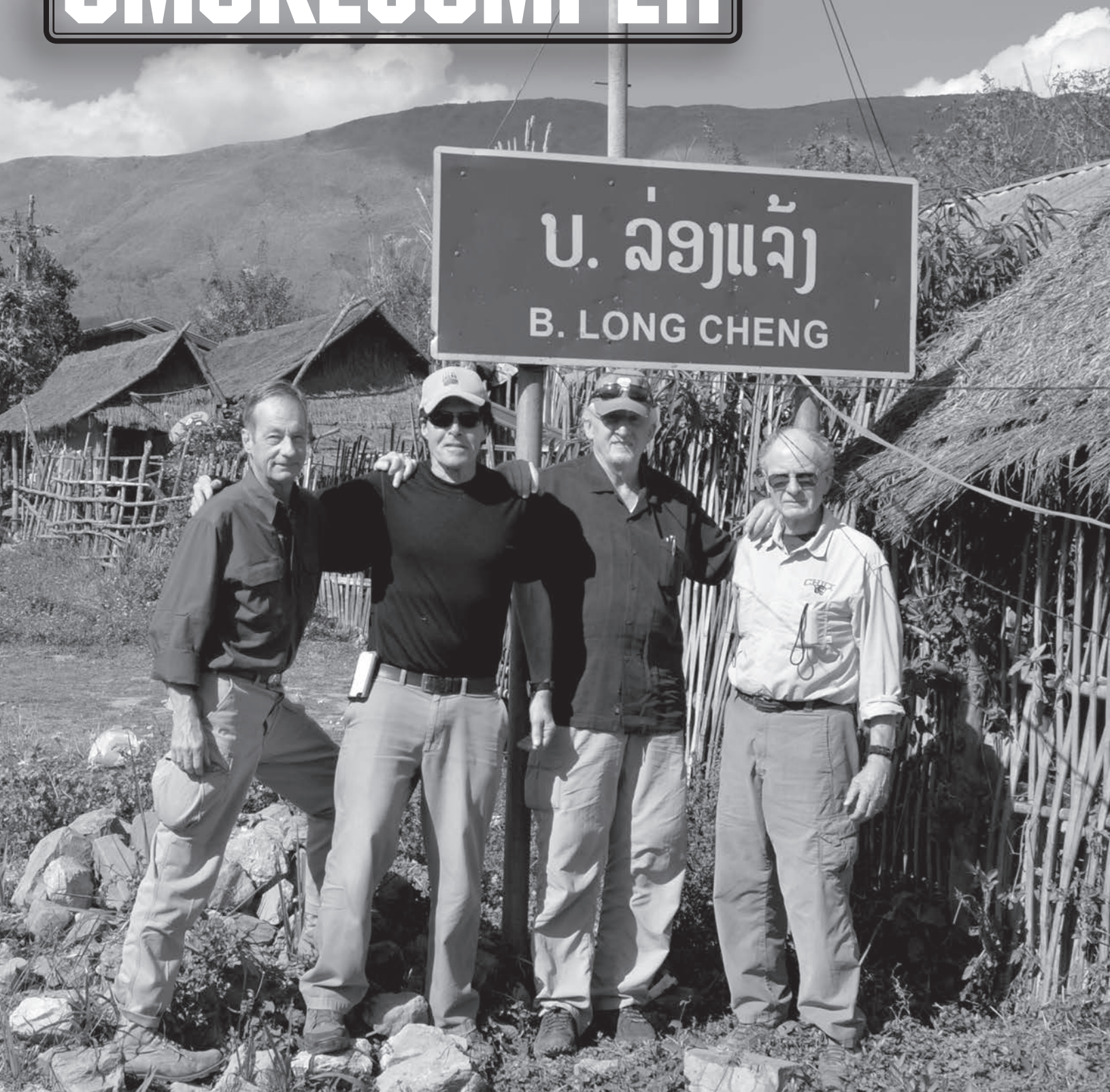


THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
JULY 2014

SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



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

PRESIDENT

THERE IS A growing controversy in the smokejumper community regarding parachute systems. It's a controversy over whether the ram-air, or "square" system used by the BLM, should become the standard for all of the smokejumper program, which would mean phasing out the "rounds" used by the USFS. Some of this transition to squares has already taken place as BLM jumpers have been involved in training USFS jumpers to become proficient users of the squares. For a number of years, some fires have been jumped with mixed loads of rounds and squares.

I want to make it clear that the National Smokejumper Association does not have a position with regard to whether one parachute system is superior over the other. It is apparent, however, that sides are being drawn and tensions are rising as decision-making time is drawing near.

Speaking solely for myself, I want to share some of the questions that I have and that I think need to be addressed openly and honestly by those in the final deci-

sion making positions before any "point of no return" is reached:

1. Generally speaking, the BLM and USFS have primary responsibility for controlling fires in different environments. The BLM in Alaska and the Great Basin are dealing with typically higher wind conditions, more open landing areas and smaller timber, whereas the USFS in the Pacific Northwest from northern California to Canada and the northern Rockies have less wind, taller timber and tighter landing areas. Again, these are generalizations and there are always exceptions. However, given these generalizations, is it not appropriate to have parachute systems that are best suited to handle these different conditions? That has been the track record of the past.

The USFS in using the "rounds" has had an outstanding record of being able to put men and women on the ground in a very effective manner for nearly 75 years. The USFS has also been jumping successfully with rounds on the Gila N.F. in New Mexico for over 50 years and that's a place noted for being windy. As the BLM smokejumper program developed in Alaska and the Great Basin, the "square" became the parachute of choice in an effort to manage the higher wind conditions. When smokejumpers were needed to handle fire busts that required bringing together both BLM and USFS jumpers, it has been possible (and practi-

cal) to fly mixed loads of jumpers and drop them from the elevations appropriate for the specific parachute system. So the questions that need to be answered are this: “Will a change to a single parachute system for both the BLM and the USFS provide a **demonstrable advantage** over the present two-system mode?” and “If there are **compelling reasons** for eliminating ‘mixed’ loads of rounds and squares, what are they?”

2. Jumper safety is a major concern. Over the nearly 75 years of the smokejumper program, there have been numerous changes in the round parachute design that have made its use both safer and more accurate. **Jeff Davis** (MSO 57) wrote a comprehensive article on the development of the round in the April 2012 issue of this magazine. From the time of the first training and fire jumps in 1940, it didn’t take long

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Anchorage.....ANC | GrangevilleGAC | Redding.....RDD |
| Boise.....NIFC | Idaho City.....IDC | Redmond.....RAC |
| Cave Junction.....CJ | La Grande.....LGD | West Yellowstone WYS |
| Fairbanks.....FBX | McCall.....MYC | Whitehorse Yukon YXY |
| Fort St. John.....YXJ | Missoula.....MSO | Winthrop.....NCSB |

to replace the ripcord with a static line. With the onset of WWII, parachute equipment was hard to come by and other round parachutes came on line, so there was a switch to the standard military issue 28’ chute with Derry Slots added. The Eagle chute, with its spine-jarring opening shock, was phased out in favor of the Irvin chute. Over the years other improvements were made that would further reduce opening shock, reduce the chance of malfunctions and increase landing accuracy. The bottom line is that, to the best of my knowledge in nearly 75 years, there has never been a fatality or a career-ending accident as a result of a malfunction with a round. That is not to say that there never will be at some point in the future. Yes, I know that injuries have occurred on landing and from mid-air collisions and some have been career ending, but that’s not the same as a failure of the parachute system. The same cannot be said for the ram-air system. I am aware of three deaths, the most recent being last year. I do not know the circumstances of how those failures came to be. The point I want to make is that all injuries are not the same and if there is going to be a transitional adjustment between the use of the ram-air and the rounds, there needs to be a full disclosure of the risks involved. So the question that I raise regarding the safety of parachute systems is this: “For each of the parachute systems currently in use, what are the statistics for the following?”

- A. Deaths that occurred on the parachute system and their causes.

Are You Going to Be “Temporarily Away”?

As more of our membership moves with the weather, we are getting an ever-increasing number of *Smokejumper* magazines returned by the post office marked “Temporarily Away.” Since we mail the magazine via bulk mail, it is not forwarded, and we are charged first class postage for its return.

If you are leaving your mailing address during the months of March, June, September and/or December, please let Chuck Sheley know. He can hold your magazine and mail it upon your return OR mail it to your seasonal address. Please help us save this triple mailing expense. Chuck’s contact information is in the information box on this page.

Another option is join our electronic mailing list. 📧

- B. Career-ending accidents that can be directly attributed to the parachute system.
 - C. Career-ending accidents that resulted from the actual landing.
 - D. A comparison of time-loss accidents between the two systems.
 - E. Are there compelling safety reasons for going to a single parachute system?
3. As taxpayers all citizens should have a concern for costs. That holds true when considering the issue of rounds and squares. We don't cut corners on the budget if it can be demonstrated that cost cutting would endanger health and safety. On the other hand, we don't want to be spending extra money when the end results are questionable. This brings me to my third concern and the questions for which clear answers are needed before any "point of no return" decisions are made:

- A. What is the current cost for each parachute system on a per jumper basis?
- B. What is the length of time and the cost involved to train a jumper to the point of initial proficiency on each system?
- C. What is the time and cost required to maintain proficiency on each of the systems?
- D. Is there a difference in the configuration of aircraft for the two systems?

It's my hope that you will be willing to share your thoughts on this matter by responding back to the magazine with your letters. We can post some to our website at www.smokejumpers.com

Finally, if you live in the urban/wildland interface, I hope you have been actively doing some *fire-wise* work around your place to protect your home and family. 🌲

After The Flaming Front: A Personal Investigative Journey Into The Yarnell Hill Fire

by Holly Neill

I have never been a smokejumper. I have worked on multiple fire assignments and attended numerous fire training classes with jumpers. I admit to drinking my fair share of beer in the fine company of smokejumpers, but I have never jumped out of a plane and onto a fire.

I am, however, deeply involved in a private investigation of the Yarnell Hill Fire that killed 19 Granite Mountain Hotshots (GMH) on June 30, 2013. I am often asked for my qualifications and experience.

I began my fire career in 1995, and I was weaned on the 1994 South Canyon Fire that took the lives of 14 firefighters. I fought fire through the Thirtymile and Esperanza Fire tragedies, and I retired a few years before Yarnell Hill. The South Canyon Fire was the landmark incident for the fire world at the beginning of my career, and Yarnell Hill is the new landmark for the end: sad but true.

As a wildland firefighter with 12 seasons behind me, I spent six seasons with National Park Service fire on an engine crew, helitack crew, and a fire use mod-

ule. I put in six more seasons on a saw team and as incident command post radio operator under a U.S. Forest Service contract.

In contrast four of the Granite Mountain Hotshots were in their very first fire season in 2013. Two were in their second season of fire, and two were in their third. Nine of the 20 GMH were qualified to the Firefighter Type II (FFT2) level, and this is within the standards set for Interagency Hotshot Crew qualifications.

Neither I nor they were certified to the fire management officer or incident commander or operations section chief positions.

Let's face it – overhead in these positions don't get killed on these fires. What qualifies and inspires me to donate my time, passion and resources to an investigation into the Yarnell Hill Fire fatalities? We're the ones who die out there.

I began this investigative journey by attending the GMH Memorial Service in Prescott Valley, Ariz., on July 9, 2013 with my husband Wayne. We had met on a Montana wildfire assignment back in 2000 and

were married three years later to the day, at the same helispot where we met.

We then spent our two-week honeymoon on an Idaho wildfire and, upon check-in, we delivered a big slab of white chocolate and huckleberry wedding cake to the Type 1 incident commander. We spiked out in a tent next to the Lochsa River, we dined on grub from plastic five-gallon buckets, and we didn't shower for two weeks. It was firefighter honeymoon bliss.

As the GMH memorial events unfolded inside Tim's Toyota Center, thousands gathered under the Arizona July sun in front of the Jumbotron. Standing among the many fold-up chairs and blankets, I noticed a man in military fatigues standing utterly still and alone during the entire service, his eyes on the screen and his arms folded.

Thousands of hot tears were shed amidst hundreds of purple ribbons and a sea of waving flags, while kind volunteers moved through the crowds passing out packs of Kleenex and bottles of ice-cold water.

I remember hoping that the families inside would somehow know just how many of us were outside, with our arms around them. I know that every wildland firefighter, every hotshot, smokejumper and FFT2 who has ever put a pulaski to the ground would have been there if he or she could.

From there we visited the Tribute Fence at Station 7 in Prescott, headquarters of the GMH. Thousands of memorial items lined the fence, and I added a fire t-shirt. Wayne carved a chair by chain saw from ponderosa pine, and we carefully inlaid 20 purple stars around the rim.

The following day we drove to Yarnell and tied in with the Type 1 team that took charge of the Yarnell Hill Fire on July 1. We were fortunate to spend time with them and ask questions. They led an orientation shuttle to the Overlook Memorial site on Highway 89, next to the Ranch House Restaurant.

From there you could look across the highway and into deployment valley. Through the zoom lens of my camera, I could see what appeared to be tiny investigators gridding the hillside, their eyes on the ground and their notebooks in hand. A former Granite Mountain hotshot arrived at the overlook site wearing Nomex pants and a GMH crew shirt. All became still as he kneeled down and sifted the black ash through his fingers.

Our Q&A with the team and the view of deployment valley left us with more questions than answers; it left this firefighter with a relentless need to understand how this unprecedented tragedy could occur.

Our second trip to Yarnell was in November 2013. I helped organize a meeting of minds with a team of



Holly Neill (Courtesy H. Neill)

experts that included John Maclean, author of numerous books on wildland fire fatalities that includes *Fire on the Mountain* and the recently released *The Esperanza Fire*, which is currently in the screenplay developmental stage.

Dr. Ted Putnam (MSO-66), whose 48-year span of fire experience includes 11 years as a Missoula smokejumper, also joined our group. Ted began his accident investigation career on the Battlement Creek Fire and was an investigator for the benchmark South Canyon and other fires.

Rounding out our group were several retired smokejumpers, including **Johnny Kirkley** (CJ-64) and **John Manley** (CJ-62). Our combined wildland fire-fighting experience spans five decades and our meetings were passionate and rich, sometimes loud and often somber; some of us racked up the bar bills.

Hiking to the top of Yarnell Hill is no easy feat. Given the current state land closures, the legal way up and down involves hiking more than 15 miles, depending on the starting point. Ted, Wayne and I met with Tex "Sonny" Gilligan and Joy Collura, the local hikers who were the last civilians to see the hotshots alive.

Their encounters with Marsh and the GM hotshots, along with numerous photos Joy took the morning of June 30, have provided valuable information to official investigators and others.



Yarnell Hill Fire Site

Photos Courtesy Holly Neill



Pioneer Cemetary
Prescott, Arizona



L-R: Ted Putnam (MSO-66), Sonny Gilligan,
Wayne Neill & Joy Collura



Tribute Fence
Station 7 - Prescott



Boulder Springs Ranch



Granite Mountain HS Crew
Lunch Spot



Granite Mountain HS Crew
Fatality Site



John Maclean, Holly Neill & Ted Putnam (MSO-66)



Joy Collura & Holly Neill

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

Sonny and Joy have been more than generous with their willingness to repeatedly guide the mountain. Always looking for answers and always willing to learn, this was their first hike with wildland firefighters who took the time to explain tactics, terminology and terrain.

The first view of deployment valley from the ridge top is a shock. The sheer absence of vegetation on this boulder-strewn landscape is the harsh reminder of a furious fire. Describing this place as barren is too generous; it is completely void of any high-desert romance.

The Helm's Ranch, cited as a "bomb proof" safety zone during the fire, looms in the distance, framed by countless exposed boulders. The dozer line, so prominent in photos of the aftermath, points directly to the deployment area.

The fatality site is a mere 650 yards west of the ranch and is protected by a chain-link fence. It seems as though nothing in good conscience should grow here. It should forever remain a static and sacred place. Yet, the site is sprinkled with tender new growth and desert renewal has already begun.

Had the hotshots been given the extra 5-10 minutes needed to reach the ranch house, then this terrible loss and unimaginable suffering would have been avoided.

We continued our hike to the hand line built by the hotshots. The original tactical plan was for the hotshots to burn out the upper two track from the saddle to the southeast, to stay ahead of the main fire.

According to statements made by Blue Ridge Hotshots, Division Supervisor Eric Marsh asked Air Attack to pretreat the green side of the two track to assist with their burnout operations. However, Air Attack directed tanker retardant drops directly onto their burnout operations instead. Blue Ridge reported that this frustrated Marsh.

When Air Attack was asked in the Serious Accident Investigation Report (SAIR) interview what tactics were discussed between him and Marsh, he replied: "To hold the south flank of the fire – dropping with single engine air attack (SEATs). There was small burnout beyond my retardant line. He did a small burnout and I dropped on it to keep it under control. He was going to burn off the trail on the ridge to keep the fire to the east. He decided to stop the burnout and build line."

While Air Attack later admits to being unclear on the tactics, the hotshots nevertheless had to shift their tactics and go direct by constructing underslung line instead.

Although Marsh was the GMH superintendent, he was assigned as division supervisor alpha on the Yarnell Hill Fire. Both operations chiefs claimed that Marsh

was assigned the division responsibilities during the morning briefing, but several witnesses stated Marsh was assigned as DIVS over the radio later in the morning after he and the crew had already reached the ridge top.

Wayne and Ted scouted the line out to the GMH lunch spot, and I followed along taking photographs. At one point I grubbed around in an ash pile and discovered a charred shrimp shell. It seems at least someone's last meal was better than an MRE.

The route to the lunch spot travels across steep and rocky terrain; the lunch spot itself ties into a large boulder field. The fire skunked around in jagged fingers, snaking up and down the slope and winding through the rocks.

The GMH sawyers cut oak brush and manzanita growing directly out of large boulder piles. What intermittent line could be hacked out with hand tools was cup trenched and certain sections were painstakingly lined on the downhill side with rocks.

Wayne has 21 years of experience as a professional helicopter logger and a faller C for USFS fire. He feels that the hotshots did an excellent job of cutting, spreading brush and navigating line across a difficult piece of ground.

We were able to orient Sonny and Joy to the entire hand line, as they were previously unaware of the extent of it. They had repeatedly told those they guided that the hotshots didn't appear to do much work that day. We explained the tactics used and the time and labor it took to apply them.

I couldn't help but wonder if the GMH had been able to continue to slowly burn their line, they would have consequently ended up in a different location. But they constructed line to the lunch spot instead. They eventually reversed direction and returned to the start of the hand line.

This is only one of numerous small events that aligned to result in one enormous tragedy, forming the classic Swiss cheese catastrophe with all of the holes in perfect alignment.

Of course, the big questions remain unanswered. Why leave the safety of the black and travel down into a steep bowl choked with unburned fuel? Now that the SAIR and Arizona Department of Occupational Safety and Health (ADOSH) report have both been released along with select SAI and ADOSH records, one thing stands out with glaring certainty. This was a conflagration of events. A complex timeline unfolded that was tightly packed into a short time span with devastating results.

An urgent weather bulletin issued to the Yarnell Hill Fire by the National Weather Service at 3:26 p.m.

and relayed by FBAN Byron Kimball to Operations Abel at 3:29 p.m. can be heard on an audio recording of the following radio transmission:

Fire Behavior: “Operations Abel, Fire Behavior on TAC 1.”

Operations Abel: “Yeah, go ahead, Byron.”

Fire Behavior: “Yes sir, weather update from the Weather Service:

Within a half hour, possible northeast, east winds, possibility of as high as 50 miles an hour.

More likely 25; definitely 25-35 up to 40.

Again, east, northeast within a half hour.”

The SAIR states that Operations confirmed receipt of the weather bulletin with Marsh around 3:50 p.m. It is unclear if Marsh received the bulletin then or confirmed receipt of it from an earlier time.

The audio bulletin specifically included two warnings that the system was due to arrive *within* a half hour.

Were Marsh and the GMH aware of the prediction window of “within a half hour?” Was this specific time frame ever mentioned to them at all? Within a half hour from 3:26 p.m. would indicate that the system should arrive near or before 3:55. Was Marsh aware when he confirmed receipt of the bulletin at 3:50 with Operations that the system was actually then due to arrive “within five minutes?”

Granite Mountain hotshot survivor Brendan McDonough makes no mention of being aware of the “within a half-hour” arrival window in his numerous interviews. I find no mention of this narrow specific time frame in either official report, although it is mentioned in one interview. In addition, there remains no clear indication that GMH received a previous weather update issued at 2:02 p.m., the precursor to what was heading their way.

From unit log for Robb Beery DIVS (ADOSH records): *1545 approx. A wind warning from the NWS was given over the command channel for strong outflow winds approaching the fire area from the north. The command channel used was the existing Arizona Division of Forestry repeater and it was scratchy but readable. Confirmation was not requested from the Divisions. I later overheard a conversation between operations and Division A asking if they copied the wind warning. Division A acknowledged and came back with something like “copy, we are in the black.”*

The SAIR states that the 3:26 p.m. National Weather Service update “seems to have been relayed efficiently throughout the incident organization” and reports that “FBAN radioed the update to Operations,

and Operations checked in with the crews to make sure they received the update.”

There are numerous individual accounts stating that the 3:26 weather bulletin was not efficiently relayed throughout the divisions or structure groups, including Beery’s account from above: *“Confirmation was not requested from the Divisions.”*

There are at least five sources on the Yarnell Hill Fire who stated during SAIR interviews that they did not receive the 3:26 weather bulletin at all. This includes a helicopter pilot, a division supervisor and an engine captain, among others.

Other resources report having been lucky enough to “overhear” the 3:26 weather bulletin only, without a call back or confirmation check by Operations to confirm their receipt of it, and this includes the Blue Ridge Hotshots. In addition, numerous other interviewees were not even asked whether they received the 3:26 weather bulletin or not, according to interview transcripts in both SAIR and ADOSH accounts.

It is no surprise that resources reported that the fire outperformed their expectations and met their trigger points sooner than expected. Without the knowledge of the 3:26 weather bulletin indicating that a 180-degree wind shift and possible 50-mph winds would arrive within a half-hour of 3:26, most of us would have been caught off-guard as well.

GMH Capt. Jesse Steed had reported seeing lightning in the distance from the ridge top. From the ADOSH report: “During interviews, Operations Abel stated that he believed at the time that Marsh and GMH would stay in the black or hike west over the top of the ridge to avoid lightning.”

What *was* the perceived lightning risk on this ridge top at 5,700 feet in “good” black, in a well-burned area that effectively exposes firefighters and their chain saws, radios and hand tools to an approaching thunderstorm? Lightning did in fact strike the west side of the ridge just 48 hours earlier.

The Yarnell Hill Fire was started approximately one-third of a mile northwest of the crew’s last location before their descent: the site of documented photos and video taken by GMH Chris MacKenzie.

If lightning risk did play a partial role in the decision to descend off the ridge, it is understandable why they avoided the very long, steep and exposed route down to the west, and chose not to travel the same exposed ridge top heading north or south. Instead they descended to the “bomb proof” predetermined safety zone below – the Helm’s Ranch – via the shortest route to this safe haven.

According to the ADOSH report, at sometime between 3:45 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., Operations Musser

radioed Marsh to check on their availability to come down and assist in Yarnell.

It is unclear why anyone would even consider asking this hotshot crew to descend nearly 1.4 miles into the valley structures at nearly the same time that a critical weather event was predicted to arrive over the fire – an event that would clearly turn the fire’s direction in the valley below. The fire would now race to the south and west, and directly into the hotshots’ path.

Supposedly the hotshots refused the relocation request by Operations by stating that they were committed to the black, yet photo evidence shows that the crew began their descent toward Yarnell shortly after 4:04 p.m.

The “within a half-hour” storm arrival window and whether GMH was aware of it now becomes a critical point. This forecast proved to be a horribly accurate one. The outflow boundary reached the north end of the fire at approximately 4:00 p.m.

Air Attack told Marsh at 3:50 p.m. that the fire could reach Yarnell in 1-2 hours. The evacuation of the town of Yarnell began at 4:00 p.m., and the fire did in fact reach Yarnell around 4:30. This was not one or two hours later, but a mere 40 minutes. It is unclear if Air Attack received the 3:26 weather bulletin. His rate of spread (ROS) prediction should have been considerably different if he factored the weather bulletin into the update that he delivered to Marsh.

Could this inaccurate ROS update along with the specific time stamp on the weather bulletin (that may not have been relayed properly) have contributed to Marsh’s false sense of security for a safe descent time into the valley?

GMH Robert Caldwell recorded a conversation between Marsh and Operations before 4:00 p.m. Marsh notifies Operations that he is trying to work his way off the top and Operations replies in part, “Keep me updated ... and we’ll get some air support down there ASAP.”

Shortly before the fatalities occurred, a dry-run path was flown for the DC-10 that carried roughly 11,000 gallons of retardant. This dry run was confirmed by Marsh at 4:37 p.m. as *what we want and where we want it*.

Following this were four frantic and unsuccessful attempts by the Granite Mountain Hotshots to reach Air Attack by radio. Marsh announced that he and his crew were sheltering up just five minutes after his request for retardant was made.

Air support didn’t materialize after all, and Marsh’s tragic 4:37 request for the very large air tanker retardant drop was never filled.

Combine these events with ongoing radio com-

munication problems, and the delayed staffing of key safety officer and planning section chief positions on the incident management team.

A decided lack of situational awareness on the part of overhead led to their failure to utilize trigger points to pull all resources off the fireline immediately after receipt of the dire and time-stamped 3:26 weather bulletin. They were, however, able to relocate incident command vehicles and resources to safe areas when the fire threatened the ICP during the afternoon.

ADOSH has levied two citations deemed serious and willfully serious against the Arizona State Forestry Division for a combined proposed penalty of \$559,000.

New information surfaces frequently, including my discovery of background radio traffic from the SAIR video records. My original October 2013 records request for the Aerial Retardant Study videos was for this very purpose.

When I finally received those records in December 2013, along with the entire SAI record, my intention was to listen to the audio recordings. I had hoped to pick up any scanned background radio traffic to or from GMH and Marsh.

From the SAIR, page 33: “There is a gap of over 30 minutes in the information available for the Granite Mountain IHC. From 1604 until 1637, the Team cannot verify any communications from the crew, and we have almost no direct information from them.” Other references in the SAIR cite the specific 33-minute gap in communications.

The general consensus from both official reports is that no one understood or was aware of the intentions, actions and movements of Marsh and the GMH.

Yet audio evidence from a 4:13-4:16 video reveals that someone asked Marsh: “What’s your status right now?” Marsh replies that Granite is making their way down their escape route “from this morning” and heading south.

Someone can be heard to say: “Copy, making (their/our) way down into the structures.” Marsh is then asked if he is on the escape route with Granite Mountain right now. He indicates that he is not with the crew, but is in another location.

The SAIR does make a reference to this conversation (page 100): “At approximately 1615, ASM2 heard radio traffic between Division Supervisor A (DIVS A, which included Granite Mountain Hotshots) and Operations about Granite Mountain going down their escape route to a safety zone.”

Not only is this conversation in the middle of the reported “gap” in communications, but it also indi-

cates that ASM2 (air support module) believes this conversation occurred between Operations and Marsh. Both operations chiefs have indicated that they may have “overheard” this conversation between Marsh and someone else, but no one has taken responsibility yet for initiating this status update with Marsh and the GMH at 4:14 p.m.

Another audio conversation was recorded around 4:30, about 15 minutes later. It indicates that someone speaking with Marsh would appreciate it if they (the crew) would hurry up. Marsh replies: “They’re coming from the heel of the fire ...”

These transmissions clearly prove that there was no 33-minute gap in communications, and that Marsh was not negligent in his supervisory responsibility to maintain communications. He communicated at least twice during “the gap” with one or more individuals who were aware of the crew’s movements and intentions.

Marsh was even told by someone to hurry the crew up, approximately 15 minutes before they perished, indicating that someone clearly knew what Marsh and the hotshots were doing.

The experience of sitting alone in my living room with Bose headphones on and hearing these transmissions for the first time was a deeply disturbing one. The audio files certainly add to the picture of what

happened while contradicting some of the official findings.

I hope official investigators and others will dig deeper into these audio files to reveal who is communicating with Marsh. Why weren’t these conversations disclosed in official interviews by the individuals who spoke with Marsh?

It is my understanding that both investigation teams simply missed the audio conversation evidence, and there was no deliberate effort on their part to conceal it.

Clearly, there are numerous questions that remain. How might these transmissions change official report conclusions? Should the SAIR and ADOSH accounts be the permanent lasting record of what happened or should new official investigation efforts be launched?

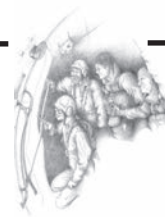
One thing is absolutely certain: our independent investigation is far from over. We made another trek to Yarnell and Prescott in March 2014 with John Maclean, and our journey continued on to the Wildland Urban Interface Conference in Reno, Nev.

Wayne and I plan to return to Prescott for the first anniversary June 30 – in memory of and in tribute to the brave men of the 2013 Granite Mountain Inter-agency Hotshot Crew.

Esse Quam Videri 🍄



Touching All Bases



NIFC Base Report

by **Todd Jinkins** (NIFC '98)

As the fire season 2014 quickly approaches, the Great Basin Smokejumpers find themselves busy on all fronts. The loft has been busy rigging and producing equipment for the more than 70 jumpers we will have this year. The training department will be teaching three jump refreshers and two fire refreshers, as well as putting on a class for new jumpers transitioning to the ram-air canopy.

Air ops will be fielding three jump ships for most of



the season and getting a fourth jump ship from Alaska in July. The jump ship compliment will be one BLM-owned Twin Otter, two contract Twin Otters and one contract Dornier.

The operations section is active readying our fleet of 12 vehicles and making sure all jumpers have the equipment needed to slay the dragon. Lastly, the crew supervisor shop has finished the hiring season. We started rookie training the week of April 14 with eight rookie candidates.

Additionally, we hired five Forest Service transfer jumpers: **Ian Pohowsky** (MSO-11), **Reyes Romero** (GAC-12), **Toby Smith** (RDD-09), **Curran Foley** (GAC-13) and **Justin Horn** (RDD-03).

Three former BLM jumpers – **Chris Stevens** (RDD-99), **Ryan Swartz** (NIFC-02) and **Ty Van Keuren** (NIFC-09) – are returning to the fold after exploring greener pastures that they finally realized weren't greener after all.

Finally, after 33 years as a BLM smokejumper, **Jim Raudenbush** (FBX-82) has reached the pinnacle of the smokejumper ranks and has been selected as the Great Basin Smokejumper Base manager.

As with any fire season, prognostication is worth the same as a wooden nickel. My only hopes for fire season 2014 are that we all come home safely and intact.

Grangeville Base Report

by **Mike Blinn** (Redding '01)

Training season is upon us in Grangeville. Early fire refresher was held at Grangeville the week of March 24. The following week, square jumpers headed to Missoula in order to get their units sessions and jump refresher out of the way. Early round jump refresher was in Missoula the week of April 7. After that, we're expecting an active prescribed fire period on the Nez Perce Clearwater Fire Zone.

We had some movement at GAC in the last couple of months. **Mike Anthony** (GAC-13) transferred to Missoula, **Thomas Haney** (GAC-13) transferred to West Yellowstone, while **Curran Foley** (GAC-13) and **Reyes Romero** (GAC-12) transferred to Boise. **Matt Smith** (GAC-01) will be taking a year's sabbatical to pursue a flying career; he'll be flying Otters to build flight time and proficiency.

Tim Lum (RDD-91) was hired as the new training foreman. Tim was the assistant training foreman at North Cascades; his report date is May 19.

In order to round out our numbers, we made offers to six rookie candidates this spring. We will be sending our rooks to Redmond to train with the Region 6 jumpers. **Nate Hesse** (RDD-01), **Phillip Schreffler** (GAC-10) and Lum will be headed to Redmond to mentor the rookie candidates.

Dan Mooney (WYS-07) attended ram-air training in Missoula starting in April. **Russel Frei** (GAC-05) and **Amanda Holt** (MSO-06) will be participating in the ram-air project as trainers. Currently we have four squares, pending Mooney's completion.

Shane Ralston (RDD-03) is still on the injured reserve after his jump accident last August. He had surgery in January in an attempt to restore mobility to his left biceps that we are anxiously awaiting to take effect. He was scheduled to undergo another surgery

April 25 to work on restoration of his deltoid.

Although the process of recovery has been long and slow, Shane has been extremely upbeat. He's working very hard in physical therapy several days a week and spending time with his family. Once the surgeries are done and things are functioning properly, Shane will be returning to work at Grangeville. Currently there is no hard date for his return.

Hopefully we'll see all you folks real soon. Have a good spring and put in a booster request when you can – we'll be waiting.

Redding Base Report

by **Luis Gomez** (Redding '94)

Redding winter never showed up, but we'll get to that later as we have other important announcements. Bob Kersh, the original loft foreman and one of the main men who helped get Redding established as a jump base in 1957, died in March. The base owes Mr. Kersh a huge amount of gratitude for everything he did for the base and is in the process of getting approval to dedicate the loft in his name.

Dan Hernandez (RDD-85) is retiring April 30. Dan retires with 550 jumps – including 230 fire jumps – and we will miss a huge amount of service and expertise in the loft.

Dan also had many other important contributions, such as welding, playing music and the chinga dog art throughout the years. There was a gathering at Anderson River Park the evening of April 27.

Tim Quigley (RDD-79) is retiring June 30. He currently has 695 jumps with 285 of those being fire jumps. He became loft foreman in 2001 and, through time, produced a lot of innovation on paracargo delivery.

Tim reduced our cargo passes by 40 percent with cargo redesigns here in Redding. We at the base will miss Tim's vast experience with spotting and fires. Not sure the date of his retirement party.

Other happenings around Redding: the base staffed aircraft through all of January and most of February and had jumpers current during that time. We staffed fires on single-resource orders locally the first week of January.

For the first time, we participated in Region 5 Fire Hire and have all of the permanent full-time positions filled going into the fire season.

The base was able to hire the Dan Hernandez position. **Mitch Hokanson** (RDD-00) will fill in behind Dan, **Richard "Rico" Gonzalez** (RDD-99) will be moving on to an air attack position across the street

with the Regional Fire and Aviation staff.

Don Graham (RDD-01), **Dave Johnson** (RDD-00) and **Doug Powell** (RDD-05) accepted spotter positions and start April 21. We also had our first true transfer accept a GS-7 squad leader position – **Patrick Johnson** (NCSB-08), who will be starting April 21. **Paul Bailey** (RDD-10), **Jason Foreman** (RDD-08),

Curtis Mathews (RDD-10) and **Zack Petty** (RDD-13) accepted senior smokejumper positions.

Toby Smith (RDD-09) accepted a position with Boise, and **Brian Kvisler** (RDD-03) has moved on to bigger and better things up in the great Pacific Northwest.

The Class of 2014 started training April 7. 🌲

Dunton 2013 Smokejumper Leadership Awards Announced

by **Bill Cramer** (NIFC-90)

The **Al Dunton** (FBX-67) Smokejumper Leadership award winners for 2013 are **Hans Ohme** (MYC-01) and **Mark Urban** (NIFC-03).

Ohme was selected from the US Forest Service on the basis of his accomplishments as a spotter and work with the medical and chainsaw programs at McCall. Hans' nomination noted strong

achievements in both programs due to his focus on safety, teamwork, innovation, work ethic, and commitment to the programs.

Urban, Great Basin Smokejumpers, was selected to receive the award posthumously. Mark's accomplishments as a spotter, Lead Rookie Trainer, IMT member, and Duty Officer were cited

in his nomination. In conjunction with his continual pursuit of perfection, Mark earned respect from subordinates for his mentoring abilities and provided motivation to all through his actions.

Both individuals went far beyond the requirements of the job and demonstrated leadership excellence. 🌲



Hans Ohme (NSA file)



Mark Urban (NSA file)

Long Cheng Visited 39 Years After CIA/Jumpers Left

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

“**T**he Most Secret Place On Earth” is the title of a 2008 film by German director Marc Eberle. It deals with the 15-year-long “Secret War” that the CIA waged from 1960-75 in Laos. Many smokejumpers (the list numbers 95 at this point) worked for the CIA and its airline, Air America.

Following this article, I’ve chosen to reprint **Shep Johnson’s** (MYC-56) “A More Than Interesting Life” from the October 2004 issue of *Smokejumper*. Shep’s story gives an excellent background into the CIA work in Southeast Asia (SEA) and other parts of the world.

One of the earliest articles we printed was **Don Courtney’s** (MSO-56) “And If You Find Out....” in the January 2000 issue. That will also be in this issue.

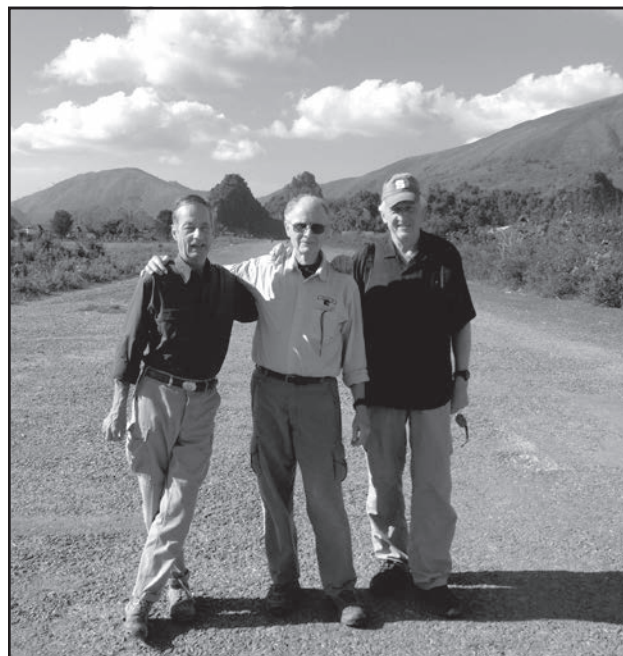
Jerry Daniels (MSO-58) was the right-hand man for Hmong General Vang Pao in the war directed at the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao Armies. Daniels is the subject of the recently-released book *Hogs Exit* by Gayle Morrison. We have printed several reviews in *Smokejumper* magazine.

During its peak, Long Cheng was one of the world’s busiest airports and had a population of approximately 50,000. More than 500 flights per day took off from Long Cheng moving up to two million pounds of cargo. Despite this, Long Cheng was never marked on any maps until recently. It is a restricted area and remains off limits to foreigners and is under the direct control of the Lao Army.

Laos is the most intensely bombed country in the history of air warfare. Over 40 years later, groups are trying to clear the unexploded ordnance that remains and has caused over 2,000 casualties as recently as 1999-2008.

With this background in mind, when **Fred Rohrbach** (MSO-65) invited me along on a trip to Long Cheng, I immediately accepted. Also making the trip were **Bob Dayton** (MSO-65) and Malcolm Creelman, a Vietnam-era Marine and Silver Star recipient. Bob and Malcolm have made numerous trips to SEA over the past 20+ years.

As with the NSA-sponsored Vietnam trips in 2007 and 2013, Fred handled all the arrangements. Fred’s business takes him to SEA on a regular basis over the years. I’ll say he has good connections and leave it at that. I’m the type of person who plans and over-plans. The best



L-R: Creelman, Sheley and Dayton on what is left of Long Cheng Runway. (Courtesy Fred Rohrbach)

“surprises” are “no surprises” for me. Fred’s planning fits right into that mold.

Arrangements for this trip were far from normal. Long Cheng is in a tightly restricted area and access to the outside is difficult. It is quite possible that, outside of German director Marc Eberle, we might be the first “outsiders” to enter the area since 1975. Again, Fred’s contacts would get us access to Long Cheng.

The plan was for Malcolm and me to fly from Seattle and meet Fred and Bob in Bangkok, Thailand. From there we would fly to Vientiane, the capitol of Laos, where we would start our drive in two 4-wheel vehicles. Hopefully, we would be able to access Long Cheng, but that was not set in stone. The drive would continue to Phonsavan, near the Plain of Jars, the site of numerous battles, and continue North to Sam Neua, where we would see the enormous caves that sheltered the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese armies.

The final leg would be the drive from Sam Neua to the Vietnam border where we would enter that country at Na Meo. Tim, an employee of Fred in Saigon, would

fly to Hanoi, get a vehicle and driver and meet us at the border checkpoint. Some pretty good planning was needed as it would not be good for us to arrive at the border checkpoint in the middle of nowhere and not have anyone there to take us to Hanoi, from where we would fly back to the U.S.

I didn't want this piece to be a travel log, but the easiest way for me to remember events was to sit down in the evening and record the day's happenings. The days do and did become a jumble, so the daily diary was a big help. I've condensed it a bit. This is not a story of the history of Long Cheng—that has been covered by the guys who were there. It was a trip that a person would want to make for educational and historic reasons but not one to be repeated a second time. We're off to Laos.

Day One—Seattle

I had not met Malcolm Creelman before, but we quickly spotted each other at the EVA airlines check-in. I had guessed that with his Marine Corps background, he might be a no-nonsense type of person—correct. He told me to skip the regular check-in line and go through the VIP line, even though I wasn't VIP ticketed. I did, no problem. Malcolm guided me through many small roadblocks on this trip and probably kept me from getting "traveler's sickness" with his supply of food that he carries with him.

Day Two—Taiwan

We gained 15 hours in clock time on the 13-hour flight to Taiwan. After a three-hour layover, we flew EVA to Bangkok, Thailand. Malcolm was in business class, so we made a plan if we got separated at the Bangkok airport. Bottom line, take a taxi and meet at the JW Marriott, where Fred and Bob were staying. Bangkok was a mess with 500 people trying to get through four customs windows, and we ended up meeting at the Marriott.

Day Three—Vientiane

All four of us flew a Thai Airlines 737 to Vientiane, the capitol of Laos—a one-hour flight. Malcolm said to hustle off the plane and beat the rush to the counter where we were to get our visas. In answer to my concerns about not having my paperwork completed, he said not to worry, that they only wanted the money—correct again.

Vientiane was quiet and laid back after the bustle of Bangkok. Checked into Lao Plaza hotel. Later that afternoon Fred made final arrangements for vehicles and drivers. Met Bob Dayton's daughter, Katherine,

her boyfriend and his parents for dinner. Katherine was in Laos on business and the parents worked for the State Department. Great dinner at an Italian restaurant (L'Opera)—the owner came to Laos 20 years ago and never went back to Italy.

Day Four—Vientiane

We had a day off in Vientiane. I tried to do some walking, but I was eight weeks into a full ankle replacement and hobbled, as I was for most of the trip. Malcolm Rule #2: Always get a hotel card from the desk before leaving on a walk. Get lost, hand the card to a taxi, bike driver and you get back. I found this to be a great idea.

We had a 3:00 pm meeting with Fred's contact (AKA "The General") to finalize travel plans and see if we were going to make it in to Long Cheng. "The General" was an interesting man and to keep the description generic—sunglasses and a Stetson cowboy hat for starters. After \$60 worth of fresh-squeezed orange juice and a transaction, the deal was done.

Dinner that evening with same crew. Noticed that most of the people walking the street in front of the restaurant were white—Europeans, mostly German, plus a lot of young backpackers.

Day Five—Heading to Long Cheng

Off to a good start. The drivers were 15 minutes ahead of time with three cases of water plus a couple sacks of bananas. I should have gotten a clue to the available food situation when I saw the bananas accompanied by noodles in a cup.

Roads shortly turned from pavement to dirt, dirt to narrow dirt, then to potholes, rocks and mountains. Drove up mountain for 30 minutes, down the other side for 30 minutes, and repeated that five times. Drivers were excellent, missing the large ore trucks (by inches) coming from a mountain that was being stripped away by the Australians. These guys could pass a truck within the 20 available yards before a blind curve and still miss the motorbike parked in the road. There wouldn't be any white NASCAR drivers at Talladega if these guys ever got to the U.S.

We went through two military checkpoints without even slowing down. "The General" must be for real. It was originally going to take two days to get to Long Cheng, but we pulled in at 1600, checked the fillings in our teeth to see if they were still intact, and got out. Fred says, "It doesn't get any better than this." We were to hear that many more times, after which Bob soon



Plenty of room to pass. (Courtesy Bob Dayton)

replied, “That’s a matter of opinion.”

Big surprise—there were rooms for us at a “Guest House.” Small, no hot water, but more than expected. Ate our own food but drank their coffee—strong, with a large dose of sweet evaporated milk. We were probably the first outsiders to stay overnight at Long Cheng since the 1970s.

Day Six—Long Cheng

The other three guys did a lot of walking in the area. I still was limited by the ankle. There looked to be about 400 people living at Long Cheng, plus 100 or so military. I was walking back to the “guest house” that evening when a line of 20-30 young men in uniform approached me, walking the other way. At first I thought they were military, but they seemed more like a youth work group of some sorts. If they were military, they had no idea of what made up a line. Moved up the road with an amoeba-like formation. Similar to smokejumpers compared to Hotshots.

As I was watching a high-school-age-girls volleyball game the next morning, there were several soldiers in the crowd carrying AKs. No one questioned me, but there were a lot of extended stares. The younger kids just stopped, turned and watched me as I walked by. Maybe they hadn’t seen a white person before or maybe they thought I walked strangely, dragging one leg.

The place was quiet and peaceful. From the reading that I have done, it was hard to imagine this once was one of the busiest airfields in the world. Skyline Ridge, the scene of many battles, stood impressively in view. The airstrip had grown over on each side and only seemed as wide as a one-lane road. There was the small military

base off the top end of the runway. Housing for workers on a hydro-project had been built across from where we stayed. We were certainly off the map.

After breakfast (our food, their coffee), we hit the road again for three plus hours to Phonsavan. Saw several military outposts on the way with 2-3 very young soldiers living in the middle of nowhere.

Stopped for lunch—Pho with strong coffee again. Malcolm brought the ashes of his dog along to be spread in the Mekong River. That didn’t work out, so we went down to the local river, found a cardboard box, put the ashes and some leaves in the box, lit it with a match, and gave the remains a Viking funeral as it floated down the river. Locals probably thought we were rather strange.

Day Seven – Eight – Nine—Phonsavan

We are in Phonsavan at Vansana Plain of Jars Hotel. No heat in the rooms and it is really cold at nights. “It doesn’t get any better than this.” Who keeps saying this?

We are in the new city. The bombing destroyed the old city. Today we visited Jars Site 1 and viewed these enormous stone jars set in the ground. No one really has an answer as to where they came from or their purpose—just another wonder of the world. There were plenty of tourists at the site—mostly Japanese and some Koreans. Japanese stand out equipped with the latest of travel gear from head to foot. They looked like they were going to climb Everest that afternoon.

Fred said we will be here a couple of days as we picked up a day when we got to Long Cheng the first travel day. He had allowed two days for that trip. We can’t speed up the trip as we already have a driver scheduled to meet us at the Vietnam border on a certain day at a certain time. Our guide this morning is a Hmong who lives here. Has sister in Sacramento.

Fred had a young man eat with us tonight. He’s a Hmong who works for the MAG (Mine Advisory Group that finds and digs up the unexploded munitions) that has an office across the street. Fred met him somewhere along the line about five years ago. He says that, since 1975, thousands of people have been killed or lost body parts from the unexploded munitions.

Day Ten – Sam Neua

Arrived in Sam Neua after a nine-hour drive. This country is nothing but mountains, very few valleys. The road was paved but narrow-1.5 lanes. We pass just like no one is coming from the other direction. Our drivers are very good, but I’m not comfortable with driving through

villages at 40mph. We went over passes that were up to 5,000 feet and most of the time you could look 2-3,000 feet off the side of the road.

Must have gone through 20 Hmong villages built along side of the road. Their houses are within feet of the road; little kids playing right next to the road—seems like we miss them by inches.

Good thing we all bought small heaters in Phonsavan before we left as the hotel does not have heat or hot water. “It doesn’t get any better than this.” But, it has great internet—go figure.

From the *Vientiane Times*: “The coldest weather in years froze provinces across Laos with northern regions suffering most from the extreme weather conditions. Two

northern provinces saw minus temperatures yesterday — the first time this year and for many years.”

We’re eating at a hotel near where we are staying. Fred buys fresh vegetables (broccoli/cauliflower) daily and hands them to the cook when we give our dinner order. They cook them up, add some great spices and serve them. Hard getting service and the orders were mixed up. Fred starts talking to them in Vietnamese when he gets frustrated and they start to get things right.

I’m good with veggies and rice along with Fred. Spaghetti is the standard for Malcolm. Toss in a 20-ounce bottle of Beer Lao and a person could go for weeks on veggies and beer. Fried rice comes standard with a fried egg on top.



Creelman, Rohrbach, Dayton and Sheley at Plain of Jars. (Courtesy F. Rohrbach)

Day Eleven – Sam Neua

Easy to get dressed in the morning as I'm wearing all my clothes to bed, it's so cold. Also easy to wake up as there is a rooster located about six inches outside the bathroom wall who starts at 0400 each morning. Would make a great addition to our rice if we could ever get our hands on him. "It doesn't get any better than this." Are you s——me Fred?

We drove about an hour to see a set of caves where the Pathet Lao had military headquarters inside a mountain. They had everything in there: hospital, sleeping, etc. Went to two more sets of caves. You would have to be raised in this country to live like that: dark, cold and damp.

Day Twelve— We're Out'a Here

We left at 0630 this morning from Sam Neua and made great time (two hours) to the Vietnam border. It took about half an hour to clear customs. We were checked three times. I think that since this crossing was so isolated these guys had plenty of time on their hands. I was later to find out in Seattle that these guys must be related to our TSA employees, but much more polite.

Fred's employee, Tim, and a driver were there right on time. We had a Mercedes van with five rows of seats—plenty of room.

Then it started—the road on the Vietnam side was dirt; narrow and logging trucks were starting to go down the hill. The logs were stacked so high it looked like they would tip with a push of the hand. We got by all of them before we got to a place where another truck had slipped off the road blocking traffic. Fortunately, it got out after about 10 minutes. We all felt it was great that we got past the log trucks as one of them would surely go off the road at this spot and the road would be closed for a day or more.

Mile after mile of dirt road passed with villages almost all the way. It seems that everyone builds right on the road. I still can't get over passing on curves and three abreast. We didn't get to Hanoi until about 5:30 that evening—11 hours of travel.

Checked into the Army hotel—run by the military. Fred likes it here as, naturally, the security is great. Actually, a pretty good room including breakfast for \$50. Got to take a warm shower and shave after two days in a cold hotel. "It doesn't get any better than this." I can finally agree with that statement.

The days are starting to fold into a daze. I think we're ready to come home.

Day 13—Hanoi

We were tourists today. Went for a long walk, but the ankle gave out on return trip. Paid a bikecab \$3.00 to get me back to the hotel. Traffic about as heavy as a stream during a salmon run. I was wondering how my guy peddling was going to get across a street three lanes wide, especially since we were going the wrong way on a one-way street. Easy, just cut to the inside and go against traffic down another one-way street. I really would like a bikecab with the peddler in front and passenger behind, but they don't come that way.

Went to the Hilton for dinner. Fred and Malcolm had two women who worked for the government join us. They knew one of them from 20 years back. She is now a spokesperson for the government. The other one was in some sort of high position. Malcolm said she trained in Russia. Fred kept them engaged in conversation for a whole hour—Bob and I sat across from each other where we could get out of the conversation. Bob jokingly said that we need to stay clear of Fred as they (police) will probably pick Fred up that night.

Day 14—Heading Home

Flew to Taiwan, then to Seattle, picking up a day and arriving before we left Taiwan. Said our goodbyes and I headed for a Sacramento flight. Great to be home!

Home Free—The Dreaded TSA

We were 30 minutes late getting in from Taiwan and I knew it would be tight getting through customs, go from the international to the main terminal, checking in with Alaska Airlines and making it to the waiting area. I would have to hustle. The ankle replacement was going from talking-to-me stage to a low roar. I had a Rush Limbaugh-type oxy pill that I was saving until I cleared security.

In the last 14 days I had cleared security in three countries, gone into a military restricted zone, and driven hundreds of miles on narrow mountain roads. Now I was home free! Think so?

My first clue came as I approached the TSA checkpoint. It was late at night and I was the only person there. "Hey, you're in the wrong line," a voice shouted. By this time I had been traveling 32 hours, was seeing visions, and tearing scar tissue in my new ankle. I looked up and saw a three-headed monster. Once my eyes focused, I

saw that there were really three of them. It was just the blimp-sized body of one that shielded the other two with just their heads showing. How could I be in the wrong line? I'm the only person in line!

That should have been my first clue. There were three of these GS-Zero/Wal-Mart rejects with time on their hands. I was the victim. "Remove everything from your pockets," came the command. My travel shirt had aspirin, cough drops, boarding passes, and everything that I would need in transit, so I just took off the shirt. When I stepped through the machine it sounded. Told them that with a knee and ankle replacement the machine always does that.

Next came the pat down, arms extended as the young man inspected the 1/16th inch hem on my undershirt for hidden explosives. The TSA had a 75-year-old, blonde (at one time), 160-pound Osama Bin Laden look alike. Next came the small pads over the hands, which had to be run through the machine to tell if I had been handling explosives in the past few hours. I was beginning to wish I had the Ebola virus and see if his machine would pick that up.

The steam was starting to come out of my ears as valuable time was being wasted. I needed to make the last flight to Sacramento or spend the night in Seattle. However, I knew that these guys had the power to RF me if I even said a word—therefore, endure in silence.

This trip was a once-in-a-lifetime experience with emphasis on "once." But I have this strange feeling that if, a year from now, Fred says, "Want to take a trip to Cambodia?" I'd say, "Do they have heat and hot water?" After all, "It doesn't get any better than this."

Some of the jumpers who worked at Long Cheng courtesy of **Ken Hessel** (MYC-58) and **T.J. Thompson** (MSO-55):

T.J. Thompson, **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58), **Shep Johnson** (MYC-56), **Miles Johnson** (MYC-53), **Ed Bustamante** (GAC-61), **George "Pappy" Smith** (IDC-62), **Frank Odom** (MYC-63), **Gary Hannon** (MSO-60), **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42), **Larry Moore** (IDC-59), **Woody Spence** (MYC-58), **Richard "Paperlegs" Peterson** (MYC-47), **Jack Cahill** (MSO-58), **Lyle Brown** (GAC-54), **Bruce Lehfeldt** (MSO-54), and **Jim Barber** (GAC-60). 🍄

Shep Johnson: A More Than Interesting Life

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

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

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

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

Below is his story, in his words.

Getting involved with the CIA

I was approached in October 1959 by **Richard "Pa-**

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

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

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

Tibet

I was hired as a C-130 crewmember, and it was my job to drop personnel and supplies into Tibet during the Tibetan revolution against the Red Chinese. The CIA referred to it as "Operation Barnum." There were 10 smokejumpers involved in the Tibetan operation, a 50-50 split between Missoula and McCall jumpers.

I credit being on the Silver City crew and being available in the off-season for being picked for this job. Many other jumpers were in college during the off-season. I want to say that we had the best group of smokejumpers that could have been put together.

Out of about 40 flights, I was on six in 1960 and one in 1962, which was the last flight that I know of. The planning for the Tibetan operation began in 1957.

There were some exciting moments. One night we had 12 or 15 Tibetans onboard. We were to drop them in one of the northernmost parts of Tibet. We had an internal fuel tank for extra fuel due to the length of the flight. As we approached the drop zone, we depressurized, and the fuel started running down the floor of the C-130. We had to turn on the lights, which was something that we never did. Flights were kept dark to prevent detection by the Chinese communists on the ground.

We had to get the troops out first and then drop the cargo of weapons and food. With the fuel problems, we had to make both passes with the aircraft lights on and exposed to enemy eyes. The risk of electrical spark and fire was high, but we got back to Thailand without incident but low on fuel. **Bill Demmons** (MSO-51) and **John Lewis** (MYC-53) worked with me on this drop.

I ended up spending 15 years with the agency, but nothing was as exciting as flying over the Himalayas at 32,000 feet and then dropping down to 15,000 feet to drop cargos of men and equipment. This worked out well for me, because I was able to do this job during the winter and smokejumping during the summer.

This particular job only lasted three seasons, because the flights were suspended due to the U-2 incident, when (Francis) Gary Powers was shot down over Russia.

Laos

In the fall of 1960, John Lewis, Andy Andersen and I reported for duty in Okinawa and made several DC-4 flights into Laos in support of Gen. Vang Pao's guerrilla army. In 1961, John Lewis and I reported to Guatemala with **Jack Wall** (MSO-48), who was in charge of training parachutists and riggers for the invasion of Cuba. John and I were asked to return to Laos and work for Air America, but I declined and returned to McCall for the upcoming fire season.

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

South Vietnam

In September of 1962, several of us reported to Intermountain Aviation in Marana, Ariz. Paperlegs, **Jack Cahill** (MSO-58), Jack Wall and I were sent to Saigon. Jack Cahill and I started dropping cargo from a C-46 aircraft. Pete and Jack Wall went up north to set up cargo-rigging sites and to work with U.S. Special Forces B-teams.

Later, I replaced Jack Wall working with the Special Forces. Cahill and Wall went to work on special ops, setting up a parachute training area out of Saigon in preparation to [infiltrate] South Vietnamese teams into North Vietnam.

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

Training Tibetans ... in Colorado

After returning to the U.S., we were sent to Camp Hale, Colo., to train Tibetans. Why Camp Hale? Because the high altitude and rough terrain were as close as they could come to Tibet.

The camp was set up by the U.S. Army for the 10th Mountain Division during World War II. Our job was to train them for airborne operations. We made our training jumps at Fort Carson, Colo. The Tibetans were probably the best and most motivated workers I have ever seen. To my knowledge they never jumped into Tibet, but walked in instead.

Very few of these fighters survived the conflict with the Chinese. They were heavily outnumbered. No Tibetan jumped in Tibet after 1960 that I know of. There was one mission flown in January of 1962. I was a crewmember along with **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58), **Lyle Brown** (MSO-54) and **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42).

Thailand, 1966

Ken Hessel (MYC-58), **Frank Odom** (MYC-63) and I were sent to Phitsunulok Camp Saritsena to train PARUs (Parachute Aerial Reinforcement Units) and members of the Royal Thai Army. Hessel was our team leader and spent some of his time at Hauhin, Thailand, training the queen of Thailand's personal guards. Our [work] was mainly building helicopter landing strips and parachute training for rescue attempts by our PARU teams. However, these men were cross-trained in many other areas. ... CIA personnel had worked with the PARUs since the 1950s.

Marana Special Projects

Between 1962 and 1975, we worked on different research-and-development projects out of Marana Airpark, near Tucson, Ariz. Projects we tested included a "para-wing" with a remote-control device and a parachute with a built-in guidance system that could zero in on a ground frequency system, commonly known as a ground-to-air beacon device.

Also, we tested the Parachute Impact System, which played a huge role in the secret war in Laos. This parachute allowed the pilot to fly high enough to keep out of range of small-arms fire. We worked with the Forest Service and BLM in ... support of [combating] wildfire. From New Mexico to Alaska, we worked with the CIA and assisted in airborne training back in Williamsburg, Va.

The Secret War

From 1965 to 1973, many smokejumpers worked as air-operations and case officers in Northern and Southern Laos. North, East, South or West, we were there. In 1969 and 1971, we supported Gen. Vang Pao's Hmong Army to take the Plain of Jars. I was wounded Feb. 14, 1971, at Gen. Vang Pao's secret base, known as Long Cheng, or Lima Site 20A. I always felt it was a Valentine's gift from Ho Chi Minh.

Christopher Robbins' account

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

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



Shep Johnson at Boum Long 1972 (Courtesy S. Johnson)

compound at the rate of one every six seconds. The NVA had overrun the men firing the 105mm.

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

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

An awesome workload

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

Largest CIA field headquarters

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

Tall rock formations or “karsts” dotted either end of the runway and were the cause for abrupt takeoffs and landings. The only way in was by air or down small foot trails. Visitors were by invitation only. ... Vang Pao's stone house, surrounded by barbed wire, was on the south side of the runway amid the shacks of perhaps twenty thousand Hmongs.

They ejected at ground zero

Shep Johnson continues: “There was one tower operator on the east side of the airfield. I don't know why rockets or incoming rounds never hit the tower. ... At the north end of the airstrip, we had a barricade of barrels filled with dirt and stacked three high. The purpose of the barrels was to stop the aircraft before they hit the limestone karst.

I witnessed two T-28s landing with their hydraulics shot out. Before the pilots hit the barricade, they ejected at ground zero. Out they go, and the parachute would open about 75 feet off the ground. Both pilots survived.

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

The day we lost the C-130 with **Billy Hester** (MSO-58) onboard, he and all the crewmembers were killed. Gary H. was running air ops, and I was working the ramp. We had three C-130s coming in at 15-minute intervals. Some time had lapsed without hearing from Hester's plane, so I advised Gary, and he called the outgoing C-130.

Gary was told that the plane was making an approach about 14 miles out. ... It never arrived, and the search was on. We spotted the wreckage that day in a rugged area [at] about 8,500 feet. The next morning we left by helicopter and landed about one mile east of the wreckage and walked down to the site. Because of the terrain and jungle, it took some time to get to the crash site.

We saw someone, and not knowing who it was (maybe Pathet Lao and the NVA), felt it better not to

continue to the crash area. Air ops ordered a Jolly Green and air cover while air commandos repelled into the site. People seem to think the pilot ran into the cloud with a mountain in it. The site where the C-46 was lost in 1960 with John [Lewis], Yogi [Eubanks] and Dave [Bevan] was about five miles down the ridge.

The Ravens

Chuck Sheley writes: The Ravens were a special and elite group of U.S. Air Force pilots who acted as spotters for American air strikes. Of the 160 men who were Ravens, 31 were KIA. **Gene Hamner** (MSO-67 was a Raven and will be featured in a future issue of *Smokejumper*.)

Robbins reports that at Long Cheng, the Air Force had an air-operations center staffed with 10 Ravens.

The Ravens lost a bunch

Shep Johnson continues: This operation did not come without a price. In the overall operation from 1961 to 1973, we lost several smokejumpers. [See *Smokejumper*, January 2004; pp. 30-31.] Most were parachute dispatch officers who worked for Air America. There were also many Air America, Continental and military pilots who flew the spotter aircraft who were killed in action. Air America lost somewhere around 241 [men]. The Ravens also lost a bunch.

After I was wounded, the family and I went on home leave and returned to Laos for another two-year tour. My job was to coordinate airborne operations between the logistics central base and outlying sites. ... One goal was to set up a better way to expedite the loading of aircraft.

Most of the people at the outlying sites were smokejumpers, so everything went smoothly. We had local soldiers and third-country people to assist in rigging and loading aircrafts. All of our cargo had to have a load manifest, which told the pilot exactly how much cargo was onboard.

In a tragic Porter crash, Cotton Davis, several Hmong Soldiers and two American Army officers were all killed. It was the last flight of the day, and air ops had to get this last load out. The plane crashed and killed all on board. We think he was just heavy, or maybe the pilot was shot by a sniper on the ridge. From that day on, we fashioned a manifest called S.O.B. meaning Souls on Board.

Buddy, we got seven people here who don't know how to jump

Chuck Sheley writes: Parker describes Shep as “a lean, former smokejumper” who helped train the 70 or so commandos. Parker goes on to say:

[Shep] was standing in front of them at the end

of the dirt airfield near the back of an idling Air America C-130, when someone yelled that it was time to go. They were wet to the bone, some less than 15 years old and none taller than their M-16 rifles. Shep checked the equipment and continued down the line to count off the men. Seventy-seven! He knew there were only 70 commandos trained to make the jump. Seven Hmong, who had probably been support staff at the airfield, had picked up parachutes and joined the group. Shep yelled to the Hmong commander, "Buddy, we got seven people here who don't know how to jump. I don't know what they're trying to prove, but it didn't get by me." There was no way to determine who the seven were, and the commander didn't seem concerned, so the plane took off. Twenty minutes later, all 77 men ran out the back of the C-130 and parachuted without injury on top of the pathfinders' lights at the edge of the Plain of Jars.

Shep, the rigger, was scheduled to leave in the fall. This was Shep's second tour. He was our special person, and we loved him. He worked hard every day, out of the ramp before the sun came up, rarely talking, always working, rigging things exactly right and then checking and rechecking. He absolutely refused to have anything go out from his rigging shed that wasn't perfect – the right supplies rigged with the right parachutes on the right planes in the right order. It was an uplifting experience to work with Shep because he was so conscientious. Like "Hog" [Jerry Daniels, MSO-58] and "Bag" [Frank Odom, MYC-63], he had come from the hills of Montana and was, for the most part, a silent frontiersman. Like the rest of us, Gen. Vang Pao liked Shep and admired his work ethic. He planned a large farewell party – a "baci." All of Sky was invited. The war stopped for Shep's baci.

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

Silent helicopters

Shep Johnson continues: In 1972 I managed heavy-lift helicopter operations out of Lima 16 or Vang Vieng. We supported the Thai mercenary soldiers with fresh food brought in from Thailand. We also moved heavy weapons, bulldozers and road-graders.

I did this until my brother Miles came over to manage and supervise that project. I then went to an outpost or a site called PS-44. [The chief of operations] put me in charge of training eight selected commando raiders. They

were of the ethnic tribe Lao Touoq. The plan was to put wiretaps into North Vietnam. The tap was put in by a Hughes 500 helicopter. ... It was virtually silent, hence [its] nickname, "Whisper."

The operation was successful, and the information the CIA received gave us the edge between the NVA and U.S. negotiators on the cease-fire in Laos and South Vietnam.

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

Getting the job done

My association with the jumpers from all smoke-jumping units found us working very well together. We enjoyed one another; we partied together; we looked out for one another. We had our disagreements, but we always came up with a solution to get the job done.

When it came to jumping out of any type of aircraft, helicopters included, there was no fear. If we wanted to sit down together and figure out how many types of aircraft we jumped and repelled out of, I would say between 30 and 40. Many of these were experimental jumps with experimental or peculiar types of equipment. When we left the outfit, many of us went to the Forest Service, Department of Interior, Indian Affairs or Department of Veterans [Affairs]. I think all of us ended up okay.

Later years

Chuck Sheley writes: During his 15 years with the CIA, Shep worked five years in Thailand and Laos. For his service, he received the Exceptional Service Medal (The Star). From 1976 to 1982, he worked for the BLM Interagency Fire Center helicopter operations in Boise. He retired from the BLM Alaska Fire Service in 1990. 🐾



Shep Johnson and Jerry Daniels at Hmong New Years celebration/rodeo. (Courtesy S. Johnson)



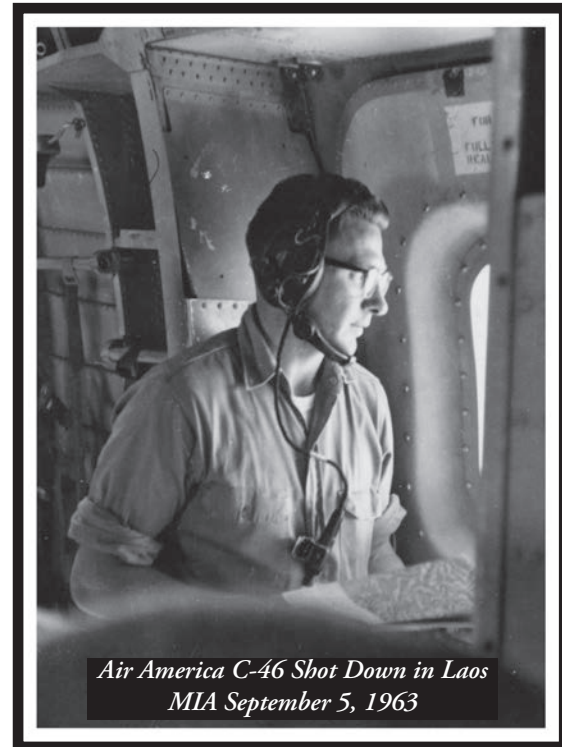
Smokejumpers Killed In Action (KIA)

Photos Courtesy NSA & Air America Archives



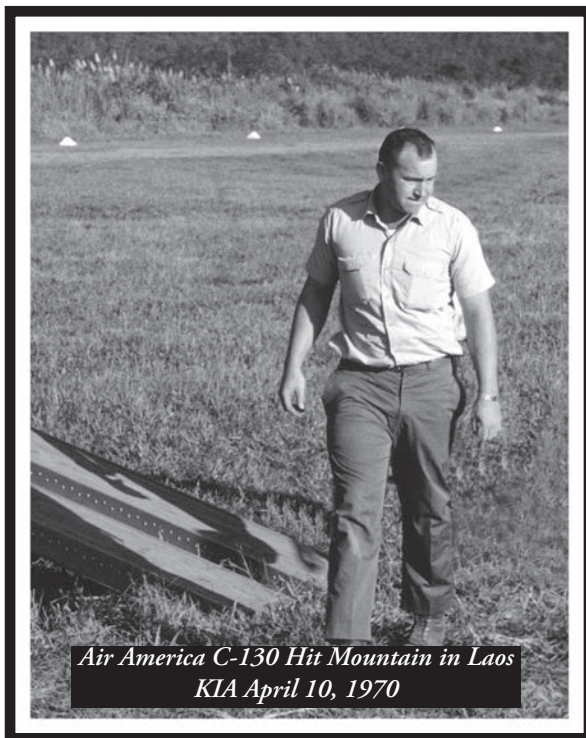
*Air America C-46 Hit Mountain in Laos
KIA July 17, 1963*

Gideon D. Newton (CJ-55)



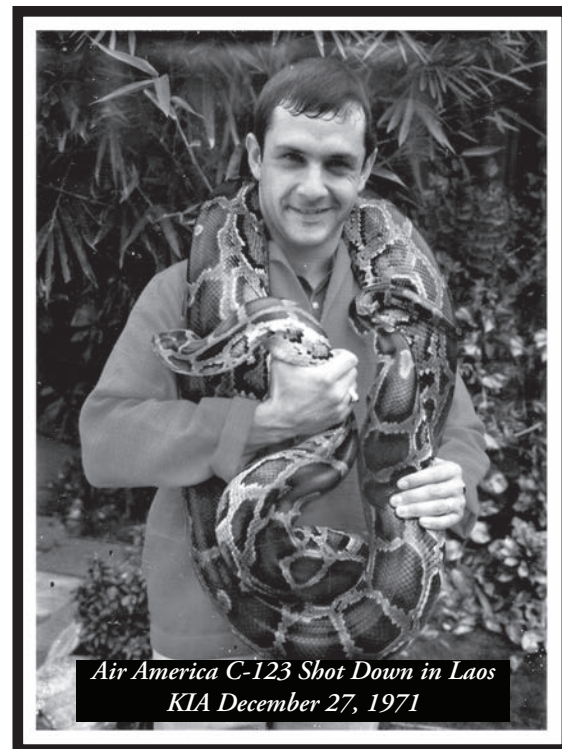
*Air America C-46 Shot Down in Laos
MIA September 5, 1963*

Eugene H. Debruin (MSO-59)



*Air America C-130 Hit Mountain in Laos
KIA April 10, 1970*

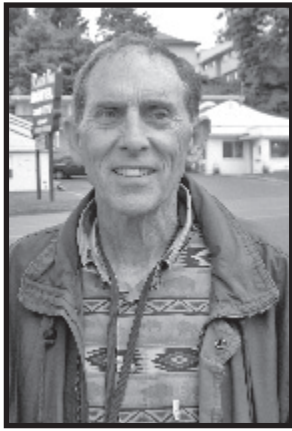
Billy K. Hester (MSO-58)



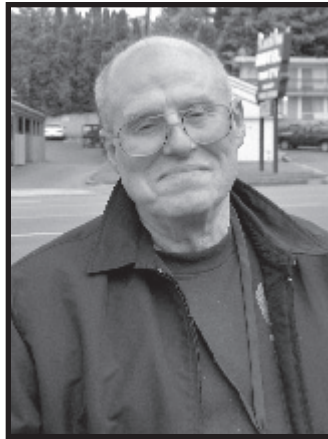
*Air America C-123 Shot Down in Laos
KIA December 27, 1971*

Edward J. Weissenback (CJ-64)

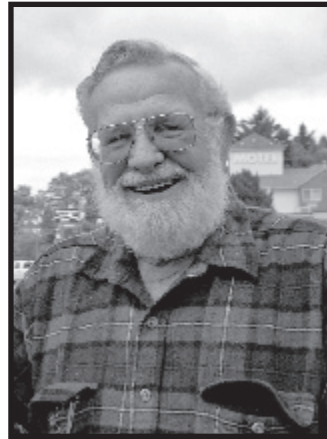
Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



Tom Butler (MSO-61)



Barry Reed (MSO-60)



Lou Banta (CJ-51)



Chuck Yeager (RAC-65)



Air America Reunion

Photos & Layout Design by [unclear]



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



*Air America Air Line
aka "K"*



John Manley (CJ-62)

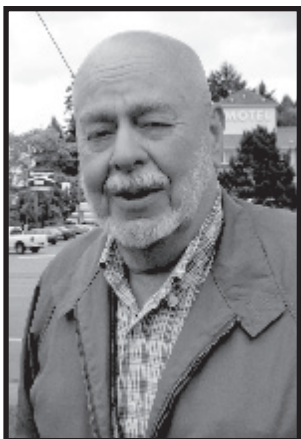


Charley Moseley (CJ-62)

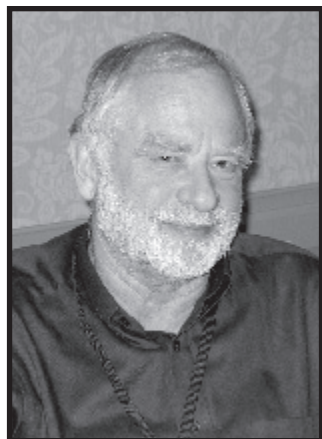


*Johnny Kirkley offers a toast from
the cup he purchased in 1967 at the*





Don Courtney (MSO-56)



Hal Ward (CJ-62)



Karl Seethaler (MSO-55)



Dale Stone (MYC-57)

ion Portland 2008

by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



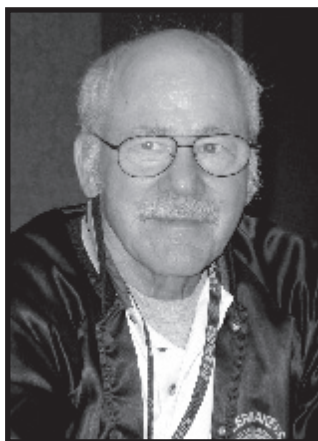
*Freight Specialist
"Pickers"*



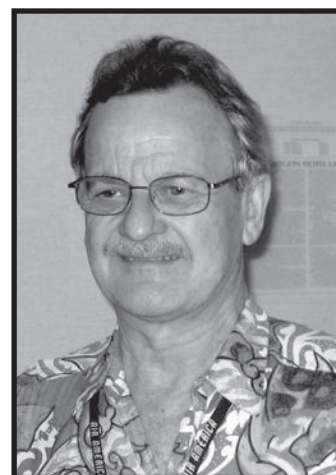
Hmong Dancers



*m a bottle of 17 year old scotch
Vientiane, Laos commissary*



Cliff Hamilton (CJ-62)



Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

Early Days With Air America

by Jack Cahill (Missoula '58)

When I was putting together the piece on the Long Cheng trip, I wanted to make it relative to past articles we have done on the smokejumper/CIA work done in Southeast Asia (SEA).

I immediately thought of the piece by Shep Johnson (MYC-56), "A More Than Interesting Life," Oct. 2004 Smokejumper, and one by Don Courtney (MSO-56), "And If You Find Out, I'll Have To Kill You," January 2000 Smokejumper.

The piece that Shep and I worked on developed over a period of months but is an excellent bit of history about the operation at Long Cheng and other projects involving smokejumpers.

I could read anything Don Courtney writes. He has only written two pieces that we have printed and both are great. "Did I mention that we were damned good looking?"

When I was talking (via email) with Ken Hessel (MYC-58) about the names of some of the jumpers who worked at Long Cheng, I got a couple emails from Jack Cahill (MSO-58). They contained a lot of good historical information that I felt needed to be put on paper. So, from Jack's emails, here's my best attempt. (Ed.)

I was initially recruited by Air America in early '61 as a kicker out of Thakli, Thailand, and stayed on for about 6-8 months before returning to the U.S. After a break I went to Marana, Arizona, and then to Vientiane, Laos, for three months. Our group consisted of Jack Wall (MSO-48), Shep Johnson (MYC-56), and "Paper Legs" Peterson (MYC-47) working out of Saigon and Da Nang in support of some Nung/Special Forces operations. There were two or three more groups of jumpers that rotated in behind us for about three months at a crack.

In late '62 I went to Udorn, Thailand, as an air-operations officer and then up to Long Cheng (LS-20A) as air-ops. Vint Lawrence (CIA, Princeton graduate, father in OSS) and Tony Poe (Anthony Poshepny, ex-WWII Marine involved in many SEA operations) plus, at times, Terry Burke (CIA Operative) were on site. We had a hooch up the hill from the runway that slept two-three people, quite primitive. We would stay for three to six weeks or more at a time, or as long as you could stand it. Then, off to Bangkok or wherever for a break.

Up-country air ops usually begin before sunup. I would walk the runway at LS-20A before the first

aircraft arrived. During the early activity at 20A, the runway was short, maybe 1000 feet. The touch-down point was slightly sloped uphill, then sharply uphill, then over the top and roll out. It would look like you were going to imbed yourself in the uphill portion once you made contact, keeps the heart going.

During the rainy season, the downhill portion of the runway would wash out, and you needed to be there to wave off the first aircraft and warn the other inbound aircraft of the problem. Initially, the support aircraft consisted of Helios, Caribous, and the H34 helicopter. Then Bird (Bird & Sons Airline) introduced the Porter and the Scottish Pioneer. I believe it was Air America that introduced the DO-28. Fuel, rice, humanitarian stuff, etc. came in on parachute or free fall in C-46 and C123.

Sam Thong (LS-20) was expanded to accept larger aircraft and a good usable road punched into 20A. Then the runway was expanded to the monster it became. I think I was at LS-36 when the new runway was introduced and never really worked ops out of the new 20A.

We met the inbound aircraft daily, offloaded and reloaded, usually dispatching to the most distant destinations first. As the day wore on, we worked in closer and closer so as to finish up a bit prior to dusk with the close-in sites. Some of the STOL (short takeoff and landing) aircraft would be dispatched to a further up country. The pilot was usually "topped off" and could be gone for half a day, or the better part of a day, if they had access to drummed fuel at the out site.

Usually an AA H34 crew would remain overnight at 20A for several days getting an early start at dawn. All STOL aircraft went south at dusk during my time.

George Smith (IDC-62) joined up a year or so later, and I went to Na Khang (LS-36). Talk about primitive—usually only myself—no other round eyes except for daytime flight crews. Occasionally Mike Lynch and maybe an Air America (AA) helicopter crew. AA did not like to remain overnight, but Mike was great at staying for a period of time.

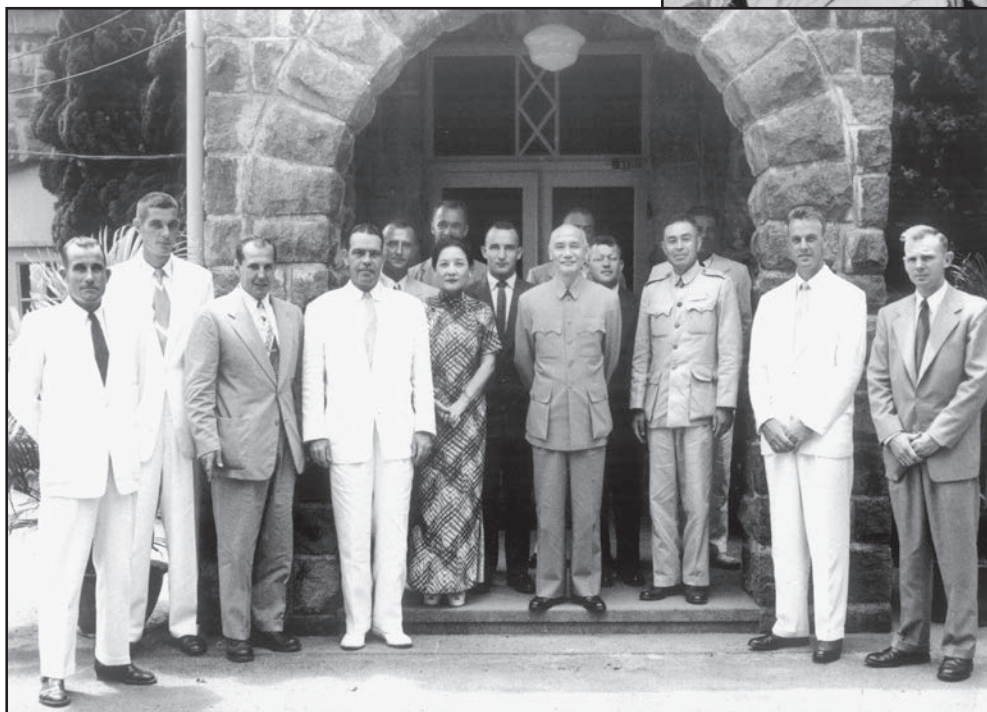
Operations out of LS-36 were much the same, but a lot more primitive. We could accept up to the Caribou. An occasional T28, that was hit and could not make it safely south, would land wheels up. I believe that at one time we had three of them adjacent to the runway.

The Air-Ops person was quite familiar with the terrain, the good/bad guy boundaries, the aircraft limitations, flight crew ability, and was able to match the mission with the asset at hand. Most of the area familiarization was accomplished by sitting in the left seat of a H34 and visiting the out sites and pass on what to expect to new flight crews. Communications were almost nonexistent and usually air-to-air. Sometime in mid '65 we received two VHF radios that helped a lot and probably kept some of the flight crews out of harms way when they strayed off course.

Eventually, the Jolly Greens positioned at LS-36 would leave just before sunset then return the next day. Later on, they also remained over night. **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58) relieved me in late '65 or early '66 and then I was history. 🇺🇸



*Above. Limasite 58 in 1965
L-R Standing: Sgt. Sun
(Paru), Capt. Deja Paru),
Jack Cahill. Kneeling: Edgar
"Pop" Buel. (Courtesy J.
Cahill)*



*Below. Historic photo from
early '60s. L-R: Vang Pao,
Jack Mathews (MSO-48)
Kong Lee. (Courtesy Roger
Warner)*

*Above. Taiwan Mission Smokejumpers: Air-
borne training staff pictured with Generalis-
simo and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. L-R:
Herman Ball (MSO-50) 2nd from left, Jack
Mathews (MSO-48) between Madame and
Chiang Kai-Shek, Jack Wall (MSO-48) two
back of Gen. Chiang just part of head visible,
Gar Thorsrud (MSO-46) 2nd from right in
white suit, Lyle Grenager (MSO-48) far right
next to Thorsrud. (Courtesy L. Grenager)*



And If You Find Out, I'll Have To Kill You

by Don Courtney (Missoula '56)

There was a time when certain jumpers coming back in the spring for another fire season were greeted with, "Where ya been? Secret mission for the CIA?"

You weren't supposed to say where you'd been, of course. We usually said that we'd been working in Alaska or Maine or some other place out of the way. Which was a pretty dumb thing to say when you were tan from the waist up, had jungle rot on your feet and were twenty pounds below your best weight. Whatever the cover story, it drew a big smirk, "Har, Har, Har!"

It got so that we'd just smirk back and say, "Can't tell you. And if you find out, I'll have to kill you." The first part was true and the second part was balderdash. But it usually got an uneasy laugh, the subject got dropped, and we'd get on with the fire season.

All the coyness was more than just a game or a fireline joke. A covert operation is like a premature baby: the odds are stacked heavily against it from the very start. The baby needs an incubator if it is to live, and without the incubator, the baby dies. The covert operation needs secrecy and without secrecy, the covert operation gets stomped and dies. Since the operation is built around people, a lot of human beings get stomped and die, as well.

CIA specifically invited/recruited smokejumpers into the covert operations business for several reasons: 1) We were damned good looking. 2) We didn't get airsick. 3) Off season, most of us weren't doing much anyway. 4) We were strong and fit. 5) We knew a lot about parachutes and about throwing people and things out of airplanes. 6) We were not active duty military, so our direct involvement in an affair of arms didn't constitute an official act of war. 7) We weren't trained to work by the book and could improvise. 8) We didn't need heavy supervision on the job. 9) We were deniable; that is, if the President chose to say he'd never heard of us, he could do so and get away with it, maybe. And 10) Did I mention that we were damned good looking?

The money was good. Not like winning the lottery, but plenty good. I don't remember what it was, but I do recall that it was about a Major's/GS-11's pay. There was danger pay on top of that, so much an hour for the time spent over unhealthy territory. It was all taxed, more than a major's pay was taxed, because less of it was tax deductible. The deal was, you filed your taxes on everything except your secret stuff and sent it off. You then handed



Don Courtney (Courtesy D. Courtney)

copies of your tax forms to your case officer (your CIA contact/boss), and sometime later, he handed you back some tax forms in another name, which you signed in that name, and came up with some more tax money. Every dime of it. No breaks.

In the early days, the CIA connection took the form of short-term contracts: employer not named on paper, no copy of the contract left in the employee's hand. You'd work a couple of months, and then go away and get called back a few month later. Or not, depending. The job was by invitation only, a phone call in the night. Jumpers already on the job had blackball control over who was added to the crew, which was very small. If a name came up and somebody didn't want to work with that guy, he never got called. It was spooky, fun stuff. "Can't tell you where you're going, can't tell you who you're working for, can't tell you what you'll be doing."

For example: First class (!) tickets to Tokyo, the name of a hotel, a phone number to call. More first class tickets to Okinawa, another phone number to call. Onto an Air Force C-130 wearing Air Force flight suits. Off that airplane into 110-degree temperature, 98 percent humidity, condensation dripping off the cold C-130 making the ramp slippery. Met by a guy who says, "Welcome! While you're here, don't tell anybody where you are or who you're working for or what you're doing." And I just couldn't help it. "Where are we," I asked, "and who are we working for and what are we doing?" And honest to God, I'm not making this up, but he answered, "I can't tell you." We all laughed like hell, but he meant it. He was a very good guy, by the way, very sincere and dedicated.

We got used to it. I remember getting shot at by a 12.7 mm gun and reporting the gun's location when we got back. Three or four days later when we were getting ready to go back to the same area, I knocked on the door of the ops room to ask, "Where was that gun, again?" The kid in there told me, "I can't tell you that." I knew that he would say that! We all growled and bitched and laughed about it. We weren't supposed to know ANYTHING, and no one was supposed to tell us anything. There was a very good and simple reason for this because there was a distinct possibility that we'd get shot down and captured. What you don't know, you can't tell. Nothing personal. You have to keep the incubator intact while the baby develops and grows.

There was a lot of hard work, long hours and some danger. It was great fun. Then, somebody did get shot down. The casualty rate of our little smokejumper crew suddenly became about that of an infantry unit in the first wave across the beach. Some Air Force puke, a major, said, "Well, that's what they get paid for." Some smokejumpers did a dance on his head, and he got transferred.

After the funerals, a carload of us driving back to Missoula decided that we'd had enough and were finished with this stuff. Never again, no way. We all agreed and shook hands on it. But every one of us went back again that fall. This time we knew that we were mortal. We

were dead serious. Those first losses were just that, only the first.

Some of us worked awhile and then left. Others stayed for years, moving into various other corners of the clandestine world. CIA worked us hard but treated us fairly. Over the years, we were always tired, frequently angry and sometimes scared. But we were never bored. Wherever we were in the agency, we tended for the most part to stick together and to look after one another - an unofficial smokejumpers' protective society. As smokejumpers within the agency culture, we were respected. There remain to this day identifiable traces of the smokejumper influence upon CIA's operations and attitudes.

We weren't an outlaw mob (a Wild Bunch, maybe). We weren't a wart-on-the-butt of the smokejumper organization. We weren't mercenaries. You don't have to have a Pulaski in your hand or a uniform on your back in order to pay your dues and serve your country with honor.

Some of us were old when we finally got back to the mountains and forests where we started. Some of us - perhaps 20 or 25 percent of us - didn't get back at all. 🍄

As required by law, the above article was reviewed by the CIA and approved for publication as containing no currently classified information.

Air America-It's A Pay Issue!

by Charley Moseley (Cave Junction '62)

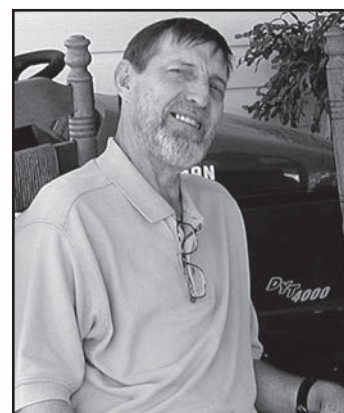
In 1966 Tom Greiner (MSO-55) told me he had a bad problem, which needed to be discussed at an upcoming "kicker" meeting, and that he was scheduled to be away on a Special Ops mission. He lobbied me hard to do him a favor. His monthly pay was less than others due to limited flying time in Special Ops. Less money was a horrible situation for Tom. I agreed to do the favor and bring it up at the meeting.

The meeting occurred in the parachute loft and was handled by Bobby Herald (MSO-55) our #1 kicker who never left anyone in doubt of who was in charge. Everything went smooth, brief and just right. And then the question: "Does anyone have anything else to bring up?" It is quiet and several pair of eyes look my way. I wanted to leave but had made a promise to Tom.

Bobby is shrugging his shoulders and getting ready to leave when I raise my hand and say, "Bob, Tom Greiner asked me to raise the question of unequal pay——." Wham! Louie Banta (CJ-51) slams his hand down

on the table and explodes right across the room up to my nose. Louie is the first C.J. jumper to work for Air America and the #2 kicker, tough and intense. He's cussing me out and I'm wondering why? I thought Bobby did the scheduling. He was the man. Wrong.

I had raised an issue that was a real festering sore and everyone had an opinion. Most were pissed off. Sucking swamp water is not one of my long suits. My ire quickly matched Lou's. The room exploded with people grabbing Lou and me, milling around, angry



Charley Moseley (Courtesy Johnny Kirkley)

as a lynch mob. The Air America boar was rocking.

What was to have been a brief meeting went on into the night. As other kickers straggled in from their missions, Bobby had to stop and explain what was happening. Every now and then, he looked over at me and raised his eyebrows as if asking, “Why?”

Finally, a kicker (not to be named) cuts off Bobby. He is our only USAF certified loadmaster and leader of the “one flight per night” big bird operations. His paychecks were the lowest of low, he is pissed but had a much better plan worked out. He eventually became head kicker.

Lou and I never said another word. My career with

Air America was over but I faked it for a few months. Paycheck went to hell. I’m admitted to law school and on my way home.

Years later at the Air American “Kickers” Reunion in Oregon, a voice unheard in 36 years is right next to me. We turn towards each other as if on cue. He is laughing at some joke, happy and with a neat, pure white beard, enjoying himself immensely. Hell, he was much like me, hoping each night to see another day.

It seemed so natural and easy to shake hands, chat a few moments and let hatred slide. Maybe the goddamn war is over. 🙏

BOOK REVIEWS

KICKERS, A NOVEL OF THE SECRET WAR

BY PATRICK LEE (MYC-56)

Review by Carl Gidlund
(Missoula '58)

HERE’S A NOVEL that will resonate with jumpers of the ’50s and ’60s and those of later generations who have an interest in smoke-jumper history. It’s a story about some of the 92 smokejumpers – by the count of author **Patrick Lee** (MYC-56) – who were recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency to “kick” cargo from aircraft to the Hmong warriors of Laos battling the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese, while the rest of us were distracted by the war in Vietnam.

Seven of our brothers were killed in that secret war, again by the author’s count, and that amounts to an attrition rate of about 10 percent, about as bad as it gets in many combat outfits.

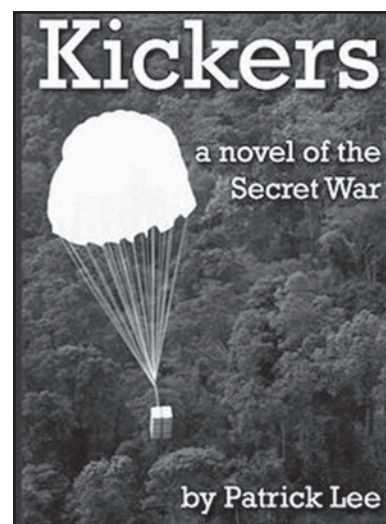
As noted in the title of the book, it is a novel, a fictional depiction of the war pieced together by Lee, who was not personally involved, but based on the reminiscences of jumpers who were. Those include **Ray Beasley** (MYC-52), **Dick Graham** (IDC-58), **Glenn Hale** (MYC-57), **Ken Hessel**

(MYC-58), **Shep Johnson** (MYC-56), **Larry Moore** (IDC-59), **Toby Scott** (MYC-57), **Woody Spence** (MYC-58), **Rocky Stone** (MYC-57) and **T.J. Thompson** (MSO-55).

The book’s characters include the real names of ’50s- and ’60s-era jumpers, but the roles and dialogue assigned them don’t necessarily correspond to the jobs they performed or the way they actually talked.

The reader will find **Richard “Paperlegs” Peterson** (MYC-47), **Roland “Big Andy” Andersen** (GAC-52), **Max Allen** (MSO-48), **Wayne Webb** (MYC-46) and a squad of others, most of them McCall jumpers, since that’s the base from which the author jumped for two seasons and from whose personnel he obtained most of the information.

In his recounting of the secret war, Lee focuses on three main protagonists – Dog, Charlie and Thanasis. They’re buddies, and he takes them from their days as ground pounders, through their training at McCall, their smoke-



jumping experiences from that base, then their recruitment by the CIA, and eventual deployment to Southeast Asia.

He presents both macro and micro views of the Laotian war, from the perspectives of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and other high-ranking figures from their administrations, including the CIA, down to the experiences of individual jumpers. It’s obvious that Lee did extensive research since he not only recounts the experiences

of his main characters, but also follows the twists and turns of U.S. policy in his macro observations.

Perhaps for simplification of the complicated story, the author takes a few liberties with actual facts. He implies that Thai police paratroop units, the PARUs, were used in road watch programs throughout the war, and that Thai T-28 pilots were also deployed throughout the conflict.

In reality, both sets of Thai warriors were used primarily as trainers and withdrawn when comparable Laotian organizations were brought up to speed. Laotian and Meo pilots actually flew ground support, many on targets that were found and reported by Lao and Meo guerillas. They were officers in the Royal Lao Air Force,

and most of them flew until they were killed.

Those who actually fought with the lowland special guerrilla units characterize them as excellent soldiers, contrary to Lee's description of them. At one point he characterizes Meo warriors as Montagnards, which they were not, and he has the jumpers on occasion using radio "10" codes, which they did not use in that theater.

Finally, in the author's note following his narrative, he writes that **John Lewis** (MYC-53) and **Darrell Eubanks** (IDC-54), the jumpers to whom he dedicated the book, were the first smokejumpers to die in the Laos War. They were indeed the first McCall jumpers to die, but he omits mention of **Dave Bevan** (MSO-55), a Missoula jumper

who also died in the same plane crash, Aug. 13, 1961.

Lee's graphic descriptions of the jumpers' lifestyles in Southeast Asia, including their drinking, fighting and whoring, probably negate any possibility that this book will be gifted to a spouse or family members of the men actually deployed as kickers. For them, however, it might be worth purchasing as a pseudo-history of an exciting and dangerous chapter in their lives.

Don't expect to come away from *Kickers* smiling. Just as the secret war ended in defeats for the U.S. policy and actions, the principal actors in this drama come to sad endings – dead, captive and crazy. But you'll have to read the book to learn their individual fates. 🍄

NEW BOOK EXAMINES MYSTERIOUS LIFE, DEATH OF JERRY DANIELS

by **Kim Briggeman**

(Copyright 2013, *The Missoulian*,
Missoula, Mont.)

UNLIKE SCORES OF people in western Montana, Gayle Morrison never knew **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58). But she figured she had his story pegged long ago.

"I thought the book was done 10 years ago," Morrison said last week in Missoula, on the eve of the release of *Hog's Exit: Jerry Daniels, the Hmong, and the CIA*.

She'd spent years in California recording interviews with the Hmong who Daniels had lived and fought alongside in the 1960s and '70s, during the U.S. government's secret war in Laos.

Most of those Hmong had been at an elaborate three-day funeral ceremony held for Daniels in Missoula in 1982 – all the while questioning whether his body was inside the sealed casket

sent home from Bangkok.

In researching her first book, *Sky Is Falling*, about the CIA's evacuation of the Hmong from Laos in 1975, Morrison had visited a refugee camp in Thailand where Daniels had orchestrated the resettlement of thousands of Hmong to America.

She had drawn out recollections of Daniels' fellow CIA operatives and tracked down State Department documents and letters that revealed Daniels' vital role in Laos during the Vietnam War. She had ample fodder for a captivating book.

Then she visited Missoula.

"I came just to see some of the places people mentioned in the book," Morrison said. "I wanted to tour the jump base and see the Oxford, and the Clark Fork River, and the Higgins Bridge. I wasn't planning on coming back."

Fate intervened, for Morrison and her book.

She met a smokejumper, the late **Tim Eldridge** (MSO-82), and fell in love.

"And I found out from Tim that there was a whole bunch of mostly retired – but not all of them retired – smokejumpers who had known Jerry, and it was like, oh, there's a whole other pool of people," she said.

A decade later, after dozens more interviews and a major edit to get it down to a manageable 500 pages, *Hog's Exit* is ready for public consumption. The first copies arrived in area bookstores July 25.

Eldridge was just 52 when he died in 2009 of complications from liver disease. But Morrison keeps coming back to Missoula, where she's bought a home in the South Hills and where friends,

both American and Hmong from Daniels' "other" life, are always around.

We crawled through those years of Khrushchev and Kennedy, Hanoi and My Lai, Neil Armstrong and Woodstock, Kent State, Patty Hearst, Agent Orange, Watergate, and all our own incidents and accidents.

Jerry "Hog" Daniels had an opinion on it all, you can be sure.

He was one of us, but there weren't many like him – a U.S. Forest Service smokejumper at age 17, the year before he graduated from Missoula County High School in 1959, and a cargo kicker in Laos for the Central Intelligence Agency's Air America by the time he was 20.

Daniels became the CIA's closest liaison to Vang Pao and the fierce-fighting Hmong, who for 13 years warded off communist forces in the mountains of northern Laos.

He returned home often enough to earn a degree from the University of Montana in 1969.

He was dead in Thailand at 40.

Daniels was as fascinating, provocative, mysterious, ribald and heroic a figure as Missoula and Helmville ever produced.

The bulk of *Hog's Exit* consists of excerpts from all those interviews and reminiscences, each one adding a new wrinkle to his persona. How to sum it all up?

"You can't," Morrison said. "In some ways he was a different person with different groups. I don't consider him a changeling, in that the people he knew as a high-school student and a young man, he continued to interact with in that same easy, goofy, frivolous manner throughout the rest of his life.

"When they got together, that's what they did: shoot the

bull and carouse and drink beer. They didn't ever get serious about anything."

Morrison saw another side of "Hog" first-hand. Her background in the Hmong experience comes from years of work in refugee resettlement at the Lao Family Community in Santa Ana, Calif., where her co-workers were all Hmong.

"I think it was 1981, the year before he died," she said. "He came to Lao Family to talk to the General (Vang Pao). I had no idea who he was, but he came up the stairs, very serious looking, and he was surrounded by probably 50 of what would have been previous Hmong soldiers. So this was somebody of some great stature."

The mob swept past her desk.

"He never made eye contact, just swooshed into the General's office. I asked, 'Who is that guy?'"

She was familiar with all the "players" stateside, Morrison said. But Daniels had come straight from Thailand.

"Of course, everybody wanted to see him; everybody wanted to talk to him. Every Hmong in the United States wanted to talk to him," she said. "So I asked who he was, and the receptionist said, 'You don't know? That's Mr. Jerry.'"

Morrison wasn't impressed at the time.

"I'd seen too many wannabe spooks (CIA agents) who would insinuate themselves into the Hmong communities and play up who they had been," she said. "I had seen these guys come waltzing through Lao Family and I didn't trust them and didn't care for their acts, and so I thought this was another one. But, no, Jerry was the real deal."

The Hmong thought so.



Gayle Morrison and Tim Eldridge (MSO-82) (Courtesy G. Morrison)

U.S. forces evacuated 7,000 Americans and Vietnamese after the fall of Saigon on April 29-30, 1975. It was up to Daniels to orchestrate secret airlifts of Hmong from Laos to Thailand in the ensuing weeks as enemy forces closed in.

He's credited with saving Vang Pao and 2,500 Hmong leaders and their families in those dramatic days. Afterward, his position among the Hmong, whom he'd come to love, made him uniquely qualified as an ethnic affairs officer for the U.S. State Department to screen refugees who merited asylum in the United States.

The initial surge of refugees into western Montana in the late 1970s, after Laos fell to the communists, was the handiwork of Daniels in Thailand, with ample assistance from his mother, Louise, in Missoula.

"Without him there would not have been a Hmong refugee resettlement program in the United States. I'm pretty sure about that," Morrison said.

"They respected him," she added, "because he never lied to them."

“That is huge,” said Morrison. “Whatever he said, they could firmly believe and take action on. He was willing to take every risk that they were taking. He lived with them, he met them as equals, and he did not pull the ‘Great White Father’ act. They totally respected him for that, and he respected them for their skills.”

The title *Hog’s Exit* refers to the code name Daniels gave himself, and to his reported death 31 years ago. The official cause given for the latter was carbon monoxide poisoning from a leaky water heater in his Bangkok apartment.

Morrison’s sources provide a detailed picture of the controversy and offer a broad spectrum of opinions about what “really happened.” Many Hmong believe Daniels’ body wasn’t in the sealed casket. There are those who believe he was killed for national security reasons, others who claim suicide, and some who think he didn’t die that April day in 1982 at all.

For several years, two of Jerry’s brothers, the Hmong and others have discussed having his coffin at the Missoula Cemetery exhumed to see what’s inside. So far it hasn’t been done.

In the book’s oral-history format, Morrison offers none of her own speculation. But ask her and she’ll point to the fierce loyalty Daniels had for the Hmong and his legion of friends and family in Montana, a loyalty that was usually returned. Had he survived, Daniels would be 72 years old. Morrison says she feels confident that he would have been in touch with somebody – “if he were able to.”

She framed “Hog’s Exit” with the first complete English account of the elaborate Hmong funeral process in Missoula and

the Blackfoot Valley.

“I wanted to give equal weight to the Hmong voices and the Hmong importance of that funeral as I did to the American voices and the stories that they were telling about Jerry,” she said.

The oral-history snippets bounce back and forth from the three-day funeral at the Mountain View Mortuary on South Russell Street and the burial at the Missoula Cemetery to raunchy stories about drinking binges, trips to the brothels of Wallace, Idaho, and riding bucking water buffalo at the Hmong military base in Laos that Daniels reportedly dubbed “Sky.”

Daniels was 10, with three older brothers, when Louise and Bob Daniels moved the family from San Francisco to Helmsville in 1951. They opened a restaurant and stayed two years before moving into Missoula. Jerry and his brothers never lost the connection to the Blackfoot country.

Kent Daniels of Florence is one of three surviving brothers. He was two years older than Jerry and the sibling closest to him growing up. He and his family became good friends of Morrison as she researched the book.

His sons, Deeder and Farrett, knew their Uncle Jerry well, as well as many of the Hmong who settled in these parts. Those initially included Vang Pao and his family, who bought a farm in the Bitterroot before moving to California. Farrett Daniels penned a moving tribute to Vang Pao and his relationship with Jerry that Morrison read at the general’s funeral in Fresno, Calif., in 2011 (a video of which is attached to this story on www.missoulian.com).

Kent added his own tribute at the end.

“I’m pretty sure,” he wrote for

Morrison to read, “that VP and Jerry’s spirits are having a grand time, wherever they may be.”

Kent and **Jack Daniels** (MSO-54) provided Morrison and Texas Tech University Press with most of the 100 photos in the book. Three are of the medals the family was presented after Jerry’s death on his behalf at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va.

Jack has a photo of the occasion. It shows then-CIA director William Casey standing with the family, his arm hooked in Jack’s.

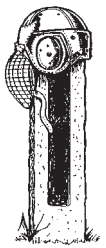
Ten years ago Jack Daniels, a world-renowned running coach in New York and a two-time Olympic medalist in the modern pentathlon, filed a Freedom of Information Act with the CIA for records pertaining to Jerry’s service and death.

Morrison chose to end the text of *Hog’s Exit* with the reply Jack got from Robert Herman, information and privacy coordinator for the agency.

“I regret that we are unable to assist you,” Herman wrote, “but trust that you can appreciate the fact that this agency, which is responsible for the clandestine collection of foreign intelligence and the clandestine conduct of foreign intelligence operations, cannot confirm the existence or extent of information that would divulge the identity of an unacknowledged employee.”

Herman said he must be consistent in the practice to “neither confirm nor deny the past or present affiliation of individuals with the CIA – unless their CIA affiliation already has been officially acknowledged.”

It’s left to researchers like Morrison to piece together the stories of “Hog” and the CIA’s secret war in Laos. And it’s left to the rest of us to speculate whether such stories are things of America’s past. 🐼



Off The List

Remember and honor fellow jumpers with a gift to the NSA Good Samaritan Fund in their name. Hard times can fall on many of us at any time. The NSA is here to support our fellow jumpers and their families through the Good Samaritan Fund. Mail your contribution to:

Chuck Sheley
10 Judy Lane
Chico, CA 95926

Henry “Hank” McCutchen (Missoula ’65)

Hank, 76, died Jan. 3, 2014, in Fort Collins, Colorado, after a brief battle with cancer.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in Zoology from Oklahoma State University, a master’s degree in Biology from Montana State University, and a doctorate in Biology from Colorado State University.

Hank worked for nearly 40 years as a ranger, management biologist, and as a research scientist for the National Park Service, as well as a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Forest Service.

Hank jumped at Missoula during the 1965 season, later serving on the staff of a regional fire incident command team.

As a research scientist, his major interest was in the assessment and restoration of large animal populations in the national parks. Hank lived and worked in a number of national parks, including Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Zion, Prince William Forest and Rocky Mountain. He retired from Joshua Tree National Park in 2004.

In the parks he conducted research on mountain sheep, elk, pronghorn antelope, black bears and grizzly bears. He specialized in their capture, marking, and radio-collaring for subsequent population and ecological research.

In addition to assignments in the National Parks, he was stationed at Colorado State University and at Northern Arizona University as a federal research scientist and coordinator with faculty adjunct appointments. He also served for several years as the regional ecologist and consultant for 41 national parks of a six-state region in Denver.

Thomas D. Oswald (Missoula ’58)

Tom died Jan 12, 2014, in Canton, Ohio, at the age of 74. He jumped from Missoula 1958 through 1963, with details to New Mexico and Alaska while working his way through Wittenberg and Kent State Universities, from which he earned bachelors and masters degrees in education. He was born in Canton May 9, 1939, and married his lifelong friend and companion, the former Karen Kesling, on May 20, 1961.

Tom taught in Canton city schools for 35 years and after retirement became a technology trainer for Public Broadcast Service (associated with Kent State) in Kent, Ohio. For the past six years, he was an NSA trail crew volunteer in Idaho, Montana, and West Virginia and was also a volunteer on the Ohio Erie Canal Towpath Trail. His hobbies included golf, reading, watching sports, and spending time with his family. In addition to his wife, Tom leaves four children, Tracy Pope, Kyla Cromer, Kelsi Barnhart and Toby Oswald, plus nine grandchildren.

The brochure distributed by his family and the funeral home features a photo of Tom in smokejumper gear in front of a Johnson Flying Service DC-3. He requested that memorial contributions be made in his name to the NSA’s Good Samaritan Fund, 10 Judy Lane, Chico, Calif. Personal condolences may be sent to the family in care of Mrs. Karen Oswald, 1004 Pine Ridge Parkway, Strasburg, Ohio 44680.

Fredrick Paul “Fritz” Schilling (Missoula ’49)

Fritz, 85, was born Dec. 3, 1928, in Missoula, Montana, and died Jan. 1, 2014, in Boise, Idaho, after a year’s battle with deteriorating health and an auto accident Dec. 29 outside of Boise.

Fritz graduated from Montana State College with a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering and went to work in Idaho Falls. He returned to MSC, completing a doctorate in chemical engineering in 1959.

He worked at Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, first in the nuclear reactor program, then in the computing group where he was privileged to be on a team that traveled to Honeywell to test a computer prior to buying it. The team was allowed to work on the machine in the evenings because during the day it was for display to other prospective buyers.

The Honeywell engineers started to stay around in the evenings because they had not seen how buyers were using the computers they were making, and this was their first opportunity to see one programmed for control and data logging.

Fritz worked for many years as the group leader of the Los Alamos non-weapons engineering group. He

advanced to deputy division leader in WX and retired in 1990.

Fritz jumped at Missoula in the 1949-50 seasons. He was friends with all the smokejumpers killed in the Mann Gulch Fire Aug. 5, 1949; his picture is on the cover of the book *Young Men and Fire* by Norman Maclean.

Fritz was active in the ski patrol at Pajarito Mountain. He continued his service in Silver Gate, Montana, by joining the search-and-rescue team and helping the Forest Service spot out-of-bounds snowmobilers.

Elmer Huston (Idaho City '52)

Elmer, 88, died January 9, 2014, in Caldwell, Idaho. He started working for U.S. Forest Service at 16, and then entered training at 17 with the Navy at NTS Farragut, Idaho. He served on the USS Mifflin during World War II and was honorably discharged in May 1946. Elmer witnessed the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima. Upon his return he continued with the Forest Service until he retired in 1976 after 31 years of service, which included working with his wife on Thunderbolt Lookout as newlyweds in 1949. Elmer jumped from Idaho City in the 1952 and 1954 seasons, and was a fire-control officer in the Idaho forests for 19 years. Elmer was an enthusiastic pilot and built two airplanes of his own.

Melvin E. "Moe" Berrien

Moe, 84, of Hayfork, California, died January 10, 2014. He was a Korean War veteran serving in the Army from 1951-53 and re-enlisting and serving in France until his discharge in 1955. He then began his USFS career as a fire crewman at Trinity Center on the Shasta-Trinity N.F.

Moe was on the original crew that started the Redding Smokejumper Base in 1957 and trained at Cave Junction before coming south. He jumped the '57 season and transferred to other USFS fire positions in the Shasta-T and El Dorado National Forests. His last position was as a fire prevention officer on the Hayfork Ranger District.

He retired from the Hayfork Ranger District in 1983 after 30 years, and then continued working in a volunteer capacity for another 30 years. The majority of the volunteer time involved inventorying and maintaining signs and gates on the road systems all over the "Trinity side" of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

William "Bill" Hamilton (Missoula '49)

Bill, 85, died Jan. 29, 2014, in East Wenatchee, Washington. He joined the U.S. Army after graduating from high school, qualifying for jump school,

and eventually becoming a paratrooper in an airborne battalion. Bill attended Wenatchee Valley College and transferred to Washington State College. After earning his bachelor's degree, he studied law at the University of Washington. He formed the Hamilton, Lynch & Kuntz law firm and later served as municipal court judge for 15 years. Bill also owned apple and cherry orchards. After retiring from the legal profession, Bill moved to Carson City, Nevada, in the late 1980s to help a friend launch a business; he remained there until returning to Wenatchee in 2001. While in Nevada, Bill volunteered to help build water collectors for bighorn sheep and other wildlife. He also coached and judged youth debate teams. Bill jumped at Missoula during the 1949-51 seasons.

Dale Matlack (Pilot)

Dale died March 21, 2014. He graduated from Colorado A&M with a degree in Forestry. Following college, Dale became a pilot in the USAF. This introduction to aviation influenced everything he did for the rest of his life. In 1964, he returned to active duty with the US Coast Guard.

Following his military obligation, he accepted an assignment with the US Forest Service as a Safety and Training Officer, retiring in 1989, returning to Boise to live.

Calvin A. Hilty (Cave Junction '43)

Calvin, 94, died March 24, 2014, in Strathmore, CA. He was raised in Missouri, the son of a Menonite minister, and was one of the original CPS-103 smokejumpers. He moved to California and farmed in the Central Valley area. Calvin is survived by his wife of 68 years, Arline. The ranks of the CPS-103 jumpers are growing thin.

Lloyd L. Reesman (Missoula '58)

Lloyd of Corvallis, MT, died April 6, 2014. He graduated from the University of Montana majoring in forestry. Lloyd jumped three seasons at Missoula before working a combined 32 years on the Helena, Bitterroot and Flathead National Forests. He participated in establishing the boundaries of the Scapegoat Wilderness Area.

Oliver W. Petty (Missoula '43)

Oliver, 99, died April 6, 2014, in Albany, Oregon. After attending Eugene Bible College he graduated from Oregon State with a degree in forestry management in 1940. He was a conscientious objector during WWII and was in the first group of CO's to train as smokejumpers in 1943. He jumped all three years of

the CPS-103 program and finished with 39 jumps.

Oliver was a beekeeper after the war and established Fairview Apiaries also known as Gibson Hill Honey Farm. He was ahead of his times in the field and was instrumental in convincing farmers to rent bees to improve their crop yields. Oliver was a member of the American Beekeepers Assoc. for over 60 years and extensively traveled abroad.

Robert C. Kersh (Pioneer Redding Loft Foreman)

Bob died February 25, 2014, 91-years old in the home he built himself in Redding California. A fifth generation Californian with roots in the Gold Country, he was in the CCC in the late 1930s in the Mt. Lassen-Redding area. In WWII he served in the USMC at the Battles of Midway and Saipan and trained recruits at Camp Lejeune in advanced infantry training for the impending invasion of Japan (called off with surrender).

In the early 1950s working the paracargo depot and smokejumper spike base in downtown Redding, Bob was instrumental in the formation of the Redding

Smokejumpers in 1957, then the design and building of the Redding Airport Smokejumper Base in the early 1960's - much of it himself.

Meticulous with attention to detail, Bob trained generations of Redding Smokejumpers in all aspects: from the training units, jumping, woodsmanship including timber falling, and the parachute loft. He was immensely proud of his smokejumpers, imbuing "Poags" (Redding Rookies) and experienced jumpers with his unique "character building" as well as can-do attitude of doing the best job possible, even with the limited resources typical of the smokejumper mission. The Detailer and "Retread" Programs of the 1960s and 1970s spread Bob's positive influence throughout the USFS California Region 5, lasting to this day.

Charles E. Moseley (Cave Junction '62)

Charley, 73, died April 8, 2014, in Mobile, Alabama. He was a graduate of the University of Alabama Business School in 1963 and the School of Law in 1969. Charley was a scholarship track athlete at Alabama setting several SEC records and placing in the NCAA Track Championships in 1962 in the

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long jump and high hurdles. In 1963 he received the Friedman Award as the Crimson Tide's best all-around athlete.

He jumped in Cave Junction and was a member of the first jumper crew at Redmond in 1964. Charley then spent several years with Air America as a "kicker" before finishing up his smokejumper career in Fairbanks. In the last 15 years he had been working in Oklahoma in the Wildcat Oil Industry.

Ernest J. Longanecker (NCSB-70)

Ernie, age 66, died unexpectedly in his sleep of a heart attack on April 13, 2014, at the home of his sister in Okanogan, WA. He rookied at NCSB in 1970, the year of the big bust, where he jumped

through the 1974 season. He made 105 USFS jumps, about a dozen jumps in the 101st and 85th Airborne Divisions. For his bravery in Vietnam he was awarded the Silver Star (with valor) medal. Ernie earned a BA degree and an MBA from Eastern Washington State College. After smokejumping he worked in the aluminum production industry at Kaiser Aluminum and later as an independent aluminum broker, in Spokane, WA, where he lived since leaving smokejumping. He enjoyed his extensive travel throughout the world for his work and for fun. Ernie skydived, built and flew ultra-light airplanes, hangglided and drove flashy sports cars way too fast. He was wonderfully witty, and he enjoyed his family, friends and life to the fullest. 🙏



SOUNDING OFF from the editor



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

I USUALLY LIKE to have a single issue to deal with for this column, but it doesn't always work out that way. This is one of those cases where I'm going to cover some bits and pieces.

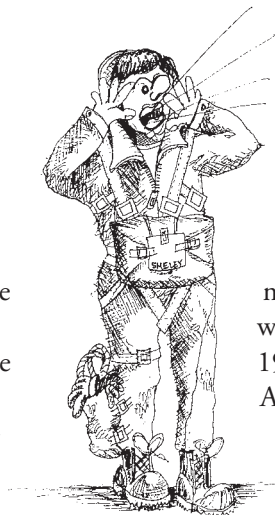
On April 8th a lot of us lost a good friend when **Charley Moseley** (CJ-62) died after heart surgery in Mobile, Alabama. Charley had been having heart issues for some years and, even though this did not come as a complete surprise, it still hurts to

lose a friend.

I still remember the first day I met Charley during breakfast at Cave Junction in 1962. I was a young Track & Field Coach at that time and wore the three-stripped Adidas running flats, long before they became popular. This rookie comes walking in the door with the same type of shoe and I assumed that we must have another "trackster" in the Gobi establishment.

After introducing myself, I told him that three of us were driving up to Eugene after work on Friday to attend the NCAA Track & Field Championships over the weekend and he was invited to come along.

Charley said that he actually had to go up on Thursday as he was participating in this National Championship meet. I guess I should have had an idea as he was built and cut like a racehorse.



Well, we saw Charley run 14.4 in the 110M hurdles and long jump over 25 feet, taking 4th in both events for the University of Alabama that weekend.

He went off to Redmond and what he thought were "greener pastures" in 1964, and I ran into him in Alaska in 1969 after he had come back from a stint with Air America in Laos. As with so many people, the NSA has

been the conduit in putting us back in touch with each other. I've seen Charley at Cave Jct. and other base reunions during the past ten years.

Somehow I got sideways with Charley this past year, and I have no idea what I did to get on his bad list. His best friend, **Johnny Kirkley** (CJ-64), fellow track star at Alabama and *Smokejumper* Photo Editor, told me not to take it too seriously—the medications that Charley was on changed him and it wasn't really Charley speak-

ing at times.

Besides being the best all-around athlete that I've ever seen, he was a good friend and a real character. Seems like most smokejumpers are real characters in their own ways. The theme of this issue is directed at Air America and the smokejumpers and the CIA. I pulled out one of Charley's Air America stories and have added it to the contents of this issue. I'm lucky to have known and worked with Charley Moseley.

I had the opportunity to speak on smokejumper history to the 2014 California Smokejumper Rookies this week (April 8th) in Redding. Smokejumpers have played such a unique part in the history of the U.S. that I wanted to show these rookies that, if they made it through training, they would become part of this history and organization. There were eight of them and Training Instructor **Jerry Spence** (RDD-94). I kept looking at another person sitting there thinking I know this person—but, from where? Afterwards Doug Sheehy, father of **Luke Sheehy** (RDD-09), came up and I immediately

recognized him. It's been almost a year since Luke was killed on a fire on the Modoc N.F. Luke was a rookie-training instructor before his death and Doug was spending some time with the new rookies. It was great seeing Doug. The Sheehy's and the Redding smokejumpers have become a large family.

About three years ago, I took seven high school kids and did three partial days working with the Mexican crews doing field-work at a local ranch. That was the subject of one of my editorials. I had five boys and two girls. The boys were made up of three Hmong, one Hispanic and one African-American. The two girls were white and my best hurdlers.

The work was grueling, repetitious, and the temperature was in the 100s. All the kids performed well. The guys were from the wrestling team, so I knew they were tough. Still we knocked off by noon and three days was good enough to show these kids how valuable our Mexican crews were and how hard they work. One of my goals was to show them that everyone who works hard is

valuable to our society regardless of their social position and pay status. We don't eat without these workers.

We quit at noon each day. The Mexican crews came back, worked the rest of the day, and continued each day until the rains came in October. I asked the kids what was the lesson they learned? Answer:

"Education is very important and we don't ever want to do this work again."

One of those young men, the African-American, grew up with his father in prison and a very shaky family life. He was a true "at-risk" student and could have ended up in prison like his Dad. Our local wrestling coach took him under his wing, became a father figure, and the young man won the California State Wrestling Champions for two years in his weight division.

Two weeks ago that young man, Nahshon Garrett, a sophomore at the Ivy League Cornell University, took 2nd place in the NCAA National Wrestling Championships losing a close 3-2 decision in the finals. 🏆

A Life That Reads Like A Book— Carl Gidlund

by Jack McNeel

*Reprinted with permission "Idaho Senior Independent"
Feb./March 2014*

Listening to **Carl Gidlund** (MSO-58) talk about his life makes one visualize a movie: undercover agent, smokejumper, in the President's executive office, served in both Army and Air Force, charter boat operator, reporter – the list goes on and on.

Even his childhood years were far beyond the norm. His dad worked for Warner Brothers in Los Angeles and

his classmates included some of John Wayne's kids, Tony Hope (Bob's son), the Crosby kids. "Bing Crosby paid for our senior prom," Carl commented.

Summers during those years were spent in Butte, Montana, with grandparents and other relatives. It gave him a taste of a different life and the day after graduating from high school he left for Montana and a job on the Flathead National Forest and later the Deer Lodge National Forest. "The idea was to save money

for college and establish Montana as my residency – which I did.”

Eventually he would graduate from the University of Montana with both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in journalism.

Carl enlisted in the Army in 1961, was sent to intelligence school and was trained as an “agent handler.” He explained this was a person who ran agent networks. He was then sent to The Seventh Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg. “The Army decided that even though I had 99 parachute jumps (for the Forest Service and sky diving) I had to go through army jump school, which I did.”

Vietnam was heating up at that time and he was sent to Defense Language Institute for a year to study the Vietnamese language. Before leaving for Vietnam, “they took away all my uniforms; I was made a warrant officer in the army, and was sent over as a civilian. I worked undercover running agents. My covers were Catholic Relief Organization and the agents were Catholics who had fled from North Vietnam.”

“The Viet Cong started killing my agents and rolling up the net towards me and I was sent to another place where my cover designation was U.S. Office of Education Advisor and my principal agent was a South Vietnamese Army officer under cover as a high school teacher.”

Returning to the U.S. he went to D.C., “where I worked in the Executive Office of the President.” He was in the Office of Emergency Preparedness, essentially what FEMA does today, and his job was public information in natural disasters in the U.S. plus stockpiles of material being held for war.

His next move was to Denver as Public Affairs Director (PAD) for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare with responsibilities over six regional states. Two years later he moved to Nevada as PAD for that state’s Dept. of Human Resources and two years later, in 1978, was transferred to Alaska as PAD for the Bureau of Land Management.

During this period he transferred to the Air Force Reserve system and served in the Air Guard in Colorado, California, and Alaska. He ultimately retired as a Lt. Colonel in the A.F. Reserve system. “I was called up for Desert Shield. My travels with the Air Guard took me all over Europe and out to the Pacific,” he added.

Carl spent ten years in Alaska, the first four of those with the BLM. He then entered several new occupations. First he started running charter and sightseeing boats on Prince William Sound, a business he says was a good way to go broke.

He tried a variety of other things. He did voice-overs for commercials and some acting commercials. He posed

for photographs for such enterprises as hotels and says, “I got to act out a lot of different things. In various commercials I was a boat operator, a bush pilot, a lawyer, a doctor, and so on. It was kind of fun.”

He was also a reporter for the *Anchorage Times* and for a short while and edited the *Tundra Drums*, a weekly newspaper for Alaska Natives in the villages.

Leaving Alaska in 1988 he went back to federal work in Texas as Public Affairs Officer (PAO) for the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas. He worked there for six years but says he missed the northwest “every moment.”

That brought him back to Idaho where he has remained ever since. First it was southern Idaho as PAO for the Upper Columbia River Basin Environmental Impact Statement Team. Two years later he transferred to the Idaho Panhandle N.F. in Coeur d’Alene where he retired in 1998 with 33 years in government service to match his 33 years in military service.

Carl Gidlund is now 75 and living a busy life at Hayden Lake with his wife, Sally. Retirement has not included much slowing down. “We’ve spent our summers playing lousy golf and our winters downhill skiing,” he laughed. “We’re bad golfers but pretty good skiers.”

Summers have also found him leading a squad of former smokejumpers on volunteer projects for the USFS including such things as rehabilitating old structures, clearing trails, “and other things the FS doesn’t have money for,” he commented.

In 2012 he was honored as Citizen of the Year as well as Veteran of the Year for the City of Hayden Lake.

He has continued to put his journalism degrees to work. After retiring he wrote for the *Spokesman Review* for six or seven years as a correspondent in their North Idaho and Golf sections and still does an occasional article for them. He also writes for the *Smokejumper* magazine and has served as president of that national organization.

Carl also donates a considerable amount of time and energy to various groups. He has been a Hospice volunteer for 13 years, “a care-giving volunteer and I also have a therapy dog that I bring to some of the patients that want to bond with pets,” he says. Sally has also worked with Hospice as a nurse. He also serves on the Hayden Veterans Commission and the District Library Commission as a trustee. In addition he’s a member of his church council, the Lutheran Church of the Master.

What time is still available allows for some travel and an occasional cruise. “We are thankful I’m retired military because we can stay in military quarters when we travel,” he commented.

He has lived a remarkable life that continues in retirement. Just watch out for him on the golf course. 🏌️

THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE THE FENCE



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

THE MONTANA AIR National Guard has started receiving the first of eight C-130s. They are not currently part of the Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) program, but could be in the future.

The 302nd Airlift Wing in Colorado Springs, Colo., an Air Force Reserve unit, and three Air Guard units – the 145th Air Wing in Charlotte, N.C., the 146th Air Wing in Channel Islands, Calif., and the 153rd Air Wing in Cheyenne, Wyo. – each has two MAFFS-equipped C-130s able to respond to wildfires throughout the U.S. There are currently seven Air National Guard C-130 aircraft equipped with the U.S. Forest Service's MAFFS.

Regarding the article by **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) in the last issue, I think he is on the right track. The question in my mind is, are pullups work-related? Are they a good measure of how someone is going to perform on the job? Most – if not all – mu-

nicipal fire departments have gone to a work-related agility test, mostly due to lawsuits claiming that the agility tests were not work-related.

Young men and women are much bigger than they were a generation ago. I don't recall a young woman in my high school being over 5-foot-8 and I was familiar with only a couple that tall elsewhere. Today it's common to see young women who are 5-10, 5-11, 6 feet and even taller.

Perhaps the packout test should be given on the first day of rookie training as a measure of how the candidate is going to perform. Eventually, someone will file a lawsuit to make the test work-related; then it will be a moot point.

Before anyone flips his or her hard hat, I am in no way in favor of lowering the standards. But maybe there are better ways of measuring the potential of being successful on the job. Let's continue the discussion on this.

Along the same lines, Dr. Brent Ruby, director of the University of Montana Center for Work Physiology and Exercise Metabolism, stated in a *Men's Journal* article that, "Workouts should mirror job demands." Rather than banging out a 10-kilometer run in featherweight running sneakers every morning, crewmembers should go for long hikes on steep trails wearing heavy backpacks and clunky boots.

"Hiking with a heavy load – that's job-specific aerobic training," he said.

He also has some interesting comments on hydration and

fireline nutrition which are well worth reading. Ruby has the credentials: he has competed in six Ironman Triathlons. To read the full article, go to <http://www.mensjournal.com/adventure/outdoor/a-training-plan-fit-for-a-forest-firefighter-20140408>.

It was announced in March that the Ironwood Hotshots are disbanding at the end of the season. The Ironwood Hotshots are a unit of the Northwest Fire District in Tucson, Ariz.

A look at their website reveals a fairly good-sized municipal fire department with 10 stations and 200 firefighters. The Northwest Fire District staffs four firefighters on their Type 1 engines.

There are varying opinions on why the District is disbanding the crew.

Some investigative reporting by our colleague Bill Gabbert at *Wildfire Today* (www.wildfiretoday.com) reveals that "when the concept of having a hotshot crew was sold to the Tucson community, one of the justifications was that the 20-person firefighting crew would make money for the district, or at least break even."

David Gephart, the district's finance director, told *Wildfire Today* the crew is being disbanded for "financial and operational" reasons. Others think it is the result of lawsuits filed against the Prescott Fire Department over the tragic Yarnell Hill Fire in which 19 Granite Hill Hotshots died.

The Northwest Fire District pays its hotshot crew members \$12 an hour. The federal reimbursement is \$39 an hour. I am

fairly certain the lowest-paid Northwest District firefighter makes a lot more than \$12 an hour and has benefits.

There is much more extensive financial analysis of the Ironwood

Hotshots and the Northwest Fire District at the *Wildfire Today* website.

The NSA Facebook page is growing, but we are still looking for more participation. There are

a lot of members out there with Facebook accounts. Please like us. The Facebook account was created for you, the members. We are always looking for photos, stories and lively discussion. 📷

Tribute To Ron Campbell, A Master Of Inspiring And Developing Potential

by Bill Gabbert, *Wildfire Today*

We recently found out that **Ron Campbell** (RDD-64), former U.S. Forest Service district fire management officer and superintendent of the El Cariso Hotshots, passed away in April (2013). Campbell had been – for the last 13 years – dealing with a variety of medical issues, including cancer, as well as heart and liver failures. He had been living in Redding, Calif., and was 72 years old.

I worked for Ron on El Cariso for three years. He was by far the best supervisor I ever had. He became more than that – a friend.

This news comes a couple of weeks after we found out that the El Cariso Hot Shots have been disbanded, at least until next year – two blows that feel like a punch to the gut for those who knew Ron or worked on the crew.

He started with the U.S. Forest Service in 1961 as a firefighter on the Cleveland National Forest in Southern California. He was promoted to driver at Alpine in 1963, working for Chuck Mills, and later worked at Descanso. He was a smokejumper at Redding in 1964 for one summer, then worked in fire prevention and was station foreman at Japatul and Mt. Laguna on the Cleveland NF.

He was Superintendent of the El Cariso Hot Shots from 1969 until 1975 when he transferred to the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in Northern California as assistant fire management officer on the Yolla Bolly Ranger District.

Ron transferred to the Sequoia two years later as district fire management officer at Kernville. He left the USFS in 1979 to work with his brother as a private contractor on slash removal and fuel-modification projects.

Before I was on El Cariso, I worked for one summer on the Mendocino National Forest in Northern California, running a chain saw on a timber stand improvement (TSI) crew, thinning young Douglas fir stands.

I went to “fire school,” got a Red Card, and worked

on three small fires that summer. I decided that fighting fire was more fun than thinning trees and in 1970 got a job on El Cariso with the help of a USFS college student summer work program through my school, Mississippi State University.

Ron was skeptical of me, at first, since I got the job through a non-traditional method. He pushed me harder, I thought, than most of the others on the crew, but maybe all the others thought the same thing about themselves. Eventually, he came around to the fact that I had chain saw experience and made me a sawyer on the crew.

One of my fellow firefighters thought I was stupid for disclosing that I knew how to run a chain saw, saying it was the hardest job. I was shocked the next year when I became one of the crew foremen.

Ron was able to see things in people, tap into their strengths, and help them develop their potential. We did a great deal of training on the crew, more than most wild-land firefighters did in the 1970s. He knew how to inspire people and challenged us to become students of fire.

At that time there was no standard training curriculum in the USFS for new firefighters. There were some films we could watch, but training standards and lesson plans were left up to the individual units or districts, at least on the Cleveland NF. The wheel was reinvented constantly when training was offered.

At Ron's direction, our crew developed a four-day basic training package for new firefighters, which became known as the “basic 32-hour package.” It consisted of an instructor's guide, a student workbook, and a slide-tape visual aid – slides synchronized to narrated audio on a tape.




There were no personal computers then, and we made all of our graphics using hand-drawn images, artist supplies, press-on letters, and a 35mm camera. The

illustrations of the “13 Situations That Shout Watch Out” were drawn by a member of the crew during that time period. This was before five more situations were added, making it 18 Situations.

When the training package was finished in 1972 or 1973, it required a Wollensak cassette recorder to put it on which could recognize the slide advance tone, and a 35mm slide projector; the two were linked with a special cable. Eventually the program was converted to VHS tapes and was used with the workbooks in many loca-


tions around the country for training new firefighters.

Quite a number of firefighters from the Ron Campbell El Cariso era moved on and up into leadership roles in firefighting and other fields. I have lost track of many of them, but at the risk of leaving some out, the list includes Gary Cones, Hal Mortier, Bob Drown, Charlie Phenix, Rick Bondar, Tom Sadowski, Allen Bond, Chuck Whitlock, **Steve Jakala** (MYC-74), Mike Herth and Roger Seewald. They all worked on the crew between 1970 and 1972. 🙏



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L-R: Rufus Robinson, Frank Derry & Earl Cooley

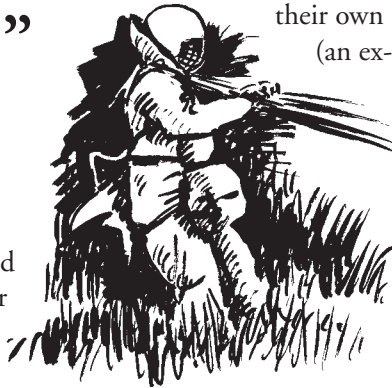
BLAST FROM THE PAST

JUMPERS DEFY “13” SUPERSTITION

The Daily Missoulian, May 18, 1944
by **Jack Demmons** (Missoula '50)

THIRTEEN ARMY PARACHUTE men jumped from planes for the first time in their lives Tuesday afternoon at the Johnson Field and debunked the ancient “13” superstition by coming through the experience without a mishap other than a minor bruise here and there.

There were actually 14 jumps made but the Forest Service officials, who have charge of the program, said that did not count, as the other jumper was one of



their own men. Smokejumper **Jack Allen** (MSO-44) (an ex-Marine) jumped to show the beginners how it was done.

The trainees are two officers and 11 enlisted men of the Air Transport Command, Alaska Division, sent here from stations in Alaska and Canada for training in search and rescue work. They completed their preliminary ground training last week.

Forest Service parachute project men **Frank Derry** (MSO-40) and **Jim Waite** (MSO-40), one working on the ground and the other in the plane, directed the program.

The Army men in the present group of trainees are from stations at Edmonton, White Horse, Fairbanks and Nome. 🦋



NSA Trails 2014 Go to: <http://nsatrails.com/> for more info.. Glacier NP 2009 Project: L-R: Dave Blakely, Barry Reed, Dan Hensley, Doug Wamsley, Richard Trinity, Fred Cooper, Hal Howell and Jim Scofield.

Smokejumping Legends Floyd and Lloyd Whitaker

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

I arrived at Missoula, Mont., early in the summer of 1977 for smokejumper training. Still, looking around the place you could have sworn it was 1943. Radial engine DC-3 jump ships, B-17 retardant bombers, and an assembly of some of the toughest men God ever put on this here good green Earth.

Later, I learned Missoula was also called the Marine Corps Rehab Center. The Aerial Fire Depot; it was a place where Marines who could not adjust to normal civilian life were sent. Our superintendent, **Larry Eisenman** (MSO-58), was a Marine, and so we learned early the code of *adapt, improvise and overcome*. We even ate off Navy china in the mess hall.

Two of the toughest jumpers at Missoula were farm/ranch boys, the **Whitaker** brothers – **Floyd** (RDD-65) and **Lloyd** (RDD-66). Levi's 501 jeans, white t-shirts with Lucky Strikes rolled up in the sleeve, and hair greased back. Both men were cut in the physique of heavyweight champion Ken Norton. And I, a rookie, was lucky enough to get Floyd as one of my squad leaders.

During the mile-and-a-half qualification run, both the Whitaker brothers ran with a cigarette behind the ear. At the end of the run, they would light up. I swear it was always a Zippo lighter, boasting smokejumper wings, engaged with the flick of a wrist that started the smoke to swirl.

I stood in awe and for some reason, back then, it never occurred to me that the height and weight limit must have been waived for Floyd and Lloyd. Both men had to stand 6-foot-2 and weigh 210 pounds – minimum.

On my first parachute jump, Floyd gave me the final rigger check as we circled the spot. He then pulled my caged face screen close to his face and said, "Browneyes! It's a good day to die."

My heart stopped. I could see **Jimmy Lee** (MSO-77) from Deerlodge, Mont., sitting in front of me make the sign of the cross. Then Floyd walked to the door of the plane. He stood in what seemed like a frozen moment in time, and then the clock sped up – fast! – "That son of a b——just bailed out of a perfectly good airplane." My heart stopped again.

Good things always happened when you were with Floyd and Lloyd. Once, Floyd led us on a jump into the

Salmon River Breaks near Riggins, Idaho. We gathered up after the jump and Floyd "eyeballed" the fire. He then took off his fire shirt.

That meant, "Boys, we're going to catch this fire, and I want a hump in your back. I want to see nothing but you know what and elbows."

In white t-shirts and Levi's jeans, we caught the fire and packed our gear up and out of that steep break to the top ridge a day or two later.

I remember my face, about level with the ground in front of me, pouring sweat out like a showerhead. We got to the top and dropped our 110-pound packs next to a Forest Service truck. A young fireguard grabbed our packs to throw into the truck bed. He tried but he couldn't. Then, he just stood and looked at us with a slack jaw. It's always fun to build legends.

So we drove into Riggins for breakfast, and the fireguard went to dispatch to get our next assignment. He came back and said they were going to keep us there over the Fourth of July weekend for initial attack.

Of course, we wanted to go back to Missoula and drink beer and jump another fire. So Floyd pushed away from the table and headed to dispatch with the fireguard. You just knew we would be back in Missoula by nightfall.

Sure enough, Floyd showed up with the fireguard as driver and a Suburban loaded with all our gear. We started out of town and Floyd motions and says: "Whooo – pull over there at the liquor store."

We stopped and Floyd got out and came back with a case of beer. Now, we were off to Missoula in style. By the time we got to the jump base, we had a converted young and eager fire guard dreaming of the day that he, too, might crack silk over the "Big Sky."

One Halloween, **Pat Nooney** (MSO-73) and I dressed up as the legends. Our t-shirts read "Floyd Jr." and "Lloyd Jr." I think we were the hit of that costume party. Fortunately for us, the Whitaker brothers took it all in stride.

I could go on and on about Floyd and Lloyd ... the things I heard about; the parachute malfunctions; the fights and cleaning out the biker bars. But, I'll just keep this short and sweet in the first person. Leave room for the next writer of ... *Smokejumper Legends*. 🍷



ODDS AND ENDS



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to James W. Anderson (MSO-58) and **Jon Larson** (FBX-89), who just became our latest **Life Members**.

Carl Gidlund (MSO-58) on **Tom Oswald** (MSO-58): "Tom and I rookied together, served on the same New Mexico crew in 1960, and fought more than a few fires together over the years. When we began working volunteer projects at the Priest River Experiment Station five years ago, he was one of the first I recruited for the crew. Why? Because he was one of the hardest workers I knew and, more than that, he possessed a marvelous personality, always upbeat, always smiling. An added bonus: he always brought his own carpentry tools just in case the station didn't have the right ones."

For the past few years our crew has staged out of Hayden Lake, where I live, so Tom flew into Spokane, our nearest airport. He'd arrive a day or two early, so I'd pick him up and then bunk him down in our home. He always pitched in, cooking, washing dishes and making his own bed. In other words, he was an ideal guest.

A retired teacher, he probably didn't have lots of extra money, but he used a chunk of it to pay his airline fare from his Ohio home to our projects and one or two others out West, and I know, too, he worked on volunteer NSA crews in the Eastern states.

I called him during the winter of 2012-2013, asking if he'd rejoin our Priest River crew. He couldn't, he said, for health reasons, but didn't specify what those were. In early January of this year, I sent Tom an email, asking if he was well enough to return to our crew. In reply, I received a note from his wife Karen, telling me he'd passed away from multiple health problems three days earlier.

I've been a hospice care-giving volunteer for 13 years, so have been a part of the dying process for many folks, including several friends. But Tom's death has struck a special chord within me. I'll always miss his can-do nature, his joyful encounters with life, his happy laughter and his friendship.

Tom's obituary stated that, instead of flowers, friends should contribute to the NSA in his mem-



ory. I take that to mean that, of all the relationships he must have had in his 74 years, the one that meant the most to him, outside of his own family, was with the smokejumper brotherhood. That says a lot about him and about us, doesn't it? RIP, Tom. Until we meet again."

Del Hessel (MYC-59) has just published his fourth book. Del, one of the top Track and Field coaches in the nation, has written *Coaching Instincts In Track and Field*. It is available from Championship Productions at www.championshipproductions.com.

Former Montana House Speaker **John Driscoll** (MSO-68) is making another bid for the Democratic nomination for the state's U.S. House seat. Driscoll filed his paperwork Thursday with the Secretary of State's Office. Driscoll served in the Montana House from 1973-1979. He also was a member of the Montana Public Service Commission and is a retired National Guard colonel.

Ron Thoreson (CJ-60): "I was saddened to see that **Bob "Rigger" Snyder** (CJ-48) has passed. He was a unique character. **Gary (Tex) Welch** (CJ-60) and I were fortunate enough to spend a couple of days talking to Bob at a Missoula reunion several years ago. I've been accused of BS myself, but on that outing I knew I was in the presence of two masters."

Bob said he'd gone into the merchant marine because, as I recall, he was the last son in a farm family and therefore ineligible to serve in one of the armed forces. He had plenty of tales of his 'high steel' construction days. I think he said he'd lost five partners to falls during that stage of his career. But the most incredible story of all involved the few days after D-Day, June 6, 1944. I've read a good deal about WWII but Bob's story was new. He said his ship was assigned to haul supplies to the Normandy beaches after the actual assault was over. He said that after they'd unloaded some supplies, he told some of his friends they ought to go "get us some of those Germans before they run out." He said they gathered up some arms and were headed inland dressed in civilian clothes when they were stopped by MPs. They were promptly returned to their ship. He said he

got a letter indicating the military's intent to court martial him and his friends, until they realized they weren't in the military and weren't subject to the military code of justice. He subsequently got a letter saying, in essence, he better not ever do that again."

Larry Edwards (MSO-02): "Really good issue, Chuck. Thanks."

Womens fitness/physical standards should generate some interesting comments/discussion. I happen to agree with you."

Tom Decker (IDC-64): "I appeared on 'I've Got a Secret' in April 1965. My 'secret' was that I landed in a nudist colony on my first fire jump as a USFS Smokejumper. I was a 4th year college student at Concordia College and worked with the USFS out of their Idaho City jumper base two short summers."

I lived in a dorm on the campus, and one day somebody answered the phone and hollered at me that CBS was on the line. It turned out that CBS had heard the story from **Stan Tate** (MYC-53). Stan had been on the 'What's My Line' show and they liked him and stayed in touch to find out if there were ever any other interesting things that the smokejumpers had done.

He passed along my name with the three other jumpers who parachuted into the Paradise Valley Club 'nudist colony' on Mohr's Creek, above Boise, Idaho. When they ascertained that the story was true, they flew me to NYC

There was a rehearsal at the CBS studio on one day, and they did the live show the next day at about 4:00 in the afternoon. Steve Allen was the host and Bill Cullen, Henry Morgan, Betsy Palmer and Bess Myerson were the panelists. They didn't guess the secret, and I won \$80 dollars and two nights in NYC.

I graduated from college and went on to seminary and was ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 1969, serving parishes in South Dakota. I entered the US Army as a chaplain in 1975 and retired from the chaplaincy in 2002."

Mark Pieper (MSO-06): "Your article concerning women and pull-ups is very insightful, in my opinion. My girlfriend is a very fit ski/bike/hiking guide and can maybe do one pull-up. She would be an exemplary firefighter if she were so inclined. She could pass rookie training, except the pull-ups. I'm sure of it. She weighs in at around 135-140 lbs, as far as I can tell. For some reason, I don't care to ask her about her weight!"

I have noticed over the years that for the most part, girls who barely make the minimum weight of 120 lbs become smokejumpers, which you hit on. Unfortunately for many of them, carrying close to their own body weight is very destructive to their

bodies. If my packout bag weighed 175 lbs (my body weight), I would surely be crushed after a single packout, if I could even complete more than a few hundred yards!

Getting stronger girls is a great goal. Have you heard that based on an MTDC study, the PT test will include the 110 lb packout in the future? However, this will only replace the sit-ups and maybe the 1.5-mile run.

It seems that finding a "one size fits all" model for the smokejumper PT test proves to be a very difficult thing."

Leo Cromwell (IDC-66): "I visited one active BLM jumper that is a NSA member today at Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Hospital in Boise. Boise Smokejumper Crew Supervisor **Matt Bowers** (MYL 95-98, NIFC 99-2014) had complete breaks of both femurs on a refresher practice jump yesterday. Matt has over 400 jumps and over 200 on this same parachute. Makes me wonder if an expert chute handler can have this happen, is the square really the chute for all smokejumpers? Matt had one leg pinned back together today and, if all goes well, the other will get put back together on Thursday."

From **Wildfire Today** website: "A smokejumper for the BLM suffered a serious injury on a training jump Monday (March 24). The jumper was flown by Life Flight to a Boise hospital, arriving within 46 minutes, and received treatment, including surgery, for two fractured femurs."

In a March 24, 2014, article in the *Nederland, Colorado, The Mountain-Ear* columnist has an interview with **Paul Nolzhauser**, who runs a local auto repair shop. Among other things, Paul claims to have been a smokejumper. He says he took his training at Fort Collins and would fly to fires out of the Jefferson Country Airport. "Once you start jumping, you learn as you go," says Paul. "But even with a parachute, landing is like jumping off a two-story building and landing on granite."

In addition, Paul claims to have worked as a sawyer and could drop 300 trees a day. My math says that is one every two minutes for a 10-hour day. If you know where Nederland is or are ever in that part of Colorado, please stop by and ask Paul to let us know if there are any more independently trained smokejumpers out there.

Beware that he is probably above average genius intelligence as he also had enough college credits for five degrees, except he didn't take some lower division courses. He probably passed "Story Telling" with flying colors, however.

Cecil Hicks (NCSB-62): "I want to compliment you on

your good physical fitness article in the April issue of *Smokejumper* magazine on problems women firefighters have in passing the smokejumper PT test. Of all the things I did in passing the annual smokejumper physical requirements, I believe the pull-ups were the hardest.”

Davis Perkins (NCSB-72): “I’ve just returned from Cambodia where the team I was with (combined medical, dental and surgical team) had a very successful mission with over 6000 patients seen. I was mostly involved with ‘mobile clinics’ out in the countryside. Many patients were former soldiers with severe battle

wounds, shrapnel and bullet wounds. A turbulent, traumatic history as you know. I will be returning with another team next year. I now leave for Ethiopia tomorrow where I will be joining another medical team as a paramedic. I’ll be gone about 3 weeks.

Everything is on track with the painting for the NSA 2015 reunion. I’ve fixed the image I want to paint. It’s the DC-3 dropping jumpers over a fire in a mountainous terrain. I hope to hire a pilot buddy to fly me over the Sierras so I can get some good terrain reference material.” 🐼

The Rack

by **Tommy Albert** (Cave Junction ’64)

A jump base is comprised of the familiar structures: parachute loft, admin building, warehouse, barracks, mess hall, ramp and runway. These are all important but far from the single element that distinguishes a smokejumper base. It is the crew that is the heart and soul of any base. Where else can a collection of individuals meld into such a cohesive and effective machine dedicated not only to carry out the smokejumper mission but to do so with a treasure chest of humor and laughs? Yes, unmistakably, it is the crew that floods our memories with countless meaningful times.

So, we have the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum dedicated to telling the fascinating story of smokejumping, and it does this in style. As visitors are guided through the various buildings displaying the tools of our trade, the thing that intrigues them as much as anything is the tales and tidbits of the individuals who participated in this great adventure.

The tour works its way through the loft and then into the Ready Room. There hang empty jumpsuits and harnesses, kind of ghostlike. A poor representation of the excitement that room generated after the siren blew, followed by the hustle and bustle of jumpers suiting up, and heightened by the sound of round engines warming up in the background.

We can never replicate this to visitors, but we can and did bring life back into the room by placing names of the jumpers above each jumpsuit rack. Now it is not a lifeless “ghost” rack. It buzzes with the stories and personalities of decades of jumpers who created the Gobi saga.

To accomplish this, we initiated a fund raising campaign that allows those who jumped at the base to permanently inscribe their name above the racks. We

initially restricted it to past Gobi jumpers. Then, **Scott Fairchild** (RAC-74) sent in his donation stating the criterion was “to have jumped from the Gobi” which, he did on a booster crew. That was not the intent, but upon studying his argument, he was right. Why not! If you jumped out of CJ, you jumped out of CJ. The trees were just as tall, the brush just as thick, and the poison oak just as abundant. Scott’s name is in the Ready Room.

We invite all who were on the CJ crew or who boosted the CJ crew to have their name permanently inscribed in the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum Ready Room. Send your name and year(s) you jumped or you boosted at CJ along with a tax deductible donation of \$10 to:

Garry Peters 168 Anchor Rock Lane Eastsound, WA 98245

Hope to see you on the Rack. You’ll be in good company. 🐼



(Courtesy Tommy Albert)



Long Tieng, Laos (LS-20a) 1965

Photo Courtesy: Dan Gamelin Archives