

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



by John Twiss
(Redmond '67)
PRESIDENT

HELLO...WHEN YOU GET this, it will be hunting season in South Dakota. I plan to chase deer and pheasants around after a five-year absence to burn some fat off. Perhaps some of you want to join me. Fall is the very best time in the Black Hills. Those of you who participated in this years trails program on our public lands have probably burned enough fat, and you have my thanks for your efforts and a job well done! The smart District Rangers are seeking you out now.

Have you taken a look at the NSA's Mission Statement lately? It is pretty straight forward: The National Smokejumper Association, through a cadre of volunteers and partnerships, is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and grassland resources, responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families, and advocating for the programs evolution.

"Advocating for the programs evolution" is a recent addition, approved by the NSA Board of Directors last spring. We all felt a need to become more involved in the future of smokejumping as well as the past. With the addition of **Jerry Williams** (RAC-72), recently retired

National Director of Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management, and **Tom Boatner** (FBX-80), recently retired National Chief of Bureau of Land Management Fire Operations, we will be well-advised on current smokejumper programs and well-coached on how best to work with the federal agencies in advocating for the smokejumper program. A support group from outside the government working in a collaborative manner can be both helpful and effective and hopefully result in better "maintaining and restoring our forest and grassland resources."

Perhaps the most rewarding part of the mission statement is "responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families." Throughout the year the NSA gives financial and volunteer support to people in need. We hear about these people from you. We are a tightly bonded family, and when one of us is down on our luck, it's up to the rest of us to respond. Examples of recent financial assistance: help to a smokejumper whose house burned down and another who lost his house in a flood; assistance to a jumper whose child needed expensive medical attention; help with educational expenses for the children of smokejumpers who died in the line of duty; donations for a firefighter memorial and a forest youth program, each being put together by smokejumpers; assistance for educational expenses for a jumper who lost a leg on a fire jump. This is just a short partial list, but gives you an idea of where your money goes. The NSA will respond within our financial capability.

The NSA maintains its financial capability through your membership dues (the \$1000 life membership is held in trust and the interest is used to fund the NSA Mission), merchan-

disse purchases (great items on the website), fundraisers, and donations. Donations are very important whether they be in memoriam, a donation in your will, or just to help

someone. The NSA recognizes all donors on the NSA Website and donations are tax deductible. Help if you can, I promise you that it will go to a smokejumper in need.

Remember the next National Smokejumper Reunion is June 11-13 in Redding. Good hunting and stay warm! 🐾

The Birth of Smokejumping - Notes Of The First Forestry Parachutist

by Georgy Alexandrovich Makeev (Leningrad 1949)

PART TWO

In Part One (April 2009) Makeev told of his efforts to develop a smokejumper program in the Soviet Union in 1934 and to convince the Head of Forest Protection that it could be done safely and effectively. The project was approved for further experimentation in 1935. In spite of negative reports from his superiors, Makeev was given approval to further develop the smokejumper program in 1936. Thanks to Bruce Ford (MSO-75) and Tony Pastro (FBX-77) for their translation of this historic document.

1936—First Year of Operational Fire Jumps

In January 1936, a co-worker from the aviation branch called me aside and asked how I would feel about going to work for the forest aviation branch. I agreed and was transferred. This caused great discord at home. My wife was thoroughly convinced that I would end up killing myself jumping. All my reassurances had no effect on her. In addition, she was certain that further work in adopting parachuting to forestry work would encounter unforeseeable difficulties. The future of this work appeared dim, indeed.

After transferring to the aviation branch, I was assigned as a sport parachute instructor, in addition to my duties as a senior researcher at the institute. This job description did not entirely correspond with my assigned duties of organizing active measures for aerial fire suppression, so the title was changed to "Parachute Affairs." For me this was another large blow to my pride, but there was no going back.

That year the branch received a large appropriation for aircraft purchase. They began to hire pilots and mechanics and to form the first aviation detachments. People were dispersed to various locations to organize the detachments and begin work.

Design and Develop the Necessary Equipment

Work had to start with equipping the jumpers. If one was to undertake such a complex operation as dropping jumpers to fires, then they should not be fighting fire with their bare hands, but be outfitted with the most effective tools. They gave me the job of developing these tools.

But before ordering special apparatus for suppressing fires with jumpers, it must first be designed. There was no information to be gotten from the literature, as these methods had not been used anywhere, either at home or

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Smokejumper 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



Jumper wearing PD-6R main and ZP-41 reserve parachutes Northern Airbase, Archangel, 1952 (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

abroad. But, having been a forestry engineer and field worker myself and having worked many years in the forest, I could well conceive what would be most needed to equip smokejumpers.

It was necessary to have the most portable and effective firefighting equipment. This did not yet exist. Therefore, I considered the

most essential equipment to be a backpack pump and containers for transporting and parachuting liquid fire retardants to forest fires. I set about to design the first series of these. Then the most convenient gear, hand tools, portable communication devices, etc. must be thought out.

Design and preparation of special apparatus for aerial firefighting was especially complex. The forest aviation branch had no design bureau or workshops. It was necessary to manufacture an apparatus's component parts at various factories and to coordinate the work between them. The whole spring was occupied with this stressful work. Talks were also going on concerning forest aviation's purchase of its own personnel training parachutes. Of course, there were no end of delights for me. The work was in full swing.

Establishing a Training Facility

One of the forest aviation bases was located near where the Gorky aviation retardant project had been conducted the previous year. At this base I prepared to conduct the first trials of firefighting with parachutists. Here I sent all the parachute and firefighting equipment. I was allowed to enlist the *young forestry worker* I. Z. Levin, whom A. V. Yarov and I had trained in jumping the previous year. From this time on, I had a true helper. Levin energetically handled everything. He commandeered a place for packing parachutes, built packing tables, and organized the group of jumpers I intended to use for fighting fires. He received all the incoming equipment.

"Giorgy Alexandrovich," Levin told me, "you can't imagine how happy I was when I got those parachutes. I hide out here in the loft with them and sit by the hour and fuss with and look at them. I love them so much."

We understood each other wordlessly and had but one thought: Get our group of jumpers trained as quickly as possible and get about the task of putting out forest fires.

I soon threw myself into work. I got acquainted with the jumper trainees, established a special place at the airfield for storing fire retardant, and arranged the premises along the lines of a city firefighting company. Personnel parachutes lay in special cabinets with jumpsuits, axes, hoes, shovels, and helmets hung on racks. Numbers were attached to the parachutes. Cargo chutes and retardant blivets lay on shelves along with my special pride and joy, the backpack pumps I designed. Practical experience revealed an array of slight defects in their construction, but in general the backpack pumps gave good results and turned out to be the really indispensable tool that smokejumpers could not do without.

Surveying all this jumping and firefighting equipment, I saw the seed of a powerful aerial detachment that in time would have heavy aircraft and its own special smokejumper teams with hi-tech equipment. In my conception, smoke-jumper crews should be the basis of an aerial fire unit transported by aircraft for fire detection and forest patrol. It did not matter if all of this had never been done before. All our future work must demonstrate the necessity of further developing the smokejumper service. If only we had the chance to work, if only there were no disaster.

In the meantime, the backpack pumps with their shiny, nickel-plated wands lay on the shelves. The cargo chutes with their variously attached loads were impressive. The whole inventory of parachute and firefighting equipment looked so solid and well disposed that not only Levin and I, but also the ground-based forestry workers, came to look and admire.

Only here with socialism, I thought, could the use of parachutists for forestry goals be so quickly developed. This could not happen in any of the capitalist countries with their privately owned forests. There, forest specialists would never be given so many opportunities for conducting such experiments.

The First Fire Jumps

Having done several training jumps with Levin, I reported to the detachment commander that we were both ready for the fulfillment of any fire assignment. We did not have to wait long.

On June 19, 1936, I learned there was a large fire burning near the village of Telki, and that they had requested immediate help. I ran to the base director's apartment, received the order to jump, then ran to Levin's apartment and notified him to get ready for jumping.

Upon arriving at the airfield, we received another communication that assistance was needed on a second fire that was burning near the village of Osinki. Osinki was located in the same direction as Telki, but beyond it.

I received an order for me to jump at Telki and for Levin to jump at Osinki. We took off within 10 minutes with pilot Kondratenko. He was an experienced jumper himself and knew how to spot jumpers very accurately. He flew so confidently and well that I always felt very much at ease sitting behind him.

After a 25-30 minute flight, we saw smoke from the fire rising above the forest. As we approached, I thought I could

see a village near the forest edge, among open fields.

Kondratenko throttled back, and the plane began descending closer to the fire. After we observed it at low altitude, he gunned the engine and gained altitude as he approached the settlement. There were plenty of open areas nearby, so it was not necessary to pick a jump spot. **Kondratenko** leaned forward, intently surveyed one of the plowed fields, and indicated with a nod of the head that this was the spot he chose to drop me. I jumped. Landing softly on the loose soil, I caught a glance of the plane circling, after which it straightened out and flew on to drop **Levin**.

Before I had managed to gather up my chute, I spied a motley crowd of peasants running from the village and climbing over fences. Coming into the village with the rough peasants, I learned that one of the local foresters had already taken some locals to fight the fire. One of the hospitable Telki residents would not let me go before drinking a cup of tea, after which I set off for the fire with 16 people. It was 13 kilometers by forest road. The workers knew the area well, and we got there within two hours. The forester and a group of workers were already working. The fire had been nearly stopped with an encircling trench. The forester took me to inspect the fireline. I love to meet the local foresters. Many times I have been struck by their experience and knowledge of the forest, how they are acquainted with every little path in their domains and where each stand is located. They loved the forest and served as fearless protectors against fire and poaching. This forester, too, turned out to be very experienced and, with a small group of workers, had succeeded in quickly stopping the fire at its most dangerous spots.

Having relieved the tired workers, extinguished the remaining hotspots, and feeling assured that the fire was left in the trusted hands of an experienced forester, I returned in the evening to Telki and arrived back at the base that night.

That same night **Levin** arrived from Osinki, having successfully put out his fire with the aid of a forester and workers. The forest guards had been the first to arrive at these fires. The smokejumpers would only demonstrate their indispensability when they were the first to get to a fire before the arrival of forest guards, and if not able to put the fire out, at least halt its spread.

Successful Timber Jumps Possible

In the ensuing days, there were no new fires, and **Levin** and I conducted training jumps directly into the timber. For training in timber jumping, we first located a nearby stand of young deciduous trees. The base director went with me in the "Emochka" (German-made sedan), to more closely inspect the stands from the ground. The reprod turned out to be very thick.

Levin and I took off for the jump. The weather was excellent, with almost no wind. The pilot circled long over the forest, turning first right, then left, until he finally saw the people on the ground. I jumped first. When the parachute opened, I again felt the special pleasure of finding myself completely alone in the total silence of the immense expanse of sky, no longer hearing the roar of the engine, and

seeing beneath my feet the green carpet of the beckoning, welcoming forest.

I slowly drifted downwind and descended toward the reprod stand we had selected earlier. I could now clearly discern the individual groups of green tree crowns. I began to estimate where I would land. After a few seconds, the bushy crown of a rather large birch flew under my feet, and with legs tight together, I lightly hit the trunk near the top of a small birch, swung away from it, and lightly hit my back on another trunk. At that moment, I felt my descent stop with no more than a half-meter remaining to the ground.

It was marvelous in the forest. Quickly undoing the snaps, I squirmed out of the harness to the ground and ran to look for the nearest opening to signal the plane that I had landed successfully. But there were no clearings close by, and through the gaps in the leaves, I noticed **Levin's** parachute descending. I then returned to my chute, took an axe from the pouch on my belt, and quickly freed the canopy and lines from the top of the birch. Then I ran to see if **Levin** needed help.

Levin's landing was less successful. He landed in a large spruce whose branches had snagged his chute. After climbing down a neighboring birch, he caught sight of some passing loggers with a saw and asked them to fall several trees to free his parachute.

After some time **Levin** and I, with our parachutes on our backs, came out to the road and got in the "Emochka." At the airfield, we proudly showed our assembled comrades our hands and said, "Not even a scratch, not even one hole in a parachute. Everything is completely fine."

Levin had some scratches and a bruised hand, but bravely hid this. Concerning the parachute, he said, subsequently, "It got a little puncture hole." This little puncture turned out to be a huge hole. That was how the first timber jump went. Later we repeated it.

The weather continued mild from a fire standpoint, and we intensified training our group of smokejumpers and did jumps to pick new jump spots and to accomplish other goals.

Wider development of smokejumper work was hindered, in that younger jumpers could not be utilized. They had only one or two jumps and were not yet permitted to jump with just any pilot. They had to be given three to four additional training jumps with a Class-1 parachute instructor. There was no such instructor in the detachment. Repeated efforts with the Gorky air club over the detailing of a Class-1 instructor had been fruitless. The group members had long since completed their ground schooling, and the arrival of an instructor promised by the air club had been constantly delayed.

More Jumpers Needed

The prevailing damp weather gradually began to change: the rains stopped, the skies cleared, and the pilot-observers started finding fires. Training the group must be speeded up. **Levin** and I constantly went to Gorky, receiving promises of an instructor's arrival. The jumper group gathered nearly

every day at the airfield, insistently asking to be allowed to train, to no avail.

Fires began to pop up more and more often, and it was necessary to quickly expand smokejumper capability.

After a short meeting at the base, it was decided not to wait for a Class-1 instructor and to conduct training jumps for the group with our own means. Jumping began on the fifth of July. **Levin** was given the task of performing the first demonstration jump. I was to do a spotter's check and together with the pilot, muster out the trainees. **Levin** jumped like a good soldier. Then we took off. Gaining altitude, the pilot circled over the airfield and straightened out on the jump run. The engine cut back, the noise quieted, and the pilot raised his hand. **Zoya** boldly began to climb out of the cabin. She walked out on the wing and turned to face the fuselage. I watched how she held the ripcord handle, how she stood. It was all correct. I smiled encouragingly. The pilot gave the command: "Get ready!" **Zoya** replied, "All ready," and carefully pulled the bottom edge of the handle from its pocket. "Go!" ordered the pilot, and **Zoya** boldly jumped off the wing. The pilot throttled up, the engine revved, the plane did a sharp turn, and I saw **Zoya's** open chute.

An Accident Almost "Kills" The Program

On July 8th we resumed training the jumpers. I did the first jump. The base director noticed that the airplane was periodically obscured by clouds and that I, from the moment of exit, had not been visible. The clouds were indeed low, and further jumping was again put off. Jumper training was postponed until July 11.

That unfortunate day has stayed in my memory my whole life, and I can still recall the smallest details. That day was nearly the last for the young jumper **Zoya Trukhina**, and nearly shut down the use of smokejumpers, killing the results of all our efforts. In allowing some insignificant thoughtlessness and not observing minor details, an accident occurred. It happened because there are no minor details in aviation.

I arose early on July 11 and went to the parachute loft to prepare equipment. **Levin** and the other jumpers also began arriving early. Around noon all the parachutes had been checked and packed. The jumpers had suited up in new suits and were ready for jumping. At one o'clock, the vehicle came, and stopping by for the doctor, we headed to the airfield. We went, as always, singing. The doctor examined everyone and cleared all for jumping. The day was sunny and hot, with a light wind.

I would first do a demonstration jump from 400 meters, so the jumpers could better observe all the jumper procedures. After me would go **Zoya Trukhina**, doing her third jump, and the other jumpers would follow. Many people had gathered at the airfield, as it became known that the smokejumpers would be jumping that day.

The base director gave permission to start jumping. Gaining altitude, the pilot headed on the jump run. After

opening, I could see the crowd of spectators assembled at the airfield, the parked airplanes, and the group of readied jumpers. Beneath my feet I could see the fence bordering the airfield. The wind carried me over the fence, and I landed safely not far from the spectators. I had still not gotten my chute gathered up when a small vehicle came up. A soldier helped me stow the chute, and we sat in the vehicle and headed for the ramp.

By now the plane with **Zoya Trukhina** was climbing into the air. A boastful pilot, whom I rather disliked, was flying. **Levin** was sitting in the back seat.

Laying my chute on the packing panels, I spotter-checked the next jumper and began to watch the plane's flight. It did slow, wide circles, climbing to 700 meters. Finally it straightened out on the jump run. But apparently the pilot changed his mind, as he did still another wide circle and again straightened out into the wind. Everyone on the ground now gazed fixedly at the plane to better see the moment the jumper would climb on the wing and exit.

The plane passed over the center of the airfield and began to gradually move off into the blue sky. Now the plane should slow and **Zoya** appear on the wing. Eyes strained to the point of tears, trying to catch the slightest movement on the tiny, distant outline of the airplane.

She Disappeared Behind the Tree Line

But why didn't he throttle back? Here should be the exit point, and the plane kept flying farther and farther. Surely he didn't want to go around again? Now it was clear that the plane had gone well beyond the exit point. Suddenly, the plane's speed diminished, and the tiny dot of the jumper appeared on the wing. In another moment she had exited the plane and fallen away. A patch of white material appeared above the falling figure. But it didn't lengthen as usual into a white ribbon. It was visible how the pilot chute stubbornly resisted, how it valiantly strove to pull out the main canopy, jerking right and left. The distance between the jumper and the earth rapidly closed. Already less than half remained. At that height, a white tongue of the main canopy suddenly and noticeably stretched out longer, and the pilot chute began to flap even stronger. But the parachute opened no further, and the black figure of the jumper, having covered the whole distance to the earth, disappeared behind the tree line.

Everyone on the airfield, forgetting all else in the world, rushed across the summer field to where **Zoya Trukhina** had fallen. Some of the base workers, together with the doctor, jumped into a vehicle and tore off, overtaking the running people.

As I watched **Zoya Trukhina's** fall, I suffered the worst seconds of my life. When it was clear that **Trukhina's** parachute had not opened fully and that she had fallen that way into the forest, the certainty of her death aroused in me pangs of pity and, at the same time, a surge of heavy dread that the adoption of smokejumping was irrevocably finished.

The thought quickly flitted through my mind that I myself had extremely carefully packed **Trukhina's** parachute.



Po-2 preparing to drop message-dropper to logging operation. Northern Airbase, 1950. Before the advent of helicopters and larger aircraft to carry crews of smokejumpers, detection Po-2's dropped fire information and directions to mobilize ground forces. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

Why hadn't it opened and why hadn't she used the reserve?

With these thoughts I ran, passing the others, toward the place of the accident. Not far from it, on the road, stood several workers from the base, including some who had gone in the auto. They barred the way of the running crowd. From here a group of people by the auto were visible on the right of the road, and to the left in the field was the white canopy of the open parachute. I ran to the parachute. Two of the detachment's pilots stood by the parachute. Approaching the canopy, I noticed it was raised slightly in one spot, covering something lying beneath. It flashed through my mind that the canopy covered the broken body of **Zoya Trukhina**. I went to the edge of the canopy, lifted it, and looked beneath. Under the canopy was only a hummock of earth. **Trukhina** was not there.

"Where is **Trukhina**?" I asked.

"They already took her to the hospital in the auto," one of the pilots answered.

"Is she alive?"

"Yes, but badly banged up."

"Was she conscious?"

"Yes, fully conscious. She was talking."

"Well, why are we standing here?" said one of the pilots.

"We need to gather up the parachute and go."

I gathered the chute and we went to the airfield. Leaving the parachute there, I went to the hospital. There were many people there. Elbowing my way into the room where **Trukhina** lay, I went up to her bed.

"**Giorgy Alexandrovich**, why didn't my parachute open?"

Zoya asked immediately on seeing me.

"But why didn't you open the reserve, when you saw that the main wasn't opening?"

"I was afraid it would tangle with the main."

Then the doctor came and said the patient should be left alone and everyone left the room. In the hall, I saw an old woman crying – this was **Zoya's** mother.

The doctor, seeing me in the foyer, said, "I just injected her with morphine to ease the pain. I didn't find any specific damage. No doubt nervous shock plays a part. You can rest assured everything necessary will be done for her. There is no need to call in any specialists."

"I always consider," he added, "that such incidents in aviation, and especially in parachuting, are the rule. There will always be a certain percentage of accidents."

"No, doctor, with proper procedures, there shouldn't be a single accident in parachuting," I replied and headed home.

At home the morning had gone as follows: My wife, as usual, busied herself about the house in the morning. She knew there would be jumper training that day, knew that I would be jumping, and was in a worried state. She often went out on the porch upon hearing the noise of an airplane and looked up into the blue sky, since parachute jumps were usually visible from the porch. About 3 o'clock she suddenly noticed people running along the street toward the airfield and, from snatches of conversation, heard that a jumper had been hurt. She dropped everything and rushed toward the airfield, which was about a kilometer and a half away. Almost there, she caught a glance of the base vehicle headed toward the hospital. She ran after it and only at the doors of the hospital was she told that **Giorgy Alexandrovich** was okay and that **Trukhina** was hurt.

At the airfield in the evening there was discussion of the accident and compilation of facts in the case.

"Did you notice it seemed as if the canopy was deliberately tied somehow so as not to open?" the base engineer asked me.

Early in the morning I headed to the hospital to check on **Trukhina's** condition. She was feeling chipper and said, "Next time, **Giorgy Alexandrovich**, please just spot me yourself, since that pilot and **Levin** weren't taking things seriously during the flight. They kept laughing at me, and that had a bad effect on me. And do you know why I think the parachute didn't open? I didn't exit the plane right. Right at the exit, the plane's wing banked suddenly and I didn't really jump, but rolled and spun off. My arms were all entangled in the lines, but I did manage to get hold of the reserve handle and was afraid to pull it, thinking it would

entangle the main lines even more. I fell like that all the way and, about 20 meters from the ground, the main opened completely. I saw that clearly, and that's how I survived."

Now the whole picture of the accident became more understandable. Only, how did the bank happen? I hadn't noticed that. Had it just seemed that way to her? Perhaps she got dizzy?

What a Bad Deal!

When I got home, **Levin** arrived.

"Boy, **Giorgy Alexandrovich**, what a bad deal. We really tripped up on a flat spot. And the jumpers are bad-mouth-ing **Trukhina**. They say, because of her now, they won't get to jump."

"How could it have happened? **Trukhina** and I packed the parachute. After packing, it was there under our eyes the whole time. Where could that entangled line have come from?"

"It could have broken and whipped into the air. When I watched the jump, it seemed to me that the main didn't open because it was held together with something."

"I didn't see that," I answered.

Late in the evening I asked again at the hospital after **Zoya Trukhina's** condition and hearing that she was feeling satisfactory, returned home. Heavy thoughts wandered through my head. The base commanders undertook parachute work under pressure from me, and in general rather feared and disliked it themselves. I had insisted on and forced this rookie training. And now, the result of all this, an accident. Who was now to blame for all this, if not me? But it seemed to me the greatest misfortune was that



Fire suppression with backpack sprayers. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

parachute operations would be forbidden and never adapted to forestry work at all. Almost the whole night I didn't sleep, and lay with an empty mind and open eyes.

Why hadn't the parachute opened? Indeed, I had packed it so carefully, seemingly following closely the smallest attention to detail. What would happen now? Surely they wouldn't halt the work that had so successfully begun. All night these questions tormented me. I found no answers to them.

The Investigation

In the accident investigation, all the reasons for it floated to the surface. It was established that **Trukhina** had been out late with her fiancé the night before the jump, and may have been fatigued the morning of the jump. The flippant behavior of the pilot and **Levin** during the flight certainly played a part. And the main reason was that at the moment of the jump, the pilot had yawed left, supposedly so the plane's tail would swing right and not snag the parachute. The pilot testified to this. **Levin** also supported this maneuver at the moment of the jump.

In interrogating **Levin**, they put to him the question: Did **Makeev** pack the parachute well, in his opinion?

"No," he answered, "in my opinion, not well."

They listened to him attentively. He continued authoritatively, "You really shouldn't pack so neatly and carefully as he does. He literally watches every little fold and edge, and such neatness is really not necessary."

Toward autumn, **Zoya** was given a vacation in the south, and soon after her return from the sanatorium, she got married. The next summer, she kept asking the detachment to take her on as a jumper.

Further Jumping Prohibited

Shortly after the accident, a telegram arrived from the Forest Aviation Trust, prohibiting the continuation of jumping.

At the beginning of August an order came for me to fly immediately to Moscow. To my surprise, in Moscow they asked the head of the Trust to use retardant drops to actively fight going forest fires.

"**Zolotov** must have really been making up stories about his tank if they're getting ready to use it to fight such large fires," I thought. With all sincerity I testified to the complete futility of such work.

Taking advantage of my presence in Moscow, I began to work for immediate approval of protocols for fighting forest fires with smokejumpers.

Consideration of the protocols was slated for a special meeting. I presented it paragraph by paragraph, and a very prominent Master of Parachuting Sport set forth his opinion. As for myself, I felt like this was something of a defense dissertation, since the use of smokejumpers for forest firefighting was my own personal idea, and I had written every word of the protocols with my own hand.

Smokejumping Approved to Continue

The protocols were approved. Now the smokejumper

service had passed an exam and received authorization to ply the boundless forest reserves of the USSR. At the same time not a day went by at the Head of Forest Protection that the need was strongly felt for the use of aviation to actively fight fires. Urgent telegrams flew from all corners of the Union requesting the dispatch of airplanes for fighting forest fires.

In 1936 forest fires were very widespread, inflicted great damage, and help could only be rendered by means of swift aviation. After approval of the general inspection protocols, it was again decided to conduct operational fire jumps.

I returned from Moscow to the airbase at the end of August. Now I was cleared to fly with a patrol plane and at the first opportunity jump to towns for quick mobilization to fight forest fires. **Levin** was unable to participate in the work, as he had been intermittently ill.

It was August 31 with a chill in the air. The base director had insisted that I wear a sheepskin coat for the flight. With the coat and parachute gear, it was cramped in the cabin of the plane. I had to sit hunched in a most uncomfortable position. Once seated, it was impossible to shift my legs, and during a long flight my legs would go numb.

After a two-hour flight we sighted a fire near a village. Descending lower, we saw people working near the fire and that it was surrounded by a fireline. The plane again climbed to altitude and continued on the patrol.

"How can I jump now?" I thought, tensing and trying to feel first one, then the other cold-stiffened leg. The pilot-observer, seated in the aft cabin, suddenly tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to a distant, barely visible smoke. His sharp eyes had picked it out first.

The plane changed course and headed straight for the smoke. It was about a 10-minute flight. The fire turned out to be burning in a pine timber lot not far from a little stream. Near the fire was a cutover area with a lot of slash. There were no people visible. We flew toward the nearest village. The pilot-observer, leaning forward, shouted directly in my ear, "Are you going to jump?"

It was now or never and I nodded affirmatively. The nearest village was 7-8 kilometers from the fire. Next to the village was a cutover area with protruding stumps. A little further a green meadow was visible. I pointed it out to the pilot.

In the sheepskin coat it was difficult to climb out of the cabin, and movement was very constrained. The pilot didn't throttle back enough, and the windblast was very strong. In addition, I had to stand a long time — one foot on the wing, the other on the step. Exiting the plane, I felt a jerk and hung sitting in the harness, but looking up at the canopy, I saw it was all tangled and that several lines ran across it in various directions.

"Oh, my God!" I cried, pulling the reserve handle. The reserve opened in an instant. Gradually, the main lines began to slide off the canopy, and it also opened fully.

I landed right near the edge of the meadow next to an enormous spruce. The peasants knew about the fire, as they had seen the smoke not long before this. No forest guard lived in the village. The nearest forester lived 12 kilometers

from here and still didn't know about the fire. I told the peasants that I needed 5-6 workers to go with me to put out the fire.

"If you pay for the work in cash, we'll find some people."

"How much per day?"

"How about 4 rubles?"

They agreed on this pay, and four men said they had to go grab a meal, as they would have to spend the night in the forest. "We don't need any more people, as we hope to handle it," they said. It was quickly getting toward evening. We headed into the forest barely an hour before sunset. As always with local people in the forest, it was an absolute pleasure. They always go along the dry places with well-trodden paths winding about and skirting all the bogs, passing over streams and rivers on planks. Walking by such paths it is easy for a new person to get disoriented, but the local residents never get lost. Finally we came to a little bridge over a stream.

"This is the stream near which you saw the fire from the plane. It should be around here somewhere, since there aren't any other streams," one of the old peasants said.

We sat to rest and had a smoke. It was quiet in the forest; not a twig on the trees was stirring. The twilight quickly deepened. On the advice of the workers we soon set out down the trail in order to arrive before dark. We went along the same little forest road. Occasionally we would smell smoke, and then it would disappear. Then we returned to the bridge and followed another trail. There was no more smell of smoke. We went back and forth, but could not find the fire. Night fell and it was very dark, so we discussed how to proceed. One old peasant listened keenly and proposed

that we split into two groups, one going to the left from the bridge, the other to the right. I went with two workers to the left. We had to force our way through dense thickets of reprod. Soon a shout rang out from the forward worker. We headed toward the shout and saw the bright flames of the fire through the darkness. The fire was not large in area, but very bright from burning downfall and clumps of brush-wood.

I must be fair and say that I learned a great deal from these experienced forest dwellers. Arriving at the fire, they first had a smoke and began to weigh where best to build a fireline – how far from the fire and on which side. I submitted completely to their experienced direction and worked with a shovel side by side. Toward morning the entire fire was surrounded by a good fireline that the workers proceeded to widen. A fresh morning breeze began to blow and trees whose roots had burned out began to topple.

Leaving a reliable worker to patrol the fire, three workers and I returned to Kuttyets, where we met the forester hurrying to the fire. I happily informed him that the fire was already contained. *This was the first fire put out by smokejumpers before the arrival of forest guards!*

From the first of September the rains began and fires ceased. Soon an order came to return to Leningrad. Going through Moscow, at the Head of Forest Protection I was given instructions to start training smokejumpers well in advance (of the fire season) for the following year. 🌲

In Part Three, the newly-formed smokejumper program proves its value in saving valuable timber and manpower.

LONELY STATIONS

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

These are the lonely stations

Desert islands

North facing ridge tops

Chaparral ledges

Holding

Remnant vegetation of

Post-glacial retreat

Valleys

Large and vast

Small and nameless

Silent

Rain

Washing sands

To the alluvial plain

Water that does not drain to the sea

Trackless roads

On the edge of vision

A drift of dust

Caught my eye

Somewhere out beyond the day's
work

Stood and watched

Or did I listen

So clear

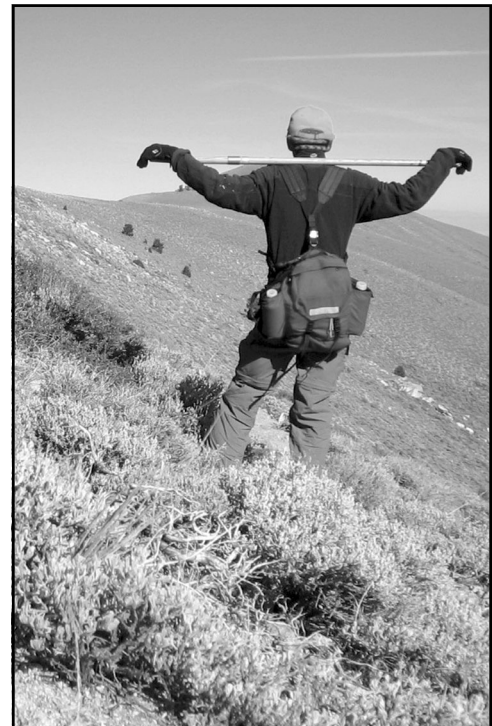
It was almost a song

Lost highway

Of the white man

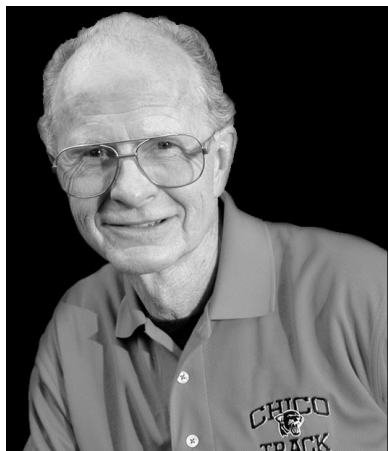
Looking for

His ancestral home





Sounding Off from the Editor



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

THE EFFORTS TO SAVE THE buildings at the Gobi (aka Siskiyou Smoke-jumper Base) have been ongoing for several years now. Under the leadership of **Roger Brandt** (Associate), **Wes Brown** (CJ-66) and **Gary "Joe" Buck** (CJ-66), the effort known as the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum Project has been teetering on the edge of failure. Despite having some of the buildings placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the possibility of losing this place forever has loomed on the horizon.

You might ask why this, no-longer used, old smokejumper base is important to anyone? Let's look at a bit of history. In 1943 the smoke-jumper program was established in Cave Junction covering fire calls in Oregon and Northern California. The primary facilities were at the Redwood Ranger Station in Cave Junction, about five miles away from the Illinois Valley Airport. By 1948 most of the buildings had been completed at the airport and by 1950, with the completion of the parachute loft, the smokejumper operation was moved to the present location. In 1982 the base was closed for various reasons. In 1983 the

airfield and base were transferred from the USFS to Josephine County.

People have often wondered why the base was ever established in this out-of-the-way location in Southern Oregon. We do know that in September 1942, a Japanese plane, launched from a submarine, dropped an incendiary bomb on the Siskiyou National Forest. Later in WWII the Japanese launched over 9,000 incendiary balloon bombs, but there is little evidence to indicate that this had anything to do with the establishment of the smokejumper base on the Siskiyou N.F.

The best rationale seems to point to the fact that Cave Junction, located in a remote, timber-rich area (very tall trees), was frequented by many lightning-caused fires. The effectiveness of the smokejumper program reinforces this thinking. During the years of the smoke-jumper program, the Siskiyou N.F. averaged a total of 3,000 acres burned annually as compared to an annual average of 20,000 prior to jumpers. Since the close of the base in 1982, over a million acres have burned. The Biscuit Fire, which cost over \$200,000,000, was ten minutes off the runway. With the legal expenses that are continuing, it could become a billion dollar fire.

Without going into the politics of the matter, the bottom line goal has been to save this historic base and create a museum showing the events and people that made the "Gobi" such a unique place. A business plan has been written explaining the advantages to the county in creating a museum that would certainly be of interest to the thousands of travelers who drive the Redwood Highway, just yards away from the entrance to



the base.

With that background, about twenty of us showed up June 22 to start work on the oldest remaining smokejumper parachute loft in the U.S. Under the leadership of Gary Buck, the group started work that Monday morning on a 60-year-old building that looked in really bad shape. It seemed like a last-ditch attempt to save the base from being torn down or changed into an industrial

park.

My mental attitude was not very positive as my wife and I drove into the base that morning. Victories have been few and defeats many these past few years. I couldn't see how Roger and Gar could keep going in the face of such odds. Regardless of the situation, I was going to lend my unskilled support to this project. When you see people working this hard on a dream, you need to get in line in spite of a dim prospect of success.

In typical smokejumper fashion, the work started on replacing the rotted wood and windows. Walls were scraped, repaired and prepped. Painting started. No one was giving directions, everyone just found a job they could do and went to work. I don't think we had a card-carrying carpenter in the group, but these guys had built so many houses they might as well have been union members. **Don Bisson** (CJ-78), **Garry Peters** (CJ-63), **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65), **Ron Lufkin** (CJ-60), **Tommy Albert** (CJ-64) and **Troop Emonds** (CJ-66) removed old windows, built new frames and did the technical measuring and cutting. **Jerry John** (CJ-62) and "Clancy" **Collins** (MYC-67) were multi-tasking and everywhere. **Jim Fritz**

(CJ-59), Wes Brown, **Mike Cramer** (CJ-59), Terressa Cramer, **K.G. Sheley** (Associate), Patricia Brandt and Mary Orton (local teachers) did the meticulous work with the glass and window frames. **Mike Hardy** (MYC-75) and Sidne Teske headed up the spray rig work. Gar Buck had the endless job of answering questions, getting supplies and keeping the operation going. Always on the move, **Sharon Westcott** (Associate) pulled together meals for lunch and dinner. Two of the legends of CJ, **Bob Nolan** (CJ-47) and **Phil Clarke** (CJ-51), showed up to support us.

One day, a gyrocopter (rotor plus propeller) was flown over the adjacent airstrip. Here was **Paul Block** (CJ-48) still flying at age 85. In my short visit with Paul, I found out that he “has to” fly as much as possible. This is the man who was featured in a 1950 edition of *Popular Mechanics* for his design of a new type of parachute, an ascension parachute that goes up. You have seen these at all major resorts with tourists being pulled up by a boat or other vehicle.

My wife said that any of the observers that stopped by during the week probably saw a bunch of people dressed in their work clothes and probably didn’t know much about who we had here, a varied group but united in cause. They wouldn’t have known that they were looking at a group that included two pilots, a dentist, two professional foresters, a highway patrolman, a book publisher, a plumbing contractor, a couple of career smokejumpers, the author of the best-seller smoke-jumper book ever and several teachers.

It was an amazing week. As it was with the NSA Glade Project I worked on in 2008, a building was reborn on a daily basis. Roger Brandt, retired Chief of Interpretation for the National Park Service, updated the progress each day. Go to www.highway199.org and click on the “Parachute Loft Restoration Project” and view our progress as it happened.

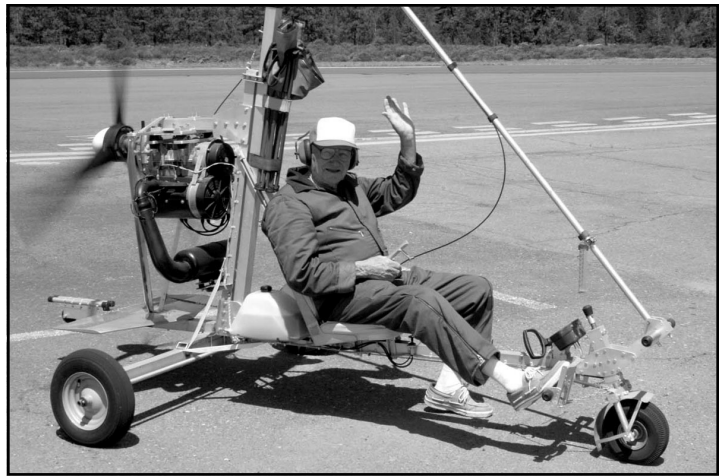
Another aspect of the week that was touching was the support of local residents who dropped by to view the work. Several pitched in and joined the work group.

Others dropped off food for us. Some of these people weren’t even born when there were smokejumpers in the Illinois Valley. A group of us went into town each morning for breakfast at a local restaurant. As we got up to leave one day, the waitress told us “breakfast for the smokejumpers” had already been taken care of by “someone.” Roger Brandt’s numerous news releases and public presentations in the area have created public support among people who have come to realize that we have a one-of-a-kind opportunity at the I.V. Airport.

Josephine County Commissioners Dwight Ellis, Sandi Cassanelli and Dave Toler each took time out of their busy schedules to check out our work. Many thanks to them from our crew for the visits.

From working on the Glade Guard Station Project (Colorado) and reading about other work done by the NSA’s Trail Maintenance Program, I know that the U.S. Forest Service does have a sense of preservation of its historical buildings, however, very limited. Why won’t they step up and help preserve buildings that were at the beginnings of the smokejumper program?

We have used up the \$3,400 in our kitty and are back to a financial ground zero. With empty pockets and a lot of enthusiasm, we have set June 14-18, 2010 for Phase Two of the Gobi restoration project. If you see someone with a tin cup and a



Eighty-five-year old Paul Block (CJ-48) in his gyrocopter on the runway at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base. (Courtesy R. Brandt)

dancing monkey standing on a corner, that might be another phase of our fundraising efforts.

We have a 503 c (3) designation and are looking for help. Any contributions made out to the *Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum* can be sent to: **Gary Buck, 412 Airport Dr, Cave Junction, OR 97523**. If anyone who knows of grants or other aid, please advise us.

Fifteen people have already indicated they will be on site next June to start phase two. If you, your wife or husband, friends and others, want to join us, just let me know. We are a friendly group.

I communicate on a regular basis with **Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77) and am getting an education as to the rich history of the USFS from the days when the District Ranger rode every inch of his forest on a horse and was an integral part of the community. We need to get back to the basics, and preserving our history is included in that theme. The Forest Service and others may not realize that on the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base, we have an aging facility where 400 young men started their careers that took them to such varying places as flying the Apollo 14 moon mission (**Stuart Roosa** CJ-53) or being the first person to climb Mt. Everest via the West Ridge Route (**Willie Unsoeld** CJ-50). Regardless of where you jumped, we want to see you in 2010 in the Illinois Valley. Save the Gobi! 🐼

Thoughts on the Gobi Project

by Murry Taylor (Redding '65)

Hey Chuck—

Just a little note on last week's (June 22-26) miracle on the Gobi. What a fun few days working on the old loft. Isn't it amazing how we keep going back to that place? Like you and all the rest, I was touched again by that spirit we call "the Gobi." This whole smokejumping story just keeps getting better and better. Whether it's a trail maintenance project, base reunions, local socials, national reunions, or a work project like we had on the Gobi, the spirit's always the same.

When I first arrived, people kept thanking me for coming. Not being a regular Cave Junction jumper, I think they thought it special that I showed up. I appreciated that, but what's really special is the base and all my memories of the great times I had boosting, jumping fires, and meeting all those crazy, wonderful folks who became some of my best friends.

I was reading about a tribe that lives in the Sahara and believes that when you are born you have a dream inside you. They say that the purpose of life is to discover that

dream and then live it. I think that's the way jumping has been for me. You know, those moments when you looked around a fire on a big mountain somewhere in the great wilds of this country and saw your fellow jumpers moving or laughing in just that certain way. You knew then and there that you were exactly the person you were meant to be and you were doing what you were suppose to be doing with the exact right people.

During work projects like we had last week, our story still goes on. We laughed and worked and meant much to each other in those same old ways. We may no longer be young, tan, handsome or whatever we were, but the laughter and the kidding and the joy of being who we are now remains the same.

Those Sahara people I mentioned also believe that once you find your dream, you will live a life of continued fulfillment. As far as smokejumping and smokejumpers go, that's pretty much the ways it's been. And so, as to who owes who a thank you, here's a hearty thanks to all for your special friendship and the chance to work and be together once again. 🙏



Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Loft Restoration Project

Kneeling L-R: KG Sheley, Patricia Brandt, Jack McCornack, Sharon Westcott, Gary Buck, Garry Peters, Jerry John, Wes Brown, Roger Brandt. (Courtesy R. Brandt)

Standing LR: Chuck Sheley, Mary Orton, Troop Emonds, Terressa Cramer, Mike Cramer, Jed Emonds, Tommy Albert, Don Bisson, Ron Lufkin, Sidne Teske, Mike Hardy, Jim Fritz, Murry Taylor

The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

TWENTY FORMER CAVE JUNCTION Smokejumpers, spouses, and community volunteers spent a week in June doing restoration work at the former Siskiyou Smokejumper Base. Work included the repair and replacement of windows and frames and prepping and painting the building. The Siskiyou Base is the last of the original smokejumper bases that still has many of its original buildings intact. The Base was established in 1943 and the loft was constructed in 1948. In the recent past, there have been threats to tear down the buildings. Restoration work has helped to alleviate the threat. The project is not receiving support from the NSA or the Forest Service yet, but there is hope for support in the future. The project received good press coverage this year. A second round of restoration work will take place June 14-18, 2010, immediately following the National Reunion in Redding. If you are interested in volunteering next year, contact Chuck Sheley.

A study lead by University of Colorado fire ecologist Tania Schoennagel and published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences looked at the

effectiveness of 44,613 fuel reduction projects undertaken in Western states under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. The study concluded that only three percent of the fuel reduction projects were conducted in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Even if another 1.5 miles into the forests extend the borders of the WUI, the total percentage of fuel reduction projects conducted to reduce fire risk in WUI areas comes to 11 percent. Does this mean 89% of the areas logged for fuel reduction were too far away from the wildland-urban interface to have much effect on the wildfire threat to communities? The study also noted that only 17% of the WUI is under federal ownership, which greatly limits the ability of federal agencies to implement fire-risk reduction treatments near communities. The full text of the study can be found at: <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2009/06/05/0900991106.full.pdf>

In a previous column I advocated giving the counties the money and letting them manage thinning in the WUI. The timber economy is so bad in Montana that out-of-work loggers are going door to door asking homeowners for work thinning trees around their homes. I probably should not have been surprised by Montana Governor Brian

Schweitzer's comments during a wildfire briefing when he said, "If you live in that interface, let's just assume you won't get help. You are responsible for your own situation. You have a personal responsibility. Don't look for the government to bail you out." The lame duck Governor is probably looking over the horizon beyond his final term to his next political office. Some observers believe there could be a Presidential run in Governor Schweitzer's future. Rumors of an appointment as Secretary of the Interior in the Obama Administration were unfounded, but made for good blog fodder. While the Governor kept a low profile during this year's legislative session, the Montana legislature did budget 30 million dollars for fighting wildland fires over the next two years.

Wendy Kamm (MSO-82) appeared in an article on female Game Wardens in the November-December 2008 issue of *Montana Outdoors*. Wendy is stationed in Fort Benton, Montana.

As this issue was going to press, we received word that our good friend **Tim Eldridge** (MSO-82) had passed away in California. We will honor his memory in a future issue.

This column is dedicated to Life Member **Gary "Tex" Welch** (CJ-60). 🌲

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.

Charlie Caldwell and Fire in the Big Horns

by Kris Kristofors (Redding '64)

Charlie Caldwell (RDD-65) had a remarkable career as both a smokejumper and a Hotshot Crew Superintendent. While he will always be remembered as the long-standing Superintendent of the Redding Hotshots, Charlie rookied in '65 and refreshed through 1974 as a member of the Redding Jumpers. With the hotshots being stationed at the jump base, he was constantly around smokejumper operations.

Thanks to **Dave Nelson** (MSO-57), Charlie was selected as a squadleader in his second year as a jumper. He also was a parachute rigger, cargo master, and spotted practice jumps. This did not make some of the older squadleaders happy, but it was difficult to keep up with Charlie.

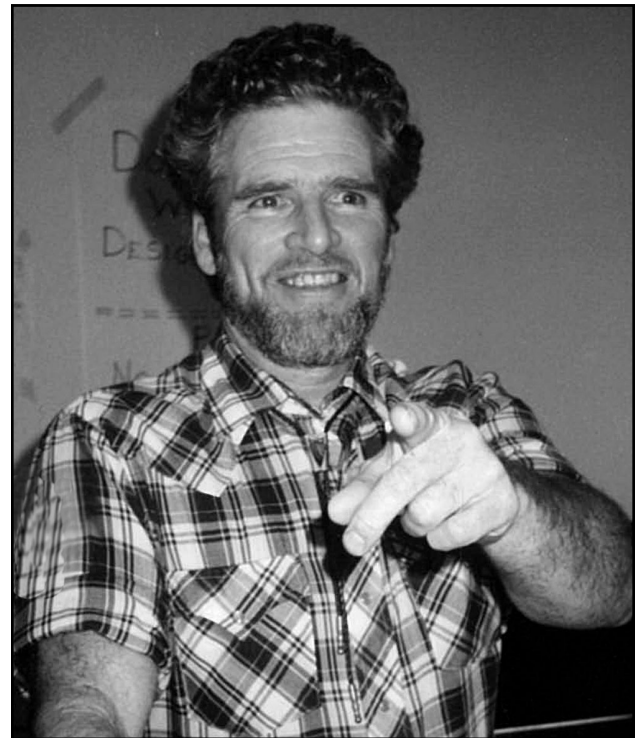
Also having been with both the smokejumpers and hotshots, I have great respect for his many years of fighting fire. Charlie founded the Redding Hotshots, started the Detail Program, and was their recognized leader for two decades, from 1967 -1986. Charlie and Mark Linane, who was one of Charlie's detail Hotshot Foremen in 1971, were the most visible Hotshot Crew Superintendents during my years with the Forest Service. Our paths crossed numerous times on many fires. In those days, we were only classified as GS-7 Hotshot Superintendents; rather low, given our responsibilities. Charlie paved the way for Hotshot Superintendents to get a higher GS rating. Charlie, because of his vast knowledge of fire suppression and fire behavior, was one of the few firemen I trusted more than myself on the fireline. He was red carded as a Line Boss, Incident Commander, Branch Director, Plans Chief, Safety Officer, Firing Boss, and Interagency Liaison Officer; much higher than anyone else I knew in first-line fire suppression.

I first ran into Charlie in 1964 after a practice jump in timber on the Shasta Lake District. **Rich Farmer** (RDD-64) and I had retrieved our chutes, while **Ray Morrow** (RDD-64) was still hopelessly entangled in a tree. I was considering leaping into the tree and helping Ray with his tangled mess (amazing what one is willing to try at 19), when Charlie drove up in a fancy patrol vehicle and started conversing with our overhead. I remember thinking at the time that this must be someone very important. He was the Acting Shasta Lake Fire Control Officer at the time.

During the next few years, Charlie became a smokejumper at age 29, founded the Redding Hotshots, and retreaded multiple years as a smokejumper. The Redding Hotshot Crew in those days was different than others, being composed of district personnel who were there on a six-month detail as a training assignment based on nationwide recommendations of Forest Supervisors. The crew also included personnel from other

firefighting agencies. During the winter, Charlie taught a variety of fire behavior and related subjects at the Northern California Service Center.

When I came back to Redding in 1969, Charlie had his unit well established. Not everyone got along well with Charlie. He was a tough character, and he expected the same degree of



Charlie Caldwell (Courtesy Rusty Witwer)

hardness in other firefighters. I don't know much about his childhood, but his father killed his mother when he was 19. That trauma must have haunted Charlie for many years.

In 1970 most of the Redding Jumpers were in Washington on a large lightning bust. **Fernando Romo** (RDD-68) and I were the only jumpers around. The shots were short of personnel, so we were assigned to them. The Redding Hotshots would never have had the reputation of always being full strength and physically able to get the job done without the support of Dave Nelson, **Dick Tracy** (MSO-53), and "eager" smokejumpers.

We flew out early in the morning and landed in Salt Lake. There we loaded a bus and drove north. I had not seen this country before and was intrigued by the vast open spaces. After a short pit stop in Sheridan, we continued and, before too

long, we were negotiating switchbacks in the “Big Horns,” which seemingly jutted out of nowhere. The Native Americans knew these mountains as “Ahsahta” (Big Horns) because of the great herds of Big Horn Sheep that gathered around the mouth of the Big Horn River that flowed from these mountains. In their travels through the region, Lewis and Clark also noticed and wrote about these vast sheep herds. It was remarkable to see more wildlife than domestic livestock. On the way to the fire, we observed antelope, elk and deer.

When we got to the fire, it had practically burned itself out. The terrain was not too steep, but we were having trouble breathing, so I figured we were at high altitude. The terrain consisted of rolling hills with swaths of grassland interspersed with small scrubby trees. It was occasionally dissected by steep cliffs suddenly dropping to gorges far below. Many of the sedimentary rocks in the burn had some kind of marine fossils embedded within them. A local told us we were about 8,000 feet elevation. At that elevation in California, one would be on some significant peaks, not rolling terrain.

The local firefighter kept referring to “parks.” After a while I came to understand that the term was a colloquialism applied to open areas. That evening we ran into Doug Priddy, one of Charlie’s foremen. He kept telling us how great it was to be a hotshot. We weren’t interested in conversation, as it had gotten miserably cold after sundown, and we were preoccupied with building a warming fire. Looking out in the distance only a few lights were noticeable, indicating that the country was sparsely populated. I kept thinking that somewhere not far below us was the site of the Battle of the Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn) where George Custer and his troops met their fate at the hands of the Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne.

Leaving the Big Horns we piled into a small bus and stacked our gear on the roof. As we started down the hill, the bus accelerated, and we all heard an angry voice from the back of the

bus, “Slow this damn thing down.” The voice was so loud it made us all cower. Charlie was right there paying attention to our safety. We were terribly overloaded, and if we had rolled the bus it wouldn’t have stopped until it reached the bottom. It would have been an ugly scene.

We hung around Greybull for about a day after which we were flown to Wenatchee, where we spent a day or two in a staging area. From there we were dispatched to the Gold Ridge Fire. The middle of the day seemed like dusk with all the smoke laying low among the heavy timber. Fernando and I were getting antsy to return to jumping, and we talked Charlie into letting us leave if we were needed. I called Winthrop and spoke with **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57). Bill seemed surprised hearing about jumpers on a hotshot crew and asked me if we had we gone through refresher training that year. After I told him we had, he said he could use us, and we quickly arranged transportation to Winthrop. I flew out almost immediately with some Redmond jumpers to construct a helipad on a ridge top overlooking a fire on a mountain across from us.

Years later Rusty Witwer and I had the Hobart Hotshots (Tahoe N.F.), which was about 90% Native American. We had some great stands on large fires. Often we worked in conjunction with the Redding Hotshots. They included many memorable moments that are stories in themselves. Rusty organized a hotshot reunion in 1986 that was also in honor of Charlie’s retirement. Charlie showed up for his retirement in a big cowboy hat, and we had a great time honoring his many years as a smoke-jumper and Hotshot Superintendent. Charlie and Dave Nelson both ended their jumping days with 92 jumps apiece. 🤠

Kris jumped six seasons at Redding, broken by a two-year tour in Vietnam. In 1975-76 he was Superintendent of the Hobart Hotshots with Rusty Witwer as one of his crew bosses. Kris is now Civilian Personnel Officer at Travis AFB in Fairfield, California.

Hey Charlie—Just Checking.

by Rusty Witwer (Ex-Hotshot Superintendent)

The first time I met Charlie was in 1971 on the Romero Fire. That was one of the few fires where I still remember all the details, as it was my first crew boss trainee assignment under **Jerry Vice** (RDD-69). Four years later I was riding with Charlie going to Doug Priddy’s going-away party at Hat Creek. Charlie asked me to go because Doug was heading to the Truckee District (Tahoe N.F.) where I was also assigned. All the way up I was just talking away about the Romero Fire. Charlie turned to me and said he could not remember the fire or anything that I was talking about. Years later I had a young driver jabbering away about some fire on which we had met, when I returned the favor and asked him what fire he was talking about. Amazing how things keep going around and around.

The best year of my career was 1975: Going to as many fires as we could, just living off of our per-diem checks, and

raising havoc on Hilltop Drive in Redding. It was a big deal to represent your forest while being detailed to the Redding Hotshots, working and learning from Charlie and the rest of the crew. All the crew members formed a bond that stood the test of time as we move on throughout the Forest Service and beyond.

As with all crews, certain things are invented during the year that stay with you for a long time. One of ours was the phrase “Just Checking.” All anyone on the crew had to do was call someone’s name like, “Hey Don!” When Don turned around, you would say, “Just checking.” Till this day, anyone from that year will still use that phrase when they first spot another member of the crew.

It was hard to leave the crew at the end of the season, but what was really remarkable was how I was treated when I returned to the District. I remember walking into the

Supervisor's Office to turn in some paperwork. **Dave Nelson** (MSO-57), who was then the Forest FMO, saw me and called me into his office. He asked me what I thought about a proposed burn that was to be done on the district. I had never even talked to a Forest FMO before, much less being asked my opinion. I remember calling Jim Bokidous from the Sequoia, who had been on the Redding Crew with me. He said that his Forest FMO had also just asked him his opinion about something. I don't think that many of us realized how our training on Charlie's crew really did make a difference when we got back to our home forest.

One of the many things that I learned from Charlie and brought back to the forest was the "couth-fining system" and song singing. While at first both might seem a bit like a fraternity stunt, I realized after becoming a Hotshot Superintendent myself, there were many good reasons that Charlie used both for crew safety and productivity. Song singing not only developed crew pride but, more importantly after a long shift, served as an emotional release that rejuvenated everyone. The couth-fining system made everyone on the crew a safety officer. Here is an example of

one fine that I realized had a deeper meaning than what initially appeared on the surface. The fine was for leaving your ball cap on while eating under a roof or tent. Now on the surface, that seemed to be more on the fraternity side than a safety violation. Years later I realized that if a lot of the crew still had their ball caps on while eating, I probably had a really tired bunch of folks and I could judge their work assignments accordingly.

Charlie was always available for advice (whether you asked or not) and, to this day, I still can call him up. I can only imagine how many other calls Charlie still receives from the other 19 crews that he supervised at Redding. Last summer while working with the Army National Guard IR recon ship up at Redding, I went out to the air tanker base and saw Charlie loading planes with retardant. I yelled out, "Hey Charlie!" Before he even turned around you could hear him say, "Just Checking." 🦉

In addition to being a Hotshot Superintendent, Rusty has worked with the USFS as Assistant State Co-op Director in the Regional Office and was Regional Fire Training officer 2005-07.

The Ford Trimotor

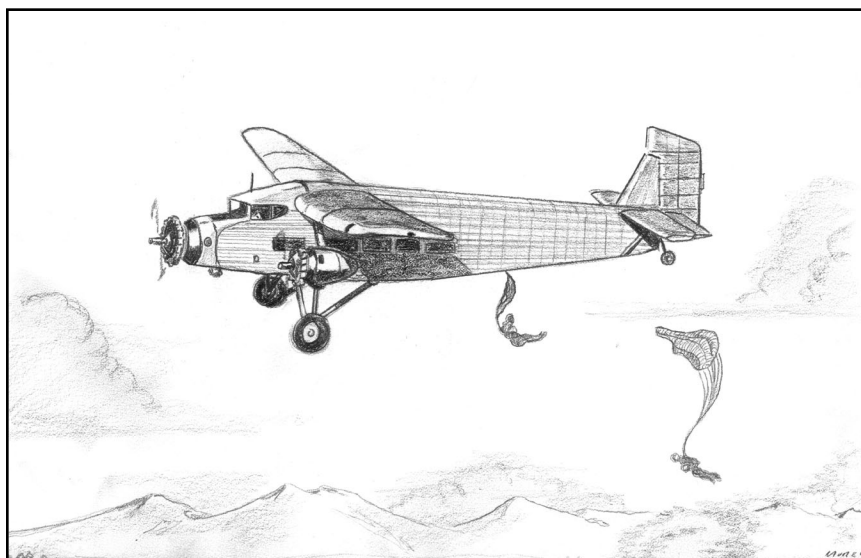
by Harvey Harden (Idaho City '59)

I recently attended the Barrett Jackson Collector Car Auction in Scottsdale, Ariz. with friends from Spokane, Wash. However, when I found out that one of the auction entries was a restored 1929 Ford Trimotor airplane, my interest changed from automobiles to airplanes.

I could not get the plane out of my mind, and I started thinking of encounters that I had with the "old tin goose," as it was affectionately called.

The Ford Trimotor was built from 1925 to 1933, and a total of 199 were produced. Of the total produced, 18 are still in existence and, as near as I can tell, six are still in flying condition.

They cost \$42,000 in 1933 and were considered cheap, reliable and tough. The fuselage and wings were built from aluminum, which was corrugated for added strength. They were especially good for flying into the backcountry, where short landing strips were the norm. They were originally produced for commercial



Ford Trimotor (Courtesy Ken Morris, Associate Member 1934–2009)

passenger service, and in the U.S. both American Airlines and United Airlines used the Ford.

The normal crew was a pilot, co-pilot and a flight attendant. It was the first plane to use the services of a flight attendant. The plane had a maximum speed of 150 mph, and the cruising speed was 90 mph;

however, the stall speed was around 64 mph, and the low stall speed was what made it so attractive as a smokejumper plane.

Henry Ford lost interest in airplanes and quit building them for a couple of reasons. His airplane division was not profitable, but the final straw was the death of his

friend and personal pilot on a test flight. Maybe the most historical flight for the venerable Ford plane was Richard Byrd's first flight over the South Pole.

My first encounter with the Ford Trimotor was during grade school. My parents owned a ranch directly across Highway 15 from the old Floating Feather Airport on the way to McCall. Bill Woods, who was called "the old man of the mountains" by many in the airplane business, owned the Floating Feather.

Bill owned most of the jukeboxes in Boise and had considerable non-aviation income; however, his love was his airplanes, his airport and his flying business. He had two stagger-wing Beechcraft planes, which he kept hangared, but he also owned a Trimotor, which he used for hauling freight and passengers into the various dude ranches that could only be reached by plane and horseback.

I can recall many times watching and wondering if the old Ford was going to make it over the foothills that were at the north end of the nearly one-mile-long runway. It was not unusual to see toilets and other supplies tied to the struts of the plane.

My father owned a plumbing business in Boise but my mother, brothers and I ran the ranch. He had the contract to plumb the "Flying B" dude ranch, which was located on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Bill Woods had the contract to fly the supplies for modernizing the "Flying B."

Part of my father's agreement with the "Flying B" and Bill Woods was that my four brothers and I would get a free round-trip ride in the old Ford Trimotor.

When it was my turn for my first plane ride, I found out that I would be lying down on a load of lumber. There was no room to sit or stand and, of course, Bill and my father were up front in comfort. Kids in our house did not complain, and for good reason. Accordingly, I enjoyed my first plane ride in the old Trimotor, but was glad for the opportunity to exit and look around

the "Flying B" before returning home in the evening.

The "Flying B" dude ranch ended up in the ownership of Marvin Hornback, who frequently hosted jumpers during the process of getting them back to Idaho City after a fire jump. Marvin also did considerable contract flying for the Forest Service. It was not unusual to get picked up by a small plane Marvin piloted and be taken to a location more convenient for Jim Larkin and the Twin Beech.

It was a sad day when we learned that Marvin was killed in a plane crash. We knew the Hornback family well since his parents lived just a short distance from our house.

My second encounter with the Ford Trimotor took place during the mid-1950s. My older brother, **Hal Harden** (MYC-57), was smokejumping at McCall. My family decided to go to McCall and watch the practice jumps, and we were horrified to see a jumper's chute get caught on the tail of the old Ford. In a split-second the chute slipped off the tail and opened into a beautiful canopy. We learned later that it was my brother whose chute caught the tail.

It was about that time I decided that I would apply for a smoke-jumper position when I was old enough. Who says smokejumpers aren't smart?

I was hired as a smokejumper in 1959, and through the summers of 1963 my main encounters with the old Trimotor were practice jumps at McCall. Who can forget the old wood steering wheel with the "Ford" inscription in the center?

I remember going down the runway and thinking, "This thing is going to rattle apart." In reality they were very safe, but they made noise like an aluminum boat in rough water. The old step that hung down on the outside below the door provided an excellent jump position, and that slow stall speed provided for an excellent jump speed.

I never got a raspberry from the old Ford. What a contrast between the Ford and the DC-3. When it was

time to choose McCall and the Trimotor or Idaho City and the Twin Beech, I picked Idaho City primarily because it was closer to Boise and the old home place on Highway 15.

For the next few years after my last jump season, I had some chance encounters with the Ford, while motorcycling through northern Idaho and western Montana. It was not unusual to see smoke, and a while later, watch a two-man stick being dropped. I could usually hear the plane before I saw it—what a beautiful melody. There is nothing close except the sound of the Twin Beech.

Years later, while visiting the old air museum at Athol, Idaho, I saw a beautifully restored Ford Trimotor. It had been restored exactly like it would have been during passenger service with a major airline. What a tragedy to have the museum burn to the ground and destroy a beautiful collection of vintage aircraft.

The museum site is now the site of the "Silverwood" amusement park, located 14 miles north of Coeur d'Alene on Highway 95.

The encounter with the Ford at the Barrett Jackson Collector Car Auction was a chance encounter since I had not read the auction catalog. What a pleasant surprise.

The promotional video and the excitement generated by the bidders was a highlight of the auction. The plane sold for \$1.1 million; it was worth every penny of it. The plane had been bought out of Montana, and it had been owned at one time by the Johnson Flying Service and leased to the USFS for use as a smokejumper plane.

My next encounter with a Ford Trimotor will be with a signed Jim Larkin print that has been stored in a round cardboard tube for too long. It is time to remove it from the tube and have it matted and framed and hung on the wall. I have been reluctant to hang it because I was not sure it would go with the decor. I was wrong. It goes with every decor. 🍷

Harvey can be reached at: (509) 869-9339 or harveyharden@peoplepc.com

The Black Warrior Fire

by Wild Bill Yensen (McCall '52)

In 2003 the McCall Smokejumpers had their 60-year reunion. One of the highlights of that reunion was a booklet of stories contributed by the jumpers from all the years. The booklet was titled *And There We Were*. Stories from the 40s at least 40% true, 50s at least 50% true and so on. One of the stories, "The Black Warrior Fire," was written by one of my dearest friends, **Steve Lloyd-Davies** (MYC-78). I decided I had better write my recollections of the fire, as what I remember is quite a bit different.

The fire was in August 1980. **Steve Loomis** (NCSB-76) was the spotter, and the jumpers were squadleader **Lynn Flock** (MYC-68), **Steve Lloyd-Davies**, **Tom Koyama** (CJ-74), **Mick Moore** (MYC-77), **Bill Keating** (MYC-79), and old Wild Bill. The fire was on a ridge that had one very steep side and timber on the other. It was windy, so Loomis put us out one at a time. I was last. There were chutes scattered all over the ridge. Being last, I looked the situation over carefully as I waited for my turn. I could see that when we de-mobed we would have to carry our packs down a trail to the creek and to a road about two miles away. I also watched the fire and it was not doing anything.

I was the oldest guy on the crew and had a new XP-5 parachute on my back. I got to jump the XP-5 and turn in an evaluation after each jump. Jumping that chute kept me jumping till '86. It turned faster, went faster, and let you down so much easier than the FS-10s the other guys had to jump. Once under the canopy I wondered why should I carry my jump gear way down that hill? The wind was blowing toward the road, so I went as far downhill as I could. I landed like a feather less than a half-mile from the

road. I put my gear in the packout bag, put it in a safe place, and headed up the hill with my PG bag.

I got to the fire and the guys were tooling up and just fooling around as the fire was quiet. We went to work and had it lined in a couple of hours and nearly dead out by dark. It was a fun fire. We told stories around the campfire and drained the blackberry brandy I carried in a little blue bottle labeled "Comfort Gel." My aunt, Lois Fuller, from Nebraska had come to McCall to visit, and she had that little blue bottle in her purse with Jack Daniels in it. I conned her out of the blue bottle and carried it in my PG bag to the end of my jumping career.

The next day I told Flock I had left my packout bag down by the creek, and I volunteered to take the chainsaw pack down to the road. On the way back, I picked up my jump gear and carried it down to the road and left it with the saw pack before heading back up the hill. When I got back to the fire, the guys had decided that since all my gear was already at the road, they would pack up the tools, sleeping bags, cargo chutes and garbage in the cardboard boxes and have me kick them down the steep side of the hill. I told them it was pretty risky as it was rocky all the way down to the road, and I did not think the boxes would stay together. They were bound and determined to only carry out their jump gear, so I reluctantly gave in.

They saddled up and headed down with only their jump gear. I kicked off all the boxes and followed them down. They hung up in the rocks. I kicked them a second time and most of the boxes flew apart spreading shovel handles, shovel blades, Pulaskis, cargo chutes and garbage all over the place. After two hours looking, I only found cargo chutes, sleeping bags, and part of the tools. I waited on the road with what I had and finally the rest of them arrived. It was getting late, so they didn't want to help search for the missing tools, and we drove in to Idaho City for supper and a few cool ones. We got to visit **Kenn Smith** (IDC-55) at his place before the ride to Boise. The ride back to McCall from Boise was pretty quiet.

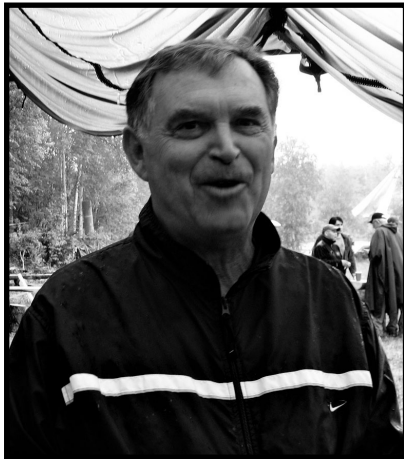
We got back to McCall around midnight. Of course we were very short on tools, and we were supposed to check everything in. Flock snuck down to the basement and the dull-tool bin. He brought up what we needed to satisfy Mr. (Thad) **Duel** (MYC-56) the next day. We got away with it.

That is how I remember the fire. We all had a good time, and we were very lucky to come in so late. 🧑

"Wild Bill" Yensen taught and coached in Southern California for thirty-five years and jumped at McCall for thirty seasons.



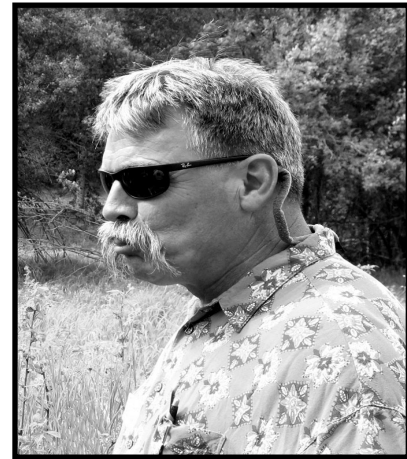
L-R: Steve Lloyd-Davies, Bill Keating, Tom Koyama and Lynn Flock. (Courtesy B. Yensen)



Greg West (FBX-64)



Bus Ride to Practice Jump

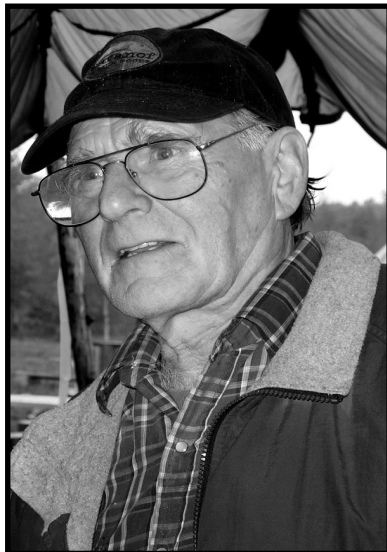


Jim Klump (RDD-64)



Alaska Smokejumpers 50th Reunion 2009

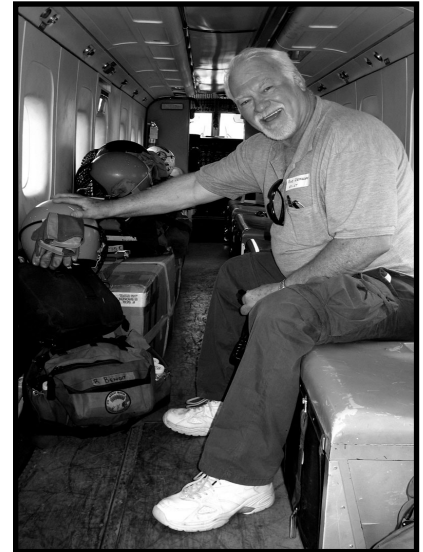
Photo's & Layout Design by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



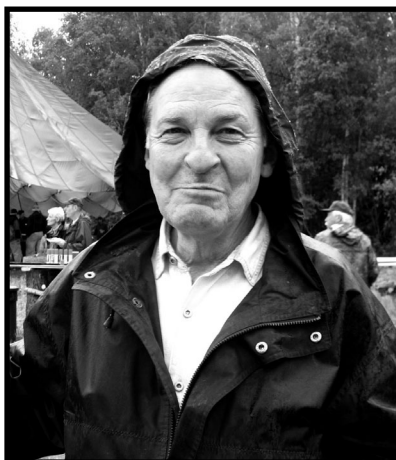
Gene Bartell (MSO-67)



Bram Granger (FBX-07)



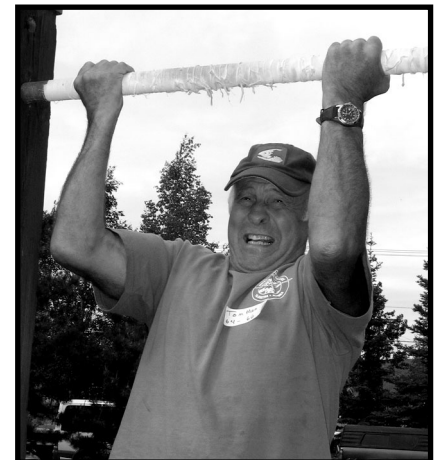
Bob Rasmussen (FBX-66)



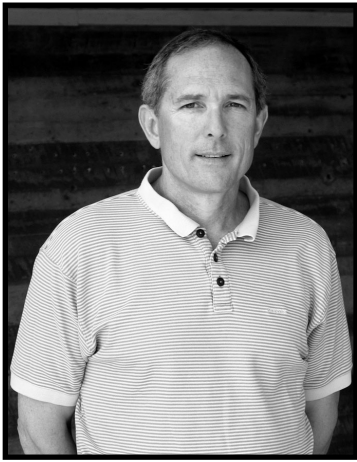
Don Wahl (MSO-63)



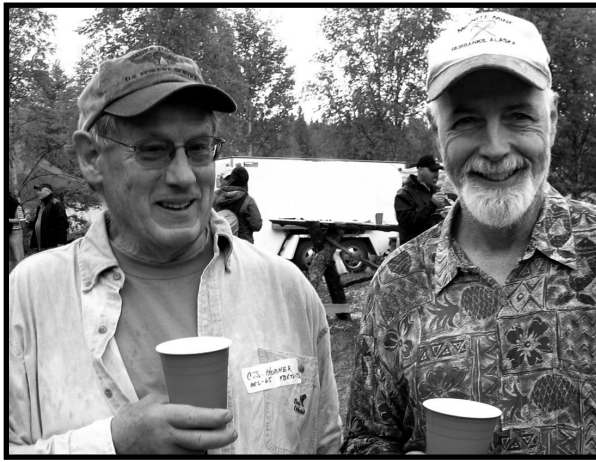
Bruce Ford (MSO-75)



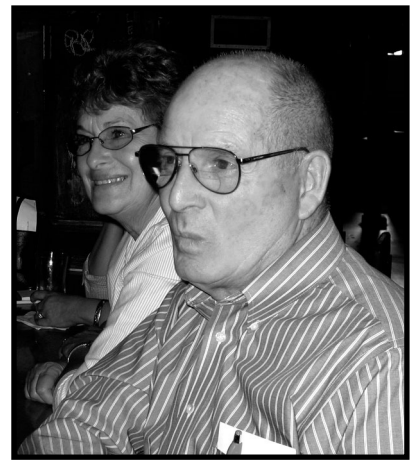
Tom Moe (MSO-63)



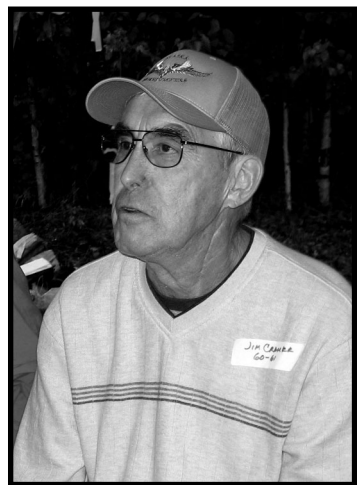
John Gould (FBX-81)



C.J. Horner (MYC-65) & Bob Moloney (MYC-64)



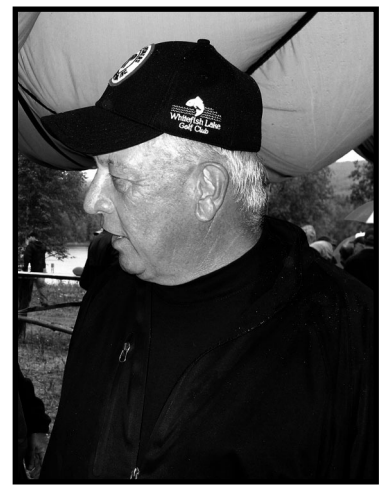
Mary & Lee Gossett (RDD-57)



Jim Cramer (CJ-58)



*John Manley (CJ-62), Jed Emonds,
Troop Emonds (CJ-66) & Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)*



Dick Hughes (MSO-64)

Life Is Short, Eat Dessert First

Alaska Mess Hall



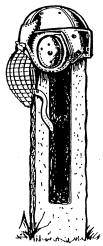
Murray Taylor (RDD-65)



Roy Percival (NCSB-57)



Audrey Banfill (RAC-06)



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.

Sherman "Tim" Wapato (North Cascades '53)

Tim died April 19, 2009, at his home in Rapid City, SD. He was a member of the Colville Confederated Tribe in Eastern Washington. Tim attended Washington State and Cal State Universities before enlisting in the Army. After leaving the Army, he spent 21 years with the L.A. Police Dept., rising to the rank of Lieutenant. Tim was the Executive Director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission 1979-89 and Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans in the Dept. of Health and Human Services until 1993. He jumped at NCSB in 1953-54 and 1957.

Lawrence J. "Larry" Casey (Missoula '46)

Larry died April 21, 2009. He graduated from the Univ. of Montana School of Forestry in 1949 and retired from the forestry business in 1982. Larry was a gunnery instructor in the Army Air Corps during WWII and continued to fly his Cessna 172 through 2001. He was an NSA member living in North Bend, Oregon.

Charles E. "Chuck" Paluso (Missoula '51)

Chuck died May 13, 2009, in Coalsdale, Arkansas. He was a graduate of Oklahoma State University and spent over 20 years in the U.S. Air Force. Chuck was a retired Lt. Colonel and flew transports and gunships in Vietnam. He was introduced to smokejumping while he worked lookout towers in the Selway N.F. during the summers of 1949 and 1950. He rookie'd in 1951 at Missoula. Chuck broke his ankle in 1952, hitting a snag in Yellowstone. He finished the season as an aerial spotter and did the same job in 1953.

William R. "Bill" Terrill (Missoula '73)

Bill died June 16, 2009, about three weeks after having a stroke. He retired from the USFS as a Silviculturalist in Northern Idaho. Bill had recently moved to Sequim, Washington. He jumped at Missoula in 1973 and Fairbanks in 1974-75.

Donald W. Tyler (Pendleton, Oregon '45)

Donald died June 24, 2009. He was a medic with the Triple Nickles based in Pendleton, Oregon, during Operation Firefly in 1945.

Leland M. "Hardrock" Jensen (McCall '69)

Lee died June 17, 2009, at his home in Lake Fork, Idaho. He had a 39-year career with the U.S. Forest Service and jumped at McCall 1969-76. After jumping, Lee became the Assistant FMO at the Big Creek Ranger Station and retired in the same

capacity on the Krassel Ranger District. Lee spent 37 years on the Payette Ski Patrol and was awarded a Purple Star for saving a life in 2006. He loved hunting and the outdoors and liked to pass on his knowledge of hunting and traditional archery.

John P. "Bup" Murray (Missoula '00)

John died June 25, 2009, at his home near Browning, Montana. Bup was raised on the Two Medicine River, south of Browning, and attended Blackfeet Community College and the Flandreau Indian School. He was a former member of the Chief Mountain Hotshots and jumped at Missoula 2000-03.

Timothy G. "Tim" Eldridge (Missoula '82)

Tim died June 27, 2009, at the UC San Diego Medical Center of complications from liver disease. He was a four-sport letterman at Thompson Falls (Montana) High School and rookie'd in 1982. Tim jumped until 1989 and then managed the Smokejumper Visitor Center at Missoula. He worked with the media on many occasions. Tim was the adviser on the movie *Firestorm* and Nicholas Evan's book *The Smokejumper*. He leaves behind fiancé and author Gayle Morrison.

Floyd E. Yoder (Cave Junction '43)

Floyd, 89, died July 4, 2009, in Iowa City, Iowa. He was a member of the CPS-103 smokejumpers and jumped two seasons at Cave Junction. Floyd was a leader in the Mennonite Church in the Kalona, Iowa, area where he farmed all of his life.

L. Edward "Eddy" Noel (Missoula '59)

Ed died July 15, 2009, at his residence in Missoula. He graduated from the University of Montana in 1963 and earned his Doctorate of Dental Science degree from the University of Washington in 1968. After serving two years in the Navy, he returned to Missoula where he set up his dental practice. Ed competed for Sentinel High School in football, track and wrestling, where he qualified for the state championships. He jumped at Missoula 1959-62, 65 and at West Yellowstone 1963-64 during his undergraduate years.

Richard A. "Stro" Strohmyer (Missoula '77)

Rick died July 15, 2009. He graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in Forestry. Rick jumped at Missoula 1977-78 and West Yellowstone 1979-84. In 1985 he started a 24-year career with the Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation and had been in Miles City for the last six years as Regional Area Manager. Rick was also a professional musician performing fiddle, banjo and guitar region wide in the Sweetwater Bluegrass Band, and a family band called "Southpaw." 🎸

The California Retread Program- How It Happened

by Bernie Weisgerber (Redding '60)

Ever hear the word “Retread” associated with the smokejumper program in California? Ever wonder what a Retread is or was? Ever wonder how the Retread Program started and who was involved? Well, hopefully I can answer those questions.

I grew up in the Forest Service, as my father was a career Forester and fireman in the outfit. I went on my first fire with my Dad when I was six-years old and he was the District Ranger on the Mt. Pinos Ranger District, Los Padres N.F. When I was about 10-years old, I went on my first helicopter ride to a large fire that was on the south side of Frazier Park, which was about five miles from the ranger station where we lived.

In 1949, at eight years old, I knew I was going to be a smokejumper. The focus and reason that motivated me was the tragedy at Mann Gulch on August 5, 1949. It motivated me at age eight and for my entire Forest Service career.

I was hired at the ripe old age of 18, right out of high school, but I turned 19 by the start of training and was one of five in our rookie class in Redding in the spring of 1960. I already had two summers with the Forest Service behind me: one season on a Timber Stand Improvement Crew and one season driving a fire truck on the Modoc N.F.

The Redding Smokejumper program, which started in 1957, was administratively attached to the Shasta Trinity National Forest until 1961. In 1961 the Regional Office administered us. Also in 1961 we moved our headquarters from downtown Redding out to the airport at the new, under-construction Northern California Service Center.

At that time and until 1962, the jumpers were mostly college students with a few non-college jumpers returning each year. Jumpers that stayed in the program tended to change bases once or twice before leaving jumping for a real job. Of course, the college jumpers were normally short timers as they went on to other jobs after a year or two of jumping. For the first few years the Redding crew size was around 25 jumpers. We mainly jumped from a Forest Service DC-3 and a privately owned Twin Beech operated by Burt Train.

I trained in 1960 and returned in '61 and '62 to Redding. At that time I too was a college student majoring in Forest Management at Humboldt State College. In the summer of 1961 Foreman **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42) left Redding and **Bob McDonald** (MSO-52) took over the reins. Bob was a Forest Management graduate from the University of California at Berkeley. One of his fellow classmates, John Warnock, was the District Ranger on the Coffee Creek Ranger District on the Shasta Trinity N.F.,

which was about a two-hour drive from Redding. I had known John Warnock since I was a small kid in southern California when he worked for my dad on a fire crew.

I ran into John one day in 1962. He asked when I was going to quit jumping and get a job in a forestry-related area so I would have some practical experience when I graduated. I replied something like “probably never.” I liked jumping and figured I would stay with it. Why anyone would leave the best job in the Forest Service was beyond me. John explained the real world to me and that was where we left it. I had a lot of respect for John, so it gave me something to think about.

Since I did not want to quit jumping, I wondered if I could do both? It was simple to me. All I had to do was take smokejumper refresher training in the spring, then go work on John's District till the jumpers had fires or needed an extra jumper in Redding. Then I could haul tail for Redding and go back to jumping. All that had to be done was to figure out a few details like: Is this legal, will it work, can it work, how will it work? There would be tons of other hidden problems that would crop up that I was unaware of.

Well, those “details” were the easy part as, unknown to me, Bob McDonald and John Warnock were college classmates and friends. They both understood the administrative procedures needed to make this work for everyone. However, I believe the real reason this worked was because they both believed it was a good idea, and they were willing to work together to accomplish a common goal. The fact they were both very good fireman didn't hurt anything, either.



*Bernie Weisgerber at a 1970 practice jump with stepson Gary Hornberger who became a West Yellowstone jumper in 1991.
(Courtesy B. Weisgerber)*

In the spring of 1963, I took the annual jumper refresher training and then went to work at Coffee Creek running a small survey crew for John. At this time there was not a Retread Program, as it would soon become known. It was just one jumper who did not want to stop jumping and two firemen that knew how to make that happen. It was more of an experiment.

The anonymity was short lived as Bob "Black Mac" McDonald saw this type of arrangement had great potential for fitting in with the new "academy" program that he had initiated in 1962. This new "fire training/professional development" program brought in permanent personnel from the California forests for a season. They would go through smokejumper training and also receive training in leadership, instructor training, intermediate fire behavior, advance first aid, hydraulics, air operations, etc. These trainees would be smokejumpers for the season and then return to their home units. McDonald saw the potential in utilizing their smokejumper training by bringing them in each spring for refresher training and then return them to their regular position on the forest. They would be called back when needed to supplement the regular jump crew.

McDonald secured approval to start the Retread program in the spring of 1963. The first "official" class consisted of six academy-trained jumpers. They came from five different Forests in California. They were **Larry Boggs**, Angeles NF, **Kenny Gouff**, Los Padres NF, **Bill Eaton**, Shasta-Trinity NF, **Bob Wilcox**, Klamath NF, **Stan Palfy** and **Don Thomas** (CJ-57), San Bernardino NF.

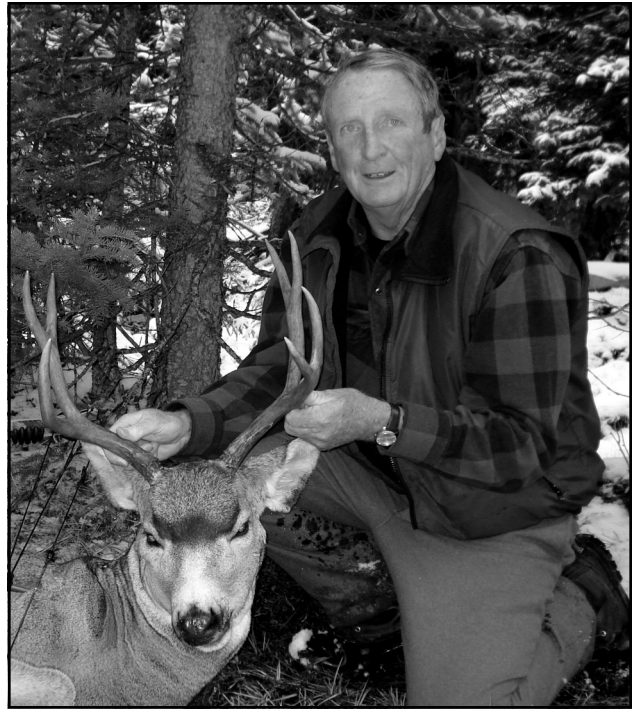
The program grew again in 1965 when **Dave Nelson** (MSO-57) became the Base Manager. Thirteen former Redding jumpers returned for Retread training. The program continued to grow under Dave Nelson's supervision. There were 20 Retreads in 1966 and 29 in 1967. In 1967 I became the first Retread to receive his 50-jump pin. In 1969 **Charlie Caldwell**, Redding Hotshot Superintendent, became the second Retread to receive his 50-jump pin. From 1970 to the end of the program in 1974, about 12 more 50-jump pins were earned. As near as I know there were no Retreads to earn a 100-jump pin.

In the winter of 1968, Dave Nelson took a District Ranger job in southern California, and he was replaced by **Dick Tracy** (MSO-53). As a side note, Dave came back in the spring as a Retread and was most likely the only District Ranger ever to also be an active jumper and, for damn sure, the last.

Under Tracy's leadership the Retread Program continued to grow and flourish. Dick was a long-time, well-known and much-respected jumper. In fact, Dick completed his 200th jump that spring during refresher training.

Tracy's initial Retread crew numbered 34 and was the largest to date. In 1969 it grew to 38 and hit a high in 1970 with 47 Retreads. In 1970 the Redding Base had its first fatality. **Tom Regennitter** (RDD-67), from the Angeles N.F., was killed making a fire jump on the Shasta-Trinity N.F. In 1971 and 1972, Retreads were steady with 32 and 33 respectively. In 1973 there were 25, and in 1974, 32.

The last year for the Retread program was 1974. The end



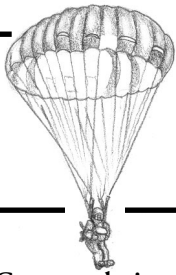
*Bernie Weiserber and results of hunt in Wyoming fall of 2008.
(Courtesy B. Weiserber)*

of the program was mostly brought on by economic factors. The cost to train the Retreads and to transport them to and from Redding was a regional concern. The real kicker was the new Washington Office direction that a jumper had to have a proficiency jump at least every two weeks. Some District Rangers were also getting more reluctant to let some of their best firemen leave the District during the summer.

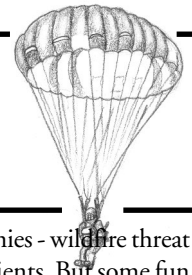
Starting in 1963 and ending in 1974, there were 98 individuals taking part in the program, and they logged 456 fire jumps and 1035 practice jumps. The average Retread spent three seasons in the program with about a third of them only spending one season. No Retread jumped the entire time the program was available. Fourteen of the 18 National Forests in California were represented.

Was the program a success? Success can be measured in many ways. The individual jumper became a better fireman, fires were contained, friends were made for life, firemen were promoted to more responsible positions, and we got a break from our regular jobs. I am sure there was a host of other benefits to the Forest Service and the individuals. Many of the Retreads went on to be Engine Foremen, Prevention Officers, Law Enforcement Officers, Hotshot Superintendents, Fuels Specialists, Aviation Officers, Administrative Officers, District Fire Management Officers, Forest Fire Management Officers, and District Rangers. They filled positions on the Ranger Districts, Supervisor's Offices, Regional Offices and the Washington Office. These folks have held every position on Regional ICS Type I and Type II Teams from squad boss to Type I Incident Commanders. Retreads have influenced fire management decisions in several regions for a long time. 🙏

Bernie can be reached at: iliamna_bernies@msn.com



Odds and Ends



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to Denis Symes (MYC-63)), who just became our latest **Life Member**.

Gordon Kellogg (CJ-57): "On a recent drive to the Bay Area, I reminisced with friends in the shadow of Mt. Shasta about a memorable day, in the summer of 1957, when another CJ jumper and I decided to climb that mountain. It was one of those magical days when you are young and strong and can do anything that pops into your head.

After returning home, I opened the April issue of *Smokeyjumper*, and right there on the front page was a picture of my climbing partner, **Gid Newton** (CJ-55). It made me sad but also glad that we had that perfect day together so long ago.

Bob Webster (MSO-55) recently sent me a couple business type cards that he had made up by a local print shop in Georgia. It has "Life Member, National Smokeyjumper Association," complete with logo and contact information. Bob has paid the setup fee and the design is in place for anyone who might be interested in having some NSA business type cards made. If you are interested, contact Bob at oldsmokeyjumper@hughes.net or 31 Buck Ln., Box Springs, Georgia 31801.

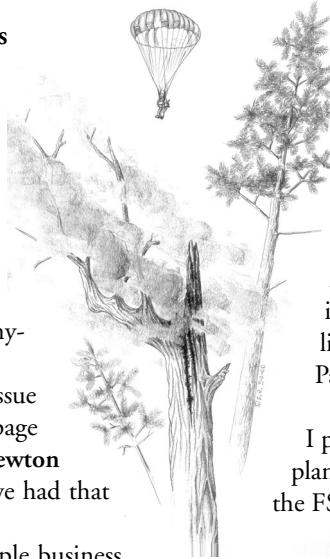
Jerry Howe (CJ-65) is working for MPRI, a private military contractor in Iraq. "I got the latest *Smokeyjumper* magazine with all the Air America stuff.

Just thought I would let you know what I am doing. I work for MPRI as a Law Enforcement Professional. Our job is to find the IED cells before they blow us up. There are a couple hundred former feds and cops throughout Iraq and Afghanistan."

Four Southern Oregonians were among the winners of the third annual Oregon Heritage Excellence Awards, presented at the Northwest History and Heritage Extravaganza in Portland. **Roger Brandt** (Associate), of Josephine County, was recognized for his many efforts to document and promote the history and heritage of sites along Highway 199 and, more specifically, the Siskiyou Smokeyjumper Base near Cave Junction.

Toby Scott (MYC-57): "We are heading for Montana where we have a cabin and 271 acres on the Blackfoot River about 60 miles east of Missoula. This will be our 15th straight summer up there. We're kinda isolated. We make our own electricity and have visits from bears occasionally-both black and grizzly. I have a small sawmill and piddle around fixing fence, spraying weeds, thinning trees and fishing. Tough life!"

John Culbertson (FBX-69): "Working full time. Most of the



work is for insurance companies - wildfire threat assessments for high-end clients. But some fun stuff, doing a little walking, scouting trees and stands for future research on Angeles NF and Los Padres NF and a remote sensing project. Several days a week walking 20-30 miles at a stretch looking for fire scars, etc.

Also involved with the Condor Trail Project to link backcountry trails from LA County to Monterey (the range of the condor). All the work is being done by volunteers, mostly through hikers like me. It will definitely become an offshoot of the Pacific Crest Trail.

Doing a fair amount of trail work on a local trail I patrol once a week - clear slides, saw downed trees, plan re-routes. The only way to get anything done with the FS is to become a volunteer."

WANT TO SPEND SOME TIME IN ARGENTINA?

Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67) is looking for some adventuresome types to work a four-six week commitment in Argentina between November (2009) and April (2010). The work would be on Finca Ogawa, a 27-acre farm/vineyard located in the heart of Argentina's version of the Napa Valley.

The work is in exchange for room, minimal food expenses, fine wine, short excursions, spectacular views of the Andes, and an experience of a lifetime. You must be able to skillfully use shovel, hoe, axe, hammer, chainsaw, corkscrew, and be a self-starter. Command of Spanish, irrigating, farming, fencing, cooking, and general construction skills is a plus. Every year we plant a huge garden of fresh vegetables, herbs, and last year we planted raspberries aplenty. Weather is fantastic as October through April is spring and summer in Argentina.

If you know anyone that is interested in this venture and/or want more details, please call toll-free 1-877-773-3403 or call 208-739-3455 cell, or visit our website at www.finaogawa.com.ar or e-mail Jerry personally at ogawasan@fintc.com.

I'm backing off the *Sounding Off From The Editor* column mention of the excessive costs to the taxpayers for their firefighter protection. That has not stopped the forwarding of newspaper editorials to me from NSA members on the subject. The Vero Beach, Florida, *Press Journal* writes that "regular county employees earn a retirement benefit of 1.6 times the years employed; Fire Rescue get three times the years employed, or about 90 percent more than regular county employees." In addition to salaries, the county contributed almost \$3,000,000 to the Fire Rescue retirement fund last year. The newspaper also noted that many of the Fire Rescue employees received more

than \$20,000 in overtime pay during that period.

The Sacramento Bee reports that 50 former firefighters will receive six-digit pensions for life. Their Fire Chief last year earned \$320,000. The **median** pay for these Metro rank-and-file firefighters was over \$114,000 last year. When questioned on this, Metro Fire officials say that this pay level is necessary to keep and attract "quality" firefighters. After continually reading about a single firefighter position attracting 700-1000 applicants, we know this is definitely not true.

By the time you read this in October, I am guessing that the west will have burned millions of acres and that the city and country firemen will have put in more overtime hours in "structure defense" than we can afford. Wouldn't we be better to leave protection of homes surrounded by brush and trees to the owners? It certainly would be cheaper to just buy the houses. When will the public catch on to this abuse of the taxpayers?

I've found some more **Siskiyou Smokejumper Base** receiver covers. Any Gobi jumper who wants one for his SUV or pickup, send me \$7.00 for shipping and I'll get one in the mail to you. For those who ordered this cover and received a NSA cover as a substitute, let me know and I'll send you a SSB cover.

The NSA receiver covers are going for the price of shipping (\$7.00). Make checks payable to NSA and send to me. The *Scholastic News*, a publication for elementary-age school kids, featured "Smoke Jumpers" on the cover page of the Oct. 2008 issue. "A fire burns in the forest. How do firefighters get to it? They jump from the sky!"

George Johnson (MSO-77) received the Dept. of Interior's Valor Award in May for his role in rescuing a family of four from an approaching fire in southern Utah two years ago. Johnson, who jumped at Missoula from 1977-87, accepted the award from Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar during a ceremony in Washington D.C.

Cecil Stevenson (MSO-53): "**Jim Gunby's** (MSO-52) letter in the July 2009 issue of *Smokejumper* brought back good memories. I also was sent to Grangeville in 1953 and had the good fortune to jump several fire with Jim. He was a first-class jumper, friend and someone who you always remember. Happy he got back from Vietnam OK."

Bernie Nielsen (MYC-47): "In the summer of 1949 or 1950, Oregon needed additional jumpers as they had a fire going on their side of Hells Canyon. Four of us were dispatched from McCall. I remember how the Snake River looked as we flew over it. Just a ribbon! This was before the dams were built and it was quite a sight. The Oregon jumpers were already on the fire when we got there. We grabbed our tools and went down toward the fire. I was about to throw some dirt when we were told to return to the jump spot and prepare to go back to McCall. A small two-place helicopter began ferrying us to a landing strip somewhere in the vicinity from which we were flown back to McCall, arriving before sundown. All in all, it was a fun day."

Tommy Albert (CJ-64) on the project (June 22-26) to save the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base: "What a great experience and result from last week's project. I think it will be the

shot heard around the world (Josephine County anyway). Now we must keep the ball rolling."

Carroll Gambrell (MSO-52): "I got word the other day that another old buddy, **Clayton Berg** (MSO-52), had passed away. Clayton was a soft-spoken, steady-Eddy type, completely unflappable. We stole a truck one time. Actually we didn't know we were stealing it, but you decide.

"Three of us, including **George Laney** (MSO-54) were coming off a fire on the Klamath N.F. in Northern Calif. After fighting the manzanita for twelve miles, we emerged at the end of a logging road where the FS had marked our map as the pickup point. There was no one in sight. We were tired, hungry, out of sorts and out of food. Worn to a frazzle, we faced a cold and hungry night. But wait. There was a ragged, old International pickup parked nearby with the keys in the ignition. Surely, the Forest Service has left it there for us. Even though it was bare of any USFS markings, that was the conclusion we reached.

"We piled our gear on board and drove some 25 miles to the Ranger Station at Happy Camp. They were not exactly happy to see us. In fact, they didn't know who we were or where we came from. They did, however, recognize the pickup and knew it belonged to someone other than the Forest Service. We choked down a few bites of supper before being driven, in a FS vehicle, three hours back to Cave Junction. I'm sure that with his last breath, Clayton swore that I led them into committing a felony, and it was only dumb luck we were never convicted."

Got a heads up from **Mike Martischang** (NIFC-74). In the latest issue (July) of the Forest Service's newsletter, *FS Today*, there is mention of the Glade Project in Colorado and the development of a DVD from the MSO Tech./Development Center on firefighter crew "cohesion and entrapment avoidance." Click on: <http://www.fs.fed.us/ftoday>

My wife, K.G., and I just returned (July 12) from the first-ever NSA Trail Maintenance couples project at Seely Lake, Montana. The group led by **Jim/Judy Cherry** (MSO-57), included **Tony/Linda Talbot** (Associates), **Phil/Bonnie Petty** (MSO-68), **Dan/Gayle Hensley** (MSO-57) and **Chuck/K.G. Sheley** (CJ-59). **Don Larson** (MSO-74) provided his excellent knowledge of woodworking to supervise the building of tables and benches for the kitchen area. Everyone was an outstanding individual and worker. Gayle Hensley will tell what we did during the week in her writeup for the *Trail Maintenance Report* that will come out at the end of the year. It is time to get your spouse involved in this important work. Look for the 2010 couples project sign-up sheet in the *Trail Maintenance Report* and join us for a great time next year. We should be able to increase our involvement to add another week.

Dennis Golik (MYC-74): "The recent fires (June) on the Shasta Trinity N.F. with the bleached-white snag patches remind me of an old fire. One time **Andy Byerly** (RDD-91) and I were boosting Zulieland. We were spotted by the legendary late **Walt Smith** (NIFC-71) onto a remote Montana lightning fire in the middle of a large, old, snag-patch burn. For safety due to extensive area around fire layered with jack-strawed snags, Walt put us some distance away from the

fire. By the time Andy and I bushwhacked and log-hopped our way to the cargo and fire, the burning period was underway. I soon realized we'd need at least *three* saw teams to cut around the perimeter of dense down jackstraw. Andy was full of energy, but after a few slow chains of line and cup trenching, I knew we'd run out of saw gas way before we could cut around perimeter. In the afternoon a spotter plane flew over and confirmed my assessment that this weren't NO longer a good-deal two-slugger fire and wondered why we'd been put there to begin with. Told them things looked dif-

ferent 6 or 7 hours earlier! If'n we coulda jumped CLOSER to the fire and got sawing QUICKLY, perhaps Andy & me coulda done some good before the burning period awoke. So, we fetched gear and fell back a few hundred yards and monitored fire that evening and night. The next day we bushwhacked our way back to the jumpspot, retrieved our personnel gear and made a tiny H-spot. Then a chopper ferried us to another nearby fire where we actually could do some good (as reinforcements). I still feel badly that we "lost" that potential good-deal fire. 🧯

Alaska's 50-year Smokejumper Reunion Reflecting on the Past, Eyeing the Future

By Cecil Hicks (North Cascades '62)

For a few days in June, current and former Alaskan smokejumpers gathered in Fairbanks for a 50-year reunion. In the summer of 1959, the same year that Alaska became a state, a squad of 16 jumpers flew to Fairbanks in a DC-3 from "the lower 48 states" for the start of the fire season.

A reunion is a time to catch up on the lives of fellow smokejumpers and friends, reflect on past jumps, and pay tribute to jumpers no longer on the jump list. As friends gathered in Fairbanks at motels, in bars and restaurants, at the loft, at the barracks, and in the mess hall on Fort Wainwright for breakfast, the jump and fire stories (all true) came alive.

For the older jumpers, some of whom haven't jumped out of an airplane for several decades, returning to the 49th state was almost culture shock as they took in the changes made to the city of Fairbanks. From a large town/small city of some 15-20,000 people in the 1960s, it has grown to some 88,000 residents living in the city limits, plus a few thousand more residents living in the outlying areas, like North Pole etc., that have turned into bedroom communities.

We now know how the city of Fairbanks spent some \$200 million dollars (just a guess) in state royalty money from the North Slope Oil Pipeline. The city built four lane ex-

pressways. There seems to be numerous four-lane roads and expressways that often only go a few miles.

First, I think the reunion organizers should be thanked for their hospitality. They did a great job. Everything was well organized and appreciated. Also, a little rain didn't hinder the camp-out bbq held at the Chena Lakes recreation area on Friday night. We had good food and great conversation under the big parachute. A liberal supply of bug dope was provided, practice jumps were made in the rain, and beer highlighted the event.

All smokejumpers attending the camp-out received a large (silver dollar-sized) gold commemorative 50th year smokejumper reunion coin handed out by **John Gould** (FBX-81), Alaska fire service manager. The front side of the coin was imprinted with a smokejumper with a ram air parachute over an outline of Alaska. The backside had two smokejumpers parachuting to a fire using circular parachutes. Tom Lonnie, BLM Alaska State Director, was on hand to greet everyone.

While driving to the BBQ, I could hardly believe all the miles of huge dikes built around Chena Lakes for flood control. During the Chena and Tanana River floods of August 1967, I lived in a trailer near the corner of University Avenue and College Road. The night the waters crested, authorities warned residents that the waters

would probably crest at 18 feet and that people living in low-lying areas should prepare for some flooding.

People literally woke up the next morning and stepped into a couple feet of water inside their homes. The Chena River crested at 31 feet and the entire city of Fairbanks and the surrounding Tanana River Valley was flooded. My trailer was surrounded by some three feet of water. My VW bug started floating away from where it was parked behind the BLM loft at 3 ½ Mile Airport Road, but dispatcher Chuck Larsen waded out with a rope and tied the car to a telephone pole and saved it.

That same night, a group of us jumpers left by commercial airplane as a backup crew at the jump base in Missoula.

If you stayed in the two-person barrack rooms provided on Fort Wainwright during the reunion, you probably saved some \$300 plus in motel expenses. Thanks again for your hospitality.

I imagine after about three days (I believe it was Ben Franklin who said guests and fish begin to smell after three days), the current jumpers were probably a little tired of hearing that back in the "old days of jumping" the mountains were steeper, the trees were taller, the ground was harder, the opening shocks were rougher, the chutes were slower to maneuver (actu-



(Courtesy Brett Fairchild)

ally they were), packs were heavier, mosquitoes were larger, and fires were bigger and hotter.

All in all, it was a lot of fun. From my personal observation, I think the current jumpers are in better shape than in my day. Most of the jumpers are making it a career now days, rather than working their way through college, and they're probably more professional. I heard that this year there wasn't a rookie-training group as most of the jumpers had returned.

On Saturday morning, a large turnout showed up to tour the jump base. When the siren sounded for an actual fire jump (not just a practice jump), the top eight people on the jump list quickly suited up in the ready room and headed for the CASA jump plane standing by on the tarmac. For safety

reasons, I saw that a number of jumpers wore kneepads, and some even wore lightweight chest and back protectors. Probably a good idea if you're looking at longevity to prevent injury.

That afternoon we rode out to Birch Hill by bus to watch practice jumps. As we drove past the entrance to the ski slope on Birch Hill, I remember one winter going there to ski and seeing a sign that read "No skiing until the weather gets up to 20 degrees below zero."

Visitors were quite impressed with the jumpers as they flew their ram-air parachutes into the jump spot. BLM jumpers exited the plane in two-person sticks from 3,000 feet. As they left the airplane, a small drogue chute opened by static line to stabilize the jumper's fall. After a count of five sec-

onds, they then pulled the main. As jumpers approached the ground they zeroed in on a cargo chute laid out the middle of the clearing. I should note that the only two jumpers that landed on top of the cargo chute were both women. Good jump.

On Saturday evening people gathered at the Silver Gulch in Fox for a banquet dinner. Again, it was good food, good beer, good conversation, and a few speakers spoke about their jump experiences and told a few stories about fellow jumpers and overhead.

Troy Hodges, the former BLM airplane contract owner/pilot of Troy Air, donated a large smokejumper painting to the jump base. **Davis Perkins** (NCSB-72), the artist who did the painting, was on hand for the presentation.

Bill Robertson (MSO-57), a former Alaskan engineer jumper, described the engineer program where each person on the small crew made some 50 to 60 jumps from helicopters to clear an area for survey markers. For several years in the 1960s the engineers worked on surveying land (some 140 million acres) that would revert from U.S. government ownership to the state of Alaska.

At the Silver Gulch, I bumped into current base manager **Bill Cramer's** dad, **John** (MYC-63). John had worked with my twin sons (Matt and Shawn) in Boise with the Idaho Department of Lands on a fire crew for the past few years. I was told he still works fire in summer to keep in shape for the big-game hunting season.

Earlier in the day John had driven out to the former BLM site on Airport Road, which is now headquarters for fire crews of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. Upon his arrival he found they were giving employees their annual pack test. In order to pass this pre-hiring requirement for seasonal employment, a person has to carry a 45-pound pack and walk three miles in less than 45 minutes. John asked if he could take the pack test. They said sure. He completed the walk in 39 minutes and 52 seconds. That's pretty darn good for somebody 67 years old that started smokejumping

46 years ago back in 1963. He was then offered a job and he accepted it.

As the dinner progressed, everybody took a moment to reflect on a deceased list being distributed that named all the fellow Alaska smokejumpers who are “gone but not forgotten.” There were 53 names on the list. I either jumped with or knew some 28 people from the list.

By car, train and airplane, former

smokejumpers departed Fairbanks following the 50th year reunion to return to their respective lives, families, and homes scattered across the country. For most of these former jumpers the gathering was a time to renew friendships and reflect about the past “glory days” when smokejumping was undoubtedly some of the best times of their life.

As for the current corps of Alaskan

smokejumpers, it was time to enjoy the moment, endure the wisdom passed on by the “old” jumpers, and realize that sometime in the future it’ll be their turn to pass on more legendary jump and fire stories to a new crop of jumpers.

I understand that the BLM smoke-jumper reunion organizers aren’t going to wait for another 50 years before the next reunion. They are already tentatively looking to have another in five years. 🌲

Bad Opening Shock

by Milt Beer (Redding '65)

It was around July 20, 1965, when we loaded up the “Doug” with a full load of jumpers. I have long forgotten where we were headed, but what happened to me on that day will never leave my memories.

From the air, the fire looked small and not too menacing. As the plane orbited the fire, it was decided to jump the whole load. Streamers were tossed and a single-lane dirt road, which bisected a brush field, was the target. There was a stiff wind blowing and another streamer pass was initiated.

I never was very good at landing by way of Allen rolls, so the brush field looked pretty good to me. Landing in the brush was a lot better than the rocky area we had for a jump spot on one Nevada fire.

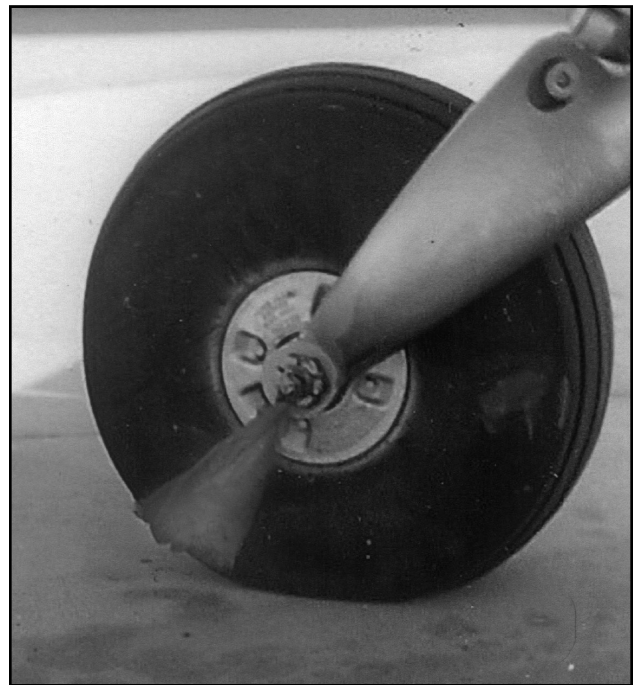
As I was slapped on the leg, in what I would call perfect form, I made my exit. Arms across reserve chute, feet together, legs slightly bent, and chin tucked down was the way we were instructed.

More quickly than normal, my helmet was violently rattled back and forth between the now-extended Capwell fittings. Then there was the usual tug of the parachute, and I looked up to see if it had fully deployed. The sun was brightly shining almost directly above. However, I could faintly make out the chute’s circular form. Not to worry, but that was a terrific opening shock.

Looking down at the jump spot, I could immediately tell that I would overshoot it if I didn’t drop faster by pulling down on the forward risers. I pulled a guideline to rotate into the wind and pulled the risers down.

Alas, my chute rapidly turned downwind. Letting go of the risers and pulling the guideline once again into the wind worked well. But every time I tried the riser trick, I would be going with the wind in short order. I never did try pulling on the risers and one guideline at the same time, since at that point I was well past the road in the brush.

Then, it was time to get down in a hurry as tall timber was looming at the end of my nice, soft brush field. I pulled the front risers down while going with the wind, and it was



Piece of parachute caught on tail wheel of plane. (Courtesy M. Beer)

working well for me, except I was headed for a single, tall white fir in the middle of the brush.

It just didn’t seem to be my day. The tree seemed to be everywhere I tried to go. No matter what I did, that tree was moving around in an attempt to snag me.

Managing to raise my legs as far as possible, I went over the fir with the very top slapping me in the crotch; thank God for the protection offered in that location.

Finally crashing into the brush, I felt relieved to not have been hung up in a tree. I don’t know who or what was tangled most at that point – the chute or me – but it took a while to undo the mess. While gathering my chute, I noticed black streaks here and there all over it.

My first thought was that the black marks were caused by

lines rapidly snapping across the nylon. Perhaps I almost had a line-over.

As I finally approached the crew, which had already put out the fire, someone yelled: "Why the hell didn't you pull your reserve? You had a Mae West." I told him my rate of descent wasn't fast enough and I didn't need the reserve.

The crew waited a while for one jumper – who'd inadvertently allowed a loop in his letdown rope to get sucked up tightly against the "sky genie" – to come down out of a very large tree. Apparently, while dropping his rope, it somehow formed a loop, and he didn't notice it until it was too late.

Without spoiling this story, I'll allow this jumper – whom we all know well – to finish it.

Once the tree-bound jumper got on the ground, we loaded the gear and ourselves for the ride to Redding in the back of a stakeside truck.

The following day just happened to be my day off. There I was, trying to sleep in, and one of the guys was shaking me while insisting I had to go out to the DC-3. I thought: "Rats! Now what?"

As I was led over to the plane and around the tail section, I saw several jumpers hunkered down, looking at the tail wheel. I took a look and, to my surprise, a piece of orange nylon was hanging from one of the tail wheel tow

points. My knees became rubbery as I knelt and retrieved the piece of parachute – MY parachute!

The loft folks surmised that the break tape used instead of break cord on the "D" bag broke away sooner than it should have. Even though the two were rated the same – tape vs. cord – the tape allowed the chute to exit the deployment bag before the suspension lines were straightened out. This caused the chute to more or less flutter out and wrap around the front of the tail wheel.

In all, a large hole was ripped open in the canopy. I'm glad the tow point groove could only handle three lines and no more. The bright sunlight I had experienced when I checked my canopy after the bad opening shock must have

been due to the sun shining through the huge hole.

I later asked the pilot what we would have done once he knew there was a hitchhiker on the tail wheel. He told me the plane would have been flown over a body of water at a low speed, and he'd have hoped I could've released myself in order to utilize my reserve. I'm happy we didn't have to find out.

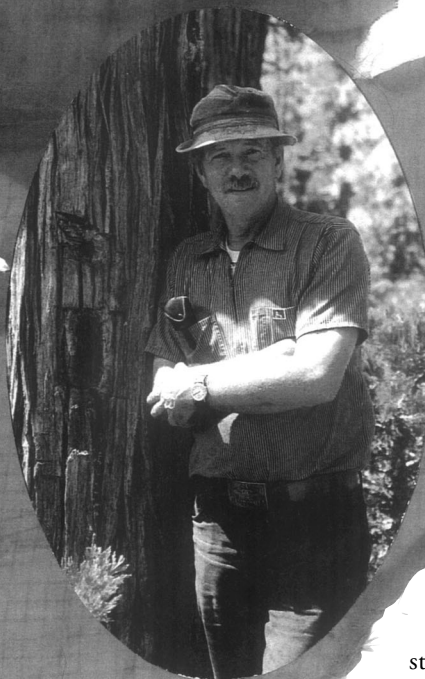
I made several jumps after this incident.

However, form was no longer my forte. When I received the signal, I

jumped as far out as possible. I may have even reached the wing tip before starting to fall. Sometimes I'd be twisted up so badly that it took almost the entire descent to straighten out. I was even happy to land in a tree!

I always carried my small piece of chute as a good luck piece until I thought I lost my wallet, where I always carried it. I wasn't concerned about the credit cards, money, or anything else of value – only that piece of orange nylon!

That nylon had let me down softly from 1,500 feet as well as many 10- to 20-foot helijumps with no injuries. It now rests in a safe place at home. 🍄



Milt Beer (Courtesy M. Beer)

Milt can be reached at: Post Office Box 300, Meadow Valley, California 95956

NSA's Good Samaritan Fund Helps Injured Jumper

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

On June 25, 2007, **Sara Brown** (RAC-03) was seriously injured while jumping on a fire outside Silver City, N.M. On the jump she and her partner collided, collapsing her chute over 80 feet in the air. The ensuing free fall resulted in breaking bones in her legs and right wrist. Her right leg was amputated below the knee a few months later.

Sara returned to Colorado State University, where she was working full time as a student and teaching assistant after earning her master's degree at Washington State University. When her academic advisor moved to the University of Wyoming, Sara transferred to pursue her PhD in Forest Ecology.

The smokejumper community has reached out with financial aid to help with her educational expenses. In addition to \$2000 from the NSA's **Good Samaritan Fund**, the McCall Smokejumpers donated \$450, the

Missoula/Silver City jumpers \$1050 and the NSA Trail Maintenance Program \$2000.

June 24, **Jerry Schmidt** (CJ-62), retired forest supervisor of the Medicine Bow N.F., made the presentation on the University of Wyoming campus with about 50 people in attendance.

Schmidt said, "I did not call her a 'hero' or the recognition of a formal 'award' or 'purple heart,' but the news media people liked using these terms.

"She is in the process of being fitted for a running leg and has challenged me to work out with her in a couple of weeks. We were both distance runners in high school and college.

"In my judgment the NSA and others did a very good thing in recognizing her this way. The people attending were fellow students and faculty who have come to know her and, in the short

time she has been in Laramie, developed tremendous respect for her. She has a very gentle and considerate, respectful way of interacting with people. She is definitely a smokejumper to be proud of!"

In an email to NSA Vice President **Doug Houston** (RAC-73), Sara responded, "Wow-thank you (NSA and the bros at all the bases) SOOOO much for the amazing award, and ceremony, and EVERYTHING.

"Jerry Schmidt did an absolutely amazing job pulling everything together. He gave a really nice speech yesterday at the award ceremony and got the media involved at the University. He is a wonderful guy, I'm so glad to have met him. We actually met today at the park for a "run." Mine was more of a hop than a run, but still felt good! That saying really is true—Once a jumper, always a jumper." 🙏

Smokejumper Fights Smokejumper

by Jerry Linton (Missoula '48)

While smokejumping and attending school at Montana State University in 1948, I was asked to box **Norm Allen** (MSO-46) in an "M" Club boxing tournament. I had never boxed before and, in fact, had no experience with the sport whatsoever.

I was 19 years old and agreed to box Norm.

Norm was in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division in World War II for three years and spent a lot of time in Italy, France and Germany. He ended up with 13 years of jumping, including the 1946-54 seasons with the smokejumpers.

Norm helped train new jumpers from 1950 through 1953, but he suffered a back injury in 1954 and that ended

his jumping days.

He had about 40 fights while in the Airborne – amateur "Golden Gloves" boxing.

A ring was set up, I believe, in the Forestry Building. While getting ready for my match against Norm, I put on my robe, and then someone helped me put on my gloves. When it was our turn to box each other, we entered the ring.

Before the fight started, I began to take off my robe. To my surprise and embarrassment, however, I couldn't get it off because the sleeves couldn't be pulled over my gloves. Well, of course, this caused a delay in the fight.

My gloves had to be taken off; then I took off the robe and

my gloves had to be put back on. Before they put my gloves back on, Norm noticed my hands hadn't been taped. Whoever was helping me apparently didn't know the procedure.

Norm, standing close by, offered to tape my hands, and did so. Now it was time to put on my gloves again and have them laced up.

Well, this was taking additional time, and the crowd was certainly enjoying what was happening. By this time, my face was slowly getting redder and redder from the embarrassment of it all.

Finally our fight was ready to start. Well, with Norm having had about 40 fights in the Airborne, needless to say, he had complete control of our bout, and I'm sure he took it

easy on me. I ended up with a puffed-up black-and-blue eye.

Anyway, it was great doing battle with Norm. He is certainly a great and proud smokejumper and man, and I'm thankful, happy, and proud to have had this experience with him.

Thank you, Norm. God bless you and your family, and thanks so much for the wonderful, exciting memories of it all. 🙏

You can reach Jerry Linton at 6015 N. Park View Ln., Spokane, WA 99205. Norm Allen lives at 944 Blue Slide Rd., Thompson Falls, MT 59873.

Who Writes 21st-Century Jump Stories?

by Mark Corbet (La Grande '74)

In April of my second season of smokejumping, I had the good fortune to spend more than a month working with Allen "Mouse" Owen (CJ-70) and a number of other Cave Junction jumpers at the Andrews-Murphy, N.C., spike base.

Now, the location was beautiful, the people friendly, the food new to me, and the jumping slower than I'd hoped for. But the absolutely best part of the stay was listening to master storyteller "Mouse" Owen tell jumper stories!

The smokejumper program is filled with – and maybe even attracts – people who like to spin a yarn. In spite of his nickname, however, Mouse towered over the best of them when it came to this particular skill. From the day I arrived in North Carolina until the day I left many weeks later, he was telling jump stories to any and all who would listen.

During my rookie season, I had soaked up every story that was told by the old men at the La Grande base and was always ready for more. Working with Mouse was my opportunity to hear non-stop jump stories and I heard a lot of them.

In recent years, *Smokejumper* magazine has become my sole source of jump stories, and there have not been very many written by active jumpers. This makes me wonder: Has smokejumping become so safe and boring that there is nothing of interest to write about? Don't any of you who've jumped in this century have

any great stories to tell?

Stories about that near miss that would have killed a normal person. Stories about the time you saved the day using only superhuman strength and brainpower unavailable to your average firefighter. Stories about the incredible places you were lucky enough to drop into.

That worst jump, packout, blowup, fire camp, malfunction, tree landing, water landing, fire landing, rock pile landing or wild animal encounter. Any truly memorable characters at your base who are the BEST at what they do – be it trainer, morale booster, spotter, chute manipulator, good deal scrounge, or philosopher?

In *Smokejumper's* July 2009 issue, a lone voice from the 21st century did reassure me that someone finds the job and the lifestyle something he loves and wants to tell the world about! To see what I mean, take a look at what Brett Fairchild (RAC-05) wrote in that issue. Writing like his tells me smokejumping is alive and well, and the future of the program is in good hands.

So, I challenge each and every one of you to start putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and tell some of your best stories. There are plenty of past and present jumpers who'd like to read them. You never know – maybe it will get you on the road to writing that first book you always knew you had in you. Here's your chance to see how it feels to have your work published.

What are you waiting for?



Alaska smokejumpers approach jump spot on Rock Slough fire, Upper Yukon Territory, July 2009. (photo by Mike McMillan/Alaska smoke jumper)



Touching All Bases



Alaska Base Report

by Mike McMillan (Fairbanks '96)

The Alaska Smokejumpers are proudly celebrating 50 years of service in 2009, coinciding with Alaska's induction to statehood in 1959.

We're also enjoying a bountiful fire season – our busiest start in four years. As of this mid-July update, we've sent 434 smokejumpers out the door on about 60 fires. 143 of those jumpers were boosters visiting from all but two Lower-48 bases. Despite crowded conditions at the base and barracks, the boosters appear happy to join the effort. We're currently reporting 140 jumpers available on our list, making Alaska the epicenter of the jump world thus far in 2009. We've dug deep into our reserves, calling **Bob Quillin** (FBX-71), **Ken Coe** (FBX-80), and **Jon Larson** (FBX-89) out of retirement, back into the loft and paracargo sections to lend experienced hands. It's great to have them back.

In May and June we continued instruction of "New Man Ram Air Training" for Forest Service and BLM transfer smokejumpers with 11 of 14 candidates completing training.

We sent **Chris Lord** (FBX-08) and **Dawson Kelsey** (RDD-95) to Silver City in May for a six-week jump detail, recording a few jumps and plenty of good living.

The fastest time recorded in our 1.5 mile PT-Test run was 7:43 by **Ben Dobrovolny** (FBX-04), running in 28 degrees.

Alaska hosted no rookie class in 2009, with our head count high enough at 73. Our snookies are stepping up and still making great coffee.

On Friday, June 5th, Alaska welcomed more than 200 retired and active smokejumpers, their families, friends and general public to help us celebrate our 50th anniversary. Frequent tours of the smokejumper base were hosted, with audio-visual presentations highlighting the unique history of the Alaska organization. The fire-call siren blared twice, sending visitors and active smokejumpers rushing to the suit-up racks. Cheers went up as jumpers donned their heavy jumpsuits before flying off to battle wildfires burning near McGrath.

A training jump on Birch Hill gave visitors a chance to take a short hike through the woods to watch eight smokejumpers parachute into the "Big Spot," to the applause of celebrants and media representatives on scene.

On Friday evening we hosted "the largest smokejumper camp ever assembled," according to Alaska Base Manager **Bill Cramer** (NIFC-90). The Chena River State Recreation Area (Flood Plain) was the ideal place for festivities to continue until daybreak. Several paracargo canopies and campfires dotted the



shores of a small lake at the site. The centerpiece of camp was a huge, green 64-foot paracargo canopy, stretching high above several fire pits, providing shelter when skies turned wet.

One load made an evening jump into a clearing near the main camp, to the delight of the crowd, with dozens of children present.

Barbequed pigs and more than twenty turkeys were on the menu. As the dinner tents cleared, BLM State Director Tom Lonnie expressed appreciation for the contributions made by smokejumpers past and present. Alaska Fire Service Manager **John Gould** (FBX-81) thanked the organizers of the reunion celebration before giving commemorative "50th Anniversary Coins" to all smokejumpers attending.

Among those on hand were brothers **Dan Percival** (FBX-64) and **Roy Percival** (NCSB-57). Roy was the first smokejumper to hit the ground on an Alaska fire jump in 1959. Roy brought his jump logbook, complete with fire jump commentary including "two days without chow – lots of mosquitoes."

A late evening raffle was held - among the coveted prizes was an oil painting donated by **Bruce Ford** (MSO-75). Bruce's original smokejumper paintings are amazing with prints available and reasonably priced. Ford's art is truly inspiring, and I've been trying to convince him to build a website to showcase his talents – we'll keep you posted.

Also raffled was a beautifully crafted hunting bow made from scratch by a team of Alaska jumpers, led by **Doug Carroll** (FBX-94) and **Gary Baumgartner** (FBX-88). The "Bro Bow" was appropriately won by avid bush pilot and hunter, **Peter Snow** (ANC-68).

The celebration continued on June 6th, and the Silver Gulch Brewery in Fox was the setting chosen for an indoor dinner party. The gathering was a great opportunity for storytelling, notably by **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65), **Rod Dow** (MYC-68), and jump ship pilot Troy Hodges. Toasts were made to jumpers who've passed on, and those unable to attend. "I haven't talked that much in twenty years," reflected **Ed Strong** (RDD-75), former chief of fire operations at AFS.

Months of planning and organizing culminated into a successful reunion. Alaska Crew Supervisor **Robert Yeager** (RDD-92) credited many jumpers, notably **Michael O'Brien** (FBX-98) who multi-tasked during an active fire season. Also deserving credit is the "Old Geezer" squad (self-named) of former jumpers, including Ken Coe, **Jack Firestone** (MYC-75), **Chip Houde** (FBX-88), **Jon Larson**, **Buck Nelson** (FBX-81), **Ed Strong**, and **Steve Theisen** (FBX-86), among others.



Audrey Banfill (RAC-06) hits the spot in a practice jump for Alaska reunion attendees. (Courtesy J. Kirkley)

Cramer credited everyone who helped. "The bros of past and present rose to the occasion and did a great job. Standard," he added.

In marital and procreation news, **Rob Miller** (FBX-05)) and Lisa married in West Virginia last October. **Chris Swisher** (FBX-03) and Mindy were wed in Alaska last November. **Randy Foland** (FBX-01) and Jamie married in Kauai in January. And **Branden Petersen** (FBX-01) and wife, Lynn, recently welcomed baby Bridger in July, their third son.

Belated congratulations go to Randy Foland, who won the "Iron Al Seiler" (FBX-85) Award in 2008 in recognition of his hard work and determination.

On the wildfire front, Alaska's 2009 season has surpassed everyone's expectations, including predictions from the weather folks here at AFS. "Slower and wetter than usual" was their initial fire season forecast, but we haven't stopped rolling jump loads out the door since May.

Among the highlights - three loads defended structures in Homer, three loads battled an 80,000 acre fire near McGrath, multiple loads responded to fires in the Upper Yukon Zone, four loads dug in on a fire on the Porcupine River, and multiple jump loads fought local fires near Delta and Fairbanks. Some jumpers have remained on fire assignments for more than two weeks. On July 17, we dropped seven loads of jumpers on wildfires across Alaska. We can only hope our luck holds out, and we keep our long list spinning into September.

Extended details and single resource assignments included **Rob Allen** (FBX-93) serving as IC of a Type-II Fire near Minto. **Ivan Smith** (MSO-95) is serving as Unit Aviation Manager for

the Tanana Zone. **Joe Don Morton** (RDD-95) is an engine operator in Doyle, California, working with Carson City BLM. **Kip Shields** (FBX-04) is working as a dispatcher for Upper Yukon Territory here at AFS.

In paracargo news, we've dropped Zodiac boats on three fire assignments this season, "to rave reviews," beamed **Chris Silks** (FBX-91), our paracargo section chief. We've also been cleared this season to drop a Zodiac and up to four jumpers on a single mission.

As of mid-July, PC has dropped 250,000 pounds of cargo to fire assignments. And 40,000 pounds of lumber are scheduled to be dropped to a "boardwalk" project to connect soggy trail sections in the White Mountains.

PC also dropped fuel barrels to archeological projects on the North Slope.

Alaska's Paracargo Section also welcomed back **Derek Patton** (RAC-00) from his former post as lead rookie trainer. That position has been filled by Chris Swisher - and all he needs now is rookies, God help them.

Boise Base Report

by Quincy Chung (NIFC '03)

Like last year, Boise has managed to have another slow start-ing season. Boise jumpers have been in Alaska since the last week in May and are still jumping fires. However in the Lower 48 we have been below normal on activity. **Hector Madrid** (MYC-89) has returned to take over as the new Boise Base Manager, while **Eric Reynolds** (NIFC-90) has gone in search of the perfect catch on some prestige river in the country. **Mike Haydon** (RAC-97) has become the new Training Manager at the base and **Derrick Hartman** (RDD-98) has taken over as the new Assistant Training Manager, while **Jared Hohn** (NIFC-01) and **Paul Lenmark** (FBX-96) have become the two newest spotters at the base.

Grangeville Base Report

by Randy Nelson (Grangeville '87)

Rain seems to be the common theme so far this year. Fire season is off to a slow start.

The first rookie class held since 1978 at Grangeville was completed June 24. Congratulations to rookies **Kristina Pattison** and **Brendon Sheehan** (MSO), **Brian Yarrow** (WYS),

Chris Markey and Garrin Ryg, (GAC). Thanks go out to **Brett Rogers** (MSO-92), **Chris Hertel** (GAC-91), **Shane Ralston** (RDD-03) and **Jody Baxter** (GAC 2007). Also **Ted McClanahan** (MSO-95) and **Pete Lannan** (WYS-06) from WYS helped out for the whole training session as did **Jessie Thomas** (MSO-04) from Missoula. Many others contributed to the training in numerous ways. Their collective efforts made the training a tremendous success.

Along with the two rooks this year we picked up two re-treads from the past. **Casey Ramsey** (RDD-01) and **Alessandro Potenziani** (RDD-01) were welcomed back to the jump list. **Tom Bates** (GAC-95), the Clear/Nez zone ATGS, and **Will Markwardt** (GAC-07) from the Colville NF, went through extensive refresher training so that they could join the list when we get busy here.

The Assistant Ops Foreman, **Kelvin Thompson** (GAC-95), is now an AFMO on the Cle-Elam district of the Wenatchee NF. His replacement at the Operations desk is **Mike Blinn** (RDD-01). Shane Ralston will be Mike's replacement as a spotter. **Nate Hesse** (RDD-01) is busily showing Shane the tricks of the trade.

Dan Vanderpool (GAC-01) and **Jason Greenwood** (GAC-06) are enjoying the shade and greenery of the Great Basin after transferring to Boise this year.

Congrats go to **Shane Ralston** and **Isaac Karuzas** (RDD-01). Both of them are officially family men now with the births of baby girls.

For now we have a full list, and the GAC raft has been getting regular use due to the propensity of weekends we are all getting off.

Missoula Base Report

by **B. Rogers Warren** (Missoula '00)

At the time of this article, Western Montana is experiencing a cooler than normal summer with average precipitation, making for a less than exciting start to the fire season. Hopefully things will have changed by publishing time.

2009 has been an otherwise busy year. We started in January by sending several Rx modules to Region 8. They assisted in the completion of numerous fuels projects around the south, including the states of Tennessee, Arkansas, North and South Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia and Alabama.

We also continued to assist the Wildland Fire Training world with instructors and course coordinators to Northern Rockies Training Center, Southwest Montana Zone/ University of Montana Continuing Education Fire Training, and the Wildland Firefighter Apprentice Academy in Sacramento, CA.

Smokejumper training began with an uneventful two-week refresher on April 13 and continued through late refresher on May 26. For the first time in recent history, Region One's rookie training was hosted by the Grangeville Smokejumpers. The Rookies spent an exciting five weeks in and around the Grangeville, ID area. On the dawn of his 98th year, **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) provided inspiration and a personal visit with the two Missoula rookies. The jump list welcomed **Kristina Pattison** (MSO-09) and **Brandon Sheehan** (MSO-09) on June 29, 2009.

James Gray (MSO-00), **Knute Olson** (MSO-00), **Dan Helterline** (GAC-89), **Jake Besmer** (MSO-03), **Tim Wallace** (MSO-06), and **Audrey Banfill** (RAC-06) successfully completed New Man Ram Air training in AK. This brings the Missoula Forest Service Ram-Air jumpers up to ten.

The Silver City Base was once again run by **Sarah Doebling** (MSO-91). The base was staffed with jumpers from Missoula, Grangeville, West Yellowstone, McCall, Boise and Fairbanks. The overall activity was light with five fires jumped. The crew was able to assist the Gila with several projects and provided overhead for single resource assignments. The highlight of the summer was the "Green Doug" (FS Van) in the Fourth of July Parade, complete with spotter and two jumpers executing a perfect exit and PLF right into the Buffalo Bar.

Some notable career moves include: **Jordan McKnight** (NCSB-04) to the Clifton District Apache-Sitgreaves AFMO and **Tighe Williamson** (MSO-08) to Lead Crewmember for Missoula National Helitack.

The circle continues here as we mourn the loss of **Tim Eldridge** (MSO-82) and **John "Bup" Murray** (MSO-00), while celebrating parenthood with a "baby boom" too numerous to keep up with.

North Cascades Base Report

by **Michael Noe** (North Cascades '99)

The winter of 2009 was a quiet one for the North Cascades Smokejumper Base. The majority of notable activity was in the mess hall/loft with the construction of jumpsuits and main parachute risers. As we entered spring, APHIS climbing presented an opportunity to send five NCSB folks back east to Worcester, MA, to hunt for the wily and elusive Asian long-horned beetle. The base was fortunate enough to have had another rookie class and we would like to congratulate the newest members of the NCSB crew: **Nick MacKenzie**, **Chris Surgenor**, **Adam Pino**, and **Fidel Verduzco**.

Everyone at the base is hoping for a busy and safe fire season, and in the words of **Dale Longanecker** (RAC-74)... "Keep on Jumping!"

Redding Base Report

by **Dylan Reeves** (Redding '03)

Truthfully, I'm a little befuddled by this new mid-season base report. The season hasn't fully gotten going yet in the R double Dizzle, so what I've decided to do is basically make up what I think might happen in the second half of the season, with barely any embellishment. Don't judge me. First, though, I'll recap the significant events of the early season.

Here at the R double D, we believe that building the future of the jumper program begins with making rookie training easy enough that anybody can do it. That's why we've initiated a self-paced, "go til you get tired, and then go slower," approach this year. We believe in instilling a healthy respect for the job by alternating between moderately paced workouts and rest days, and treating the rookies with the respect that they've earned by showing up unprepared. What we don't want is for anyone to feel like they have to get strong before they get here....that's what rookie training is for. It is our hope

that these young smokejumper candidates will look back fondly on those six weeks and think, "Hey, that wasn't so bad!"

After several earnest attempts, including moving his locker to the far northwest corner of the hangar, we have finally gotten rid of **Brad "I Smell Like Vinegar" Moschetti** (RDD-06). Apparently Brad found a crew that doesn't do background checks or any kind of character assessment whatsoever and is now some kind of fire-use crew assistant captain on the Tahoe NF. He will now be working on the same forest as his new wife, Courtney "Oh, my god, what did I do?" Moschetti.

Donovan "Potsticker" Lee (RDD-03) accepted a captain position on the Mendocino Hotshots, primarily because he was under the impression that he would be allowed to ride his dirt bike on fires.

This season saw the return of **Doug Powell** (RDD-05), **Felipe Marquez** (RDD-03) and **Tye Erwin** (RDD-02), after they all realized that hotshot crews never get to jump out of airplanes. Two GS-8 spotter positions were filled with **Greg "San Gregfashanio Wilderness" Fashano** (RDD-99) and **Mitch Hokanson** (RDD-00). Their GS-7 squadleader spots were filled with **Brian Pontes** (RDD-03) and **Brad Schuette** (RDD-04). **Doug Powell** and **Derek Wheeler** (RDD-05) joined the ranks of the permanently doomed as year-round GS-6's. In an effort to prevent firefighters from leaving the Forest Service and going to CDF to make money, the Forest Service devised a retention plan that involved getting rid of what we all hated the most: getting laid off in the winter. Yuck! All but the seasonals will be working year-round now, so all you GS-9 13/13's can suck on that!

Dylan Reeves (RDD-03), who has taken to referring to himself in the third person, has been sitting out the season after having rotator cuff repair surgery and will no longer try to change a tire on the airplane by lifting it up with one arm. Despite gaining 50 pounds and forgetting how to work, **Dylan** was pleased to be voted one of Tiger Beat Magazine's "Top 200 Most Handsome Smokejumpers of 2009."

With regard to **Rico "In Regards To" Gonzalez** (RDD-99), he is anticipating another phenomenal summer, assuming he doesn't twist an ankle or become otherwise decapitated as a result of a fragrant foul in a morning basketball game. With any luck, Rico will find himself on a fire in the high desert sagebrush and pigeon juniper, where he can enjoy his lunch in the shade of the aspirin trees at the base of a rock scurry. If he does wind up in the timbers, he'll have his pretzel harness handy in regards to climbing trees.

I have decided this year to respect the request of my rookie bro, **Brian Pontes** (RDD-03), and make no mention of him or his shotgun wedding to a toothless hillbilly in Kentucky last fall.

Jerry Spence (RDD-94), along with **Josh Mathiesen** (RDD-94), are working on their ATGS task books. With these two as qualified air attacks, we'll succeed in our mission to dominate the world of aerially delivered firefighters in California. Jerry actually put himself on hold to attend his son's graduation from eighth grade. Speaking of former Mendocino guys with a lot of neck hair, **Derek Wheeler** be-

came our newest senior parachute rigger and will now most likely return to the saw shop to continue sharpening a cross-cut saw.

As for the rest of the season, we are going to have a marginally above average year with each smokejumper jumping, on average, between seven and nine fires. We will send eight guys to Region 8 in October and three guys to Massachusetts to climb trees. In the interest of concealing my clairvoyant abilities, I won't reveal the names at this time. But I know. Every time we put a full load of jumpers on a fire or group of fires, we will order three booster loads to be filled by **McCall**, **Missoula** and **Redmond**. The **McCall** jumpers will return home after 48 hours without a jump and will rotate to the bottom of their list. At least one booster, either from **Redmond** or **Missoula**, will return home swollen and disfigured from poison oak, vowing never to return to Redding again. **Sean "The Eggman" Hines** (RDD-06) will turn down 140 hours of overtime to expand his backyard chicken condominium. Collectively, **Scott "The Jedster" Smith** (RDD-02), **Caleb "I Bought A New Phone, But I Lost It" Edwards** (RDD-02) and **Dean "American Psycho" Banducci** (RDD-03) will consume 673 pounds of carne asada and refried beans from Taco Barn, which, when you think about it, is gross. And, finally....yes, **Moshchetti** will be back.

Redmond Base Report

by **James Hansen** (Redding '87)

Greetings everybody. Life rolls on at Redmond with the crew largely intact from last year, save for the periodic coming and going of **Doug Smith** (RAC-01) and the defection of **Bjorn Skovlin** (RAC-05), who upon deciding that the grass was browner on the other side of the Basin, has left us for Boise. Detailer **Nolan Brewer** (RAC-08) did not return, and **Nate Silva** (RAC-08) is temporarily diverted to nursing school so he can treat himself the next time he breaks something. The acquisition of transfers **Matt Steen** (RDD-07), **Shane Orser** (RDD-08), and **Jeff Coburn** (NCSB-08) gave us enough folks to preclude the training of a rookie class, though last year's class continues to uphold their tradition of diligence, hard work, and landing as far as humanly possible from the panels on practice jumps.

Heidi Bunkers (RAC-04) has left us for the summer on a detail in North Cascades National Park. If you make it to that part of the world, you might spot her up there with her Smokey Bear hat pulled down low over her mirrored aviator shades, one hand resting on the butt of her revolver while she jabs a tourist in the sternum with her nightstick. "Those are *sensitive plants*, boy!"

Mark Hentze (RAC-00) has managed, despite a few misadventures and a bout with aquatic parasites, to survive another winter in Columbia. He's in the final stages of co-authoring a guidebook to Columbian rivers, sure to be a favorite of whitewater enthusiasts and revolutionaries everywhere. **Josh Cantrell** (MSO-97) decided that a dozen years or so was long enough to go without changing a diaper. He and Cory welcome newborn daughter Addison. In his continual quest for greater pilot skills and fresher doughnuts, **Tony Sleznick** (RDD-92) has received his instrument rating. Look out be-

low. It must be a sign of the somnolent start to the season, driven by boredom or lack of overtime, but the last time I saw **Jeanine Faulkner** (MSO-98), she was skinning a rockchuck out by the saw shack.

Coming back from a practice jump, there are times when the crowd in the six-pack resembles those TV commercials in which a pack of graying gentlemen of a certain age have been restored to youthful vigor, thanks to pharmaceutical control of their urinary incontinence. Not really wanting to be a part of that scene, I have traded my silken wings for those of aluminum and have accepted the job as air attack on the Fremont-Winema N.F. Leaving jumping will be a bummer, of course, but with 355 total jumps, 212 on fires, I feel like I've had a pretty good run. Among those now working at RAC, this leaves me second only to **Tony Loughton** (RDD-83) in fire jumps, which is as it should be. Surpassing Tony in anything just wouldn't feel right. And I'll miss all of you, from my magnificent rookie bros in the class of '87 to the rookies of last year and all of the rest of you that have looked out for me over the years. Look up sometime, and I might be looking out for you, too. I'll be up on bro.

West Yellowstone Base Report

by **Ernie Walker** (Redding '01)

Due to frequent thunderstorms accompanied by heavy rains and a July 8th snowfall in the high country, West Yellowstone is seeing a delayed start to the local fire season.

We sadly said goodbye to pilot **Randy Leypoldt** after ten seasons at the WY jumpbase. Randy decided to take a job with a contractor on the east coast. Good luck, Randy, you will be missed! We welcome **John Lesnick** as our new Dornier pilot.

Look to the sky for our own Operations Manager, **Charlie Wetzel** (WYS-92). Charlie has taken a detail as a smoke-jumper pilot for RAC. He is currently flying cargo in Alaska.

Timo Rova (WYS-95), operation extraordinaire, is doing a great job adjusting to his new desk job in West. Ops is full this season with **Timo Rova**, **Cole Parker** (MSO-92), **Ernie Walker** (RDD-01), and **Hans Smith** (MSO-00). The operations team is doing a good job picking up where Wetzel left off.

West helped boost the early fire season in R-3 by sending three to Silver City. **Cindy Champion** (WYS-99), **Nick Stanzak** (WYS-05), and **Eric Held** (WYS-06) spent the spring in NM, with Cindy training as spotter. Ernie Walker and **Ryan McCliment** (NCSB-07) went to assist the Pleasant Valley Hotshot Crews, while **Jason Gibb** (GAC-04) did one tour on an engine in R-3. **Mark Duffey** (WYS-98) filled in as an ICT3 on the A bar S.

West trained three more square jumpers in Alaska this spring: **Mark Belitz** (WYS-01), **Justin Horn** (RDD-03), and **Bobby Sutton** (MSO-91). Good job RATS! They continue their training in the lower forty-eight. Hans Smith also went to McGrath, AK, as an ICT3. Currently, West is helping support Alaska's fire suppression with ten jumpers and the Dornier temporarily on loan.

This year the base promoted **Pete Lannan** (WYS-07) as Training Assistant Foreman, **Joe Rock** (WYS-05) as temporary

squadleader, **Mark Belitz** moved over to Loft Assistant Foreman, and **Ted McClanahan** (MSO-95) is heading up Loadmasters. **Billy Bennett** (WYS-98) is the new Tanker Base manager, and **Magen Crowley** is our new permanent Administrative assistant.

Permanent jumpers hired on this season are **Darcy Walsh** (MSO-06), **Ryan** (McLovin') **McCliment** (NCSB-2007), **David Wilkins** (WYS-07), **Eric Held**, **Jason Hill** (WYS-07) and **Dean Chambers** (WYS 06). West also hired **Robert Smith** (MSO-07) as a temp GS-6 and brought new rookie detailer **Brian Yarrow** (WYS-09) to the base.

We want to say thank you to Pete Lannan and Ted McClanahan for all their hard work in Grangeville and Missoula training rookies for the season. They brought back one good man for West!

Fish On! The big fish contest has begun with **Brian Hatfield** (WYS-06) weighing in a 24-inch brown trout out of Hebgen Lake.

In another contest to populate the world with junior jumpers, Pete and Meagan Lannan win the prize with their new, bouncing baby boy, Liam.

Congratulations!

McCall Base Report

by **Matthew Galyardt** (McCall '02)

To date (July 9th), the season out of McCall has been painfully slow. The lack of a single fire jump out of McCall has got folks thumbing through historical records trying to figure out the latest first jump from this base. Our research shows we have two weeks before we set a new unwelcome record! One non-fire related activity of note was our participation in the Hill Air Force Base air show in Ogden, UT, where we conducted a demonstration jump in front of 290,000 spectators.

While the fire season has been slow, training kept us busy in the spring. We began rookie training with 14 Neds and ended up finishing with nine: **Peter Dutchick**, **Tim Garity**, **Jared Hendee**, **Adam Humbach**, **Matt Ingram**, **Lane Lamoreaux**, **Phil Reid**, **Kellen Smick**, and **Clay Yazzie**. We have also had some personnel movement: **Dustin Doane** (MYC-00) took an AFMO Fuels position on the Payette, while **Matt Carroll** (MYC-03) took a detail to the Washington Office that is helping him fulfill his degree requirements at Yale. Newly filled positions at the base include: **Jarrold Sayer** (MYC-95) as Assistant Loadmaster Foreman, **Jason Class** (MYC-04), **Matt Galyardt** (MYC-02) and **Todd Haynes** (MYC-02) as Spotters, and **Hans Ohme** (MYC-01), **Jeremy Cowie** (MYC-06), and **Jon Patton** (MYC-05) as Squadleaders.

As for jumpers gone but certainly not forgotten, **Steve Mello** (MYC-72) was finally able to get his retirement papers through the system and is now enjoying his free time. Although he still seems to show his face at the base quite a bit. On a more somber note, **Lee Jensen** (MYC-69) lost his battle with cancer in June. He was sent off in style with a memorial based around an elk camp with friends and family recounting his full life and all those wonderful stories he was so good at telling. 🙏

Aw Hell, Just Come On Down

by Ron Price (Cave Junction '56)

Late in the winter of 1956, I'm sitting on a vermin-infested couch in a sleazy apartment rented by **Wayne Schrunk** (CJ-57). He was poor, but he had a phone. I was poorer and borrowed the phone to call **Jim Allen** (NCSB-46) at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base. I had no fire experience, but my pitch for the job of becoming a smokejumper was that I was an "outdoor guy." Outdoor guy meaning Oregon State Wildlife and Fisheries major just back from a job in Alaska as a stream guard.

Added to that was my one summer as a guide at the Oregon Caves National Monument where I watched smokejumpers like **Jimmie Dollard** (CJ-52) and **Rod Newton** (CJ-51) walk off into the woods heading for the swimming hole with the waitresses and house maids. But I gained fire experience, as I was the one left to put out the evening campfire after the smokejumpers had left with my girlfriends.

So did I want to fight fire or chase "hot stuff?" Jim

Allen, always patient, listened to my pitch and then ran out of time.

"Aw hell, just come on down," was the way he cut through the smoke and my bullshit spiel.

What a gate Jim opened. After the 1959 season, it was OCS at Quantico, then the 1960 Basic School for Lieutenants. There, a salty Marine Company Commander, with two slots open for Army Ranger School (320 in the Company), said, "Give one to Price—He's a smokejumper." That was a chance to parlay my way to Army Jump School. That was easy. As Jim had said, "All you are is cargo."

That resulted in training in SCUBA (Navy Underwater Swimmers Course) and an attachment to a Navy SEAL Team in Vietnam. Lots of toys to play with: parachutes, submarines—not to mention working with some very stimulating people and real characters.

All of this when the boss said, "Aw hell, just come on down."

MOVIE REVIEW

"SMOKEJUMPER" - THE MOVIE

by Tony Beltran (Idaho City '69)

FIRST, THE DISCLAIMER: I am not a movie critic, just a movie fan. This article focuses on the early smoke-jumper-themed movies up until 1960.

Before we look at the old movies, let's get the newer ones out of the way. "Always" (1989) is a beautifully filmed movie with a schmaltzy love story. It's based on the old World War II movie "A Guy Named Joe." Smokejumpers are featured, but you never get to see them jump. We do see them get in trouble on the fire line and saved by retardant bombers, though.

Marine Corps Capt. Dale Dye (retired) is the jumper squadleader. Next to Richard Widmark, he has my vote for best former Marine/actor playing a jumper. Over the years, I've met non-jumper, non-fire people who really like "Always" just because of the airplanes and the great fire scenes.

To top things off, the real Catalina pilots, Bob Schaeffli and Mike McCown, are standing in the dispatch office when Holly Hunter is ready to steal the B-26.

The other movie is "Firestorm." Most jumpers hated it, but in the words of a great jumper movie fan we all know, "If you want reality, rent a documentary." I think it is a fun movie and more jumpers would have liked it if it had been called "Raiders of the Lost Overtime." It plays like an old-time serial with Howie Long escaping peril after peril, until he triumphs in the end.

A fine contemporary film is "Smokejumpers: In the Line of Duty." I really like this movie because it's an excellent tribute to **Don Mackey** (MSO-87) and the Storm King firefighters.

I will address the other recent TV and direct-to-video movies at some other time.

Moving on ...

"Now, Mr. Peabody, set the way-back machine to 1942." The movie is "The Forest Rangers" with Fred Mac Murray, who plays a district ranger who doubles as a smoke-jumper. This movie has wonderful footage of old planes and old para-

chutes and some really interesting forest fire special effects. Also, lots of old logger footage.

Susan Hayward and Paulette Goddard provide romance with the subplot being about a disenchanted air attack pilot, who starts forest fires.

Next, we come to "Red Skies of Montana," a smokejumper classic released in 1952. This movie was one of the reasons I (and I suspect many others) joined the smokejumpers. It's been written about in Smokejumper Magazine and in various books about the nuts and bolts of how it was made and some of the smokejumpers who were extras in it.

What do I have to add? Just trivia. The first load that goes out with Cliff Mason (Widmark) has a jumper named Noxon, played by Richard Crenna. (You may remember Crenna as Col. Troutman; that's right — Rambo's boss.)

In the second fire call, we see a young Charles Buchinsky working in the kitchen. He is a jumper called Neff. Many years later he would be

voted one of the most popular male actors in the world – under the name Charles Bronson.

Even if you don't care for the story, it has great jumper footage, great old airplanes and helicopters, as well as super forest fire scenes, culminating in a gem of a Pulaski fight.

Another movie that featured smokejumpers came out in 1952: "The Blazing Forest" with John Payne. John is helping a widow with her logging operation and along comes a man-caused fire, thus the name of the show. Once again, if you don't care for the story, the great footage of the Ford Trimotor and Eagle parachutes makes it worth watching. Also, some of the early chainsaws the loggers used are great to see.

Honorable mention goes to "Telephone Creek," a short subject made by the State of Idaho. I love this film because it features two of my favorite heroes, **Wayne Webb** (MYC-46) and **Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson** (MYC-47). You'll notice they're the real things – not actors playing heroes.

Television was in full swing in 1956, and one of the shows, "Hour of

Stars," would condense Hollywood movies into a 50-minute black-and-white program. "Red Skies of Montana" became "The Smokejumpers" with Dan Duryea and Dean Jagger. The only actor from "Red Skies" to transition to the TV version was Lawrence Dobkin (Leo the spotter).

Some interesting trivia: Dobkin played a smokejumper twice and then narrated the movie "A Fire Called Jeremiah." So he is the only Hollywood celeb to play a smokejumper role three times.

This brings me to Walt Disney's "A Fire Called Jeremiah." Even today, I love this film – great photography, a great story and above all, real-life heroes, including **Cliff Blake** (MSO-55), **Tom Uphill** (MSO-56), **Randy Hurst** (MSO-54), **Jeff Davis** (MSO-57) and a cast of thousands.

If you were in this film you can tell your grandkids, "Yeah, I was in that movie and I did my own stunts." I watch it 3-4 times a year, and I still get a thrill from it and pride in having been a smokejumper.

Well, there you have it. I glossed over the newer films, but really tried to

get you hooked into the older stuff. If you get a chance see these older films, view them in the manner in which they were meant to be seen – the escape fare of exciting events and real action heroes.

This isn't a complete smokejumper film guide, but just an old smokejumper sharing his movie observations with you. Keep in mind that "Lassie," "Wild Kingdom" and even "The FBI" touched on smokejumping. I believe one episode of "The FBI" was filmed at Cave Junction, Ore.

Any of you Cave Junction jumpers who were involved, let me know the details. The plot line of this installment is Inspector Erskine (Efrem Zimbalist Jr.) and his sidekick commandeer the Beech 18, borrow parachutes and jump gear to "cut the bad guys off at the pass" via an FS-10.

In conclusion, I pray every day that "health, wealth and long life" befalls everyone who is near and dear to me, and "Jumping Fire" will hit the big screen as the best jumper movie ever made. We need a really cool actor to portray **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65). Until then ... "hasta la video!" 📺

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