my visitation to the Mann Gulch site in 1999.

I find no fault in the landing zone location based on the visual definition of the fire at jump time. Normally, anabatic winds (upslope winds) dominate sparsely forested areas from mid-morning to afternoon, and I assume that the smoke plume from the original fire was not indicating rapid uphill travel, or Earl Cooley would not have used a site above the fire. All the unfavorable and unexpected weather activities suddenly came together and Mann Gulch was a deadly trap. It seems to me that smokechaser Harrison would not have come up to meet the jumpers if the original fire was in rapid uphill progress.

In *Young Men and Fire*, Norman Maclean cast fault on the Forest Service, and when Secretary of Agriculture Babbitt spoke at the 1995 Smokejumper Reunion dinner, he said Mann Gulch and Storm King were examples of incompetence in training, technology and quality of leadership. Wildfire fighting is dangerous work, but more of the bad decisions are made in the comfortable conference rooms in Washington, D.C., where they let politicians decide on forest practices. There are instances where the best forest practice

is not to send firefighters, but the public wants no smoke in their backyard, so we do their dirty work.

I have great admiration for Bob Sallee, who went from a typical high school graduate in 1949 with no long-range plans to a person who put his priorities in order, got an education and did very well in his professional career. I was blessed to know him and Walt Rumsey, along with the others that did not survive. They all have impacted my life more than I realized. I would also be remiss not to mention Earl Cooley, Fred Brauer, Al Cramer, Bob Johnson (pilot) and all the wonderful people associated with that activity who molded firefighters from the eager young men who volunteered for the program.

I was a rookie jumper in 1949, a navy veteran, a two-year Forestry student at University of Idaho, and had three summers of firefighting experience. I was thrilled to be a smokejumper. I was in a training group with Rumble, Rumsey, Sallee and a couple others with surnames in the S's. I knew Walt as a friend and buddy and knew Bob less because he was younger (17) and had just graduated from high school. We ate, ran, worked, trained together and slept in the same barracks at Nine Mile. None of us had cars, so our activities were pretty much after-work sports at the base.

We played softball most every evening. Two days before we were to get our first parachute jump, I got a line drive that hit my middle finger, left hand, and shattered the long finger joint. They fixed me up at Missoula Hospital with my finger in tension and an aluminum cast for protection. I wanted to jump, but Earl Cooley said to wait a couple days. So I became the camp flunkey, but Earl kept me on. Walt,



Historic Photo 1941: L-R Unidentified, Bill Mussberger, Jim Alexander, Bill Yagy (pilot killed in later crash).  
(Courtesy Jim "Smokey" Alexander)

Bob and the others got their seven jumps while I waited. About a week later they put me in an accelerated group and I got my training jumps, but I was out of the original group and not on the jump list sequence with them. Instead, I was on a jump list with some veteran jumpers.

The fire activity slowed a little and most of us were sent to project work in the region. I was with a group near Wisdom, Montana, on trail work when the call came to bring the jumpers back to Missoula. About six or seven of us arrived at Hale Field early on August 5 and were assigned to jump lists. As I recall, it was Wednesday, and they were making up a crew to go to Helena National Forest in a DC-3 with 15-16 jumpers. I was not in the sequence, but when I saw Walt and Bob on the list I requested to be put on that fire to be with my old buddies. But they already had me scheduled to go on a two-man jump in Northern Idaho since I had considerable firefighting experience. Events starting with the broken finger had relocated me on the jump list, or I would have been in Mann Gulch on that fateful August day.

After Mann Gulch, I talked with Walt and Bob, but they didn't say much except that Walt said they crested the hill and found refuge in a talus rock slide area. They were both shaken by the tragedy. Everyone was affected, but I liked the work, absolutely trusted the management, and knew the dangers of firefighting. Everybody in the Missoula jump operation was professional and accepted the incident as horrible, but did not try to affix blame. Instead, they put

their energy into fixing the problem by better understanding, communication, training and coordination with professionals who knew the terrain, fuels and localized weather. The MSO married jumpers, some with children, and especially the rookies seemed to be much more shaken by the incident. Some resigned.

I made several jumps after 8/5/49 and I went back in 1950, but it was a wet summer and I was on project work near Seeley Lake. After a couple weeks, my fiancée called and I went to Central Montana for a weekend visit. The next week I called the project leader who said if I wanted to terminate, it was fine because they had little hope of jumping. The next summer (1951) I was married, but made a couple practice jumps and went to Pattee Canyon for project work.

I graduated in 1952 as a Mining Engineer and started my professional life. I always loved the work of smokejumping and considered the prospects of that kind of life, but with a wife and small children, I was not certain of the long-range viability of that choice.

I attended the 1999 50-year anniversary events at Helena. It was a nice experience until they unveiled the memorial statue of a headless jumper holding a helmet. I was disgusted and offended. In 1949 there were no females or minorities in smokejumping. They could easily have put a generic male head, but instead chose to bow to political correctness. It looks more like a fashion statement than a heartfelt, uplifting commemoration!

Joe Rumble (Missoula '49)





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# The Joyful Wedding of Mike McMillan and Molly McGourty

by Murry Taylor (Redding '65)

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L-R: Mike McMillan, Murry Taylor, Molly McGourty (Courtesy Murry Taylor)

**J**une 10, 2006, I found myself standing with smokejumper Mike McMillan (FBX -96) and aircraft manager Molly McGourty on a grassy slope overlooking the Tanana Valley. The sky cleared just as the ceremony began, revealing the peaks of the range, including Mt. Deborah and Mt. Hayes. The

Nenana Fire was at 45,000 acres and putting up a major column at its head. The setting seemed perfect—two fire fighters taking time out to get married on a beautiful summer day surrounded by family, friends, smokejumpers and fellow BLMer's.

It was my one day to be on my best behavior as "The Reverent Reverend Taylor." As I began to speak, I panicked that I was going to have tears right off, not that tears bother me that much, it's just that I wanted the ceremony to be all about them. Just then Molly whispered something to Mike. When I looked at her, then him, they were grinning and winking and so full of joy, I immediately relaxed. From then on it was easy.

After the completion of the vows I said, "And now by the power vested in me, this couple, and the State of Alaska, I now pronounce you husband and wife." As I prepared to say, "Michael, you may kiss the bride," I was nearly knocked aside as Mike grabbed Molly. The moment right afterwards is captured in the photo.

Molly and Mike . . . thank you for asking me to stand with you on your special day. You sure made it fun. 🐻

*Congratulations to Mike and Molly from Smokejumper magazine. Mike collects and edits the "Touching All Bases" columns that keep all of us up to date on the happenings at the bases.*

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## THANK YOU SHARON WESTCOTT

by Roger Brandt (Associate)

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Smokejumpers who attended the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base reunion in June 2006 owe a word of thanks to Sharon Westcott, a fine lady who spent more than a month setting up displays for the reunion around the historic base as well as inside the old parachute loft. Her reasons for working so hard on this project reach back into the past as well as into the future.

Sharon Westcott, a native of New Mexico, has been living in southwest Oregon since 1971 and remembers the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base when it was still in operation. "I used to live on Lake Selmac, about 15 miles from the base, and some of the guys from the base would make a jump into the lake as part the Fourth of July Celebration held every year in the county managed campgrounds." It was experiences like this that helped to galvanize an admiration for the smokejumping program.

Sharon worked as a well driller for 20 years and drilled wells for many of the jumpers who settled in the area. In 1991, she became an ultralite instructor and started Fly Wild Air, a flight school located near the smokejumper base at Illinoi Valley airport.

During the 15 years she has had her business at the airport, Sharon began to realize that this airfield had outstanding potential for recreation flying. "The combination of scenery and the history of the Cave Junction base makes this a unique travel destination for flyers. All they need are some things to help them appreciate what they see around them, and you will have a great tourism destination for flyers as well as for travelers on Highway 199." Many of the displays that Sharon created for the reunion have been left standing to augment a tour guide of the base recently printed in a local tourism publication.

Sharon is just one of a group of people who are working to get the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base established as a National Historic Site. She makes her living working as an advanced instructor who provides training for ultralite instructors and is also the team leader for America's microlite team in Europe. She works part time for Jack McCormick, an aviation engineer, who makes flying machines for Hollywood movies. He has his shop in the base's parachute loft. We would also like to thank him for generously allowing us to set up displays and for allowing visitors to enter the loft during the reunion. 🐻

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# The Nomex Fashion Show

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

We use to all roll up our sleeves to fight the forest fire,  
So often we put out the flames in t-shirts, Whites attire.  
The favorite pants were Lee "Can't Bust Em's" or Levi 501's  
With cotton treated fire shirts and a U.S. shoulder patch.

A Filson khaki cruiser vest with lunch and steel canteens  
Worn by our dad's in World War II complete in canvas OD green.  
So light were we the dirt just flew as fire line we ran  
Around those burns and put 'em out; *"in minimum of time."*

Today the kids compete with all to dress the latest vogue.  
The cost sky rocketed to match the weight and time to hold  
A crew to stage for weeks on end; through fire severity.  
That's why they held, revue and ran *"The Nomex Fashion Show."*

The pants cost dear old Uncle Sam at least a hundred bucks.  
You see they now have Kevlar strands to strengthen Nomex thread.  
Protect you to 800 – it's measured in the red  
While denim jeans will always fail; six hundred it's been said.

Either way which one you wear; I'll bet the ranch you're dead.

But still I'd take the denim to protect from brush and thistle;  
Insect bites, and warmth at night; its more then fiery tinsel.

Line gear is all modified by those most in the know.  
It's always most compared upon *"the walk"* at  
*"The Nomex Fashion Show"*

With colors, size, material and fit that's tailored for:  
Fire shelters, phones and radios, GPS and more.

*Randy* sports just standard Nomex; blister burned and frayed  
A yellow hardhat, matching shirt; pink line gear on display  
Contrasting blue striped head scarf with the latest shelter tent.  
A mixed and matched ensemble; to some he's heaven sent.

*Suzie* models high-tech Kevlar Nomex khaki pants  
A full brimmed Bullard white hardhat - with goggles; tinted lens.  
Her red Montana line gear must hold 50 U.S. lbs.  
She barley moves, just waddles round the Nomex fashion tent.

*Kevin* wins the crowd in green-tinge Nomex cargo pants.  
His line gear Colorado; a sky blue Rocky Mountain high  
All trimmed in red artillery; a squad boss out for hire.

No wonder not much line gets dug once crews are briefed and  
rested  
With all the gear they pack designed to weather fire and best it.  
I guess that's why old timers said in Guard School long ago:

*"If you dress a crew to get burned over, that's probably what you'll  
get:*

*But dress 'em all to work and sweat; they'll kill the fire – you bet!"*

Now that's a saying that was proved at the Thirty Mile divide  
When those survived just left and dived into the river wide.

So spend your dollars wisely to gain skill in fire behavior.  
Promote at first initiative not bureaucratic liars,  
For PPE will always fail; once fire is on the roll;  
Its real out there, not phony like *"The Nomex Fashion Show."* 🦋



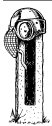
Karl Brauneis (NSA file)

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## Where Are These Guys?

Please send any information to: John  
McDaniel/NSA Mbrship, P.O. Box  
105, Falun KS 67442, email:  
jumpercj57@hotmail.com

Frank E. Reed ..... (NCSB-52)  
Ron Schaefer ..... (MSO-52)  
Phil Smith ..... (CJ-52)  
Erwin L. Stafford ..... (MSO-52)  
John R. Williams ..... (MSO-52)  
Steve Wood ..... (NCSB-52)



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### Arthur A. Henderson (Missoula '50)

Art, of Brookwood, Alabama, died March 27, 2006. He  
jumped at Missoula in 1950 while a student at the Univer-  
sity of Minnesota. After graduating, he went to work for the  
National Park Service becoming a ranger and a naturalist.

### Stephen Norrod (McCall '78)

Steve, 58, died July 24, 2006. He born in Bethesda,  
Maryland, and was raised throughout the South, including  
Tennessee, Florida and Alabama. After high school, Steve  
traveled west, where he spent ten years as a smokejumper  
jumping at McCall, Fairbanks and Boise. He received an  
undergraduate degree from East Tennessee State and

## Off the List

obtained his master's in social work from the University of  
Dayton. Steve was employed by New Day Mental Health  
Center in Billings at the time of death.

Four month's before his death, Steve was advised that he  
should enter Hospice as his cancer spread. He refused this  
care and continued working even carrying his own oxygen.  
On Monday, July 24, 2006, Steve was short of breath as he  
readied himself for work. He called his own ambulance, was  
admitted to the hospital and passed away shortly after dark.  
He was courageous and determined as he literally fought to  
the very end. 🦋

*Thanks to Jim Norton for additional information about Steve  
received over the web site.*

# 2007 National Smokejumper Reunion

June 8-10, 2007

Boise, Idaho

by Steve Nemore (Redmond '69)



Steve Nemore (NSA file)

**Where:** Boise State University campus.

**When:** Friday, June 8 through Sunday, June 10, 2007

**Why:** To visit with your old Smokejumper Brothers.

It's been three years since the 2004 reunion in Missoula, and there are way too many smokejumpers (and pilots and associates) getting way too old, and they are not staying connected with their brothers, AND there are too many smokejumpers who have never reconnected with their brothers. ("Brothers" herein is a unisex, non-discriminatory term referring to all smokejumpers, male and female, and the abbreviation of brothers is "bros.")

Didn't know you had brothers? Well, you do! ... Because when you did rookie training and then jumped and put out fires—whether it was one season or 30 seasons—you became a brother to all the people who have ever been smokejumpers.

And even if some of the smokejumpers who you worked with were ugly, self-centered, ignorant, creepy, dishonest, overbearing, aggressive, racist, elitist, phony, weak, Democrat, Republican, religious, atheist, Western, Eastern, country, city, farmer, theologian, librarian, lawyer, pilot, asshole, comedian, Mexican, Canadian, soldier, draft dodger, conscientious objector, logger, physicist ... any of those and lots more ... they were smokejumpers and, thusly, they are your brothers.

So go get those anti-social hermits, those aging old men, those too busy or too poor or too scheduled or too depressed, and roust them into action. Berate, or badger, or pester or embarrass them and influence them to start planning now to get to Boise in June 2007. You know you want to talk to those old people ... you know there's lots that wasn't said and fights that were never settled and thanks never given, and families never met ... so you call those old brothers and pressure them to meet you at the **2007 National Smokejumper Reunion**.

## ACTIVITIES

### Friday, June 8

- Registration begins at 1100 ... and continues throughout the day. The registration office with continuous information will be in the BSU Student Union Building.
- On-campus housing check-in begins at 1200.
- Pick up t-shirts, hats and other memorabilia.
- Vendors set up: Prints, books, t-shirts, sculptures, insurance, firefighting equipment.
- Photo session beginning at 1700. Each base has a separate photo and every person gets a CD of all photos.
- Barbecue and beer at 1800 on the patio.
- Possible demo jump by Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service jumpers.

- Plenty of time and space for visiting.
- Reception area and registration closes at 2300.

## Saturday, June 9

- Registration and visiting areas open at 0700 and open throughout the day.
- Golf tournament
- BSing with Bros
- Idaho City Tour
- Visiting bros
- 10K (or less) Fun Run and walk
- Visiting with friends
- Birds of Prey tour
- Discussions with bros
- City of Boise tour
- Visiting with bros
- Aircraft Display tour
- Conversing with bros
- BLM Smokejumper base tour
- Laughing with bros
- Rafting the Payette River
- Remembering with bros
- Idaho Fish and Game Nature Center
- Conversing with old friends
- Spouses tour of places and things non-smokejumper-related
- Visiting amongst people related to bros
- **Cocktail hour at 1700 in Taco Bell Arena** (basketball pavilion)
- **Banquet at 1800 in Taco Bell Arena**

Sit-down served meals, vendors in the halls, continuous videos and slides on the big screen, special guest speakers, distinguished master of ceremonies, awards and honorarium. Dancing to canned music, LOTS of visiting ... Specially created video; order prints of photos. Receive photo CD with list of all attendees and a complete list of all smokejumpers who have ever been. Taco Bell Arena closes at 2300

## Sunday, June 10

- **Memorial brunch at 0930 in the Jordan Ballroom of the BSU Student Center.**
- Served brunch, special nondenominational memorial service led by several famous smokejumper counselors/ministers.
- **Vendors and merchandise available after service.**
- **Registration office and information desk closes up at 1200.**
- **Visiting areas in SUB remain open til 1700.**

## Registration

Look for registration in future issues and the mail.  
Mark it: June 8-10, 2007, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho.