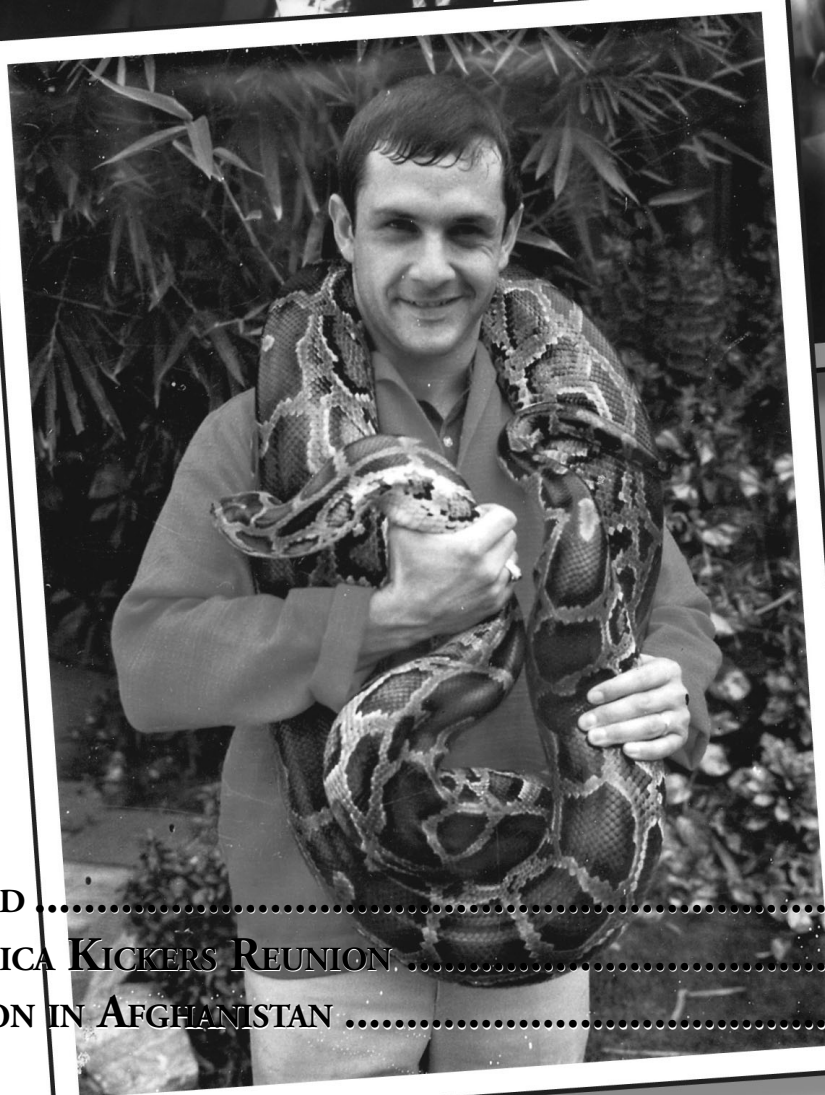


THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
APRIL 2009

SMOKEJUMPER



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Special Year

by **Pferron Doss** (Missoula '77)

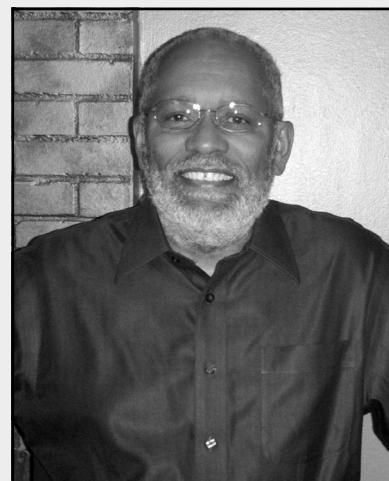
This is a special year for all Americans. We have witnessed the inauguration of Barack Hussein Obama, the first African American to be sworn into this office and the 44th President of the United States. Regardless of whether you voted for Obama or not, history books will be forever changed.

It was similar when **Larry Eisenman** (MSO-58) took a chance and allowed me to join the smokejumper organization. I had the pleasure of being a smokejumper from 1977-79 out of Missoula and was the only African American jumper in the lower 48 during that time period. There were two other African Americans who came before me: **Wardell Davis** (MSO-45) and **Milford Preston** (RDD-74).

I am still a Forest Service career employee working in R-6 Human Resources. When discussions arise about my earlier career, a special smile comes over my face when I share that I was a former smokejumper. I cannot tell you how many times someone replied, "But you're..." And I'd interrupt saying, "Yes, I am African American." I'd then add, "It wasn't about the skin color; it was the fortitude of sticking with it, doing your part just like everyone else." I was quite aware of the fact that I stood out and there were eyes always looking at me. It didn't take me long to realize that those eyes were there to ensure my safety, and that I could be depended upon to put in a day's work for a day's pay. Etched in my mind, but fading rapidly, are all the friendships, acquaintances, jumps and stories that have become a living part of my soul. Being an African American smokejumper does have its historical significance.

This year especially brings out those memories of "Yes we can."

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Pferron Doss (Courtesy P. Doss)

Rite of Passage: A First Fire Jump Is Laid to Rest

by Doug Bird (McCall '57)

In June 1957, 19 young "Neds," including me, finished our initial smokejumper training in McCall, Idaho. I had completed the prescribed seven practice jumps, learned how to tie knots while suspended on the letdown apparatus, practiced making Allen rolls by jumping off the tailgate of the old, green Dodge pickup at 20 mph, and spent many classroom hours learning fire behavior, first-aid, and how to fill out fire report forms. Meryl Cables (IDC-48) and Paperlegs Peterson (MYC-47) had taken all my money in a poker game in the barracks one night. Before that, I had lost five bucks to Max Allen (MSO-48) on a bet that I could beat him in a

25-yard dash in our "Whites," running backwards.

After a couple of weeks of working my way up the jump list, an early morning call came for a Ford-load of eight jumpers to report to the Bridge Creek Fire. I was at last on my way to my *first fire jump*!

I don't remember who all the other jumpers were who flew with me on that wonderful, old, corrugated tin aircraft. I know that **Toby Scott** (MYC-57), another 1957 "Ned," was on board, as was **Miles Johnson** (MYC-53) and the squadleader, and my soon-to-be mentor, **Jack Helle** (MYC-54): a mix of rookie and seasoned jumpers. We made the jump on a grassy ridge with lots of room and no ground hazards. I think we all got into the jump spot easily with not much wind to scatter us around the mountainside. Not your typical jump in Salmon River country, as I would learn over the next four years. I was elated, proud, and extremely pleased with myself. I was finally a real smokejumper.

We got the fire out in a couple of days, taking turns pulling on a two-man crosscut saw to cut down the three-foot, lightning-struck ponderosa pine where the fire had started. We completed a good fireline right up against the black, spading up the fire area like a field freshly plowed and ready for planting potatoes. We "Neds" had to do the cold trailing and checking for hot spots, feeling around in the dirt for any residual heat and checking all the blackened branches with our bare hands. Our last meal on the Bridge Creek Fire was a stew made from leftover meat and vegetables, heated up in a metal water can. We had slept two nights in old, surplus World War II down bags under diamond-studded skies. All in all, a great time on the mountain!

The packout began at the top of steep pinegrass slopes leading down to the river. Miles showed me how to pack all my gear, except the short-handled shovel and the Pulaski, in the canvas elephant bag and slide it down the grass-slick, nearly vertical slope using my letdown rope to ease the bag's descent. The Salmon River Breaks were just too steep and slippery to negotiate with 90+ pounds on my back, especially since I weighed only 145 pounds. Of course, as we reached the last couple hundred yards, most of us somehow "accidentally" let go of the ropes and, man, did those bags bounce and fly all the way to the bottom. We then hiked down to the Middle Fork of the Salmon, where we swam and scrubbed off some of the ashes while waiting for the North Fork District assistant ranger to pick us up and take us back to Salmon City. The Ford would come over in the morning to take us back to McCall.

To celebrate my first jump, we all went to the Silver Spur

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

Saloon, where we spent the evening drinking and telling lies. We relived the jump we had just made: the old-timers telling the "Neds" how tough it used to be, how we'd probably get all busted up on our next jump, and how we could expect a 20-mile packout, *at least*, the next time. Jack Helle showed me how to soak a dollar bill in beer, then lay it flat on a wallet and toss it up to the ceiling where the bill would stick and the wallet would fall back to the floor. So I wrote "Doug Bird's First Fire Jump, July 14, 1957" on a dollar bill and stuck it to the ceiling of the Silver Spur. I wonder if it's still there.

Then Jack spotted an older guy (he must have been at least 30 years old)) sitting all by himself over at one of the tables, looking lonely and dejected. Jack invited him to join us, since no one should be depressed and alone when jumpers are celebrating. Turned out the guy was a Four Roses whiskey salesman, and sales were not going well. Perhaps Four Roses was just a bit pricey for the loggers and ranchers of Idaho and Montana. Or maybe he was simply a bad salesman. Anyway, he happened to have a couple of bottles with him and insisted we all take a sip just so we could tell him what we thought of the brand. I guess we couldn't make up our minds with only one drink, so we kept sampling until we'd emptied all the bottles. We all assured him, our words somewhat slurred, that his run of bad luck had nothing to do with the quality of his product.

About that time the bartender decided he'd had enough of our cutting up, playing Johnny Cash's "I'll Walk the Line" over and over on the jukebox, tossing wallets, and flipping coins to determine whose turn it was to pay for the beer chasers (for the whiskey he wasn't selling). He told us to leave. Jack, who had done his best to fairly assess Four Roses, had kind of settled down on the floor. So when we left we took turns dragging him down the street toward the warehouse and canvas cots awaiting us. On the way we passed a funeral home, where we spotted a busted wooden casket without a lid, propped up against the wall around back. We were tired of dragging Jack, so we put him in the casket, making him much easier to carry.

Someone, one of the old-timers I'm sure, said he knew of a place where we could get one more beer for the rest of the hump to the warehouse. We all agreed this was a great idea and told him to lead on. He did, and we wound up in the Salmon City "house of ill repute," seven inebriated smokejumpers staggering in under the weight of an unconscious kid laid out in a casket. This was too much for the "madam," who told us in no uncertain terms to "get the *#!% out of here." We left immediately, but in our haste left Jack behind! We collapsed on our cots and fell fast asleep. Several hours later, just as we were getting ready to head back to McCall, Jack came running up, very indignant. After all, he had awakened in a casket in the lobby of a bordello, his hands folded reverently around an empty Olympia beer can! He seemed to think this was not the way to treat a fellow jumper, but the other seven of us thought it was quite fitting, especially since it had happened to "Ol' Jack Helle."

My first fire jump! What an experience! I just couldn't

wait till the next one, and I stayed in and around the jumper organization for the next 30 years.

I think any young man would have done the same, don't you? 🐦

Doug Bird can be contacted at dmbird1@mac.com

Visual Symphony

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

Arctic night
All in darkness
Boreal forest
All in light

I dreamed
An ancient carillon
Amongst
The woods of my camp

And when I awoke
From the horizon
A bridge of sun
Closed the night

And treetops lit
Birch, spruce and poplar
Each distinct
In transient tone

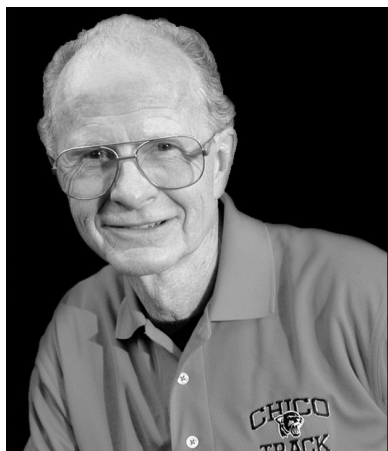
Sounding for me
A visual symphony
And
Tracking an arc
Of circumpolar light



John Culbertson



Sounding Off from the Editor



by Chuck Sheley
(Cave Junction '59)
MANAGING EDITOR

Guest Editorial

by John Marker (Associate)

CHUCK, YOUR COMMENTS are on target about current firefighting policies and pay. As a director of The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR), I have heard from many members and other retirees concerned about costs and fire fighting operations. NAFSR has established a fire management committee, under the direction of former USFS Deputy Chief Al West and NAFSR members with solid fire backgrounds, to try to sort out some of the key fire and leadership issues currently impacting the Forest Service fire programs. Committee members are asking active fire and resource managers for their perspectives on the issues.

Fire cost is a major issue, but in the minds of many NAFSR members and others the implementation of Appropriate Management Response (AMR) and a component of AMR, Wildland Fire Use (WFU), is a serious concern.

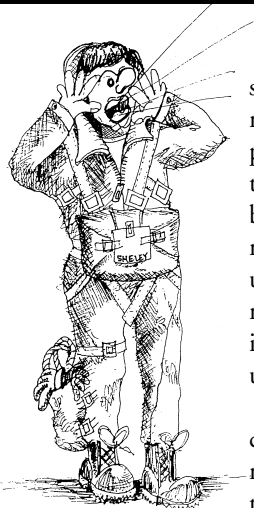
Briefly, AMR is management direction coming from the interagency Federal Wildland Fire Policy developed by the federal wildland agencies in cooperation with the states and other fire organizations in 1995. The policy recognizes the importance of fire as a tool in

ecosystem management and provides direction for the use of fire and control of fire based upon land and resource plans and integrated fire plans. It provides a full range of options for the land managers from full suppression to allowing a fire to function in its natural ecological role. Wildland Fire Use is the operational phase that allows fire managers the site-specific selection of how to manage unplanned ignitions in or out of wilderness areas.

The policy, as written, makes sense to most of the retirees I communicate with, but what upsets them is how the policy is being used. During the past several years, many of our members and colleagues have become increasingly concerned with what they see as fires running amuck in many western forests. Uneasiness increases when they hear and read that fires are "accomplishing management objectives" as more money is spent, more acres burned, and resources damaged or destroyed.

Questions by retirees to FS line officers about the rationale behind allowing the fires to get so big elicit responses ranging from safety issues, lack of resources for returning fire to the land and reducing fuel loading, which have only partially answered the questions. One of the reasons responses may not be more concise is the lack of up-to-date forest plans for use in decision making. Many plans are years out of date and often inadequate for today's fire situations.

However, there is also little said about damage to soils, watersheds, wildlife and fishery habitat (including endangered species), timber resources, recreation, and to local economies and public health. The true cost of fires (suppression costs, monetary costs of resource losses, plus economic and public health) are seldom discussed.



For the majority of us who spent careers attempting to manage the forests and protect people, this current approach to fire management is troubling. The majority of our members support the planned use of fire in the woods, but many of us believe what is going on now is not the proper use of fire on the land.

NAFSR wants the fire committee's efforts to help members understand the rationale for current fire policies and to use our collective

knowledge and experience as a positive help to the Forest Service as it works to manage the increasing complex and expensive challenge of wildfire protection and land management.

We have no illusion that NAFSR and its members have answers for all of the fire issues, but we hope we can contribute to the conversation that clarifies the mission of the national forests, their importance to the well being of the Nation, and how they should be protected from the ravages of wildfire.

When completed, the paper will be discussed with the Chief of the Forest Service and made available to NAFSR members and others. 📌

John has been involved in wildfire since 1953 when he was a member of Called-When-Needed fire crew in Pennsylvania. During college he worked as a firefighter in R-5, where he began his forestry career. During 33 years with the Forest Service, he has been a forester, district fire control officer, district ranger, fire overhead team member, regional fire operations officer in R-4, and managed the Forest Service's first national interface fire protection program. He retired as Director of Public Affairs for the Pacific Northwest Region. Since retirement he has been an interface fire consultant and partner in Wildland Firefighter magazine. Currently he and his wife own an orchard in the Hood River Valley, where he is a fire district commissioner.

The Start of the Fall of Long Tieng

by Ed Dearborn (Associate)

Editor's note: Edwin (Ed) Dearborn never was a smokejumper, but fought his first blaze – the Snake River Fire – as a 16-year-old Forest Service employee (though claiming to be 20) in 1949. He joined the Marines in 1950 and used that as a springboard for a long career in flying, including stints with Air America and Continental Air Services in Southeast Asia.

This story begins Dec. 17, 1971, when the North Vietnamese Army launched a full-scale attack on the Plaines des Jarres (PDJ) against all the firebases. Thai artillery units manned most of these bases.

Two of Continental Air Services Twin Otters were ordered Dec. 18 to Long Tieng (LS-21) to load with ammunition and supplies for the Thai firebases on the PDJ. The two Otters assigned this task made numerous trips for the airdrop of supplies.

They made these runs through heavy AAA fire, and both aircraft took some hits, resulting in some damage.

I flew one of the Twin Otters on another resupply mission for the firebases out of Long Tieng Dec. 19. I was briefed by the “customer” on the mission and had a chance to talk with **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58) about the present situation on the PDJ.

Jerry – whose nickname was “Hog” – was very hesitant to give me much information, as most of what he had was not confirmed. So I had very little to pass on to the flight crews, other than all the firebases and DZs were hot.

Continental Air Services continued to fly the resupply mission along with Air America right up to the last day. Some of the missions were successful, but most were not due to heavy AAA fire. The job was finished Dec. 20 as the PDJ was, for the most part, in NVA hands.

I spent Dec. 20-21 picking up survivors of the PDJ collapse. They were in terrible shape. I took the ones who were not badly wounded to Long Tieng; the others I took to hospitals in Thailand. I'd see Jerry on occasion, and the talk was always about whether or not Long Tieng could hold out against the NVA and its tanks. Jerry would be in his bunker most of the time.

I headed to California Dec. 23 to spend Christmas with my family. I would be there only a few days before I had to return to Laos, traveling to Vientiane Dec. 29. I learned on arrival that the NVA had taken Skyline Drive overlooking Long Tieng.

Everyone, including the ambassador, believed Long Tieng could fall to the NVA at any time.

It was decided that a rescue “cover and protection” (CAP) by Continental Air Services would be on station each night to keep track of the agency personnel in the event they had to move out of the area quickly. We were to keep a continuous radio watch with “Hog” and “Bamboo” from dusk until dawn.

It was to be our job to keep track of the agency people, should Long Tieng be overrun, and to keep track of their es-

cape route. We'd also send in vector choppers – at the appropriate time – to pick them up.

I loaded up a Twin Otter at 7 p.m., New Year's Eve with my emergency bag, a Thompson, coffee and a leather jacket. It was going to be a cold night flying CAP over Long Tieng. I had a very good co-pilot with me in Capt. Dan Cloud.

We took off from Vientiane for the 40-minute flight to Long Tieng, arriving over the base about 7:40, and setting up for orbit. I contacted Hog on a frequency the local forces and agency people used.

Daniels came up on the channel and said that, so far, all was quiet. I could hear other units on the selected frequency, Alley Cat – the C-130 night watch, and local small units checking in.

Not long after our arrival over the airport, word came in from the local troops that the NVA was on the move on the western side of Long Tieng's runway.

I called Hog and asked him what was going on. He said he didn't have all the information and was sure the bad guys were tuned into this channel. His last remark was, “We're about to have a New Year's Eve party down here, soon!”

I told him I'd find a hole in the overcast and try to get down to where I could see the runway and take a look for him.

Jerry said, “Negative! The ceiling is too low, and the NVA gunners could get a good shot at you.”

We maintained our altitude at about 5,000 feet. This afforded us clearance over some of the hills around Long Tieng. Still, it was barely enough as the airport runway's elevation was 3,100 feet.

Hog and I kept the conversation going as much as possible, talking about some of the great parties we survived. One in particular was when Hog came down to Vientiane and spent four days with me, bunking in my place at the Continental Air Services compound. I reminded him of the time in Tucson, Ariz., when I watched him and **Toby Scott** (MYC-57) give a bad impression of rodeo cowboys riding saddle broncs. I told Jerry that I still thought it was meant to impress all the young girls hanging on the fence.

I'd been up flying since 7 a.m. that day and was really beat. I told Cloud that I wanted to get about an hour's worth of sleep and asked him to take over. I wanted him to keep the aircraft in this same orbit, and stay in contact with Hog and the crew on the deck.

I went to the back of the aircraft and lay on the cold deck. We were not to be relieved for another two hours – at midnight – by another CAS Twin Otter.

Not long after I closed my eyes, word came to us that the NVA was on the runway. There was a tremendous explosion shortly thereafter. This woke me up, and Cloud shouted that the NVA was hitting Long Tieng.

I got back in the seat and took over the controls. Cloud had

already started us down through the overcast; we broke through right over the runway. While we descended, Cloud called Hog on the radio, but there was no answer.

Below the clouds, the ceiling was about 1,000 feet. We could see the ammunition dump and the storage area burning, and in the fire's glow we could make out some dark figures moving down the runway. I stayed inside the bowl surrounding the runway for 10-15 minutes trying to see what was happening, and whether the base was being overrun. Still no call from Hog.

There were people standing outside what I thought was Hog's bunker, and I'm sure they could see the Otter. I learned later they thought it was an NVA aircraft, and then they believed it was a U.S. forward air control (FAC). For whatever reason, no one to my knowledge took a shot at us. Lucky!

Finally, Hog came up on the radio and said he'd seen our aircraft. He gave us as much information as he could on the bombing of the ammunition dump. It was done by NVA sappers who were then caught. They admitted setting the charges in the ammunition boxes and the 500-pound bombs.

I took the Otter back up to a secure altitude and told Hog we were going to head back to Vientiane, as we were getting low on fuel and our relief was due soon.

Hog said all was quiet and he didn't expect any more trouble that night, and that they'd be able to hold out until morning. When we left for Vientiane after the other Otter came on station, I called Hog one more time and said, "Don't get your butt shot off, partner, and have a happy New Year."

I would not see Jerry again or talk to him until mid-March 1972. We still owned the southern half of Long Tieng and some of Skyline Drive, the northern portion of Long Tieng.

I went to Long Tieng to spend a few days with Jerry and to check on the airdrops by the CAS pilots on Skyline, north of the runway. I choppered in, landing on the south side of Long Tieng as the runway was still under heavy and constant artillery attack. A customer picked me up and drove me to Jerry's bunker.

I was shocked when I saw Jerry. He was unshaven, wearing old clothes and looking as though he hadn't had a good shower in a couple of weeks. He was sullen and not the good ol' Jerry I knew. He was tired and ready to get out.

The bunker looked just like a wartime bunker, with cans and bottles everywhere and weapons stacked against the wall.

Jerry was sure they couldn't hold out there much longer. He was sure things would get much worse.

He said, "We aren't making it here. I don't think we can hold out much longer. If it goes bad, I'm going to have to walk out of here."

Jerry "Hog" Daniels did not have to walk out. Gen. Vang Pao got his troops moving, and they pushed the NVA back out of Long Tieng and off Skyline Drive.

I would never see Jerry again.

Ed Dearborn received three Purple Hearts for wounds he suffered in the Korean War in 1952. It wasn't the last time he'd find himself in hostile territory.

Things were peaceful as he began his flying career with Aloha Airlines as a DC-3 pilot in 1959, where he stayed until joining Air America. Dearborn began flying Helio Couriers and Caribou for Air America, becoming chief pilot for the STOL program in 1962. He flew the first Caribou into Vietnam to support Special Forces in 1963.

Dearborn was assigned to the Central Intelligence Agency in July 1963 as air operations officer for the Congolese Air Force. He took over the program in the Belgian Congo and ran that for a year, then returned to Air America and the Caribou program.

He helped form Continental Air Services, a subsidiary of Continental Airlines, in June 1965 and was chief pilot and director of operations. In the parallel program to Air America, Dearborn flew the C-130, Twin Otter, Pilatus Porter and the Sky Van.

After leaving Southeast Asia in 1972, Dearborn had stints with Trans International Airlines and MGM Grand Air. He wrapped up his career with Boeing and Flight Safety as a program manager, then as an instructor on the Gulfstream G1V. 🇺🇸

My 80th birthday was June 24, 2008, and my granddaughter, Tarah Byrne, celebrated her 18th birthday 12 days earlier. I decided to go skydiving for my birthday.

When I told my granddaughter what I was going to do, she said, "Grandpa, I'd like to do that, too, and go with you!"

A person must be 18 to skydive legally.

We jumped July 5 in the wheat fields near the little town of Ritzville, Wash., about 60 miles west of Spokane. The weather was great—clear blue sky, warm, and a gentle breeze.

We made a tandem jump, two

Skydiving at 80 and 18

by Jerry Linton (Missoula '48)

people harnessed together; each of us had a jump partner. There were three other skydivers in our plane that day, two young men and a young woman.

It was fun to watch the others jump before it was our turn. We jumped at approximately 12,000 feet and were free-falling for about 50 seconds. Both of us had a nice landing.

Each of our jump partners had a video camera strapped to his head, and they recorded us leaving the plane, then free-falling, and our landings.

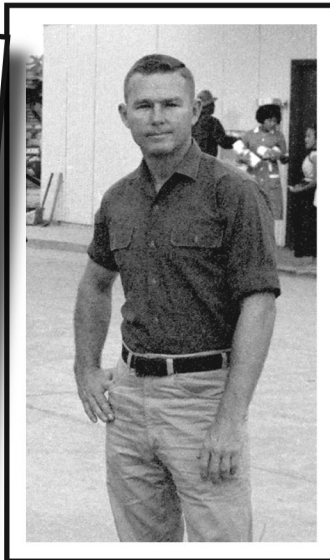
Such an exciting time for both of us, and an experience we'll never forget!



Jerry Linton and granddaughter
(Courtesy J. Linton)



Lee Gossett (RDD-57)



Tom Greiner (MSO-55)



Bobby Herald (MSO-55)

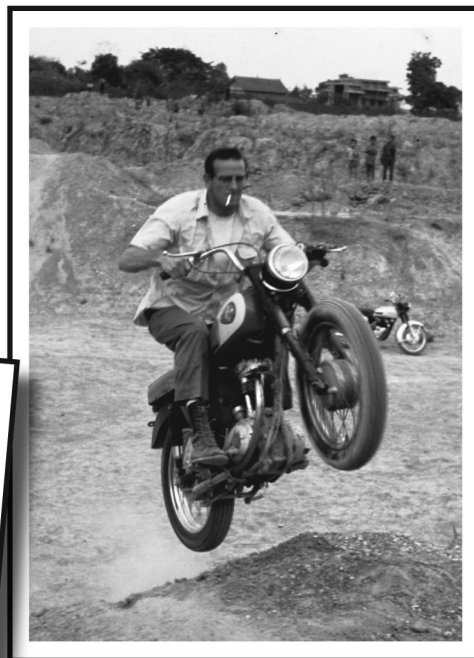


Smokejumpers With Air America

Photo's & Layout Design, by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



George Rainey (RAC-68)



Louie Banta (CJ-51)



Barry Reed (MSO-60)

Remembering “Animal Ed” Weissenback

by Karen Weissenback Moen

I have recently been looking through old photo books for photographs of Edward for **Johnny Kirkley** (CJ-64) to be used in *Smokejumper*. Looking at pictures of Ed brought back many happy memories of an absolutely glorious young man.

Edward was born in September 1942, in New York City, and resided in Queens through his high school years. As a child his mother let him hatch and raise baby cobras for the Bronx Zoo, and he was a constant amazement to his conventional, east coast family. He had one older sister, who now lives in New Jersey, and a brother, who lives in southern California. Both parents have passed away in recent years. As a sophomore in high school, Edward spent one year at a catholic seminary, as he hoped to become either a priest or Marist Brother. He then discovered girls and girls discovered him and he changed career plans. He played football for a year at Penn State and then traveled west to work as a logger in the Brookings area, spent a summer or two as a “ground pounder” for the Forest Service, fished in Alaska, and then began smokejumping in 1964 at Cave Junction, Oregon. He could hardly believe that he was actually paid to jump out of airplanes to fight fires!

As he was not a full-time student during this period, he was drafted into the army in 1964 and was part of the 101st Airborne out of Fort Campbell and sent to Vietnam for thirteen months. He served in the Highlands Campaign, where he was wounded and received a purple heart. He returned to Southern Oregon State College (now Southern Oregon University) in the spring of 1967. We met in the fall of 1967, and he introduced me to the world of sport jumping, kayaking, hiking, and other adventures. I was usually the one hanging around with the admiring look on my face rather than being an active participant in many of these activities. While at Southern Oregon, Edward was a Creative Writing major and was considered “promising” by his professors.

We married in July 1968 following Edward accepting a job with Air America. He left for Laos two weeks after our wedding, and I followed him two months later. He worked as an Air Freight Specialist (Kicker) until April 1969, when he returned to Redmond and smokejumping for the summer. We then returned to SOC/SOU for each of us to finish up our last year of college. Edward jumped again at Redmond in 1970 and had a terrible accident when his parachute malfunctioned and he drifted into a large tree.

He spent the rest of that summer working at the base with a badly injured back, and he missed out on a great jump season. We lived in an apartment in town and spent many evenings with other jumpers, sharing stories of jumps, past and present, and, from time to time, deep discussions



Karen and Ed Weissenback Laos 1971 (Courtesy D. Gamelin)

about the meaning of life and the universe. It was a great Redmond summer.

At the end of the season, Edward was recalled by Air America, got a doctor to sign off on his physical (taking the back brace off on his way into the doctor's office), and we left for Laos in September 1970. We settled in Vientiane a second time, meeting up with friends and Redmond jumpers from our 1968-69 stay, including **George Rainey** (RAC-68), **Charlie Yeager** (RAC-65), and **Gary Granquist** (RAC-65), who had also joined Air America. The work in Laos was always challenging for the men but the “jumpers” hung together. We had many dinners at our house where tales of jumping in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California were told and retold. In the summer of 1971, following a trip home to New York and Oregon, we learned that we were expecting our first child.

Edward, unfortunately, became a civilian MIA when the plane on which he was working was shot down on December 27, 1971 over a section of northern Laos controlled by the Chinese, who were building a road across northern Laos near the Chinese border. The Air America C-123 was off course and had gone too far north while trying to find a landing strip in northwest Laos, south of the Mekong River; the plane had actually gone north of the river due to heavy tail winds that day. Because of accurate intelligence reporting, there was never any doubt about what had happened, and it was always assumed that there were no survivors.

Edward was not among the POWs returning home in 1973, and there was never any expectation that he or other members of the flight crew would be found alive. (*Air America pilot George Ritter and co-pilot Roy Townley are MIA-Ed.*) Our daughter, Amber Celeste Weissenback, was born February 27, 1972 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Several years ago, the crash site was located and has been visited by a military recovery team. No remains were recovered, and it was not possible to excavate the site at the time. There is a possibility that the site will be excavated at some point during the period from 2012-2018. There was a slim possibility that the recovery team would have had a chance to visit the site in March 2008; however, the search and diplomatic protocols could not be worked out with the Laotian government. The crash site is reported to be outside a small village at the end of what used to be a rice field near the edge of the jungle. I still receive periodic intelligence reports, and all have indicated that witnesses reported the plane burned for three days (due to the cargo it was

carrying), and there were no parachutes seen nor survivors ever reported.

Edward loved animals of all sorts, physical and mental challenges, and his family and friends. He had the greatest sense of adventure of anyone I've ever known. He was an intelligent man possessing boyish charm, an optimistic spirit, a wicked sense of humor, physical strength and ability, and an enjoyment for life that was truly remarkable. He loved and lived every day of his life fully and with great enthusiasm and with the expectation that new and amazing adventures were just around the bend in the road.

I so appreciate the fact that so many of you remember Edward – the outpouring of affection and sharing of your own memories at the recent reunion in Redmond warmed my heart. The time with Edward was a part of my life that was very special. He would be honored to be remembered by you all as he considered jumpers to be very special people and valued the times that he had with those of you he called colleagues and friends. 🙏

Air America Kicker Reunion

by Johnny Kirkley (Cave Junction '64)

My old buddy **Clifford Hamilton** (CJ-62) deserves most of the credit for my motivation in rounding up our Kicker compadres for the June 2008 Air America Reunion in Portland. When I met Cliff during my rookie Smokejumping season in '64 at Cave Junction, Oregon, it became immediately apparent that his intellect, wit and California attitude challenged my southern competitive spirit. Since our first meeting some 40-odd years ago, we have made wagers around the world. There have been bets on pool at the Kerby Tavern in Oregon, bets on who could drink the most martini's at Joe's Bar in Hong Kong, bets on whatever pops up at the White Rose in Vientiane, Laos, and bets on shooting basketball in Harry's Bar in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

One of our more memorable wagers occurred at **Robert Moloney's** (MYC-64) Midnight Mine in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1974. The Dallas Cowboys were losing 17 to 23 to the Washington Redskins with less than a minute to play. Cliff offered me half off our bet if I conceded before Washington kicked off to the Cowboys with less than a minute in the game. "Ok," I said. With the clock winding down, Clint Longley completed a 50-yard touchdown pass to Drew Pearson, and Herrera kicked the extra point to give the Cowboys a 24 to 23 win. Of course, I was beside myself for losing faith and accepting his offer. It wasn't so much, accepting his half-off offer and snatching defeat out of the jaws of victory, as it has been listening to his description of those events for the past 34 years.

A more recent wager occurred September 2007 while we visited **Charley Moseley** (CJ-62) in Oklahoma. We were watching the Alabama/Arkansas football game being played in Tuscaloosa. Knowing us as Alabama alumni, Cliff wanted the Razorbacks if we gave him 3½ points. We refused that offer,

so he said, "Ok, I'll give y'all Arkansas and 6 points," assuming we wouldn't bet against our alma mater. Charley and I immediately took his bet. Cliff reveled in his glory when Arkansas scored the first 21 points and led most of the game. As the game approached the 4th quarter, I commented that not only were we going to win the bet, but the Tide would also win the game. He was shaking his head after Bama defeated Arkansas 41-38 losing him the bet. He kept saying, "It just ain't fair! It's not right to bet against your own school!" Hearing Cliff's sniveling, as he paid us cash while we obnoxiously laughed, was worth much more than the money we wagered.

During a phone conversation with Cliff in the spring of '07, we were discussing the annual Air America Reunion. Knowing that he had attended the majority of annual reunions since their inception, I asked, "What's the highest number of Kickers who have attended a reunion?"

"About twenty in Las Vegas when Richard Smith tried to get everybody together," he responded.

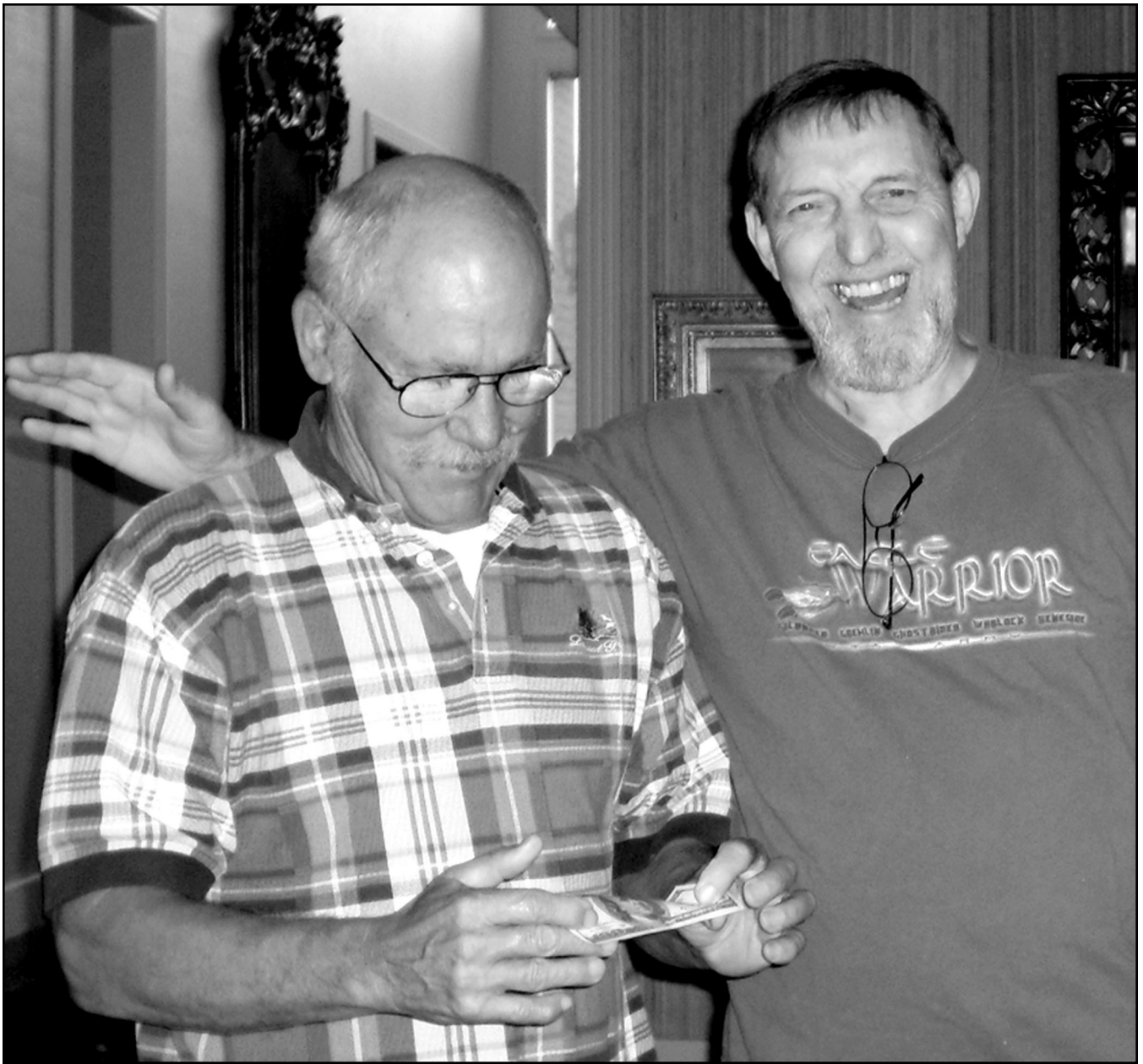
"I've got a bottle of 17-year-old scotch that I bought at the Vientiane Commissary in '67. Sure would like to have a drink with all those guys. How many you think I can get to come to Portland next year?"

"I doubt if you can get more than 20 to show," he said. His response became the challenge, so I tendered.

"I bet you the cost of the room during the Portland reunion that I can get more than 20 Kickers to come have a toast from my old bottle of whiskey."

"You sure you want to make this bet? You haven't got a chance of winning," he questioned negatively thus prompting my response and the challenge.

"Okay, it's a bet," Cliff accepted, thus starting my quest to



L-R: Cliff Hamilton, Charley Moseley. Money changing hands in Sugar Land, Texas. (Courtesy J. Kirkley)

locate as many Kickers as possible to come to Portland.

First, I tried to locate the Air America Air Freight Specialist (AFS) through a couple old address lists. Then, I contacted my dear friend Janie Mullins. She had the master list of employees turned over by the CIA to the Air America archives sent to me. After perusing the database, I realized that there were twenty-two names I personally knew who were not on the master list. In the early years prior to the establishment of Air America, Inc. in January 1962, most of the Kickers hired were Smokejumpers. As the war progressed the CIA, aka "The Customer," began hiring Green Beret Special Forces. The jumpers fondly knew them as "TK's," short for "Trained Killers."

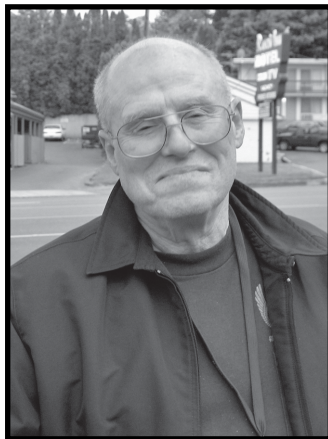
During my research it was pointed out to me that several names on the AFS master list were undercover operatives who didn't actually work as an AFS but needed to conceal their

missions. After combining the company's master list with those I had worked with and the memory of others, I had a total of ninety-nine names of Air Freight Specialist from 1962 to 1975. After a year of emails, postcards and phone calls, addresses were attained for 50 guys. The remaining forty-nine were either resting in peace or untraceable. Patty Sherman, AAM Treasurer, did a wonderful job securing a location to have our Kicker Dinner. All enjoyed good fun as we ate Thai food and toasted with 58-year-old scotch in commemorative Air America shot glasses supplied by fellow Kicker Dan Gamelin. All thirty-three Kickers who came to Portland brought interesting accounts of their adventures with Air America. That number earned me a nice, cozy suite courtesy of Mr. Hamilton.

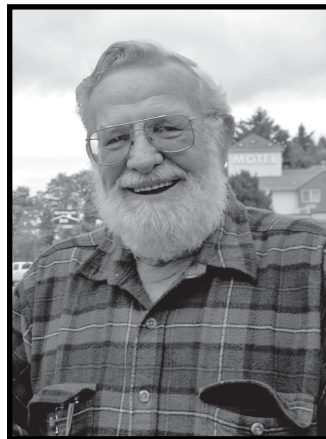
Hey, Clifford, here's a chance to recoup your deficit. Next football season, Bama against all comers 100 p/g... Wanna bet? (Better check to see if Utah is on the schedule-Ed.) 🍓



Dale Stone (MYC-57)



Barry Reed (MSO-60)



Lou Banta (CJ-51)



Chuck Yeager (RAC-65)

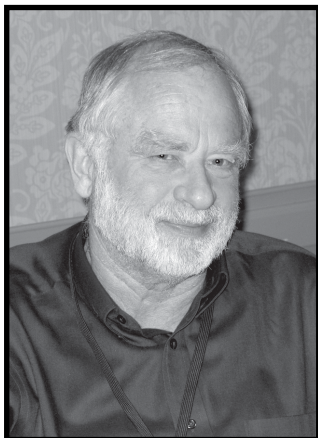


Air America Reunion Portland 2008

Photo's & Layout Design by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



Air America Air Freight Specialist



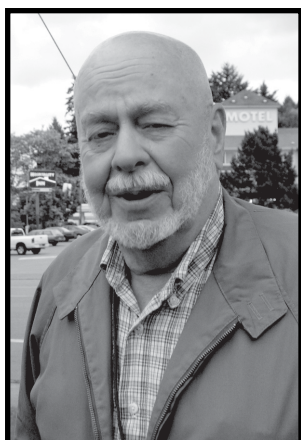
Hal Ward (CJ-62)



Hmong Dancers



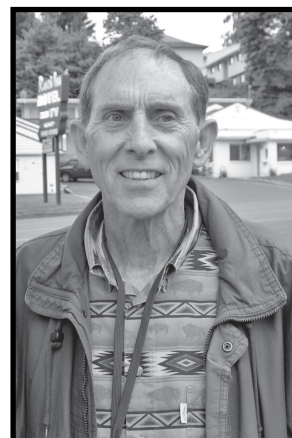
Karl Seethaler (MSO-55)



Don Courtney (MSO-56)



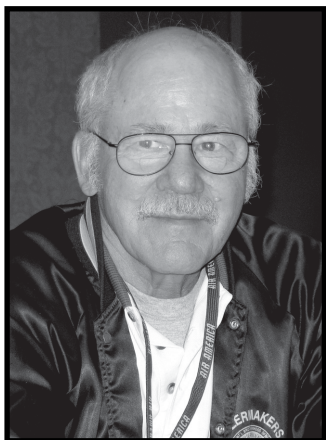
Phisit Intharathat & Nit • Mary & Lee Gossett (RDD-57)



Tom Butler (MSO-61)



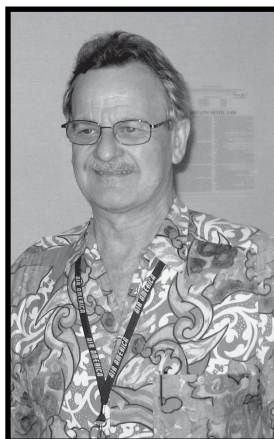
Kicker Dinner Toast



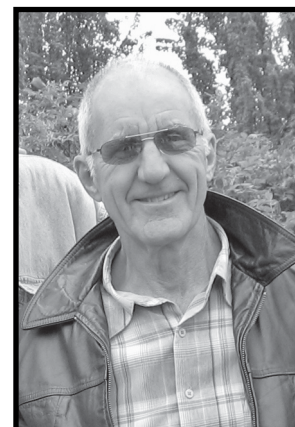
Cliff Hamilton (CJ-62)



Charley Moseley (CJ-62)



Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



John Manley (CJ-62)

Off Season In Afghanistan

Mike Hill (West Yellowstone '95)

Mike is working for an aviation contractor in Afghanistan. In a recent email he gives us a picture of some of the day-to-day operations. (Ed.)

During the off-season I have found the time to write another brief narrative for the magazine. It's been awhile since I've written because I have been outside of the U.S. since late 2005 working in Antarctica and Australia/New Zealand. Recently I spent a year in Afghanistan managing helicopter operations for a military contractor. Last summer I came back to the U.S. to re-qualify my USFS firefighting skills. While I was out on fires several old smokejumper friends asked me to tell them about some of the projects I am involved in overseas. This piece offers a slice of daily life as a military contractor in Afghanistan by the way of taking you along on a typical routine mission with one of my Russian flight crews.

What's Afghanistan like? By now I have been able to travel across most of this vast country viewing the year-round ice-capped, towering Himalayan peaks, the rolling foothills of the Central Asian steppe, and the wind-swept, brown desert sands down south. Afghanistan is made up of a diverse terrain with people who come from many different proud warrior traditions. They often can be found in its remote corners still living in ways similar to what they have for the past thousand years. The people here have withstood numerous invaders throughout their long history, and they, along with this rugged landscape, make this an extraordinary place. The blend of history, culture, and an amazing landscape are what attracted me to want to further explore this country.

On this mission I'm perched high above this awesome vista on the metal flip-seat inside the cockpit of a mighty Russian Mi26, the world's largest helicopter. Looking out over the snowy mountainous landscape, the horizon is broken up only by a few flat desert islands. Settled in between one of the Russian flight crew, we are flying deep inland over hostile country. Several helicopters have already been lost on operations here. If things go wrong, I will be the ground contact with the military in the fight to come.

What are we doing with helicopters in this place? You name it. We get people off the dangerous roads and help when needed. We are the link that keeps several key outposts deep in Taliban country open. Anything, anywhere, we can get it done.

When the fighting resurfaced in Afghanistan, the Russian aircraft became the preferred type of contract helicopters. These aircraft were developed during the Soviet/Afghan war and succeed in this harsh environment, and these Eastern flight crews have had proven experience in this terrain.

Is it dangerous here in Afghanistan? Nightly rocket attacks can be the norm; suicide bombers are a very real threat when

you are outside the wire. Helicopter crashes, ambushes and kidnappings for ransom are always possible. We stay alert and always plan our operations out to the finest detail.

The Mi26's cockpit is about the same size as a C-130 cargo plane's cockpit with several workstations. On this early morning flight there are six of us on board, thousands of feet up buzzing across the blue skyline. While Vladimir and Igor man their workstations as chief pilot and navigator, outside our bubble window I can see the dust being kicked up by three Taliban riding dirt bikes. They are wearing their black turbans with AK-47s slung over their shoulders and are spread out in a line with long gaps between, in case they come under attack.

We will soon drop down into our first outpost of the day to drop off the much-needed supplies of food, communication gear, ammo and mail. Another day at the office! I stand up and fold the hearing protection headset down over my ears. I head back with the loadmaster as he checks the load, and I prepare for our landing by gearing up in an assault vest complete with camelback, spare food, survival kit, GPS, magazines and M-4 rifle. Setting up for landings and rising up for take-offs tend to be the time when things can go wrong.

I feel privileged to have been selected to work here with this team. The Russian crew is strong and experienced. Most are ex-military and have had unique experiences all over Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East with this unbelievably powerful Mi26 helicopter. This is an interesting part of the world. Like those who have had the chance to work other remote overseas assignments, I have been able to accumulate valuable skills that continue to help me adapt, survive and thrive.

I have always had a passion for travel and adventure. It's only a matter of time before I see some of you again and, until that time, I'll look forward to when we can fight fires and sit around a campfire in some remote forest and swap a few more stories. 🍷

"Smokejumper" will publish a second article in the July issue in which Mike gives more background on the current situation in Afghanistan.



Mike Hill in front of the Mi26



Bob Moloney (MYC-64)



Cliff Hamilton (CJ-62) & Tom Butler (MSO-61)



Karl Seethaler (MSO-55)



Mick Swift (CJ-56)

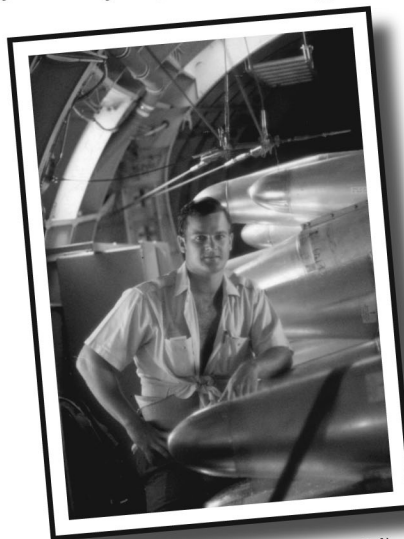


Smokejumpers With Air America

Photo's & Layout Design, by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



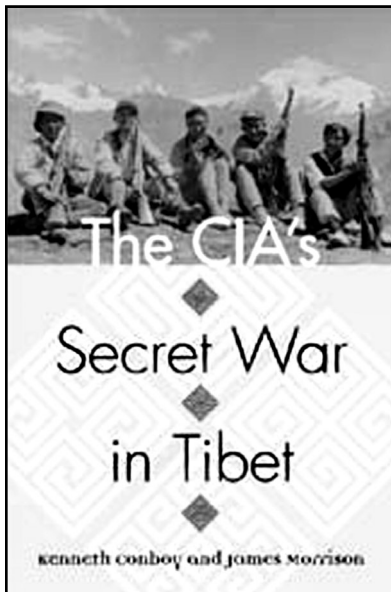
John Manley (CJ-62)



Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

BOOK REVIEW

by Carl Gidlund (Missoula '58)



The CIA's Secret War in Tibet
By Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison

University Press of Kansas, 2002
320 pages, 24 photographs, 9 maps,
hardcover, ISBN 978-0-7006-1159,
\$34.95

"The CIA's Secret War in Tibet" is an in-depth description of the clandestine service's attempts to thwart the Communist Chinese Government's takeover of that tiny country. And smokejumpers had a part in those efforts because the McCall and Missoula bases were fertile grounds for Central Intelligence Agency recruiters in the '50s and '60s.

While thoroughly describing the intricacies of international diplomacy and our nation's efforts to subvert the Chinese, the book also provides details of the work many of our brothers were involved with in that ultimately-failed effort.

Because of their expertise in parachuting and cargo handling, the jumpers were assigned duties in those fields, including teaching Tibetan volunteers their skills.

One of the first assigned was **Jack Wall** (Missoula '48), a veteran of early '50s efforts launched from

Taiwan against the new Communist government that had taken over mainland China. Later, Wall was part of a cadre that trained Tibetan recruits, who were smuggled into the U.S. for training at Camp Hale, Colorado.

Another early agency operative was **Gar Thorsrud** (Missoula '46), also a veteran of the earlier Taiwan mission, which involved inserting agents into China and North Korea. He began his agency service in 1951.

The book's authors describe the agency's rationale for recruiting those men and others who followed: "For the CIA, the smokejumpers were attractive on a number of counts. Not only were they fit and adventurous, but the job entailed learning the basics about parachuting and air delivery techniques. Smokejumpers, in fact, were on the leading edge with equipment such as steerable chutes and skills, such as rough-terrain jumping. Moreover many – like Thorsrud – were promising college students who volunteered for the task during summer break."

According to the book, Thorsrud and other jumpers worked the Taiwan operation for two years, then left the agency. He returned for a career beginning in 1956 when he was assigned to find drop zones in Tibet and to select aircraft and crews for missions over that nation which had been invaded by troops from the Peoples Republic of China.

In the fall of 1958, Thorsrud recruited **Roland "Andy" Andersen** (Missoula '52), **Bill Demmons** (Missoula '51) and **Ray Schenck** (Missoula '56) as cargo kickers for the Tibet mission.

The book quotes Anderson: "It was perfect because we could do Asian operations during the winter and spring, then be home for smoke jumping in the summer."

They were initially dispatched to

Okinawa where they scraped off identifying numbers and insignia from a C-118 – the military version of a DC-6 – then flew to a base in East Pakistan. From there, they were dispatched for clandestine drop missions to friendly Tibetan guerrillas.

Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson (McCall '47) also joined the Tibet team as a kicker in 1958 and also trained Tibetan paratroopers.

Thomas "T.J. Thompson (Missoula '55) became the head of the parachute riggers supporting the Tibetan operation out of Agra, India, in 1959. The book notes that he would later become a world-renowned parachute designer. In 1981 he returned on a CIA-sanctioned trip to inspect the rigging facility he'd helped establish two decades earlier. "Not only was the facility in great shape," he said, "but there were still some of the Tibetan riggers I had trained."

Miles Johnson (McCall '53), his brother **Shep** (McCall '56) and **John "Tex" Lewis** (McCall '53) were recruited in late 1959. By that time, unmarked C-130s were replacing the C-118 as platforms for personnel and cargo drops. **Andersen, Demmons and Art Jukkala** (Missoula '56) were the first kickers from the new planes.

In the book, Shep recounts he was tending cattle on his Idaho ranch when he got an urgent message to come to the phone.

"I thought my mother was sick, but it was another smokejumper saying that I was needed in Washington. The next day I bought a sports coat and flew to D.C., where I met some of the CIA officers, including Gar [Thorsrud]. We spent ten days looking over maps. Then they gave me an advance in pay; it was the first time I had handled a \$100 bill."

In 1961, **Lyle Brown** (Missoula '54) joined the Tibet operation. According to the book, he "had been

busy kicking cargo to guerrilla outposts in the highlands of north-eastern Laos when he got the call to report to Takhli [Thailand] in early December.

“Fresh to Southeast Asia after a tour training Cuban paratroopers for the Bay of Pigs, he exemplified the rugged ideals that the CIA saw in the aerial firefighting community: ‘We were good under adverse conditions,’ he reflected. ‘We didn’t need a martini, but would be just as happy with some C-rations and a cup of coffee around a campfire.’”

According to the book, “By the full moon cycle of January 1960, nearly a dozen jumpers were assembled on Okinawa.” They then flew to a Pakistani airfield.

Brown’s first Tibet mission was with the Johnson brothers, “squeezed

into the back of a packed Hercules.” Behind them on the flight line was a similarly loaded C-130 with another three smokejumpers. Skirting the Nepal-Tibet border, they dropped their loads of weapons and ammunition to waiting Tibetan guerrillas.

Two other jumpers, **Ed Beasley** (McCall ’52) and **Bruce Lehfeldt** (Missoula ’54), are mentioned in notes at the end of the book, but no other references are made concerning them.

Some small errata: The book refers to Miles Johnson as a Missoula jumper. He actually trained in McCall. And, the authors claim that a Tibetan jumper balked at exiting the aircraft, grabbing kicker Andersen in an attempt to remain with the aircraft. Andersen says that isn’t true; the jumper accidentally got

tangled in Andersen’s radio headset cord, which he pulled off as he willingly leapt from the ramp of a C-130.

There’s much more to the book, of course, including a cast of hundreds of Tibetans, most of whom are named so that it reads rather like a Russian novel. There’s also a passel of Indians, other CIA operatives, the Dalai Lama and his relatives and followers, plus Presidents, Secretaries of State, ambassadors and some fairly good descriptions of various cargo and personnel drops.

If you’re a student of mid-East history, you’ll enjoy the book. But if you’re principally interested in smokejumper history, this review covers most of the jumper-related Tibet operations described in the book. 🍷

Remembering Everett L. “Sam” Houston (McCall ’71)

by Murry Taylor (Redding ’65)

It was a warm, early August, smoke-filled afternoon when Sam’s friends and family gathered under the great oaks on the north bank of Redding’s Caldwell Park to honor his life and passing. As emerald swirls and upwellings of the Sacramento River flowed silently by, Neptune P2V retardant planes moved back and forth across the sky working fires to the west. The resonance of their big radial engines seemed a perfect background to Sam’s years both as a smokejumper and then cargo kicker for Air America in Southeast Asia. **Don Bell** (IDC-69) and **Rick Russell** (FBX-77) were there. **Tony Beltran** (IDC-69) and wife, Dede, were also present.

A bulletin board near the river’s edge held several dozen photos of Everett: as a boy growing up on a farm near Marysville; the day of his marriage to Susan; holding John, his first-born, high over his head, smiling; playing with his two boys (John and Matt); and living his life as father, husband and friend. In the center of the photo group was an enlargement of a handsome young man sitting in the cockpit of a C-123, looking back through the companion-way grinning mischievously.

Suddenly the rumble of fifty or more motorcycles—all ridden by ex-Special Forces guys—broke the solemnity of our gathering. There they came, across the bridge, heading our way, each flying an American flag and wearing the

colors, insignias and patches of their various units. After they lined up their bikes in the parking lot, we all gathered up and formed a circle around a giant oak to listen to Larry Trimble, the group’s representative. With Susan, John and Matt standing before him, after a short prayer he spoke these words:

“On behalf of the Special Forces Operations Association and at the request of its president, I would like to present Susan with this Special Operations Memorial Plaque. This plaque is to honor Sam. During the Vietnam War he was a member of an elite commando unit, MACV/SOG, code-named Studies and Observations Group (SOG), a top-secret operations force and the forerunner of today’s Delta Force and Seals. As highly-skilled Green Berets, they were the bravest of the brave and the most highly decorated force of that war. Sam ran many clandestine, covert-type operations behind enemy lines to recover downed pilots or rescue other teams that had been overrun by the NVA (the North Vietnamese Army). Not only were men rescued, but by giving them immediate medical aid Sam saved many lives.”

Susan, John and Matt were then presented with the Special Operations coin and each given an American flag.

For the remainder of the afternoon we enjoyed a barbecue and stood around visiting and remembering Sam. Members of the Redding Fire Department arrived in three

trucks, not so much to honor Sam, but more I think to show their respect for John who had recently become one of them. Several people rose to speak of Sam's life and the value of his friendship. Although most of us knew Sam as "Doc Sam" during his years as a smokejumper, it was clear that during his years as a Family Nurse Practitioner he had touched and healed many. Joan, a friend of the family, had put together a folder containing a collection of messages that has been posted in the *Redding Record Searchlight's* webpage obituary section.

Here's two:

"Working with Ev changed my life forever. I thank God I was able to be near such an awesome man during the hard times of his life. It is hard to believe I will never hear him call down the hall for me again, 'Where's my nurse,' nor will I ever again be able to tease him by calling him a bleeding heart liberal. I give thanks every day that I was blessed enough to be part of his life. I am glad that his family was with him in the end. The world will be a dimmer place without his shining presence to guide those in need. We will miss you, Everett. Until we meet again, Heather Allen, Whitmore, Calif."

And this:

"I had the pleasure of working with Everett in the Family Practice Department. He was one of the smartest men I've ever known in my whole life. His compassion for his patients was tremendous; however, he never allowed anyone to run over him. He had the deepest respect for his co-workers and it was well deserved. I loved listening to his experiences and life stories, but most of all, under that tough exterior was a real human with feelings and a huge heart, especially for his family. I will miss his smile, his stories, but most of all I will miss him. My thoughts and prayers are with the family." Cheryl Sharrah, Anderson, California.

Other comments from various entries include:

"His passing will not only leave a hole in the heart of family and friends, but also in the community."

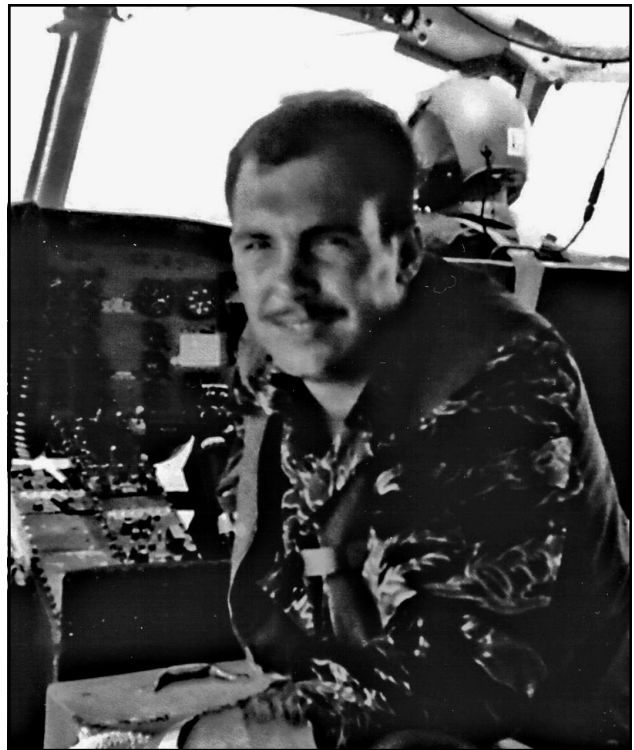
"As a warrior and a healer, it just made us respect and miss him all the more."

". . . a friend who greatly impacted my life."

Sam's career as a jumper began in McCall in 1969. He jumped there two years, then after a stint in Asia with Air America, came to Alaska in '73 and stayed until '77. Unlike most smokejumpers who only knew Sam during his years jumping, he turned out to be my friend for the next 33 years as well. After he quit jumping he located not far from my place in Yreka, California, where he worked with a local doctor as a Physicians Assistant.

During those bachelor years we'd spend Saturday evenings sitting in his front room, drinking beer and lamenting the women (lack of) situation in small town America. Then came Susan and marriage. I stood with them as Sam's best man. From then on I was part of the family. For all this time Sam was not just my friend, but my doctor as well.

Having observed him with a few of his patients, I often accused him of having the bedside manner of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. "What?" I would hear him snarl at them. "You feel bad? What do you expect? You smoke! You're fat! Of course



Everett Houston (Courtesy John Houston)

you feel bad."

Each spring when I'd leave for Alaska he'd give me some pills (antibiotics mostly), a few notes and his phone numbers. Sometimes I'd call from McGrath or Galena while jumping fires out West.

"Sam, I've got a bad sore throat and feel weak."

"How many hours of overtime do you have?"

"I should break 500 next week."

"Good, then I can charge you double."

"I take it back, I meant 200."

"What color's your phlegm?"

"Sort of greenish-yellow and kind of lumpy."

"Green and lumpy? Oh, that's unfortunate. You're probably going to die."

Then, after a moment of being delighted with himself, he would prescribe the proper pills from the stash he'd sent with me. Invariably I would get better and go on fighting fire with no downtime. For a while I suffered with boils. He cured them with special doses of Zinc. When I had allergies, he suggested I was lactose intolerant and I was. From the time I met him until his death he handled all my medical needs and was unfailingly brilliant at it.

As most of you remember, Sam was big (220 lbs), strong and very athletic. Out of the 65 on the Alaska crew, he was the fastest on the rope climb for all the five years he jumped there. He also could do more pull-ups than anyone. Once, in a contest with **Tom Hilliard** (MYC-67) and **Jim McGehee** (MSO-71) he almost did more than the two of them put together.

As both warrior and healer the story that seems most telling about Sam is the time he broke Hilliard's neck. Hilliard had been a Captain in the Marines and thus the

two had this running banter against each other. Sam referred to Hilliard as "Hill Jerk," and Hilliard to Sam as "Pukeston." One morning during PT they were wrestling in the sawdust pit under the pull-up bars. Sam had Hilliard in a headlock. Hilliard had a scissor grip around Sam's mid-section. Neither would give up. Finally as PT time came to an end, Sam told Hilliard, "Dammit, Tom, give up. Give up or I'll break your neck." Hilliard made a desperate move to free himself. Sam gave a quick twist to Hilliard's head then flopped him into the sawdust with a, you guessed it, broken neck. For the next three days Sam looked after Hilliard, confined to his barracks room, stuck in bed with a neck collar on. Sam took him food and a variety of pills.

As a solid jumper and good fireman, Sam never needed to throw his weight around on fires. He was a natural leader/fireboss, a common sense guy with no need to push himself on anyone. Along with **Bill Neumeister** (MSO -68) he was instrumental in starting Alaska's EMT program. That's about the time a lot of jumpers began to call him Doc Sam.

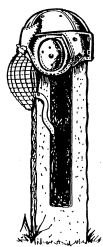
One of the messages on the *Record Searchlight* webpage was from **Rod Dow** (MYC-68), one of Sam's rookie bros:

"Isn't a person's life amazing. I read all these remembrances of Everett Houston's life and they remind me so vividly of him. But a person has more than one life packed into one's years. First off, none of us called him Everett. Never. To us he was "Sam" or "Doc Sam." We jumped with

him in McCall and Fairbanks. It was a different environment than the life he has had with the medical profession and with his family. Rest assured, though, we are all talking about the same guy. Honest, straight-forward, interesting, valuable. Did you ever notice the way he had the exact same demeanor whether he was talking about world shaking tragedies, Saigon nightlife, or yesterday's breakfast? Does everybody know that he was a terrific high school 440 yard runner? One of the fastest 20' rope climbers in California? He had enormous upper body strength. Yes, I will miss him, too. I made him promise me to take me on a tour of Saigon when I meet him on the other side. My best wishes to Matt, John and Susan.

As the hours passed and the shadows lengthened, that time that we take now and then to honor those no longer with us came to an end as surely as each day comes and goes. Still, in that moment, I felt a large amount of pride for being part of a group that thought so much of my friend, Doc Sam.

Saying our goodbyes we hugged and cried; the motorcycle men rode away; the fire trucks left for their duty stations; the river continued its silent but steady flow to the sea. As Don Bell and I got into his car, we looked up and watched a retardant plane making its way across the sky, heading west, loading and returning, fighting fire, doing its work, keeping the faith. Surely, I thought, if Sam were still here with us, he would have us all be doing the same. 🕯



Off The List

We want to know! If you learn of the 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.

Gordon C. Cross (Cave Junction '51)

Gordon died November 25, 2008, of complications from pneumonia. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Forestry and jumped at Cave Junction for three seasons interrupted by two years in the Army. Following in the footsteps of his father, a famous Alaskan bush pilot John Cross, Gordon became a commercial airline pilot. Gordon started his career with Wien Air Alaska in 1955. He retired to Las Vegas in 1990.

Charles D. "Chuck" Parker (Missoula '47)

Chuck died December 10, 2008. After attending a year at Montana State University, he joined the Merchant Marines during WWII and later volunteered for the Army and was discharged as a captain. After the war he finished his degree at Montana State and received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1953. Chuck spent four years on staff at Iowa and then returned to Missoula where he founded the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology at

Montana State. He spent several decades teaching and running a clinic that helped provide speech and hearing services throughout Montana.

Philip B. Stanley (Missoula '43)

Phil, 89, died November 7, 2008, in Polson, Montana. He was born in China to missionary parents. Phil attended Oberlin College and was drafted into the Civilian Public Service in 1942. He fought fire and maintained trails in forests on the west coast. It was during this time he heard that the fledgling smokejumper program was having trouble getting and keeping able-bodied firefighters due to the demands of WWII. As a result of his letter writing campaign to Region 1 and Washington, D.C., the CPS-103 smokejumper unit was started in May 1943. Some 225 conscientious objectors kept the smokejumper program going from 1943-45. With a large number of young men raised on farms in the mid-west, the group was known for their ability to work long and hard. Phil opened

a photography store in Missoula after the war and eventually retired to Polson in 1990.

Herman J. "Jack" Heikkenen (Idaho City '51)

Jack died in Norfolk, Virginia, October 22, 2008, of Leukemia. He was a graduate of the University of Michigan where he obtained his B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in Forestry. Jack was an officer in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. He taught Forestry at the University of Washington, Virginia Polytechnic and Virginia Tech. Jack was a much-published professor and leading authority on Forest Entomology.

Edward C. Bangle (Missoula '47)

Deceased December 30, 2007.

Dail J. Butler (Idaho City '51)

Deceased September 3, 2008.

James F. "Jim" Page (Cave Junction '60)

Jim died November 26, 2008, in Greenville, North Carolina. He graduated from North Carolina State University in 1963 with a degree in Forestry. Jim started his Forest Service career as a smokejumper at Cave Junction. In 1963 he and his wife, Sarah, drove the Alaska Highway to his first permanent job on the Chugach N.F. After eight years in Alaska, Jim worked for the USFS in six other states and

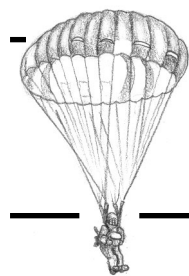
retired in 1996 as Forest Supervisor on the Monongahela N.F. in West Virginia.

Richard C. Gettman (Redding '72)

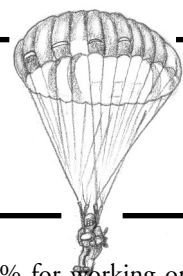
Richard died July 23, 2008, in Fall River Mills, California. He jumped at Redding in 1972, was a hotshot and firefighter with the Forest Service at Mt. Shasta, California. Richard was an Air Force veteran of Vietnam and suffered from exposure to Agent Orange.

Willard S. Krabill (Cave Junction '45)

Willard died January 6, 2009, in his home in Goshen, Indiana. Dr. Krabill was a leading figure in health care in the Goshen area. During his career he delivered more than 2,700 babies to local residents, instituted courses in human sexuality at Goshen College and served on numerous boards and ethics committees. He graduated from Goshen College in 1949 and received his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in 1953. He also received a master's degree in public health from U.C. Berkeley in 1973. In the 50s Dr. Krabill served a three-year Mennonite Committee term working with leprosy patients in Vietnam. He started in family practice after returning from Vietnam and later became the physician for Goshen College until his retirement in 1991. He was a member of the CPS-103 smokejumpers. 🌲



Odds and Ends

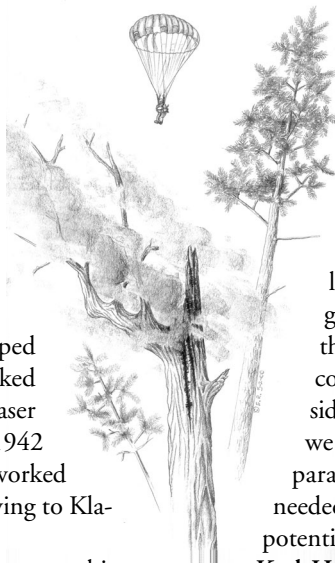


by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to Don Wahl (MSO-63), Jim Klump (RDD-64), Leo Cromwell (IDC-66), and Bob Whaley (MSO-56) who just became our latest **Life Members**.

George Cross (MSO-74) forwarded me a copy of a document which included a job resume written by **Rufus Robinson (MSO-40)** who, along with **Earl Cooley (MSO-40)**, made the first fire jump in U.S. history July 12, 1940. It is interesting that Robinson only jumped two seasons and, in addition to jumping, worked the Moose Creek R.D. in 1941 as a smoke chaser and lookout. He quit the Forest Service in 1942 and moved to Santa Cruz, Calif., where he worked as a foreman for a roofing company until moving to Klamath Fall, Oregon, in 1948.

Chuck Pickard (MSO-48) has been forwarding me news bits relating to my editorials concerning the budget-breaking expense of police and fire protection as a part of city budgets. It seems that in Peabody, Mass., the police union has proposed that Sept. 11 be added as a paid holiday. Officers



would receive an extra 25% for working on that day. No members of the Peabody force were killed in the Sept. 11 attacks.

Two of the great centerfolds created by **Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)** in past issues have featured historic photos from the collections of **Wally Dobbins (MSO-47)** and **Ted Dethlefs (MSO-47)**. Those centerfolds have provided an excellent look into the roots of the smokejumper program. I've gotten several appreciative comments on this section of the magazine. If you have a photo collection that would make a good centerfold, consider sending it to me. We're looking for pictures where we can see faces and identify individuals. Pictures of parachutes, trees and airplanes are *not* the content needed in this section of the magazine. If you have a potential centerfold, please get ahold of me.

Karl Hartzell (NIFC-70): "I must offer a personal note regarding the much-appreciated and accurate portrayal provided by **Francis Mohr (IDC-63)** in his "Tribute to Smokey Stover" (*Smokejumper* Oct. 2008). I was a fortunate recipient of Smokey's easygoing, but attentive and concerned

shepherding while I worked under him in Boise. Francis' perceptions of Smokey's endearing personality and management style closely match those of mine. But I would like to take issue with one notable error in Francis' recounting. In August of 1971, Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton *did indeed* visit us at the Boise loft. On the morning of his proposed visit, I donned some crazy patterned pants and a loud-colored shirt, as Francis described most of the guys doing. I was stationed at the desk in the receptionist's office, being somewhat immobile due to a leg cast incurred as a result of an on-the-job injury. I well remember Rogers Morton coming through "my" office after (I believe) he had briefly visited the cast of circus performers in the loft. He proceeded with a rather quirky smile, but offering me warm wishes for recovery just the same. Smokey's anxiety over the Secretary's visit was well-grounded and justified!"

I have three members who have moved and not left a mailing address. If anyone knows where I can reach the following, please let me know: **David R. Cuplin** (MSO-48) and **Robert E. Parcell** (MSO-71).

Fred Donner (MSO-59) has written many articles for *Smoke-jumper* and wants to let readers know that he has a new email: freddonner@frontiernet.net

Bob Gara (MYC-51): "I report that a friend, fellow smoke-jumper and colleague, **Jack Heikkinen** PhD (IDC-51), passed away on October 21. He died of leukemia. I met Jack during our first year at the McCall base, as he had the bunk next to me. I quickly learned he was extremely proud of his Finnish heritage as he placed a plywood sheet below the mattress of his cot. I asked him about this arrangement, and he said, 'All Finns, by their very nature, cannot tolerate softness regardless of what form it comes in.' He had a forestry degree from University of Michigan and several years later went back for a PhD. in forest entomology. I met Jack again while he was leaving the University of Washington faculty to become an associate professor of forest entomology at VPI in Blacksburg, Virginia. In fact I took up the position at UW that Jack vacated. He became a well-known researcher on interactions between trees and the insects that kill them. He always felt that tree-killing insects simply were the coup de grace of sick trees. This

notion was studied by dozens of colleagues and graduate students to see if this basic relationship was true. Jack and Fred Knight wrote an important textbook in forest entomology called *Principles of Forest Entomology*, a book used by forestry students around the world. One of Heikkinen's favorite sayings (paraphrasing Conan Doyle) was, 'As a good Finn, I know it's a capital mistake to theorize before the main evidence is in.' I might also add that Jack's brother Ed was a smokejumper at IC in 1953 and 1954 and he died in 1980."

Gov. Ted Kulongoski (Oregon) has nominated the founding president of the World Forestry Center in Portland to lead the Oregon Board of Forestry. **John Blackwell** (MYC-64) is a former state forester and former chairman of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission.

Jim Rabideau (NCSB-49): "Enjoyed the January issue, especially the story about **Jim Allen** (NCSB 46), who was one of my squadleaders at NCSB in 1949. The description of his caring for his men was accurate beyond detail. I saw him take over from a squadleader, who was bent on causing problems for a rookie who was having a difficult time with the letdown procedures. The problem stemmed from an ill-fitting harness. The squadleader acted as if he cared less. Jim spotted the problem, and the two of them went off to the loft to get a properly fitting harness. On return, the rookie successfully went through the letdown procedure. Jim was a former paratrooper, who made one of the combat jumps in Europe in 1944, and was wise to equipment needs. The other squadleader seemed bent on embarrassing rookies rather than helping out. They don't come any better than Jim in my opinion."

Starr Jenkins (CJ-48): "Thanks for your hard-hitting editorial on the many excesses of firefighters' pay now going on. San Luis Obispo is going through the same situation as Vallejo (facing bankruptcy) through the unions gaining compulsory arbitration. The arbitrator was given only one choice: to accept the town's offer or the union's demand. No chance of any middle ground. The city council predicts bankruptcy in about five or six years. I'm going to send copies of your editorial to our city council and Gov. Schwarzenegger. Thanks for picking this hot potato for your editorials." 🍌



NSA Trail Crew



Five-in-One

by **Jim Cherry** (Missoula-57)

Recently a lightning strike close to my house fried my All-in-One printer/copier/fax/scanner. Bummer! I had to buy a new one. Also, I recently had the opportunity to make use of one of those old, reliable stand-bys... 3 in 1 oil. It proved to be a real work saver for me.

I was thinking about how sometimes there is more than one benefit in a single item. That is certainly the case in my life as I put in five weeks of volunteering with the NSA Trail Maintenance (TM) Program this summer.

Actually, my summer began in early May when I went to NE Minnesota and hand planted 2000 tree seedlings at a camp I once directed in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). That took 3 days and then I

went to Grand Marais, Minnesota, and learned how to build timber frame structures. The camp had 40 of their 60 buildings destroyed in the 2007 Ham Lake Fire and the timber frame structures would be the beginning of cabin replacement. That time provided multiple benefits in that it proved to be a good physical workout together with the opportunity to renew some old friendships, establish new ones and, on top of that, it was a case of doing some good for an organization that was in need of help. While in Grand Marais I also had the chance to have some special conversations with the USFS Gunflint Ranger District... but more on that later.

Early June had me heading to McCall, Idaho, for the NSA Board of Directors meeting and another benefit... a first ever visit to that famous jumper base during their reunion and an opportunity to present a special NSA Life Member memorial plaque that honored five special people out of McCall's rich history... four jumpers and one pilot. (You can read their histories and the story behind the plaque in the October 2008 issue of *Smokejumper* magazine.)

Leaving McCall, I headed for Stanley, Idaho, to visit with **Tom Kovalicky** (MSO-61) and to scout the TM fence-building project that would be coming up in July. After that I headed for West Yellowstone to visit **Barry Hicks** (MSO-64) and see the early progress being made at the National Smokejumper Center. It all allowed for a leisurely week of travel from McCall down to SW Colorado and the historic Glade Guard Station's restoration project. It was an outstanding crew to be privileged to work with. What fellowship! What food! What weather! What a sense of accomplishment! Others have written about the project in the October 2008 *Smokejumper* magazine so I won't go into any details here. I can say, however, that it is wonderful to be retired and to have the family encouragement and the freedom to be able to engage with the TM program.

I returned home to Iowa in late June, having missed all the flooding that had ravaged major parts of the state while I was gone. It was a quick turn-around and on July 4th I was on the road again and heading back to Missoula and then Stanley for that fence building project. (High gas prices be damned! I won't let that keep me from this time with friends... some of whom I have yet to meet.) I have a passion for building those log-worm fences. I've lost track of how many projects I have been on where we've done that, but each year it's amazing to watch how the crew carries on in the manner we learned on the fireline so many years ago. Seldom does anyone need to be told what to do. No one is standing idle with hands in pockets. Guys find a tool or a task that needs doing or they see someone who could use a hand and they are there to help. We don't work at the speed we once did but we are sure steady at the job. As is usually the case, we finished the task and ran out of work before the end of the project. Tom Kovalicky pampers the crew with the lodging arrangements... soft beds in comfortable (luxury) accommodations with outstanding Dutch oven prepared meals.

Having completed two TM projects, it was back to Missoula and then to Seeley Lake where I would spend the

next two weeks working with two different crews... the first week would be a continuation of work on the Double Arrow Lookout. This would be the 4th week of work on the tower over a 3-year period. You can read about it in the 2008 TM Report that is mailed out to members each January. These projects with the Seeley Lake Ranger District are a plum... a drive-to location with beautiful lakeside camping, hot showers each night, assistance from the district staff that truly knows how to work with volunteers.

The 2nd week at Seeley Lake (my 4th week of TM work in 2008) was directed at working with a crew to begin the process of restoring the ranger station's old bunkhouse. The setting is among huge pine and Doug fir overlooking the lake. The Seeley Lake RD has a historic place in jumper history, and this two-story building housed many jumpers assigned to Seeley Lake for project work in years gone by. Now it holds promise to become a staging location for the NSA's TM work in the future as a location for providing housing for our volunteers before, between, and after TM projects in the "Bob" and other nearby areas. It will also be able to serve as a location for equipment storage and as a suitable facility for launching some special TM operations, such as the "Couples Only" TM project that we are looking forward to in 2009.

Finally, it was back to Iowa for some catch-up on projects here at home and to prepare for a final week of TM work in a new area... the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) of NE Minnesota. Throughout the summer I had been working with staff from the Gunflint Ranger District in setting up a project. This would be the rebuilding of the historic and critically important Stairway Portage. Our crew was small (6) but powerful, and with determination we finished the project with a bit of overtime effort on the last day. We had succeeded in removing and replacing all of the 118 stair treads and thereby gave this structure an anticipated 15-20 year extension on its life.

Five TM projects in a single summer! It was a true blessing. I think back to August 2004 when I took part in two TM projects and, after grinding out the last usable part of my right hip, had hip replacement surgery that gave me back my pain-free mobility. I think back to April of 2005 and the heart attack I had that left me with no heart muscle damage and no restrictions but with three stents. I am indeed a very lucky guy. I see each day of life as a pure gift from God. These TM projects infuse me with new life and energy each year. They keep me determined to not let this body of mine go to waste and to not let my time be a waste but rather an investment. The fellowship shared in working side-by-side, the conversations around the meals and the campfires, the work ethic that comes so naturally, the new friendships that are formed and the old ones that are renewed... I can't think of a better way to invest a week... or two... or more.

A footnote... I ended the summer by backpacking Isle Royale National Park (located in Lake Superior) for a week with my son. We had several close moose encounters, beautiful fall colors coming on, and some outstanding father/son quality time together. Life is indeed good. 🌲

Old Jumper Runs NYC Marathon

by Mike Overby (Missoula '67))

Being a part of the Smokejumper Trail Crew since 1999, I wanted to let you know how I got motivated to run in the New York City Marathon.

On my first trail project in the Bob Marshall in 1999, I met **Wendy Kamm** (MSO-82) who said she wanted to run in a marathon that winter. I was impressed with Wendy's stamina and work ethic. The next summer I was on another project with Wendy and was curious to know how her marathon had gone. She said she hadn't run one as planned that year, but was going to do so in the coming year. Since I didn't want to show up the next summer and hear Wendy tell me that she had run one and I hadn't, I set out to run my first marathon in Dallas in 2001. I was never on a project with her again, but that began a great "get back in shape" period (like before jumping each summer during college). The Trails Project is a great opportunity to get back into the woods, get in shape, work hard and enjoy the camaraderie of old jumpers.

In January 2008, I saw the movie *Bucket List*. If you haven't seen the movie (starring Jack Nicholson & Morgan Freeman), it is about two 60ish terminally ill men who escape from a cancer ward to do what they had always wanted to do before "kicking the bucket."

As a result of seeing the movie, I put a list together that included, among other things, backpacking the Continental Divide Trail and running in the New York City Marathon. Since it was impossible to do the CDT all at one time, two other MSO-67 jumpers (**Jim Phillips** and **Phil Difani**) joined me on the CDT in the Bob Marshall for nine days before meeting our NSA trail project team on the Sarbo Creek Project. Even though we weren't able to stick to the CDT due to heavy snow pack, we did cover 125 miles before and after the project, ending up at Trixie's in Ovando with a cold Moose Drool. What a great experience and great group of guys to enjoy it with.

After returning from the CDT/Trails Project, I learned about, applied for and accepted the challenge to raise funds in support of Hole in the Wall Camps by running in the ING New York City Marathon on November 2, 2008. The Hole in the Wall Camps is a non-profit project established by Paul Newman to

help send terminal/critically ill children to a specially equipped summer camp. If it hadn't have been for hundreds of thousands of cheering fans, the pain (that came real close to my first real long jumper pack out) would have been too much. It was a great experience and a great year.

I had a NSA logo on the back of my running shirt with a big "MSO-67" printed underneath. I was surprised how many people came up from behind and (after asking what it was) congratulated me on being a smokejumper.

I look forward to continuing participation in the NSA Trails Project every summer and "maybe" finishing the CDT one day. Anyone up for the next leg? After looking up the qualifying time for my 60 plus-age group in the Boston Marathon, maybe that "bucket list item" isn't so impossible either. 🏃

Mike can be reached at: Mike.Overby@ExpressPros.com



Mike Overby (Courtesy M. Overby)

The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

MONTANA STATE SENATOR Dave Lewis has introduced Senate Bill 34 in the 2009 Montana legislature. The bill would include the “natural accumulation of fuel for fire that poses a threat to public health or safety” in the definition of “community decay” and extend the authority of counties to enforce a community decay ordinance in the wildland urban interface. The bill would allow a County government to require a property owner to abate “the natural accumulation of fuel for fire that poses a threat to public health or safety” and, if the property owner does not comply, the County will be allowed to do the work and bill the property owner. What the bill does not specifically state is if the Federal government would be included as property owners. If it did a county in Montana could potentially cite a representative of the Federal government with ticket and require them to thin fuels in the wildland urban interface. Should this bill pass the legislature and be signed by the Governor, you can be assured that there will be a challenge in court by the Federal government. Nearly fifty bills were introduced in the Montana legislature during this session

addressing wildland fire issues.

By the time you read this, the first and defining one hundred days of the Obama administration will almost have been completed. Everyone is wondering how the Forest Service and the BLM will fair in the Administration. According to the Obama-Biden campaign website, “The risk of fire to firefighters and communities could be significantly reduced by working hand-in-hand with states and localities and investing in effective fire prevention, mitigation, and land and forest management measures. As President, Barack Obama will aggressively pursue an effective fire prevention, mitigation, and land and forest management plan that decreases the fire risks that many communities are now facing. When wildfire threatens lives and property, an Obama-Biden Administration will increase the federal government’s commitment to field the most professional, well-trained, and well-coordinated wildfire fighting force in the world...Barack Obama will focus the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management’s efforts on working with local communities on hazardous fuels projects to make communities safer and forests healthier. An Obama-Biden Administration will use controlled burns and prescribed natural fire to reduce such fuels in close coordination with those

communities that are most at risk.

Thousands of jobs will be created by working with communities to thin unnaturally crowded forests close to homes. And by coordinating fuel reduction efforts with biomass energy projects, communities will have the potential to generate new sources of low cost energy. Resources will be focused where they will do the most good: in the wildland-urban interface, and not in fighting fires or on logging projects in remote, backcountry areas.”

If you read this policy statement in its entirety, you will notice that it was written by some low level policy wonk that is unfamiliar with wildland firefighting. While this policy piece is long on fluff and lacks any real detail, it should be noted that the International Association of Firefighters endorsed Obama. And there is probably some pandering going on. To his credit, Obama has surrounded himself with more scientists then ideologues. It will be interesting to see how many acres actually get thinned in the next four years and who performs the work: contractors, smokejumpers, and/or other resource professionals. Lawsuits and NEPA are also a barrier to getting any substantial thinning done. The issue of the labor shortage may be alleviated in the near term by the recession. Whatever happens, it won’t be boring. 🌲

Please Tell Us When You Change Your Address

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