

# SMOKEJUMPER



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Cover photo: Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell presents Jon McBride one of the plaques he received as leader of the NSA Trails Program. (USFS Photo)



## Message from the President



by John Twiss  
(Redmond '67)  
PRESIDENT

### Happy New Year, everyone.

I HOPE YOUR HOLIDAYS went well and your winter has been mild. Your board of directors has been hard at work, as you can see by reading the October Boise meeting notes on the NSA website.

We enjoyed meeting with Boise Smokejumper Base Manager **Hector Madrid** (MYC-89), McCall Operations Foreman **Eric Brundige** (MYC-77), Assistant Base Manager **Jim Raudenbush** (FBX-82) and Chief of Preparedness **Sean Cross** (FBX-83). They gave us a great update on the current smokejumper program.

They're an impressive bunch and we felt that the current smokejumper program is in good hands.

We also were thankful that Karyn Wood, Forest Service national assistant director for fire operations, and John Glenn, Bureau of Land Management national chief of fire operations, took the time to sit down with us and discuss the future of smokejumping in their agencies. We plan to stay involved and work cooperatively with the agencies.

It is clear that the smokejumpers' role has expanded. Smokejumpers today participate on large fire teams, serve as managers on large prescribed and natural fire assignments, serve on tree disease crews, and are often

detailed to units to serve as fire management officers, to name a few.

In Boise we learned that the Trails/Facilities Program led by **Jon McBride** (MSO-54) had a banner season, with 28 projects and 318 volunteers – up from 213 in 2008. More than 150 miles of trails were maintained.

No wonder Jon got a presidential award.

I thank each of you for your volunteer efforts on our public lands! Let's do even more in 2010. I believe you may see some projects in the Eastern states this year.

**Barry Hicks** (MSO-64) gave a presentation on the new National Smokejumper Center in West Yellowstone, and its emphasis on getting youth involved in understanding sound land stewardship and enjoyment of the outdoors.

Smokejumper volunteers are accustomed to stimulating interest in the outdoor environment. NSA Vice President **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) gave a presentation on preserving the historical structures at the Cave Junction Smokejumper Base – which was established in 1943 – and the work that volunteers have done thus far.

Chuck is hoping to gather up people after the National Smokejumper Reunion in Redding, June 11-13, to head to CJ and put a new roof on the parachute loft.

Director for Membership **John McDaniel** (CJ-57) told us we have 1,567 NSA smokejumper members, 138 NSA associate members, and 21 NSA pilot members. John asked us to encourage more NSA Life Memberships – we currently have 230 – as a portion of those monies goes toward helping our smokejumpers and their families in need.

A life member gets the magazine for life, pays no more membership fees, receives a cool

"Life Member" cap and plaque, along with recognition in the NSA magazine. Your contribution is also tax deductible!

You can contact John at P.O. Box 105, Falun, KS 67442-0105 or jumpercj57@hotmail.com.  
Got a comment on where the

National Smokejumper Association is going? Feel free to drop me a note. It's your organization and we want to hear from you. 🙏

# The Birth of Smokejumping-Notes Of The First Forestry Parachutist

by Georgy Alexandrovich Makeev (Leningrad 1949)

## PART THREE

*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. In spite of negative reports from his superiors, Makeev was given approval to further develop the smokejumper program in 1936.*

*In Part Two (July 2009) Makeev designed and developed the necessary equipment for the program, and the first fire jumps were made. An accident during training almost stopped the program but Makeev convinced his superiors to let him continue.*

*Thanks to Bruce Ford (MSO-75) and Tony Pastro (FBX-77) for their translation of this historic document.*

### 1937 – Thirty-Two Forest Fires Extinguished by Smokejumpers with Members of the Local Population

Whoever has been in the far north in the winter knows the harsh beauty of the Archangel region in the months of November and December. It made a great impression on me when I arrived in Kotlas in the winter of 1937. The violet expanse of boundless forests under low-floating clouds, bright white sparkling snow harmonized so with each other. The harshness of the far north was in the air.

The newly-organized Northern Base of Forest Aviation huddled at that time in a small room in the city of Kotlas. The meeting with Levin was most heartfelt, most joyful. Having lived through the summer and endured challenges, we had become still closer.

We decided to organize a school near the village of Krasnoborsk. Parachutes and other materials were packed on trucks, and I went with them to Krasnoborsk. The trucks ran along the smooth, transparent ice of the river, now scrambling over the small, sandy islands and speeding along the road between brush and reeds. Sometimes the truck broke through the ice, settled on its rear wheels, and would helplessly lurch and chatter in one place. Getting up the steep bank of the Dvina required the aid of a tractor. Towards evening we saw a large, old garden enclosed by a fence. Opening the gate we went along snow-covered, tree-lined walk of the garden. The walk lead us to an open place, in the middle of which stood a remarkable two-story wooden house with glass verandas, little balconies and a

pretty tower. The old keeper opened the back entrance and the trucks started unloading.

The school facility was remarkable. Here we could easily set up both a dormitory for the students and classrooms. But most importantly, the length of several rooms allowed the arrangement of tables for packing parachutes. Hurried work commenced to prepare the facility for receiving

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#### Smokejumper base abbreviations:

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



*Group of jumpers and An-2 (aircraft) Northern Airbase, Archangel, 1954. This was the first year the An-2 was used at Archangel, allowing the deployment of larger groups of jumpers. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)*

students and the beginning of studies. Parachute tables and cots were prepared, dishes purchased, a dorm and dining room organized.

### **Highly Motivated New Jumpers Recruited and Trained**

In response to telegrams sent out by the forest trust, students soon started arriving. They were all local forest workers - woodsmen and rangers raised in the forest, well versed in the work of putting out forest fires and with an ardent desire to be jumpers. It was hard to imagine a better contingent for a smokejumper school.

With exceptional interest and effort the forest workers learned parachuting. Until late in the evening until lights out, the parachute packing class was full of training students. With the constant efforts to complete the program of studies, time flew by day after day, week after week. Two months went by and soon the whole winter passed. Returning to Leningrad, I was occupied in design work and looking after the quick completion of factory orders for the new smokejumper equipment.

Summer came. From the Northern Airbase, information began to arrive that the jumpers had started jumping into settlements to mobilize the population and that they had started to successfully put out forest fires. Not until July did

I end up at the Northern Airbase and find that firefighting work was in full swing. All 18 jumpers were jumping into settlements. With joy I saw how the parachute service took hold and was used for quickly organizing the population for fire suppression.

### **Air Dropping Cargo**

But there still wasn't full-fledged use of the parachute service. Inertia still existed. Cargo racks were not installed on the aircraft, so fires could still not be fought completely independently.

"Comrade **Shcheglov**, cargo racks must be mounted on the airplanes as soon as possible," I proposed to the *boss of operations*.

"It would be possible to mount them, but we don't see the need for this," they said at the base.

"How do you not see this need if you are still not getting all possible resources you can to the fires?"

"But, we hear only from you that the work does not go well enough. All of our aircraft are flying, all of the forest co-ops are very satisfied with our work."

"The forest co-ops still don't know what they can really ask from us. They don't know what you can and should give to them," I said.

The *aviation technician* **Zakharov**, a party member, came to my aid. He fiddled with the cargo racks until late at night



and towards morning had them mounted. Now it was necessary to carry out tests with the cargo racks and cargo parachutes to conduct cargo drops.

The harnesses filled with cargo were brought to the parking area, and they started to attach them under the airplane.

"Well, Comrade **Makeev**, will the cargo really break these break cords?"

"Yes, of course. They are factory-made and specifically designed for breaking with this cargo."

"Maybe they are calculated correctly for another airplane but aren't suitable for this plane and could break the wing."

"They will certainly break. We already threw cargo parachutes with them last year and the cords always broke."

"But remember, all responsibility for this lies on you. Remember – it's your responsibility."

"I remember. Let's drop them."

Then the pilot **Efimov** went up and two white canopies with cargo hanging under them opened under his airplane and smoothly descended. Everything was very satisfactory. Voices clamored, "They came down so well and everything works. Now what? Let's start dropping cargo."

Retardant was strapped at the aerodrome, cargo racks mounted, cargo parachutes tested, and everything was ready. The weather stayed hot, the sun burned from morning to night, not a single cloud was seen, and forest fires continued

popping up. Three jumpers from the Krasnoborsk operations section were dropped to more dangerous fires.

**Malanin**, the foreman of the crew and ailing with malaria, was the only one left.

"If there is a new fire tomorrow, it's my turn to jump," I thought.

## Malishkin Needs Help

The next day, July 19, there were no fires visible in the morning. In the forest area to the east, where the previous day a big column of smoke was seen and the jumper **Malishkin** dropped, there was no more smoke.

"Jumpers work well," I thought happily and with pride in my students. So, now the parachute service is firmly entrenched in firefighting. Even if I were to die it would grow all the same, and these 18 enthusiastic jumpers wouldn't let it perish.

After noon I began to notice a column of smoke in the same place in the east. The smoke quickly started increasing, rising upward in a large column and then extending horizontally. Comparing the location of the smoke with the map, it was determined that this was the same fire to which **Malishkin** was dropped the previous day. A patrol aircraft, flying there quickly, reported that yesterday's fire was again burning.

"What is **Malishkin** doing there? How did he lose the



Group of jumpers before boarding Il-14 airplane, Central Airbase, 1970. The Il-14 was first used for smokejumping in 1968. (A higher-speed aircraft, its use necessitated a drogue deployment system to stabilize the jumper after exit). (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

fire?" everyone wondered.

After a quick consultation, it was decided that **Malishkin** couldn't leave the fire. He probably needed help, and it was necessary to drop him backpack pumps and chemicals and to drop another jumper in to help with the organization of work. This year I still hadn't jumped, and it was almost a year since my last jump. I should therefore first receive a training jump at the aerodrome, but the situation required a quick response, and it wouldn't do to be slow.

After 15 to 20 minutes I was sitting in the plane. Under the bottom of the plane, cargo chutes with 20 backpack pumps were hung. A group of the detachment's workers stood near the plane. The engine started and **Efimov** and I lifted into the air. We flew across the beautiful Dvina. The smoke column gradually got nearer and more visible. At last we flew up to it. The fire started near a small river and quickly spread deep into the forest.

"Fisherman started it," I thought, looking over the area surrounding the fire and looking for a suitable jumpspot. A small meadow with two haystacks in it was visible, about 3-5 kilometers from the fire.

"Landing here will be nice and comfortable. It looks like soft, bright green grass on the meadow," I thought.

The cargo chutes drifted down, and the white spots of the canopies settled on the edge of the meadow. The airplane made another circle and I jumped. The canopy opened normally, the jump was spotted correctly, and I descended smoothly to the center of the meadow. The next instant my legs wound up in something completely soft and wet, and I began to collapse in an unsteady quagmire. A column of spray doused my face, and my hands went in the water to my elbows. All the bog area closest to me was slowly sinking into the water, erupting up in bubbles. Nearby I saw a tiny, dwarf birch and crawled toward it with difficulty unfastening the snaps and freeing my harness from the risers. Spreading out as wide as possible and holding onto tall hummocks, I gradually made it to the birch. I began pulling in the risers and suspension lines and packing them in the parachute container.

The pilot **Efimov** asked afterwards, "What was up with you, **Georgy Alexandrovich**? You lay so long after landing, I even started to worry."

Dragging my parachute from the swamp to the edge of the forest, I put it in a safe, dry place. Going down to the swamp again for the cargo chutes, I dragged one out to the forest's edge, but didn't have the strength to drag out the second and could only lift it onto a large tussock.

After taking care of the chutes, I grabbed several backpack pumps and headed towards the fire. Twilight quickly fell and it became night. The thick forest changed to logging areas. Passing through the logged areas, the trail descended down into brush and then into a swamp. Smoke hadn't been visible for a long time.

"Hopefully, I didn't mix up the direction," I thought. "I should go perfectly straight and keep from veering to the side."

The going became harder, the darkness in the forest thickened still more. My feet fell between roots and I started

to get tired and lose my orientation and self-confidence. The fatigue of the last months of intense work had had an effect on my nerves.

"Am I right to be out here wandering alone in the forest? What can I do alone when I'm so feeble that I couldn't even pull the second parachute out? And is it really possible to put out forest fires with jumper crews? Indeed, this requires so much strength."

My heart began to burst from the realization of my own weakness and helplessness, from my inability to do what seemed necessary: to get to the fire faster, encourage the people, to give them help. I was completely alone. I knew that nobody could see me and unbidden tears coursed my cheeks, sobs arose in my throat. But I walked with undiminished pace, trying not to change course.

"No, no, it's still too early to despair and lose heart. My duty is to be here at the very hardest place of work. It would certainly take a whole crew of 5-6 jumpers to put out a fire independently, but I am only one, and so it is so difficult for me."

I was approaching the river and it couldn't be too far now. At that moment I heard the crack of a twig close by and saw a person walking quickly. Two more emerged behind him. They were workers from the fire. They said that four of them had worked all day with the forester to contain the fire, and now the forester sent them for replacements while he stayed alone on the fire.

I made it to the river and went along the bank searching for a place to cross to the other side. The fire was now clearly visible. It was half a kilometer from me. Because of the night dew it had quieted down. In many places fire had already climbed to the spruce crowns and burned the tops of the trees like a torch against the background of the sky. They gave sinister warning, that with the coming of the daytime heat they would turn into a crown fire, a natural disaster sweeping away everything in its path.

Crossing the river, I finally found the exhausted forester napping under a tree. From him I found out that the jumper and 15 workers had managed to get to the fire while it was still small and quickly stopped it. Leaving four people to guard the fire, the jumper returned to the village, but the fire began to flare up again during the day. Inspecting the fire's edge, I saw that its area was now already 80-100 hectares, and the danger was high that on the next day it would become a crown fire. The forester calmed me, saying that he sent the most reliable people to the village and that he expected the arrival of 15-20 of its workers to stop the fire. In any case, it was necessary to bring the backpack pumps left at the cargo, and I went back to the jumpspot. After wandering about two hours in the forest, I returned with the remaining backpack pumps.

Assessing the situation again, I concluded that at least 100 people would be needed in order to catch this fire. I would have to go to the village myself and get the whole administration going to get this number of workers. The worn-out forester meanwhile settled in more comfortably between the roots of a big spruce, got a leftover piece of bread wrapped in a rag from his bag, and began to eat it in



*Pilot-observer and suited jumpers by An-2, conferring on jumpspot for active fire. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)*

sad meditation.

"That can't be your last bread?"

"Yes, indeed I haven't been home for five days. I came straight here from section 89 where we had spent four days."

"Here's the deal. Later in the morning an airplane will fly by here. Take these two-signal panels and lay them out on an open spot near the river, half a meter from each other. The airplane will see this signal and bring you and the workers food." The forester listened attentively without interrupting, but seemed unwilling to believe it.

"He will drop food to you in a special green, canvas bag by parachute. If the parachute ends up in the river, immediately pull it out and dry it. Untie the bag, take bread and canned goods, eat freely yourself and feed those workers who have little bread. When the airplane comes a second time, lay out the signal streamers in the shape of the letter "R." This will mean that you need workers. The airplane will see this and take measures to send workers. I am also going myself for workers. You stay here to wait for the workers, and when they arrive, handle the firefighting."

Having explained all this to the forester, I gave him my bread and set out along the bank of the river to the closest village of Berezonavalok, 12 kilometers away. Going along the bank I saw the shelter of some fishermen. One of the fishermen agreed to take me to the village. The small boat quickly slid downstream with the current, sometimes scraping the bottom of the river. It turned out that the fisherman saw the chutes falling from a distance the day

before and he knew the spot where they landed. It was located two full kilometers from a bend of the river. I asked the fisherman to stop the boat there and bring the parachutes. While the fisherman went for the chutes, I fell asleep without realizing it, warmed by the morning sun. Waking up I saw, to my astonishment, **Malishkin** and the fisherman next to me with the parachutes.

"Yesterday, I saw from the village that the fire started burning again and understood that the guards had left," said **Malishkin**. "I gathered 17 workers and am now going with them to the fire."

"With 17 workers you can't do much. Go and try to hold the fire, and I will go and collect another 30-50 people. You signal the aircraft to send food, chemicals, and workers."

Arriving at the village, I sent a telegram to the administration, requesting that workers be sent. Only by evening did I manage to send some people from the co-op to the fire and make my own way back.

Meanwhile, a stubborn struggle was going on at the fire. The head of the fire was already three kilometers into the forest. In its path, this band of fire burned small reproduction and brush that momentarily blazed like torches to their very tops. With a whistle and crackle, fire enveloped the crowns of big spruce. The fire went in a wall, emitting characteristic rustles and crackles, generating searing heat several meters in front of itself, pouring out pungent, suffocating smoke and spreading at two to three meters a minute. The fire left behind a sad picture of charred, still occasionally smoking tree

trunks amid the black, burnt forest floor. Closer to the front of the fire, many trees still burned fiercely. The forester and **Malishkin** were at the head of the fire with the strongest workers. They were trying to get a fireline around it. Behind them remained only widely spaced workers for patrolling the fire edge. A command point was organized at an open place on the riverbank. Here the changing workers snacked and signal streamers were laid out for the airplane. The airplane dropped several bladders of chemicals and another 20 backpack pumps and food. Walking along the edge of the fire, it was frightening to see the long line of flames that had subsided, but were ready to burn again. A line extending for a kilometer was guarded by a solitary 10-12 year old boy diligently and coolly spraying the flames, sneaking up to the fireline. This view of a little boy in a peasant coat with a pump hanging from his shoulders was the embodiment of the dream that lit my long and persistent nights of design work. This “RLO” pump was the very instrument that allowed a little boy to successfully fight fire, the instrument that I so strived for and defended before **Zolotov**.

The telegrams that were sent and signals given to the airplane did their work –fresh worker power continually came to the fire. As a result, the head of the fire was held and surrounded by a fireline. The entire fireline across the length of the front of the fire was cleaned out and widened.

The airplane repeatedly appeared over the fire and threw down message streamers with warning instructions about the possibility of the fire flanking and possible breakthroughs. Only after two days of fatiguing work was the struggle with the fire fully finished. Reliable guards were set along the entire front. Relieved workers rested at the command point, and unneeded workers left for the village. At the village I made arrangements by telephone for the patrol plane to pick me up at the closest landing field.

At the base I was able to observe the work of jumpers on fires and to check the work of the backpack pump. The work at the northern base in Krasnoborsk for 1937 was very significant. Eighty-two parachute jumps were made to settlements for mobilizing the population and quickly organizing firefighting efforts. An array of flight crews together with the jumpers received special thanks from the forest cooperative for exemplary work in forest fire protection. The advisability of using the parachute service for firefighting in the thinly populated and roadless regions was proven in full, and local forest organizations insistently requested further and wider use of jumpers for fire suppression. 📌

*In Part Four Makeev achieves his goal of showing that smokejumpers can be the first on a fire and put it out without any outside help.*

## My Friend Orville

by Josh Voshall (Redding '03)

So, no s—, there I was (as all good jumper stories start out) on my way back from fishing with my dad, John, from the Mighty Elk River just north of Port Orford, Ore., when I turned to my dad and asked if we could stop at a house on the right.

He obliged, of course, and we turned to the right where a fake pelican greeted us. We drove into the driveway to a house where a former jumper lived, but one whom I'd yet to meet.

I hopped out of the truck and asked if an **Orville Looper** (CJ-49) lived there. His wife, Millie, said, “Yeah, he's driving up right now.”

As my dad and I turned to look, there came this guy in his mid-70s driving up on a four-wheeler from the beach. He looked like he'd had a fun-filled day roaming around on the beach and was worn out.

I introduced myself and my dad,

and told him I was a rookie from Redding, and that I'd seen his name on the jump list from the NSA. With his kind voice, he said, “Hi. Nice to meet you both,” and that started both of our families' relationship as friends.

I visited the Loopers as much as I could during the year. They lived about a mile and a half north of my parents and would stop in to say “hi” when I came in to town.

Orville had an awe-inspiring presence about him. He had broad shoulders that seemed to go for miles and a square jaw that would hurt any normal man if he punched Orville. Past that, though, he was a great storyteller and told you what he was thinking about – and no s—, he would tell you the truth! That was what Orville was all about, letting you know how it was and how it should be in all aspects of life, and I enjoyed every minute of it!

I asked him when and where he rookie'd. His reply was Cave Junction

in 1949. I said, “No way! I go through there when I come home and go back to work.”

I asked him what it was like to jump when jumping was fairly new. His reply: “The greatest time I had in my career.”

I then probed at his years in jumping, asking where he went and for how long. He told me through his career, he went to Redding in 1957 to help start the base there, and then in 1959, he and some Missoula jumpers started the base in Fairbanks, Alaska.

As I found out, Orville was the first operations manager in Redding, then was the first base manager in Fairbanks.

My jaw nearly dropped. I remember seeing a picture of Orville in the training room in Redding, but of course he was much younger. I recognized the name but I didn't know he started the base in Fairbanks.

Ten years after Orville started



*Orv Looper and Josh Voshall (Courtesy J. Voshall)*

jumping he was a base manager, or program manager. This was impressive to me, so I asked him more questions, of course. I asked him: "How did you pick the group to go to Alaska?"

His response was, "Well, I called their bosses if I didn't know (the prospective jumpers) and asked about them. Some of the replies I got were, 'Well, he has a bad attitude.'

"To tell you the truth, I didn't give a s— about their attitude. I wanted to know if they were hard workers."

Well, in the long run, Orville said he had a great bunch of guys who were hard workers!

I asked Orville, "How were the days in Redding?" He said it took a little convincing to get the district rangers and forest supervisor to buy the idea that smokejumpers could be utilized in California. Orville told of a story about taking a district ranger on a flight over Castle Crags one day, when the ranger turned to Orville and asked, "Do you think you can jump those?"

In true jumper fashion, Orville replied, "If you can get a fire up there, then yeah, we can jump it!" Orville told me that within days of meeting him!

He also said that in those days, the smokejumper operations took place in downtown Redding, and it was hard

to keep the boys in line after a long night downtown, but we all know that!

We went off in tangents for the next two years on telling stories of our experiences. One caught my ear and I have to tell it. Orville told me of a night in Cave Junction where he and some bros were hanging out at a local bar when one of the locals came up to them and wanted to start something. Orville said that he stuck out his square chin and told the local to "try it and see what happens."

Well, Orville had a presence when he entered the room, but his chin beat him to the door, as did his shoulders. I mean, his chin was square and stout! Turns out the guy backed out of the event. That's all Orville had to do.

The two years I knew the Loopers were great. My family was their family and vice-versa. I had a great time listening to Orville tell his stories from his uranium jump to his last jumps in Alaska.

We went back and forth, not trying to outdo each other, but to learn from each other and boy, did I learn from Orville. To tell you the truth, Orville was like a grandpa to me, like part of the family. My mom and dad enjoyed having him and Millie around, especially my mom. My mom thought he was great – very much to-the-point as he pulled no

punches and was overall a great guy.

In November 2005, at about the end of Redding's jump season, my mom called to say Orville was in the hospital. I packed up my things at the base that day and headed home with no hesitation. Orville was still in the hospital about a week before Thanksgiving, but was back at home celebrating with his family a few days later. His family included his wife, her son and daughters, and the Voshalls.

Millie had to go to Orville's sister's funeral in Cave Junction a few days later, so my mom – in true mom fashion – took care of Orville while she was gone. I stopped over throughout the weekend to see how things were going and saw that Orville needed some help getting around. My mom and I spent most of those days spending it with Orville, listening to his stories or watching him sleep.

When Millie came home, Orville was doing well but something was wrong. Millie called Roger, Orville's only son, to come down from Washington state. It was the first time I had met Roger and we got along well. We talked about what Roger was doing and also about Orville and what a great guy he was.

My mom woke me at 7 o'clock the morning of Dec. 6, 2005, as she told me of Orville's passing. So in true smokejumper fashion, I ran a mile and a half to the Looper home to give Millie a big hug and Roger a firm handshake, and I told them how sorry I was about Orville.

I know how hard it is to lose a friend and a family member, and on that day I lost both.

I wanted to tell you my stories about Orville as I knew him – a kind and generous man as well as a legend in the jumper community for his many attributes in building our future in the jumper world.

Every time I jump, I think about Orville and what it must have felt like to be in his boots when he was around. I later found out that he was in the Battle of Midway in World War II. He was an extraordinary man who reached for his dreams and succeeded in every way. 🙏



# Forest Service Trains On The Ram-Air System

by Mark Belitz (West Yellowstone '01)

**T**he U.S. Forest Service has finished a second season of gaining skills on the ram-air system. The Bureau of Land Management is helping the Forest Service in this training process by its expertise, guiding the Forest Service in correct procedures and sharing lessons learned from its many years of jumping the ram-air system.

The Forest Service, meanwhile, is interested in gaining a knowledge base of the ram-air system so that it may critically evaluate all systems for the smokejumper mission.

There are currently 15 active Forest Service ram-air jumpers; 2008 was the first year of training the Forest Service ram-air jumpers. There were smokejumpers selected from various Forest Service bases and trained in Fairbanks on the DC-7 ram-air system.

They trained another class of nine Forest Service employees in Fairbanks in 2009; however, due to logistical concerns over BLM oversight, the students were selected only from Region One – Missoula and West Yellowstone.

After three weeks of training and 21 proficiency jumps, we were ready to be fire-operational for the emerging fire season in Alaska. We were all able to jump the DC-7 in Alaska on fire assignments. After several weeks of the Alaska fire season, we returned to Missoula for more student jumps with the emphasis on mountainous terrain and ridge landings.

Following our training in Missoula, the Forest Service ram-air jumpers dispersed to where they were needed for the fire season.

I'll offer a few of my initial thoughts on my experience with the DC-7 over the course of the season. First, here's a little of my background for making these evaluations: I rookied for West Yellowstone in 2001, making this my ninth season as a smokejumper. I had more than 150 jumps on the FS-14 canopy prior to my first jump on the DC-7, and I've been able to get a fire jump from most smokejumper bases. I currently have 39 jumps on the DC-7.

My first impression of the ram-air system was the immense amount of responsibility that I had in my hands – not only the performance abilities of the canopy, but the ability to really hurt myself if I didn't understand how to recognize a malfunction and execute the proper emergency procedure.

Also, there is an extra amount of air awareness to flying this canopy as it requires you to be more attentive of airspace and altitude. I compare this added responsibility to my experience in learning to drive. I got my initial training on the farm tractor, but when I finally graduated to driving

the family car, I realized I could do so much more, but could also get in trouble if I ever got careless. I appreciate this added responsibility, as I've always preferred having fate in my own hands; however, I can't blame my accuracy anymore on the spotter or an increase in winds.

Another question that often arises is the performance of the ram-air canopy in tight timber jumps. Yes, the ram-air canopy requires more of a glide angle versus the FS-14 that has a greater vertical descent. In our training we jumped several tight jump spots and were very pleased with the performance.

Looking back at my jump career, I can remember only one incident when a ram-air canopy couldn't have made it in that particular jump spot. If there were any ram-air jumpers on board, they probably would have had to pick an alternate jump spot a mile or two away. However, as a round jumper and as a spotter, there have been numerous instances when we had to "dry run" a fire due to winds that were greater than 15 miles an hour but had not reached the 25-mph wind speed limit for the DC-7.

I know many times I've been disappointed to return to base. Sometimes we'd been able to return and jump that fire in the morning or evening when the winds calm down, but sometimes the fire was staffed by somebody else and I feel that we had wasted time and had not fulfilled our purpose to the user.

The other issue to contemplate is training and money. The ram-air canopy costs more to operate. The equipment costs more; the training requires about 25 proficiency jumps to be operational, compared to the 15 jumps on the FS-14. The unavoidable fact is that more time and money needs to be placed into the equipment and into the employee.

The question is really: "Is the payoff worth it?" The smokejumper organization has changed dramatically from the early years.

Smokejumpers are no longer jumping for just a couple of years; they are making careers out of smokejumping. Is it worth investing the extra training in the employee? I believe given the ability to jump in higher winds, land more softly, and catch a fire before it turns into a large project fire could pay for the entire program.

The other extra benefit with the ram-air is the three-ring system that allows the user to cut away the main in the case of an emergency. The reserve static line can then deploy the reserve without the main competing with the reserve for air. This makes for a more dependable reserve deployment and performance.

Another significant benefit is the ability to pack the main



## USFS Graduating Ram-Air Class 2009

*Standing L-R: Trainer Tony Marchini (FBX-01), Trainer Chris Swisher (FBX-03), Dan Helterline (MSO-89), Justin Horn (RDD-03), Tim Wallace (MSO-06), Knute Olson (MSO-00), James Greenwood (GAC-06), Bjorn Skovlin (RAC-05), Trainer Eric Duning (NIFC-01), Trainer Phil Lind (NIFC-01), Trainer Ezra Butterfield (FBX-06). Kneeling L-R: Trainer Mark Motes (RDD-86), Trainer Jay Wattenbarger (FBX-92), James Gray (MSO-00), Jake Besmer (MSO-03), Audrey Banfill (RAC-06), Mark Belitz (WYS-01), Bobby Sutton (MSO-91) (Courtesy Mark Belitz)*

in the field with tools one can easily carry in a leg pocket. This ability to rig in the field has proven very beneficial to the BLM in its need to staff sub-bases, and I believe it can prove beneficial to the Forest Service when we open up our sub-bases.

As a spotter, I appreciate the ability to jump a four-person stick. I can remember two instances during which this would have been valuable. One was when we had an emerging fire with air tankers coming in for drops, and I had to hold them while we were dropping two-person sticks. Every time we circled, those two air tankers also circled.

The other incident was when I was rushing to beat legal dark as the sun was setting. In both cases a few minutes less in our operation would have been valuable.

The ability to pull your own drogue release handle to deploy the main can be very thrilling, but it shouldn't be overlooked at the potential benefit of this either. For one, the five-second count gets the jumper out of the door

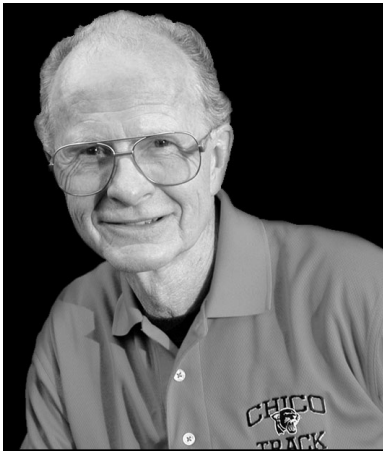
stabilized and in smooth air for a clean deployment of the main parachute. However, a second advantage often overlooked is the confidence the jumper receives by being able to fall under drogue, do a good count, and pull the green handle.

With the FS-14, I trained to pull my reserve handle, but I never knew if I could perform this simple function while falling through the air. Still, the first time you pull that green handle, you suddenly build that calmness, confidence, and situational awareness while falling to do anything that may be required in an emergency.

I believe smokejumpers are wise to continually look at ways of improving the program, and the parachute system is just one of the many ways we can look at fulfilling the need of our users. The DC-7 receives good evaluations from me, but it may not be the "best" canopy for the job, or the only canopy to get the job done. I'm just excited that the Forest Service is open to evaluating potential systems for the smokejumper mission. 🍄



# Sounding Off from the Editor



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

## Sweat Equity Might Save Original Smokejumper Base

THE FIRST PART OF the NSA Mission Statement reads: "The National Smokejumper Association, through a cadre of volunteers and partnerships, is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping,....."

If you read this column in the October issue of *Smokejumper*, you know that in June a group of approximately twenty former smokejumpers plus another fifteen local supporters spent a week restoring the oldest smokejumper parachute loft in the U.S. located in Cave Junction, Oregon.

For five years, a local group led by **Roger Brandt** (Associate), **Wes Brown** (CJ-66), and **Gary Buck** (CJ-66) has lobbied to save the original buildings that made up the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base (1943-82). Thanks to their efforts, the loft was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2006. Even with this designation, the building is not protected and could be demolished. Josephine County (Oregon) took over the airport and the buildings after the closing of the base in 1982.

A legitimate business plan has been written for the project. The

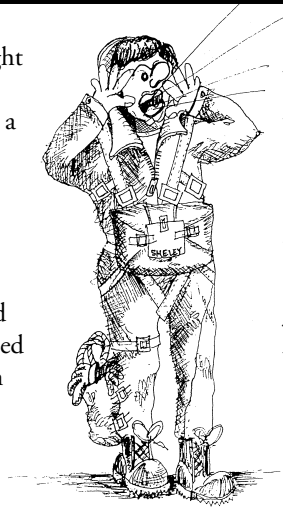
Redwood Highway runs right by the base and carries an estimated 300,000 travelers a year within feet of the base. Highway 199 is a major tourist travel route between the coast and I-5 that runs from Mexico to Canada. A restored SSB would be good for an economically depressed area that could benefit from tourist dollars.

Beyond that, all of us as former and current smokejumpers should be concerned about the preservation of our history. Smokejumping is a unique way of fighting forest fires and has only existed in the U.S., Canada and Russia. In the history of smokejumping in the U.S. (1940-2009), there have only been approximately 5,700 men and women who have done this job.

In my ten years as editor of *Smokejumper* magazine, I have been in contact with over 2,000 of you. I have *never* found a person who was not proud to be or have been a smokejumper. The most common comment is that "smokejumping was the best job I ever had." This comes from individuals who are CEOs, doctors, lawyers, teachers, pilots, farmers, elected officials, university presidents, career military, CIA professionals, dentists and the list goes on. It was the job, but the bottom line is: It was the people!

The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base (SSB) was a very small base located in a very isolated part of big timber country. Only 400 jumpers rookied at CJ in the history of the base.

As per any base, we had our share of interesting individuals. Consider **Willie Unsoeld** (CJ-50) who was the first person to ever climb Mt. Everest via the difficult West Ridge Route. He was so cool that he worked on crossword puzzles while on his first



jump.

**Stuart Roosa** (CJ-53) was the Command Module Pilot for the Apollo 14 moon mission and the SSB is the home for a "Moon Tree" planted from seeds flown on that mission. The July 27, 2009, issue of *Time Magazine* says about Roosa, "His deft piloting saved the mission when the command and lunar modules at first failed to dock properly; agile thruster work tripped the latches, and the flight

proceeded."

Then there was **Allen D. "Mouse" Owen** (CJ-70), the smallest smokejumper and U.S. Marine in history. At four feet, 10 inches, he had to get backing from a senator and representative to get into both outfits. As a Recon Marine and "Tunnel Rat" he served three tours in Vietnam. After three years of the most dangerous assignments in Vietnam, he wanted the chance to become a smokejumper. Of course he didn't meet the "standards" and had to get politically appointed. He didn't look for the easy way. As he said, "All I want is a chance to do the job. If I can't cut it, I'll be the first goddamned son-of-a bitch to tell myself to head on down the road with no bad feelings." Well, he cut it and was instrumental in getting the first woman smokejumper into smokejumping.

Since that workweek in June in which the parachute loft was restored to a condition identical to a 1950 photo, we have had some very significant and positive signs.

In a July 16 email from Gary Buck, he said, "Last night we had an Airport Layout Plan meeting. It was probably the best meeting we ever had with the county—it was very positive. They wanted to change

some of the previous planning which would have destroyed the Gobi (SSB). They are now talking about the 'nationally historic smokejumper base.'"

Five days later: "We went to a County Commissioners meeting this morning and asked for authorization for the project next June. They gave us a resounding *unanimous* approval along with some special compliments on the loft project. It was very positive."

Ron Brown of KDRV-TV in Medford reported, "Efforts by a nationwide group of former smokejumpers to restore a former Cave Junction Smokejumper Base got a big boost Tuesday (July 21). Josephine County commissioners gave their stamp of approval on the first phase restoration. The 'Loft' building now looks much like it did 65 years ago when it was new."

"I think this is what Illinois Valley needs. It's what Josephine County needs. This, to me, is the ideal concept of economic development within Josephine County," said Josephine Co. Commissioner

Sandy Cassanelli.

This is a great example of what a group of volunteers can do. Forty ex-smokejumpers and local residents put in five days of sweat equity with no guarantees that the loft wouldn't be torn down a week after we left. It was also a good faith demonstration to the County Commissioners that we want to save this historic base and that we are willing to volunteer our time and skills to make this dream come true.

Last week (July 21) while on a family vacation at Sunriver, Oregon, I was able to take my whole family on a "show me" tour of the Redmond Air Center. I really wanted to have a good tour, so I asked **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) to come out of retirement and show us around. It was a great opportunity to show the grandkids a part of my life that has been important since my rookie year at CJ in 1959. Times have changed since we manned Redmond with six jumpers and slept on cots in the hangar.

During the "show me," I had a chance to meet **Josh Voshall** (RDD-03) with whom I had exchanged several emails. Josh is currently

jumping at RAC and is one of the small number of current jumpers who are NSA members. I was impressed with his support of the NSA and our goals to save smokejumper history and be an active advocate for the program. He accepted my invitation to take a couple days off and come down to the Gobi next June and pound a few nails and meet some great people.

The same invitation is extended to all of you for the week of June 14-18, 2010. The history of smokejumping is unique and the saving of the oldest standing base is a project in which we all need to become involved.

Go to: [www.highway199.org](http://www.highway199.org) and see what we did last summer.

*Since the July issue of Smokejumper donations have come in from **Loyle Washam** (MSO-51), **Bob Nolan** (CJ-47), **Phil Clarke** (CJ-51), **Starr Jenkins** (CJ-48), **Sharon Miller**, **Sandi Cassanelli**, **Ron Donaca** (CJ-60), and **Jerry John** (CJ-62). These donations will be turned into shingles and paint to be used next June. 🙏*

## Project Coldfeet

by Toby Scott (McCall '57)

*During a seven-day span in May 1962, the U.S. intelligence community had an extraordinary opportunity – to collect intelligence from an abandoned Soviet research station in the Arctic. The effort to pick up these materials, called "Project Coldfeet," used a specially equipped B-17 to pick up two intelligence collectors who'd parachuted to the ice several days earlier. The crew, including former smokejumper **Toby Scott** (MYC-57), collected valuable information on the Soviet research in acoustical systems, among other sensitive subjects. Scott shares here his firsthand experience in this remarkably planned and executed mission.*

In reference to a phone conversation with **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) a few months ago, I decided to write up something about "Operation Coldfeet." Here goes!

I waited a couple of years to see if Smokejumper Magazine was going to write up the story about "Operation Coldfeet." There were several smokejumpers from Missoula and McCall involved with Coldfeet. Finally, I called Chuck and asked why nothing was written about the operation. He said nobody had submitted a story.

Everybody who was on the B-17 who is still alive is getting kinda long in the tooth. Obviously, in a few more years, there won't be anyone left to give a firsthand account of this bit of history. I think it's a story that needs to be told, so I decided to write up a short story about "Operation Coldfeet."

In the summer of 2006, Nancy and I were hunkered down in our cabin in Montana's Blackfoot Valley where we stay each year from May until November. She rides her horse, Jazzie, and I piddle around my shop, garden and sawmill, when I'm not fishing or hunting coyotes.

I got a call from **Gar Thorsrud** (MSO-46), my boss – we called him "Super Chief" – at Intermountain Aviation, Inc. at Marana, Ariz., when I worked there from February 1962 to August 1964. He asked me to write up everything I could remember about the Fulton Skyhook System, which we developed on the B-17G airplane at Marana, and meet him and **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52) at the Missoula Club in a couple of days.

Bob ran the tail position and I ran the nose position.

While having a Pabst Blue Ribbon and a burger, Gar told Bob and me that the CIA had commissioned British artist Keith Woodcock to do a series of paintings which would represent some of the history of the CIA's clandestine operations. These paintings would be permanently displayed in the lobby of the CIA's headquarters at Langley, Va.

One of the events portrayed would be the B-17 picking up Lt. Junior Grade Leonard Leschack from the Soviet drift station NP-8 on June 2, 1962.

When I first started working with the Fulton Skyhook System in February 1962, we were using the B-17G and retrieving dummies through the "Joe hole" in the belly. After nearly crashing when the dummy started making wild erratic circles and wrapping around the tail, we started bringing the dummy in through the tail. This worked out well and proved successful.

I think you can still access "Operation Coldfeet" or "Project Coldfeet" on the Internet; then you will better understand the Fulton Skyhook System and its history.

By around April 1962, we had the system working smoothly. We picked up dummies in all kinds of conditions and would consistently have the dummy on board about six minutes after contact. The flaws were gradually worked out.

The system was to be used to pick up a captured American B-26 pilot in Indonesia who was going to be executed. At some time in May, Attorney General Robert Kennedy negotiated the release of the pilot. We were then stuck with a clandestine retrieval system and nothing to do with it.

The U.S. and Russians had maintained research stations on the polar ice cap for years. These were also listening stations which monitored each other's communications and activities. The only way the Russians had access to research station NP-8 in 1962 was by fixed-wing aircraft.

Large cracks had started forming in the ice pack near their runway in March 1962. They packed up and made a hasty departure, thinking no one could retrieve intelligence from the site before it was covered with ice.

The U.S. Navy and the CIA decided this would be an excellent opportunity for the Fulton Skyhook System. We packed up all our gear in the B-17 and a C-46 and headed north.

We stopped in Seattle and picked up Air Force Maj. Jim Smith, Leschack, and Pan-American Airlines navigator Bill Jordan. Bill knew how to navigate using sun lines. When you're close to the North Pole, a compass isn't reliable. He rode in the nose with me; there was a periscope in the nose roof through which he could observe the sun to navigate.

Leschack was a young man, about 23, who had just completed a hasty jump-training course, and Smitty (Smith) was a seasoned airborne veteran about 35 years old. Both were well-qualified for this project as they could read, write and speak Russian fluently.

We flew from Seattle to Point Barrow, Alaska, where we landed on a 5,000-foot PSP runway and stayed at the U.S. Naval Research Station. We wound up making five trips out of Point Barrow that lasted from 12 to 14 hours each. Each time we took off, we carried 3,600 gallons of 100-octane

gasoline, and we would use every foot of that runway each time we took off.

The first time out, we couldn't find NP-8. With the help of a Navy P-2V, we located it our second time out and dropped Smitty and Leschack and all their supplies. Back then, we didn't have all the navigating tools that are available now. When it came time to pick them up, it took three trips before we located them, and conditions were far from perfect.

There was about a 30-mph ground wind and 800-foot ceiling. In the development stage of the Skyhook System when there were high winds, we bounced the dummies off the ground a couple of times. Needless to say, there was great concern for the safety of Smith and Leschack. The weather was supposed to get worse, so it was decided to go ahead with the operation.

Fortunately, we had two very capable and experienced pilots – Capt. Connie "Seig" Seigrist, who flew for Gen. Chenault, and Capt. Doug Price, who flew a C-119 ("Dollar Nineteen") at Dien Bien Phu.

We retrieved the 150-pound intelligence bundle first with no problems, then picked up the two men, also with no problems. Needless to say, this entire operation was highly classified. After the classification status was removed in the late 1980s, we had a reunion in Las Vegas. The old B-17 was there.

At the time, all the crew members were alive and present except **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58), who died in Thailand in 1982. At the reunion, it was revealed that the U.S. had gathered significant intelligence as a result of Operation Coldfeet.

There was a medal ceremony at the CIA Headquarters in McLean, Va., in April 2008. Surviving crew members and relatives of deceased crew members were presented with citations and the Agency Seal Medal. The painting of the B-17 was unveiled by Woodcock, the artist, during the ceremony; the original is now hanging in the headquarters lobby.

There is a brief description of "Operation Coldfeet" and the names and signatures of crew members and relatives of the deceased crew members. The ceremony was very impressive. Crew members and relatives also received copies of the painting, also signed by those present.

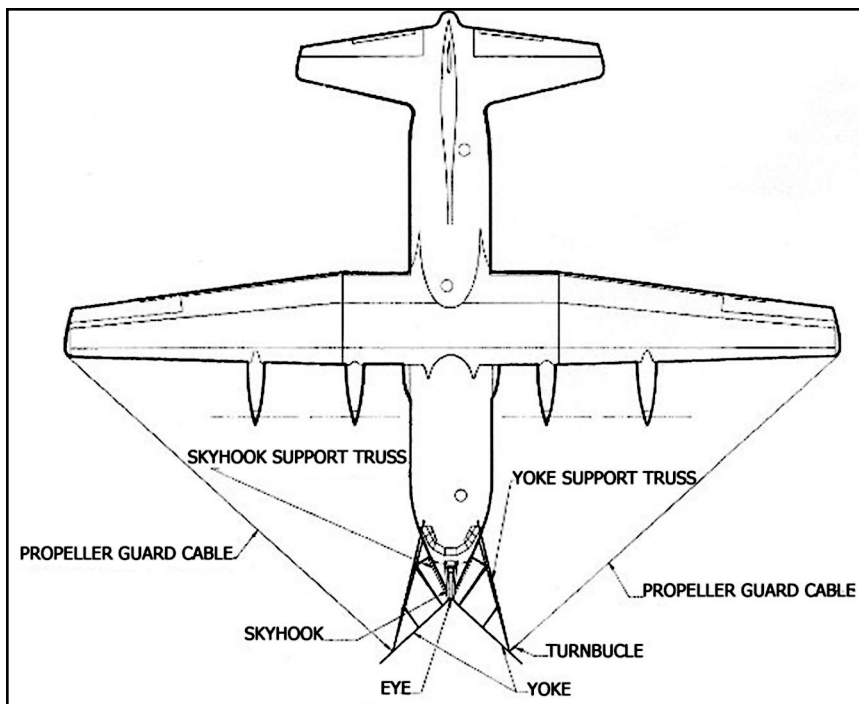
I was at the ceremony, as were Price, Jordan, Leschack, **Jack Wall** (MSO-48), Thorsrud and Nicol. Deceased crew members and persons representing them were Nora Seigrist and three sons for Capt. Seigrist; Sue Dahedl and Catherine Rohman, daughters of Maj. Smith; **Shep Johnson** (MYC-56), representing **Miles Johnson** (MYC-53); Kent and Shirley Daniels and **Jack Daniels** (MSO-54), family of Jerry Daniels; and Mary Turk, representing Leo Turk.

Miss Nancy and I had two firsts on that trip. It was the first time we'd ever stayed in a \$200-a-night hotel room and the first time we'd ever paid \$12 for a hamburger.

One thing about Washington, D.C., is that it sure makes you appreciate Montana!

Nancy and I spend about half our time at Lake Buchanan, Texas, and the other half in the Blackfoot Valley.





(Courtesy Robert E. Fulton, Jr./U.S. Air Force public domain image)

My first look at the Blackfoot Valley was in the company of Jerry Daniels in Sept. 1964. Jerry lived in Helmville, Mont. in his younger days.

In the fall of 1964, Jerry and I spent 54 days in a row without sleeping under the roof of a building. We carried 90-pound packs 28 miles from Monture Trailhead to the headwaters of the South Fork of the Flathead River, where Youngs Creek and Danaher Creek come together. We floated all the way through the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area and came out at Spotted Bear Ranger Station.

Jerry's brother Kent (the animal man) had dropped off my car at the ranger station, and we went to Missoula to buy groceries and supplies, and headed back into the Bob Marshall for some goat hunting above Holland Lake. We got our goats. We caught two bull trout – 11 pounds and 15 pounds – on the float trip.

We also got elk, antelope, mule deer and 14 Canadian geese that fall. I bought my place near Helmville in 1988. We framed up the cabin in 1995; this will be our 15th summer in the cabin. We've backpacked into the Bob Marshall several times, canoed 47 miles of the Blackfoot River on four trips, shot the Alberton Gorge on the Clark Fork twice (tipping over once) in rubber boats, and thoroughly enjoyed our life here in the Blackfoot Valley.

We welcome correspondence by mail (see addresses below). We don't have cellular phones or computers and we make our own electricity. Our closest neighbor is two miles away. We don't have a TV – just a radio, and we only get one station.

Our big events each week are the mail and dump run to Helmville, where we always stop at the Copper Queen Saloon for a cool one and the latest bear stories, and our trip to Lincoln each week, where we hit the Bootlegger Bar and

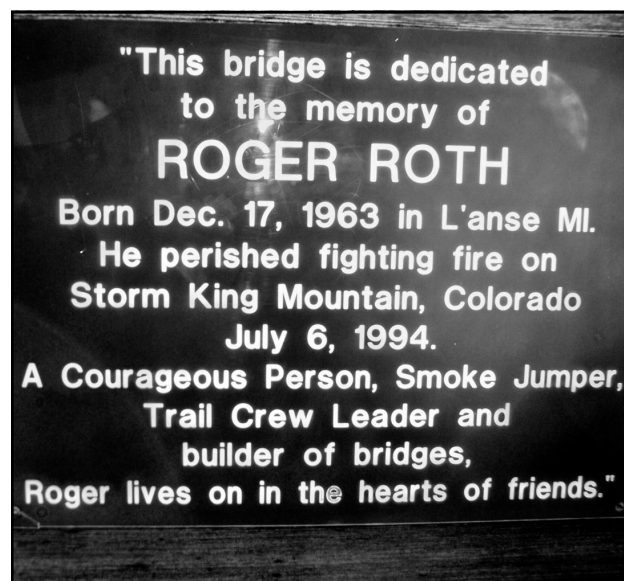
Restaurant first off for Taco Tuesday – two tacos for \$1.50 and a 16-ounce mug of Bud Light for \$1.50. Then we head to the grocery store, gas station and library – the same one visited by Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber.

About the only stress we have up here is driving through Denver going to and coming from Texas, and maybe a couple of bear encounters each summer.

When we have old jumpers come by for a visit, we get them to sign one of the deck poles out front. Some of the names you'll see are **Kenny Roth** (MYC-46), **Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson** (MYC-47), **T.J. Thompson** (MSO-55), **Ray Beasley** (MYC-52), **Miles Johnson**, **Shep Johnson**, **Ken Hessel** (MYC-58), **Larry "Alfalfa" Moore** (IDC-59), **Charlie Brown** (IDC-56), **Hal Samsel** (MSO-49), **Larry Newman** (MSO-60), **Mike Oehlerich** (MSO-60), **Mike Daly** (IDC-57), **John Magel** (MYC-58), **Pat Lee** (MYC-56), **Tony Beltran** (IDC-69) and **Tim Eldridge** (MSO-82).

Drop by if you're ever in our area. Look for mile marker 55 along Highway 200, one mile up the draw – the only house up there. We always have a cold beer. 🍺

*You can reach Toby Scott at P.O. Box 105, Helmville, MT 59843 from May until November and at 103 Chuckwagon Dr., Burnet, TX 78611 during the rest of the year.*



*Roth memorial plaque. See article by Cecil Hicks on page 29 for the story. (Courtesy Cecil Hicks)*



*Commissioner Sandi Cassanelli &  
Troop Emonds (CJ-66)*



*Tom Albert (CJ-64), Garry Peters (CJ-63)  
& Don Bisson (CJ-78)*



*Mike Hardy (MYC-75)*



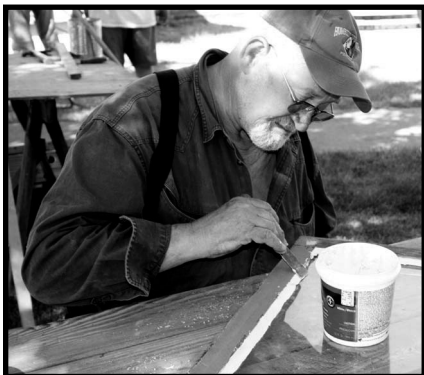
*Commissioner Dwight Ellis Presents  
Appreciation Certificate*



*Jed Emonds*



*Restoration Crew*



*Jim Fritz (CJ-59)*



*Jerry John (CJ-62)*



*L-R: Wes Brown (CJ-66), Gary Buck (CJ-66),  
Tom Albert (CJ-64) & Commissioner Dave Toler*



*Phil Clark (CJ-51) &  
Bob Nolan (CJ-47)*



*Alex Ponder*



*Paul Block (CJ-48) & Pat Brandt*



*Murry Taylor (RDD-65)*



*Chuck Sheley (CJ-59)*



*Wes Brown (CJ-66)*



## Gobi Restoration Project 2009

*Photo's Courtesy Roger Brandt*



*Garry Peters (CJ-63)*



*L-R: Mike Cramer (CJ-59), Teresa Cramer, Jim Fritz (CJ-59) & K G Sheley*



*Mike Cramer (CJ-59)*



*Bob Nolan (CJ-47)*



*Tom Albert (CJ-64), Ron Lufkin (CJ-62) & Gary Buck (CJ-66)*



*Stan Collins (MYC-67)*



*Don Bisson (CJ-78)*



*Sidne Teske*



*Sharon Westcott & Troop Emonds (CJ-66)*

*Layout Design by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)*

# The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**  
(Associate)

MANY MILESTONES highlighted 2009, including the 60th anniversary of the Mann Gulch Fire, the 50th anniversary of the rescue jump into the Hebgen Lake earthquake area, and the 100th anniversary of the arrival in Missoula of Rev. John and Clara Maclean, along with Norman and Paul.

There was also the loss of a couple of people I would not have known without being a member of this fine organization: **Gary Welch** (CJ-60) and **Tim Eldridge** (MSO-82).

I met Gary at a couple of reunions through the hospitality of the Cave Junction bunch. Like everyone else who jumped out of CJ, Gary was a bit of a character.

Tim Eldridge passed away at the University of California, San Diego Medical Center on June 27, 2009, while awaiting a liver transplant. Tim was No. 1 on the transplant list.

After several injuries ended his jumping career, Tim became the Visitor Center Manager and Media Relations Specialist for the Aerial Fire Depot in Missoula. One of Tim's most difficult assignments was handling media relations for the Tanker 04 crash on July 29, 1994,

resulting in the deaths of Capt. Bob Kelly and First Officer Randy Lynn.

The crash happened 18 miles northwest of Missoula in the Butler Creek area. The media in Missoula was difficult at best; at least one cub reporter threatened to hike to the crash site, after being denied access, before the site was secure and the crew removed.

Tim handled a difficult situation with a lot of grace and professionalism. In my own work with Tim, he was always honest and up-front. If he didn't know something, he said so, and found someone who did have the answer. He never played the spin game and never once did I hear him say, "Don't quote me on this, but ...", Tim's integrity is a lesson for us all.

Some of you may recall seeing and hearing Tim sing the National Anthem at the rededication of the Aerial Fire Depot in 2004.

Tim and I had talked about taking the Advanced PIO (public information officer) course together at FEMA's Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Md. The course is designed to be stressful and the days are long and hard, to replicate conditions in the field. Tim would have breezed through the course with ease and had a lot of fun

doing it.

We had also talked about making a trip into Mann Gulch, and I had hoped to get Tim back there last fall. Tim was feeling well enough in fall 2008 to climb to the "M" above Missoula – a major accomplishment.

Tim had a well-developed sense of humor and was a great storyteller. We met for the last time in Charlie B's on Homecoming Weekend in 2008. As it always is with good friends, our visit was far too short. I had planned on going to Missoula to see Tim in the spring but he was too weak to receive visitors.

He flew to California the following week for the last time to see his specialists. Several hundred of Tim's relatives, friends, bros and patrons of Charlie B's gathered to say goodbye in Missoula Aug. 8.

Tim is survived by his fiancée, author Gayle L. Morrison of Santa Ana, Calif.; his son, Andy Eldridge of Missoula; two sisters and an uncle; his smokejumper brothers and sisters; extended family and many friends.

If you want to honor Tim's memory, sign an organ donor card. Tim was so very close to receiving a lifesaving transplant.

This column is dedicated to the memory of Tim Eldridge. 🕯

## 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.

# Longs Peak Climb

by Roland Pera (Missoula '56)

**L**ongs Peak, located in Rocky Mountain National Park near Estes Park, is one of the 54 peaks in Colorado above 14,000 feet elevation.

I have had a fascination with this mountain for some time. After hiking a few of the “Fourteeners” in the last few years, I learned that this peak was the most difficult mountain to climb of the 47 Fourteeners that are not considered to be technical climbs.

The challenge intrigued me. I suggested this climb in May to my friend Dallas McKenzie, who was enthusiastic and immediately began planning the trip. He is a retired schoolteacher, 10 years my junior and in great shape. As a teacher he led many hiking trips to Colorado with students.

We spent two days in the Estes Park area – elevation 7,500 feet – trying to acclimatize. This included a walk during which we started at 9,400 feet and hiked to 10,400 feet.

There are two basic strategies used to hike to the top of Longs Peak. The first requires just one day, beginning the hike at 3 a.m. to 4 a.m., reaching the summit before noon, and completing the sixteen-mile round trip by 4 to 6 in the afternoon.

The second, more wimpy strategy is to spread the torture over two days, which involves camping at the Boulderfield Campground six miles from the trailhead (ranger station) and then summiting and returning to the ranger station the next day. We chose the latter strategy.

Another person joined our party at the trailhead, none other than **John “J.B.” Stone** (MSO-56) of Breckenridge, Colo. He and I go back to 1956 when we both trained to become smokejumpers in Missoula. J.B. is a decorated ex-Air Force pilot who served during the Vietnam War.

His Mississippi accent still resonates but at a lower level than in 1956. In those days most of us had no idea what he was trying to say.

The weather for this hike was partly cloudy and 50 degrees. Our packs weighed around 30 pounds; this is the disadvantage of the second strategy. We looked with envy at the people who were doing it all in one day with their six- to 10-pound packs.

Our destination for that day was the six-mile trek to Boulderfield Campground, elevation 12,700 feet – a 3,300-foot elevation gain from the trailhead. At 9:30 a.m., Dallas gave the command to start marching (just kidding). Everyone told us that this would be the easy part of our adventure and after the second day, we were in complete agreement.

Around the three-mile mark – a little above 11,000 feet –

we had huffed and puffed our way above tree line. We could see that the weather behind us was not good, but for the moment we had escaped the rain. Around a mile or so from the campground, the tread of the trail pretty much disappeared. From that point to the summit, we basically walked over rocks of all shapes and sizes.

We arrived at The Boulderfield around 2:30 p.m. as the weather was rapidly deteriorating. As the name implies, the campground is in the midst of large boulders that were probably moved here by a glacier many years ago. Somehow or other, the National Park Service was able to move enough rocks to make enough room to pitch six or seven tents. They also had piled rock walls around the tent sites to provide some wind protection.

The camping area lies 400 vertical feet below the famed Keyhole, in full view of the imposing summit of the peak.

Nothing could be more stark and desolate than this campground. The permanent residents are marmots and pikas. The marmot is a squirrel-like creature that will steal your food, carry off your boots, and chew its way into your tent if it smells food. The Park Service has marmot boxes

made of steel by each tent site where campers should keep their food. There are also two solar-powered privies at the site.

The tents were up by 3 p.m., just in time as it began to rain quite hard. We had no choice

but to crawl into our tents until around 5:30 when the rain stopped. It was then time to prepare dinner.

Both Dallas and J.B. had packed stoves and they began boiling water for the freeze-dried dinners. Thanks to Dallas, I had beef stroganoff for dinner and oatmeal and scrambled eggs with ham for breakfast. It was quite cool as we were wearing all the layers we had packed.

I don't know how much sleeping we accomplished that night – in my case, perhaps 3-4 hours – but in spite of a morning temperature of 30 degrees, our tents and sleeping bags kept us reasonably warm.

We rose at 5:30 a.m. and began our preparation to head out. It took us awhile to get our act together, and at 7:15 we stashed our heavier packs in the tents in favor of daypacks weighing 7-10 pounds and began our quest for the summit. The weather was perfect with sunny skies and very little wind.

Hiking to the campground, there are four places – including The Boulderfield – where drinking water is available, so fortunately, we did not have to pack a lot of water (the Park Service strongly advises filtering the water, which we did). From The Boulderfield to the summit, there are no water sources.

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“In spite of the spectacular view, many hikers turn back after seeing what lies ahead.”

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The first target was The Keyhole at 13,100 feet, rising 400 feet from the campground. It looked close-by but it still took us a bit less than an hour to arrive. The Keyhole is an opening at the top of a ridge that resembles a keyhole. It is from that point that the real fun (torture) begins.

In spite of the spectacular view, many hikers turn back after seeing what lies ahead. We were resolute enough to push ahead but there were times that I wished I'd turned back at that point.

Immediately after moving through The Keyhole, we were on the area known as The Ledges. The path is indicated by some bullets that are painted on the rock. At one point there are two iron bars drilled into the rock to hold for security. Most of that section is scary, as falling off the path could mean a fall of hundreds of feet.

The route actually descends a few hundred feet into the next section which is known as The Trough. Most hikers agree this is the worst part of the climb. This is a wide area which rises quite dramatically around 700-800 vertical feet.

There is no best way to go. The loose rock that is present does not help at all. Toward the top it gets narrower, and before the very top it pinches down to two large rocks.

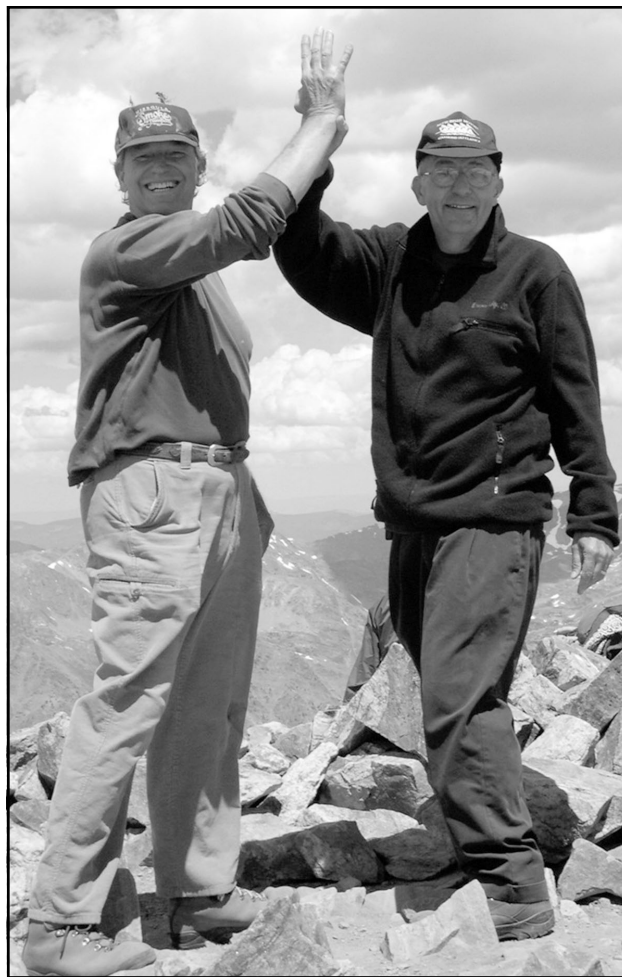
There were two paths up those rocks. Neither one seemed to work for J.B. and me. At that point I freaked out a little, but before long other hikers showed up and we all helped each other over the pinch to the top of The Trough.

At this point we were approaching 14,000 feet but still had a way to go before the top. This led to the next part of the climb which is known as The Narrows. Here the path is again characterized by narrow ledges and includes places where you squeeze between some rocks. You can't enjoy the magnificent views much, due to the pressure to be extremely careful.

Conquering The Narrows brought us to the last 250 feet of vertical known as The Home Stretch. Victory was now in sight. This section consisted of mostly flat rock rising at a very steep angle. Much of The Home Stretch was done on all fours, moving 10 or 20 feet vertically and then stopping and gasping for air.

J.B. and I, stumbling and panting, reached the top at about 10:30 a.m. Dallas beat us by an hour or so. I had a feeling of exhilaration that has been matched only a few times in my life. The weather was still beautiful, the views were awesome, the temperature was 48 degrees, and there was surprisingly little wind. The actual elevation of the peak is 14,259 feet. We did the usual high-fives, took the pictures, chatted with others at the top, ate our energy bars, and began facing the reality of our need to descend. We started down around 11 a.m.

It is a well-known fact among climbers that more accidents and deaths happen on the way down than on the way up. The fatigue factor is a big reason, and another might be that it is easy to get complacent by taking the attitude that now it is going to be easy. Totally unlike the other mountains I've climbed or hiked, coming down Longs Peak (at least to the campground) is equally difficult as going up. One badly placed foot could easily result in a sprained ankle and the need to be rescued.



L-R: J.B. Stone and Roland Pera. (Courtesy R. Pera)

The much-despised Trough on the way up was equally despised on the way down. Arriving at The Keyhole was a huge psychological boost as it meant that the treacherous part of the journey was over. It took about 40 minutes from there to our tents at the campground.

Dallas, as usual, was ahead of us and had taken the tents down. We filtered some water, readied our packs, and began the six-mile walk to the trailhead. Six miles downhill on a trail should have been a piece of cake, but my body was very tired. With the weather still almost perfect, we left the campground around 2:45 p.m. and arrived at the trailhead around 7:30. Getting back to the car did not offer the same exhilaration as reaching the top but it certainly was a wonderful feeling.

It was dark by the time we finished dinner and checked into a motel in Longmont. It was a marvelous feeling to shower and get into some clean clothes. I was so incredibly tired and sore and couldn't wait to go to bed. However, after the lights were out and my eyes were shut, all I could see was rocks of all shapes and sizes. It took me quite some time to drop off to sleep.

You must understand that my account of this hike is from the perspective of a person in his 70s. Had a 21-year-old written this, I am reasonably sure that it would have sounded a bit less onerous. 🧗

# From Missoula to Redding and The Big Trees

by Perry Rahn (Missoula '61)

**Y**ou say, "Oh, no. Not another jump story." Yep. We Missoula rookies had just completed our seven practice jumps and celebrated that evening with a keg of beer with some University of Montana co-eds. Then on July 13, 1961, a DC-3 took a bunch of us down to Redding, California. It was hotter than blazes at the Redding Airport. That afternoon my first fire jump was the kind of thing we dream about: a two-manner on a ridge in the Shasta wilderness. But it didn't work out that well.

After the opening shock I looked down and saw no clearing at all. There were large trees on the north side of a ridge and rocky cliffs on the south side. Remembering that my fellow rookie **Dale Swedeen** (MSO-61) had just broken his back landing against a large rock, I steered into the trees.

California has the biggest trees imaginable. My feet entered the canopy of the top limbs of a tree that was at least 200 feet tall. I think it was a Doug Fir or Redwood. The parachute collapsed and I fell out of the tree. I did a perfect swan dive and crashed headfirst into the brush below. It was a long fall but, luckily, I did not strike the ground. I torpedood into the brush like a cork shoved into a wine bottle. I was completely stuck upside down in this manzanita brush. I was OK but I couldn't move. (So much for an "Allen roll.") All the while the airplane (as I recall, a DC-3) kept circling around to see if we were OK. I could hear my partner, **Larry Loritz** (MSO-60), calling for me, and I finally broke out of bondage and hustled up the hill to tell him I was OK. Then the plane went away and it was

quiet. There we were with about a one-acre forest fire.

Larry asked me if I saw where the fire gear parachutes landed. I said, "no." For the next six hours we looked all over creation and could not find them. We tried putting a fireline in with sticks. But the fire was creeping steadily along through the thick brush. Finally, we figured that the plane had forgotten to drop our two cargo chutes. Since there was no way to fight the fire, we decided to hike out.

It was about dusk when we got a drink and waded across a river to a Ranger Station. A guy there said, "Who are you?" We said, "The smokejumpers." He said, "Well, then, who is up on the fire?"

They drove the two of us to Redding, and the next day four of us had another jump, this one at Bear Mountain in the Trinity Alps. The thing I vividly recall is that immediately after the opening shock I hit the ground. I think I exited the plane only about 200 feet above the ground. But

this fire was a piece of cake. We were on a mountain peak above the timberline and only had to contend with smoldering duff down in the boulders. For several days we did this while a helicopter brought meals up to us. Can you believe hot beef with mashed potatoes and gravy? We were up on this peak looking out at snow-capped Mt. Shasta, not too far away.

A week later I heard that the DC-3 had indeed dropped the cargo chutes on my first jump. But by the next day the fire required an eight-man stick.

I can remember all this even though it happened 48 years ago. Isn't it funny how you can remember things like that, but can't recall things that happened only last year? 🐼



*Perry Rahn and son, Mike, on a 2005 backpack trip in the Bighorn Mountains (Wyoming). (Courtesy P. Rahn)*

# Glade Project Update

by Bill Ruskin (Cave Junction'58)

Over the past two summers, smokejumper volunteers of the NSA Trails Program have pioneered the renovation of the Glade Ranger/ Guard Station (circa 1910) on the San Juan National Forest, about 75 miles west of Durango, Colorado. Without the NSA volunteer participation in restoration, this station and other structures on this CCC site (circa 1930s) likely would have been razed by the USFS.

In 2008, we restored the exterior of the ranger station, including foundation work, scraping and painting; installed new porch balusters, railings and expertly crafted finials; removed all windows for shop repair over the winter; installed a new

door frame and door for the main entry; completed the pointing of the brick chimney, and installed an entire new roof.

In 2009 smokejumper volunteers did additional work on the station and restored the garage, including scraping and painting, and installed a new roof. Drainage improvements were made to both structures. In addition, the meat house and out house were restored, including a partial new floor in the meat house. Crews alternated jobs during the week constructing 1/2 mile of trail on the site and installing 1/3 mile of fence posts, which will eventually tie in with existing log worm and drop down fences to help secure the site from cattle and vehicles. 🐾



2009 Glade Project Crew (Colorado). Back L-R: Warren Pierce (CJ-64), Dave Ferguson (Assoc), Steve Vittum (MSO-71), Herm Ball (MSO-50), Denis Symes (MYC-63), Ron Siple (MYC-53), Doug Wamsley (MSO-65), John Payne (MSO-66). Front (L to R): Russel Heaton (Assoc), Rich Hilderbrand (MSO-66), Bill Ruskin (CJ-58) with Kepler, Joe Lord (MSO-56) with Gunner, Jimmie Dollard (CJ-52). (Courtesy B. Ruskin)

## The Real Cost of Wildfires

by Bob Zybach

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The tab for U.S. wildfires, as commonly reported by the news me-

dia, is only a fraction of the full costs experienced by the public.

Darrel Kenops' recent commentary in *The Oregonian* ("Balancing protection with beneficial use," Aug. 25) makes the point that we export our

environmental impacts to international destinations when we cannot find ways to locally meet our nation's needs for forest products. Excellent point. But lost in this discussion are the year-in-and-year-out costs that

citizens must bear each time a wildfire scorches mile after square mile of Oregon's forests.

Real costs for wildfires are stupendous and insidiously invisible. It isn't just the billion dollars or more diverted each year from other useful programs in federal and state budgets to stamp out fires as typically reported by the media. Most expenses are never assigned to the bottom-line costs of wildfire.

For example, less tangible values such as damaged wildlife habitat, degraded soil and lost recreational opportunities are difficult to value monetarily; yet, these are greatly valued by the public, as are clean air, clean water and beautiful scenery.

With co-authors Michael Dubrasich, Gregory Benner and John Marker, we have published a one-page checklist of real costs that also should be tallied when the news media covers wildfire.

On this list are property costs, including damage to federal, state, private, utility and municipal facilities; public health, including asthma, emphysema and coronary disease; indirect firefighting costs, including crew training, equipment and inventories of supplies; and post-fire costs, including timber, agriculture and home losses. The checklist goes on to detail air and atmospheric, soil-related, recreation, aesthetic and energy effects, plus the loss of cultural and historical resources.

We estimate that, nationwide, the true costs of wildfire, over and above seasonal firefighting expenses, range between \$20 billion and \$100 billion a year – or between 10 to 50 times what is typically reported to simply put out fires.

So what can be done? There are those who think that passive management of our publicly owned forests is the correct path: those that espouse the “naturally functioning ecosystem” and “let it burn” school of forest management.

I doubt the public has much appetite for the kind of fires that occurred in the past, as described by Kenops, before we began excluding fire from the landscape. The massive fires of the past – extinguished only when winter

weather arrived – are not acceptable today. Also not acceptable is the status quo. In effect, public policy for the past 20 years has been to fight nearly every fire that ignites, yet do nothing to manage the consequences of insect-infested, diseased, wind-thrown and overstocked forestlands.

There are successfully tested alternatives to passive management. Actively removing excess woody biomass, thinning stands of trees for beneficial use, and selectively employing prescribed fire are among them. These activities all have costs but some can be

done profitably: creating long-term jobs, reducing risks for severe fire, beautifying our forests, protecting our resources, and offsetting our international dependence on energy and forest products.

These activities will have their own environmental impacts. But then, so does doing nothing. And, in the long haul, doing nothing is proving to be much, much more expensive. 🌲

*Bob Zybach is the program manager for Oregon Websites and Watersheds Project Inc.*

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## Helena NSA Group Open To All

by Jim Phillips (Missoula '67)

**T**he Helena Chapter of the National Smokejumper Association meets at 10 a.m. every Tuesday at the Red Atlas coffee house, 400 Euclid Ave.

The choice of the Red Atlas has much to do with our perception that there was an unspoken desire of a half-dozen other local coffee shops that we take our banter and bluster elsewhere. We have been wondering why those businesses would project such an attitude, given the high level of profundity and profanity we promote and proclaim.

Any reputable chronicler would describe our raucous exchanges as great examples of hyperbole and hubris.

Typically it is not a large gathering, since the more-prudent smokejumpers in the Helena area are intent on protecting what is left of their reputations. The three or four of us who regularly attend drink coffee until we shake and chatter like a Travelair following a storm cell over the Bitterroot Mountains.

That aside, we have, however, raised a modest sum of money for the NSA Trails Program (TRAMPS) by tossing dice and splitting the pot. We have also begun planning and plotting how we can gouge ever more money from the faithful in support of NSA programs. So far we have raised \$3.41 and will maintain a positive perseverance until reaching our goal of \$7.33.

We recently voted to invite for coffee anyone who hasn't heard our silk stories. So if you're in Helena on a Tuesday and don't mind being strong-armed for your loose change, and if you can stay awake through the retelling of our days of glory under the silk, consider yourselves invited for java and jubilation. 🌲



*Miriam Warner, cook for the Granite Chief Wilderness (R-5) Trail Project. (Courtesy Rich Johnson)*



*R-5 Trail Crew Project, Granite Chief Wilderness, Aug. 2009. L-R: Scott "Mouse" Warner (RDD-69), Andy Stevenson (RDD-65), John Helmer (RDD-59), Jeff Steffens (BIFC-78), Chuck Sheley (CJ-59), Kev Hodgkin (RDD-67). (Courtesy Rich Johnson)*

## WORK SILENT by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

Usually go about 8 miles with McCloud or saw.  
Try to avoid plans and let it happen. Don't talk  
Just work.

Then look up, see it's dark. Sit down on the trail, fish  
around for my headlamp, watch the stars come out  
before turning on the light

Guess that's why most of us got into this in the first place.  
Memory of time when we were kids.

Couldn't wait to get back to the mountains  
and now, older - after the struggle of wrong turns and bills  
that didn't get paid

All that settles down.

And what's left is the trail where you started.

Shovel, saw, whatever it takes. Get the job done.

And the NSA trail. So far from here, I do follow it though.  
Laugh with the stories, squint at the pictures - picking out a  
face from the past.

And I think about the guys spread out across the country.  
Working.

Some in groups. Others, loners like me.

Moving dirt.

Working trails is as good as it gets.

Making the path clear for that kid out on his own, mom on  
a run - on what must of been a hard day, young bikers  
roaring down their thunder road and old folks walking  
silently.

I watch them pass, nod, wave of the hand.

And sometimes think I hear Woody Guthrie singing.

See the ghost of a CCC guy on a bend at sunset.

John Muir and Robert Marshall - all boiled down to this  
trail and a shovel.

Work silent. This land is your land. This land was made for  
you and me.



*John Culbertson  
(Courtesy J. Culbertson)*



## NEW NSA LIFE MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 2009

*Thanks for your support!*

#	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	BASE	YEAR
223	WAHL .....	DON .....	MISSOULA .....	1963
224	KLUMP .....	JIM .....	REDDING .....	1964
225	CROMWELL .....	LEO .....	IDAHO CITY .....	1966
226	WHALEY .....	BOB .....	MISSOULA .....	1956
227	HOLLIDAY .....	SCOTT .....	REDMOND .....	1988
228	MICHAELSON .....	DOUGLAS K. ....	MISSOULA .....	1956
229	SYMES .....	DENIS .....	MCCALL .....	1963
230	KURT .....	ROHRBACH .....	MISSOULA .....	2003

## 2009 La Grande Smokejumper Reunion

by Mike Walker (La Grande '76)

**W**e arrived from all points of the compass – from places as distant as Alaska and Texas, and as close as a few blocks away. The occasion was to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the closing of the La Grande, Ore., smokejumper base in 1982.

(OK, OK. So we were a little late. We talked about it for two years. You can't rush into something as important as this.)

The celebration kicked off with a gathering at the Union County Fairgrounds Friday, June 19. Bear hugs and backslaps were the order of the evening, and jumpers who hadn't seen each other for decades in some cases compared old war stories and new adventures. The sight of familiar faces, worked on a little bit by Father Time, called up a lot of recollections. You couldn't stop grinning. Midnight came and went, but nobody was checking his watch.

Then on a cool and cloudy Saturday, some folks took up clubs and spent the morning trying to make the little white ball go in the hole. **Denny Lewis** (NCSB-68) led a group up for mountain biking. The rest of us waited out the clouds and then descended on **Paul Diacetis** (LGD-75) and his wife, Cathy, to finish what was left of Friday night's food and try out some newly embellished stories.

Saturday evening saw the mother-of-all parties convening at the Eagles for the two-hour happy hour, followed by a catered buffet of gourmet food. The evening's master of ceremonies was supposed to be **Mike "Coot" Walker** (LGD-76), but he was shouldered aside by Don Michele from the

Baloni Family in Chicago. Don Michele chastised us for behavior unbecoming obedient and respectful mobsters, specifying such breaches of conduct as the motorcycle ride by **Willie Lowden** (NCSB-72) through the base warehouse, the unauthorized entry of a '74 VW Bug in the Starkey jeep races, and a highly inappropriate liaison with a comely member of the base's upstairs staff.

Further sins were mentioned but not dwelled upon because it was time to recognize some base statistics and move on to the finale – **Bill Bickers'** (NCSB-72) multimedia program on smokejumping at La Grande – followed by a richly rewarding raffle for all unspent funds from the fees collected for the whole celebration.

Under cool and rainy skies, we met at Riverside Park Sunday morning in front of a welcome fire with coffee and muffins to say our farewells.

We were always a small base, and I think that contributed to the spirited camaraderie we all felt. (That and the fact that we all had dirt on each other.) In the end the forces of unenlightened bureaucracy closed us down despite the best efforts of **Lee Walton** (RDD-63) and **Jim Grant** (NCSB-65), but they never touched the La Grande spirit, which we took with us to our next adventures.

Denny Lewis was the driving force behind the success of this meeting (if you've worked with Denny, you know exactly what I mean), and he was ably assisted by **Ken Watson** (LGD-74) and Paul Diacetis. They deserve our thanks. 🙏

# Talking To Trees

by LeRoy Cook (Cave Junction '64)

**A**t this stage of my life, I think often about the people in my past, those older men and women who were part of my young boyhood. They reached out and touched me, making me who I am. How important they were!

Sometimes it seems like they're still with me, that they haven't left – yet unable to speak. Their essence, their pith is still with me. Although all would not like what today's world has become, I think often of them, wishing they were still alive ... so I could talk to them.

I helped Mom, my brothers and my sister say good-bye to Dad in early November. Killed by one or more cowardly hit-and-run drivers, he now rests at Veterans Memorial in Houston, a beautiful and fitting place. His death was unexpected, tragic; I miss him.

I stayed on with Mom after everyone else left. It rained steadily for two days, and during this quiet time our conversations were spontaneous and steady about Dad, family and the past. Living 2,000 miles away, I treasure my time with her.

The events of the past were only a few days old; Dad's loss had not fully hit us both. Yet I knew that soon I had to leave for Idaho and my family, all the while knowing Mom wanted me to stay.

The day before I was to leave, the rain quit. There was a full moon that night, so I stepped out of the house to gather strength to leave. The trees around the house are more than

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“For some reason, trees bring out natural emotions.”

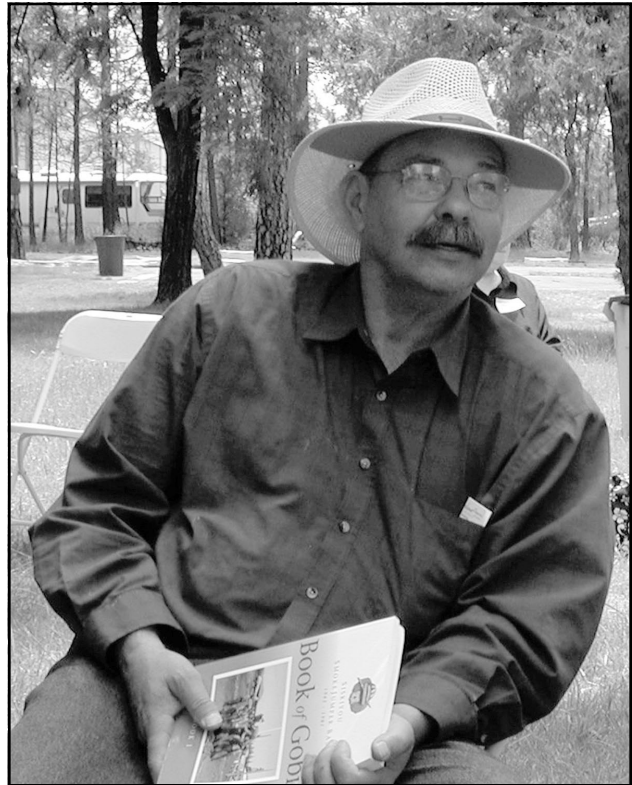
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100 feet high, and the moonlight falling through them was stunning.

I've been to a lot of places and seen a lot of moonlit nights, but that night I came to the conclusion that there is nothing more beautiful than a full moon with its light shining down through tall, old-growth Southern yellow pine. Their contorted, spiky tops with hollow voids create a special craggy silhouette, an aesthetic appeal unique to Southern woodland.

For some reason, trees bring out natural emotions. They have been associated with hope, Christianity, and Christmas for hundreds of years, representing the restorative power of nature. Nothing is more spiritual than the full moon through tall, majestic trees, especially on a quiet night.

These patriarchs have character; they are a heritage of the landscape and a window into time. Their breath and awe, their spiritual essence invokes thoughts about life on this Earth and reflections about our lives. They are a pride of the



*LeRoy Cook (Courtesy J. Kirkley)*

landscape that, for many people today, go unnoticed.

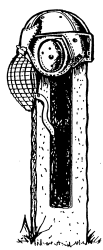
I don't know if Dad was looking down or trying to reach me that night. But I did learn that for me, to deal with grief and gather strength, I now seek out tall old trees – to visit these special places on a quiet night for a private conversation with lost loved ones. What makes a place special is the way it rests inside your soul, and old-growth trees do that for me.

Imagine a quiet night with a full moon, its almost-liquid light cascading through the tall treetops and high arthritic limbs – a legacy of place to bear witness to personal thoughts.

People today no longer live close to the soil, they don't know how to listen to the land, and sadly, a beautiful, spiritual part of something goes missing. Whether it's an ocean beach, a mountaintop, or just a place to look at the stars, I encourage all to go find their “tall old trees” and have that private conversation.

Make it a place that gives you strength and renews your spiritual wind, to connect to someone and something you love that is gone. You will find more understanding and love in your heart.

So ... next year, go find that place and on a quiet night, have that talk. I recommend it. 🌲



## 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). Any gifts in honor of these jumpers will be added to NSA Good Samaritan Fund and recognized in this magazine. Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contribution to: Charles Brown, NSA Treasurer, 2723 Wilderness Ct. Wichita, KS 67226-2526.

### **Gordon H. Miller (McCall '44)**

The Rev. Gordon H. Miller died August 3, 2009, in Dallas, Texas. He joined the Civilian Public Service after graduating from high school in 1943 and jumped at McCall during the 1944 and '45 seasons. He graduated from the University of Texas in 1957 and received his divinity degree from Southern Methodist University. As a pastor he ministered mostly in small towns in south and west Texas. He retired in 1989, but came back to the pulpit in 1997 and ended his career as associate pastor of the Elmwood United Methodist Church in Oak Cliff, Texas, in 2002.

### **William W. "Bill" Frost (Pilot)**

Bill, who lived in Anderson, California, died July 16, 2009. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1943 and served in the Pacific Theater during WWII. Bill learned to fly on the G.I. Bill and received his pilot's license in 1948. After working all phases of flying in the Siskiyou County town of Montague, he went to work for the Forest Service in 1961 as a pilot. Bill retired from the Forest Service in 1982 and dropped smokejumpers as a contract pilot until 1992.

### **Edward N. Kirk (Missoula '44)**

Ed died July 14, 2009, in Barnesville, Ohio, at age 89. He was a member of the Religious Society of Friends and jumped the 1944 and 1945 seasons as a member of the CPS-103 jumpers. Ed was badly injured on a jump when a tree collapsed his parachute. He worked for the Crane/Demming Pump Co. in Salem, Ohio, for most of his adult life before moving to Barnesville.

*Thanks to Ed's cousin, Ernie Hartley (MSO-62), for this information.*

### **J. Roger Evans (Missoula '50)**

Roger died in Sandpoint, Idaho, July 23, 2009. He jumped three summers while he was in medical school in Ohio. After his internship in Salt Lake City, Roger completed a general surgery residency in Seattle where he set up a surgery practice in the suburb of Burien. Following his retirement in 1991 he moved to Sandpoint.

### **John O. Thach (Cave Junction '46)**

John died August 11, 2009. He joined the Army at age 17 and was assigned to the Schofield Barracks on December 7, 1941. He saw the Japanese planes fly over on their way to Pearl Harbor and was wounded in the leg by a stray bullet.

John later joined the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne and jumped into Holland during Operation Market Garden. He was later involved in the Battle of the Bulge and received the Bronze Star. After the war he was Chief Accountant for the Colorado State Treasury Department for 14 years.

### **Clayton V. Berg (Missoula '52)**

Clayton died June 17, 2009, as a result of a tractor accident at his nursery in Helena, Montana. He was a graduate of South Dakota State University with a degree in Entomology and jumped five seasons at Missoula. Clayton started the Valley Nursery in the 1960s and was well-known for his work in developing cold-hardy plants. His 10-acre nursery boasts the largest collection of cold-hardy plants for the northern U.S.

### **Donald L. Chapman (Cave Junction '53)**

Don died January 7, 2001, in Waukesha, Wisconsin. He graduated from San Jose State University (Calif.) and attended law school at Willamette University in Oregon. Don was a veteran of the Army 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division and received the Bronze Star in Korea.

*Thanks to Dr. John Lindlan (CJ-52) for the research on this obit.*

### **James S. Diederich (Redding '70)**

Jim died August 26, 2009. An old friend of Jim's was told that Jim went into the hospital with internal bleeding which resulted in his death. It was Jim's wishes that his ashes be returned to McCall for a final resting place. After his rookie training in Redding, he transferred to McCall where he jumped the next 18 seasons. Jim was in charge of the Loadmaster Operations at McCall and helped in the training of the rookie jumpers. He loved being the "MC" at the end-of-the-season "T" parties.

*Thanks to Leo Cromwell (ICD-66) for the above information.*

### **David R. Cuplin (Missoula '48)**

David, 80, of Cudahy, passed away on Friday, October 9, 2009, at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in Union Grove, Wisconsin. He served with the 187<sup>th</sup> Airborne Regimental Combat Team in Korea and attended the University of Montana upon his return. David retired in 1991 from the Ladish Company after over 30 years of employment. A funeral service with full military honors was held at the Southern Wisconsin Veterans Cemetery on Wednesday,

October 14, 2009, at 12 noon. David jumped at Missoula in 1948 and 1952-55 and was a NSA Life Member.

### **James E. Eggers (Cave Junction '56)**

Jim of Elk Grove, California, died February 19, 2009. He attended college in Santa Barbara and Ashland, Oregon, where he was active in polo and was offered a baseball contract with the Philadelphia Phillies. Jim started a successful collection business known as North-west Creditors and retired at age 49. He jumped at Cave

Junction in 1956 and was a member of the NSA.

### **Roderic A. Orr (Redmond '83)**

Roderic died September 30, 2009, at his home in Eagle River, Alaska, after a four-year battle against cancer. He was a graduate of Humboldt State University, California, with a degree in wildlife biology. Roderic rookied at Redmond in 1983 and transferred to Fairbanks in 1984. He began a flying career in 1991 as a charter pilot and eventually flew freight internationally in 747s for Atlas Air. 🐼

## **Weissenback Memorial Honors Smokejumper, MIA since '71**

Friends and family gathered at the Eagle Point National Cemetery in southern Oregon Sept. 11 to honor and remember **Ed Weissenback (CJ-64)**.

Weissenback, who came back following his rookie year for a 1967-70 stint at Redmond, has been listed as missing in action in western Laos since Dec. 27, 1971. The Air America C-123 on which he and three other men were working was shot down on that date by enemy artillery over the "China Road," just north of the Mekong River.

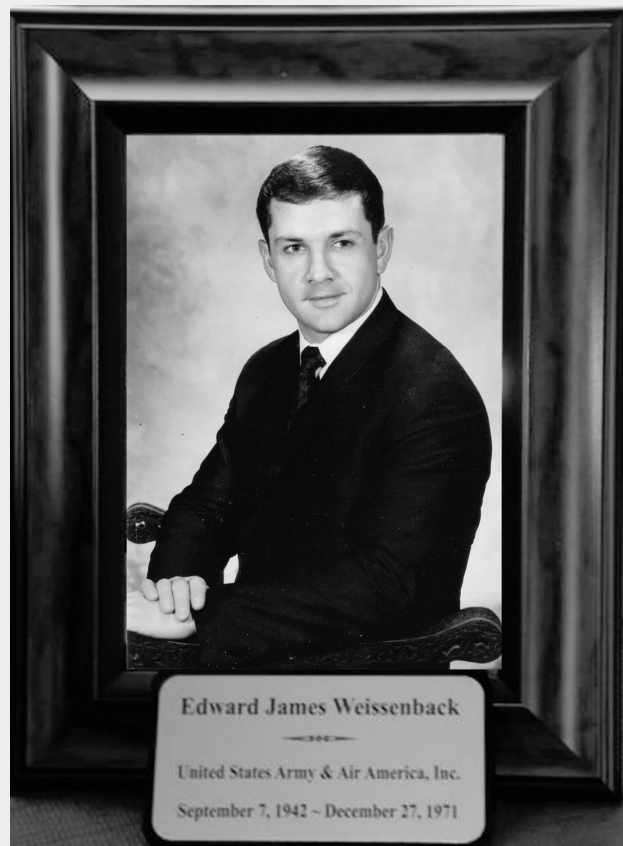
Among those attending the memorial service were his wife, Karen Moen; his daughter, Amber Weissenback; his sister, Marie Kaspar, and her husband, Matthew; his brother, Roger Weissenback; and three nieces, Laura, Mary and Joanna.

Also attending was Phillipe Ritter, son of the captain of the C-123 the day that it disappeared. This was the first memorial service held for any of the missing men.

Former Oregon smokejumpers attending the memorial service and related activities included **Charley Moseley (CJ-62)**; **Charles "Chuck" Yeager (RAC-65)** and his wife, Karla; **Lee Gossett (RDD-57)** and his wife, Mary; **Tommy Albert (CJ-64)** and his wife, Kathy; **Jim Hawes (RAC-66)** and his wife, Stella; **Wes Brown (CJ-66)**; **Gary Buck (CJ-66)**; **Jerry John (CJ-62)**; and **Al Boucher (CJ-49)** and his wife, Ruth.

Former smokejumper and Weissenback's Air America colleague, **Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)**, designed the service brochure. Air America colleagues and college friends from throughout Oregon also attended.

An Oregon National Guard team performed military honors. KDRV, Medford's ABC television affiliate, covered the service and features a link to the news segment on its



*(Courtesy Mary Koepfel)*

website at <http://kdrv.com/news/local/140976>.

It was a fitting tribute to a man many knew as Edward James Weissenback – or by his nickname, "Animal Ed."

# Isle Royale National Park Bridge Commemorates Smokejumper

by Cecil Hicks (North Cascades '62)

I spent a week with my four brothers in September 2009 doing volunteer work at Isle Royale National Park in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, also known as the U.P. This park is rather isolated and is located on a rocky, tree-covered island some 60 miles out in Lake Superior, the largest of the Great Lakes.

Travel to the park is either by boat or float plane from the mainland of either Minnesota or Michigan.

The main, larger island at Isle Royale is perhaps 10 miles wide by about 45 miles long. During the summer, seasonal visitors clamor to the island for a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities including fishing, boating, kayaking and canoeing. With some 160 miles of wilderness trails, hiking and camping are very popular.

The park is noted for having both moose and wolves living on the island, and hikers – if they're lucky – can observe these wild animals in their habitat.

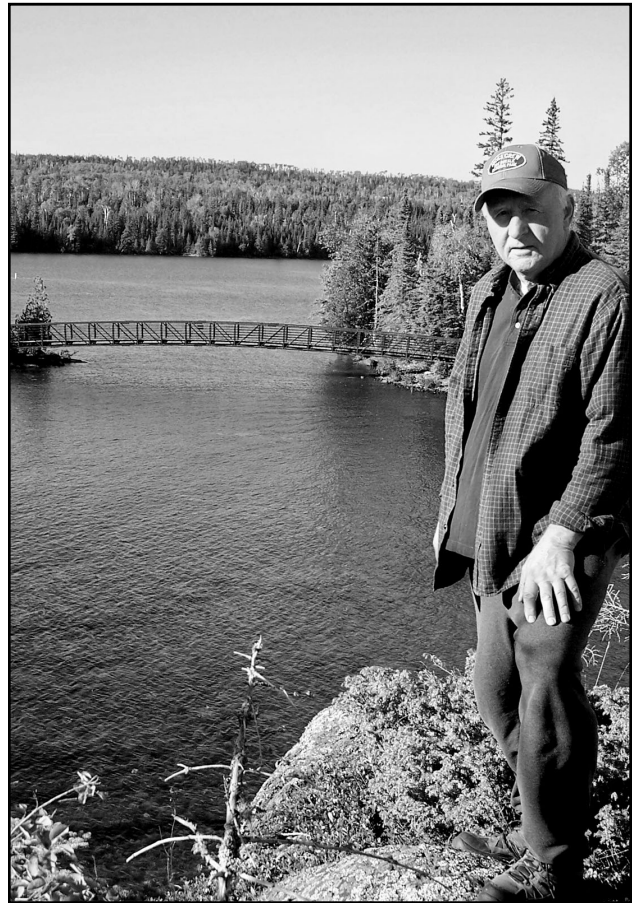
My older brother, Carol, who lives at Marquette, Mich., in the U.P., has supervised a volunteer Isle Royale work crew for a week in May and another week in September over the past 15 years. He's a retired college professor and once headed up the Engineering Technology Department at Northern Michigan University in Marquette.

He has assisted the park service over the years with repair and construction projects, including building a visitors center on the west side of the island as well as housing for seasonal workers. His crews have also repainted numerous buildings (inside and out) and replaced roofs, siding, windows and doors. They've also repainted lighthouses and replaced rotting interior walls.

You might say the 2009 Hicks Brothers Volunteer Crew was made up of five "old geezers" ranging in age from 55 to 68. I'm a retired fourth-grade school teacher, and in my younger years I spent seven seasons working as a smokejumper. I trained at North Cascades Smokejumper Base at Winthrop, Wash., in 1962 and then transferred to the BLM in Fairbanks, Alaska. I now live in the panhandle country of northern Idaho at Sandpoint; my brothers and sisters all live in the Midwest.

On the second day of our volunteer week at Isle Royale National Park, Carol and I went for a hike after work. We were staying in national park housing on Mott Island, the seasonal park headquarters that is open from April 16 until the end of October.

As we walked across a footbridge between Mott Island and a neighboring island named Caribou, I spotted a plaque midway and stopped to read it. It was a memorial dedicated to **Roger Roth** (MYC-92), a smokejumper who died on the



*Cecil Hicks with Roger Roth memorial bridge in the background.  
(Courtesy Carol Hicks)*

Storm King Fire in Colorado on July 6, 1994. I didn't know it at the time but Roger was from Michigan's U.P. and had worked on the trail crew at Isle Royale for six years, 1985 to 1991, before training as a smokejumper.

Buzz Brown, the Isle Royale trail supervisor, was instrumental in obtaining the memorial plaque for the bridge. A photo of the plaque is on page 15 of *Smokejumper*.

Roger was born Dec. 17, 1963, in L'Anse, Michigan, the son of Walter and Carol Roth. He grew up in L'Anse and was a 1982 graduate of L'Anse High School. He attended Northern Michigan University for a year and a half before starting work with the National Park Service at Isle Royale.

He spent the next six years during the summers working trails at Isle Royale. He also spent three winters fighting wildland fires in Florida and a summer on a hotshot crew at Sequoia-Kings National Park in California. 🌲

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# National Reunion Coming In June

by Murry Taylor (Redding '65)

Mark your calendars and get ready for another National Smokejumper Association Reunion. Next June 11-13 we will celebrate not just another reunion, but seventy years of smokejumping. For those who attended the 2000 Redding Reunion ten years ago, the venue will be the same with major functions held at the Redding Convention Center. All registration information and schedule of events will be mailed to you in February.

Events will follow the usual pattern with registration Friday, followed by an evening barbecue. On Saturday there will be a fun-run, golf event, jump-base tours, maybe a practice jump, and then an evening banquet at the Convention Center. On Sunday morning the reunion will

be capped with a memorial brunch at the Convention Center.

This reunion will offer something new—an “unofficial” extra day for attendees to visit and reminisce about past glorious activities, heroic deeds, and other requisite “do you remember whens.” Even though we have three days, it is still difficult to find time to visit with your many friends and acquaintances from the past that you may not have seen for many years. So, Thursday, June 10 (afternoon and evening), has been designated as Beer, Buddies and B.S. Day. It is not part of the official reunion and nothing is to be provided by the NSA. This event will begin about 4:00 P.M. Thursday afternoon at the Red Lion Inn. 🍷

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## Trails Program Leader Receives Presidential Recognition

by Carl Gidlund (Missoula '58)

**J**on McBride (MSO-54) has received the President's Call to Service Award for his leadership of the National Smokejumper Association's Art Jukkala Trails Program for the past 11 years.

The award, accompanied by a Forest Service Certificate of Achievement, was presented by Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell at a national reunion of Forest Service retirees in Missoula, Sept. 7.

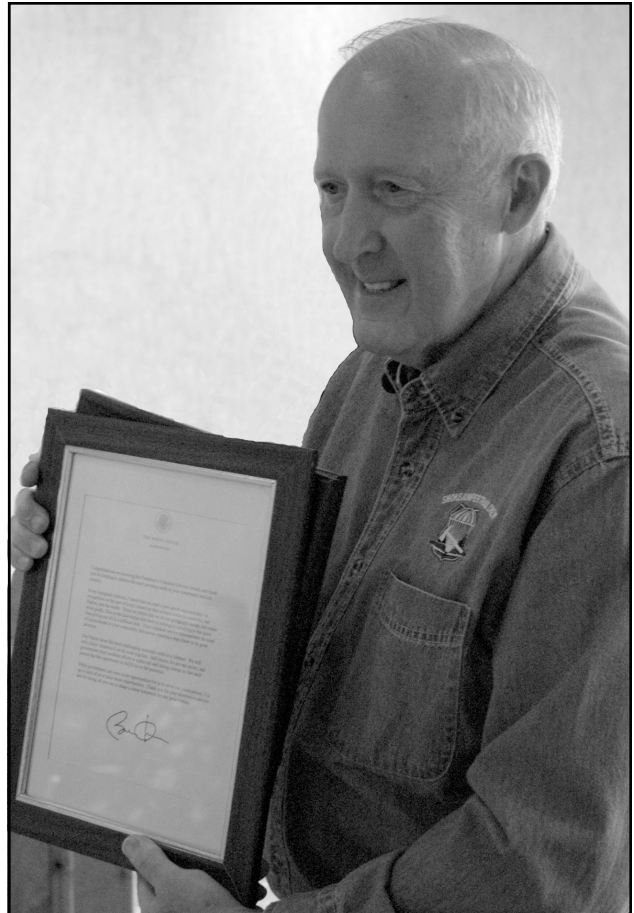
The citation accompanying the award noted that 1,000 veteran Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management smokejumpers, plus NSA associate members, have contributed many thousands of hours of volunteer service in clearing trails, renovating guard stations, lookouts and other structures, erecting fences and building corrals since the program started in 1999.

**Art Jukkala** (MSO-56), the program's founder, died of a heart attack while leading the first trail crew in 1999. McBride took over for him, and since then the men and women under his guidance have accomplished more than 130 projects.

A Forest Service news release describing the program said, “Jon McBride's efforts in successfully leading this program involve coordinating with individual forests and foundations, planning and organizing crews, assuring volunteers met Forest Service standards in their work and even planning their menus and arranging to feed groups of volunteers.”

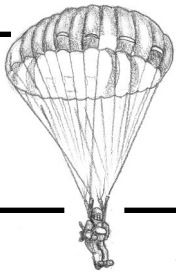
McBride's take-home from the ceremony consisted of a Gold Level service pin and plaque, a letter from President Barack Obama, and the Forest Service plaque.

In accepting the award, McBride said he was only the figurehead, that the men and women who have been doing the work are the real awardees. 🍷

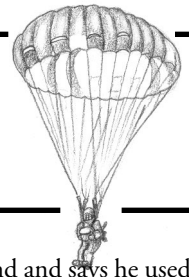


*Jon McBride. (Courtesy Fred Cooper)*





# Odds and Ends



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to **Kurt Rohrbach** (MSO-03) who just became our latest Life Member.

**Tom Kovalicky** (MSO-61) passed along an article from the Riggins, Idaho, newspaper that covered the last training jump of the 2009 rookies from R-1. Although numbers varied within the article, it looked like six R-1 rookies trained at Grangeville this year with three of them to be based at Grangeville, two at Missoula and one in West Yellowstone.

Although it will be old news by the time you read this in the October issue, The Boise Idaho News reported July 23rd that two Boise smokejumpers were injured on a fire jump. **David Zuarez** (RDD-91) and **Frank Clements** (NCSB-88) were jumping a fire on the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation about 30 miles north of Vernal, Utah. Both will return to duty.

**John Helmer** (RDD-59) sent me an article from the Wall Street Journal dealing with the tremendous amounts of taxpayer money being spent on city firemen. Pension spiking is a common practice used to boost a final year's salary which, in turn, raises their lifetime pension. One of several methods used to spike pay in the final year of work is to get salary credit for unused vacation and holidays. A city fire chief in Northern California making \$186,000 a year was able to retire at \$241,000 a year by using this method. He then was hired back as a consultant for the same fire department at \$176,000 a year. Don't think that this is an unusual case. The newspapers are full of examples of firefighter pay abuses. This in a state that is going broke, and where we have cut or eliminated children's protective services. Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson can add a new line to their song "Mama's Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys"—let 'em grow up to be city firefighters.

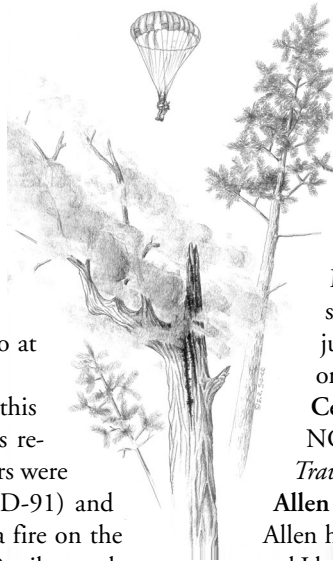
Got an email from **Alex Theios** (CJ-65) who says that he has had successful surgery for Prostate Cancer. Go Alex!

**Bob Graham** (MSO-52) has an article in the July 2009 issue of Smokejumper. His email contact at the end of the article was incorrect.

If you want to contact Bob, you can do so at: 6808 Marx Ct., Bonners Ferry, ID 83805 or bobmag2@verizon.net.

**Al Boucher** (CJ-49): "That was a good article you wrote about the rehab work on the CJ loft. I started work on the foundation in 1950, and I know you guys were more organized than we were."

**Hank Brodersen** (MSO-54) is looking for any information about a possible jumper named Vergil Agostinelli, who might have jumped in the late 1940s out of Missoula. Vergil



lives near Hank in Maryland and says he used to jump out of Ford Trimotors but is unable to recall any details regarding training, years jumped, etc. He apparently graduated from MSU in 1950. If anyone remembers him, please contact Hank at hankbjumper@verizon.net or call him at 301-475-7927.

Many thanks to **Loyle Washam** (MSO-51) for his support of the efforts to save the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base. Loyle's donation and letter to me demonstrates the "brotherhood" of smokejumping.

**Cecil Hicks** (NCSB-62) published an article on the NCSB Base in the Sept/Oct 2009 issue of *Northwest Travel Magazine*.

**Allen Sneidermiller** (Assoc) stopped by my house today. Allen had been on one of my firefighting crews in 1985, and I hadn't seen him since Feb. of this year. He was on his bicycle riding by to see me after completing a 14,000-mile trip around the United States. I was completely amazed that someone could ride eight months on a bike with a trailer for personal gear and cover that distance. He especially wanted to thank the NCSB base for their hospitality when he asked to pitch his tent on the base when traveling through Washington.

Good news from "**Spud**" **DeJarnette** (MSO-49). Spud developed a serious lung infection that may have dated back to last May when he was doing restoration work in a historic theater in Auburn, California. Spud said that only on one day did he fail to wear a respirator while breathing ages-old dust and rat droppings. Spud is the key person in the NSA's Region-5 Trails Program. We hope that his recovery is total, and he will be able to continue to expand on the R-5 Trails Program. 🙏

**WANTED:** Artwork, knives, guns, fishing equipment, first born, and more for the **SILENT AUCTION** to be held at the National Smokejumper Reunion, Redding, California, June 2010. The Silent Auction at the Boise Reunion was a huge success and this can/will be even bigger. The items can be tax deductible, and the sales price can be applied to the purchase of a Life Membership in the NSA.

It's a great opportunity to help out and to do some spring cleaning. Please contact Stanley DeLong: 2370 Baldwin Ave., Oroville, CA 95966, 530-533-0144/delong-heritage@sbcglobal.net.



Presented to



**BILL CRAMER, CHIEF**  
**BLM-Alaska Smokejumpers**

**July 4, 2009**

*In commemoration of the 50 Year Anniversary  
of the Alaska Smokejumpers.*

**On behalf of the Alaska Smokejumpers that went on  
to serve with Air America in Laos from 1961 to 1974.**

Dave Bevan  
Bob Herald  
Tom Greiner  
Gid Newton  
Gene DeBruin  
Lou Banta  
Lee Gossett  
Carl Seethaler  
Bill Bowles  
Barry Reed  
Tom Butler  
Glen Marlow  
Claude Greiner

Sam Greiner  
John Manley  
Gary Granquist  
George Rainey  
Bob Moloney  
Cliff Hamilton  
Shep Johnson  
John Lewis  
Larry Moore  
Charley Moseley  
Ray Schenck  
Jim Veitch

Plaque presented to Bill Cramer by Lee Gossett (RDD-57) as thanks for Bill's help in hosting the recent Alaska Smokejumper Reunion. It honors the Alaska jumpers who served in Southeast Asia. (Courtesy L. Gossett)