

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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SMOKEJUMPER

THE
PIONEERS

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Message from the President



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

PRESIDENT

AS I PEN this article the thermometer outside our home reads minus-13 degrees, and the weather radio is going off with a blizzard warning. By the time you read this, I will be preparing my garden for planting. Time brings changes.

One of the changes we experience is found in our propensity to forget things. I woke up at midnight last night and wrote down some notes on what I wanted to say in this epistle so that when I woke in the morning those thoughts would not have flown away with the dawn's first light. It worked.

I received an e-mail Dec. 31 from **John Driscoll** (MSO-67) with information that he had completed 30 interviews during the year as part of the effort to record smokejumper history.

The digital video discs containing the interviews have been deposited into the NSA archives at the University of Montana Mansfield Library Archives and will be available for viewing during the 75th Anniversary Smokejumper Reunion scheduled for Missoula in July 2015.

For more information on the wide diversity of the interviews and the many "firsts," you can go to http://stewardmagazine.com/Current_Issue/Winter_2014.html. A great depth of gratitude goes to John for his work and to those who have given their stories to posterity.

Also at the end of the year, **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) passed along a note that came to our NSA web page. The son of **King Brady** (MSO-46) was wondering if he might have some ancestry connections with me as the name "Cherry" is in his background.

That inquiry started a string of e-mail communications back and forth between us. So far we haven't found a connection but it did get me started on searching out my own roots with the help of www.ancestry.com and it did lead me to learn about the Cherry Coal Mine disaster that took place in 1909 in Illinois.

It was the third-most-deadly mine disaster in U.S. history and resulted in establishing the first serious mine safety regulations and laws. It reminded me of what the Mann Gulch disaster did for firefighting safety practices. It's important that we remember our history.

USFS and BLM jump bases have submitted recommendations for the 2014 **Al Dunton** (FBX-67) Smokejumper Leadership Award. The candidates all had outstanding credentials, making a selection down to one USFS and one BLM award a difficult task.

You can read about the award winners in the next issue of the SJ Magazine or on the NSA web

page at www.smokejumpers.com. It's important that we recognize exceptional leadership.

At the October 2014 meeting of the NSA Board of Directors, a list of eight questions was approved for submitting to the USFS in an effort to gather information on the decision-making process regarding the parachute systems of the future.

The NSA does not have a position on what type of parachute system will be most appropriate for the future. That's a complex issue. However, given the significance of this issue to current smokejumpers and to the entire membership of the NSA, the Board of Directors felt a responsibility to raise these questions.

I have received an acknowledgement that the letter was in hand and that a response will be coming when answers were available. We hope to have the answers by the time of the reunion in July.

Finally, I want to express heartfelt thanks for the strong and generous response to the annual letter that I sent out prior to the holiday season. Your generosity

makes a great difference in the NSA's ability to remain "in the black" with the annual operating budget. As of the end of the calendar year you have given \$20,000.

See you at the reunion in Missoula in July? Hope so ... 🔪

White Boots and Ruana Smokejumper Knives

by Major Boddicker (Missoula '63)

White Boots and Ruana, Smokejumper knives were the badges of the real professional smokejumpers of the 1950- and 60-era jumpers. Those of us new guys with tight budgets because of marriage or financial stress had to settle for Danner boots and K-bar folding knives. But we all eventually wanted to be booted in Whites and carry Ruanas.

I finally got a real Ruana smokejumper knife in 2008 in a trade for a collection of my first model Crit'R•Calls. Steve Nordstrom, Rudy Ruana's grandson, is a collector of predator calls and his grandfather's knives.

Remember, nice sets of elk antlers were traded straight across to Rudy for one of his great knives. Lots of elk antlers were hauled back to Missoula on USFS transportation for a face-to-face trade, picked up on O.T. after the fire was lined. I was there but I didn't do it.

To the 1950- to 70-era jumpers, this is your chance to finally get a genuine Rudy Ruana smokejumper model knife if you missed out on your first chance. I am donating it to the 75th Smokejumpers Reunion to support NSA's great projects. (*This original model Ruana will be on Silent Auction at the Reunion. Ed.*) 🔪

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

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

Get Smokejumper One Month Before Anyone Else

NSA members are signing up for the electronic version of *Smokejumper* that is delivered via email. It is sent in a PDF file that contains everything that is in the hard copy issue.

The advantages are: early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings. If you like the hard copy, you can download and print it at home.

NSA Director **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) says: "I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing. I think I mentioned in an earlier message that I'm having other magazines/newsletters delivered electronically. It takes less space to store them electronically and if I do want a hard copy, it is easy to print using the *Fast Draft printer option* which allows printing 48 pages in less than two minutes on my printer and uses a lot less ink."

If you want to be added to the electronic mailing, contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59): cnkgshley@earthlink.net. 🔪

Who Were The Pioneer Smokejumpers?

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

The development of smokejumping in the Soviet Union and the United States, although worlds apart, had similarities. Both programs started after experiments with dropping retardant from airplanes. Both faced uphill battles in proving that dropping firefighters by parachute could be done safely and effectively. In 1934 Girogy Alexandrovich Makeev had to overcome age, air sickness, and resistance from his bosses to prove that this could be done.

As we move into the 75th year of smokejumping in the United States, it's time to look back on the men who started the whole works. We need to keep our timelines in order to better understand the development of smokejumping and, also, to honor those men who had a lot of skill, in addition to a vision.

Details sometimes vary according to the writer. I'm going directly to *The History of The North Cascades Smokejumper Base* by **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57) and emails with **Steve Smith** (Life Member Associate) who was involved in detailed research when he produced the NSA video *Firefighters From the Sky*.

After an experimental program relating to dropping retardant from aircraft in California was shut down in 1938, funds and aircraft were shifted to the experimental program involving parachuting firefighters. This experimental program ran from October-November 1939 on the Chelan N.F. (now the Okanogan N.F.). The Eagle Parachute Company from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was contracted to provide experienced parachutists and basic equipment. Professional jumpers **Frank Derry** (MSO-40), **Glenn Smith** (NCSB-40), **Chester Derry** (MSO-40) and **Virgil Derry** (NCSB-40) plus two locals, Dick Tuttle and Alan Honey, were the contract personnel.

The Forest Service assigned nine support personnel, including **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40), to the project. Francis was one of five USFS personnel to make jumps during the 1939 experimental program.

After making "dummy drops" in various terrain types, 58 live jumps were made by eleven different jumpers. The first experimental jump into timber was done by Glenn Smith. There were no major injuries, and the program proved that firefighters could be parachuted into rugged mountainous terrain to fight forest fires. Walt Anderson, Fire Assistant Chelan N.F., has been credited with naming the parachuting firefighters "Smokejumpers."



Francis Lufkin 1939 Experimental Program (Courtesy Larry Lufkin)

A 1940 USFS memo says: "One physically well-qualified and well-trained firefighter delivered on a fire in 30 minutes is worth 10 to 500 CCC boys or pickup laborers delivered on the job in a few hours. *Smoke-jumping obviously represents the ultimate in fast delivery of reinforcement or first attack men to fires.*" It seems like this idea has been forgotten in recent years.

As a result of the successful experimental program in 1939, two smokejumper programs were established in 1940. The five-man unit in R-6 at Winthrop consisted of Glenn Smith, Virgil Derry, Francis Lufkin,

and rookie George Honey (not to be confused with Alan Honey from the 1939 group). Dick Tuttle from the 1939 group was originally hired, but was seriously injured in a tree climbing accident before the program started. Training started June 10, 1940, under the direction of Frank Derry and took five to six days and included five jumps, two of which were timber jumps. After the training was completed Frank and Chet Derry then went to Missoula to train their first rookie crew. *Winthrop was the first active smokejumper base in the U.S.*

Earl Cooley (MSO-40) indicates in his book *Trimotor and Trail*, that squadleader **Rufus Robinson** (MSO-40) was sent to Winthrop in the spring to be trained before he came to Seeley Lake and made a demonstration jump. Robinson then went to Moose Creek to start work on the parachute loft building while the Missoula crew went through their training.

The R-1 program consisted of Project Leader Merle Lundrigan, Frank and Chet Derry, and seven rookie jumpers selected from each of the region's national forests. The 1940 Missoula rookie crew was made up of Earl Cooley, **James "Smokey" Alexander**, **Dick Lynch** and **Jim Waite**. Leonard Hamilton did not pass the physical and Bill Bolen dropped out during training.

In an interesting side note, **Dr. Leo P. Martin** (MSO-40) was the first doctor trained for parachute rescue. Dr. Martin must have trained later in the season, as he is not listed with the initial Missoula crew. He was later killed in October 1942 in a crash of an Army Air Force plane at the Walla Walla Air Base.

On July 12, 1940, Rufus Robinson and Earl Cooley made the first fire jumps in the U.S. at Marten Creek on the Nez Perce NF with Dick Johnson as the pilot.

On August 10, 1940, Francis Lufkin and Glenn Smith made the first fire jumps in R-6 on the Little Bridge Creek Fire, Chelan NF. George Honey and Virgil Derry jumped the second fire the next day.

Even though expansion of the program to ten jumpers was recommended at Winthrop for the 1941 season, the threat of war and lack of funding concentrated smokejumping to Region 1. Lufkin, Honey and Smith joined the R-1 jumpers at Nine Mile for that season. Only nine fires were jumped during the 1941 season. After training, Lufkin would return to R-6 and manage air cargo operations at the Twisp R.S.

By 1943 with WWII in full swing, there were only five experienced jumpers and only four candidates who could pass the physical exam. The introduction of the CPS-103 men (Conscientious Objectors) added 62 physically qualified personnel to the smokejumper program. The 1943 jumpers were stationed at Nine Mile or assigned to the two newly established bases at Cave

Junction, Oregon, and McCall, Idaho.

Francis Lufkin continued to manage the cargo operations and satellite smokejumper base at Winthrop through 1944. In 1945 Winthrop re-opened with a crew of 15 CPS-103 jumpers, and Lufkin became the Aerial Project Officer. He continued at that job until 1972 when he retired after 33 years as a smokejumper. During that time, he received a presidential citation from President Lyndon Johnson and a Department of Agriculture Secretary's Award, plus numerous citations from the USFS. His two sons **Ron** (CJ-60) and **Larry** (CJ-63) followed him into smokejumping. Francis died February 12, 1998, in Bellingham, Washington.

Earl Cooley was promoted to squadleader for the 1942 season and was in charge of fire training and the Nine Mile Camp during the 1943 season. After the 1944 season, Earl was assigned to the Kootenai NF as timber sale assistant but transferred back to Missoula as foreman in May 1945, a position he held until 1950 when he was promoted to an administrative assistant position. In 1951 Earl took the District Ranger job at the Red River District (Nez Perce NF) and transferred to the Naxon District in 1955. When the job of Parachute Project Superintendent was created in 1958, Earl moved back to Missoula to take that position. In the spring of 1971 he moved from the smokejumpers to a position of Regional Equipment Specialist from which he retired in 1975. Earl died November 9, 2009, at age 98.

Frank Derry, born July 27, 1904, in California, died August 2, 1968, in Kalispell, Montana, five days after his 64th birthday. He was a resident of Bigfork. Frank is responsible for the development of the steerable parachute in 1942. The addition of "Derry slots" and guidelines allowed any standard flat parachute to be converted into one that fit the needs of a person parachuting into rugged terrain. Frank continued on with the smokejumper program until 1945.

Virgil W. "Bus" Derry, born November 7, 1908, died January 31, 1995, in Sun City, Arizona at age 85. He jumped at NCSB during the 1940 season. After leaving smokejumping he worked in logging, heavy construction and as a commercial fisherman in Texas.

Chet Derry made the first rescue jump when he parachuted to a downed Johnson Flying Service Travelair on July 15, 1940, on the Nez Perce N.F. Pilot, Bob Maricich, was on a cargo drop when a wing clipped a tree. He was killed and cargo kicker Del Claybaugh was seriously injured. Chet was killed April 20, 1947, in a mid-air collision while piloting a plane from Missoula to Hamilton, Montana. He jumped at Missoula in 1940 and '41.

Glenn Smith jumped at Missoula during the 1941 season, was gone 1942-43, and returned to jump 1944-49. He is listed as working at Missoula in 1950-51 but not recorded in any jump records. See more about Glenn in an additional article in this issue.

When listing “pioneers” in the smokejumper program, we should also mention **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41) who left the program in 1943, flew C-47s in WWII, and returned to smokejumping in 1946 until 1957. Fred died June 25, 2007.

Wag Dodge (MSO-41) went into the Coast Guard in 1942 but returned to Missoula and jumped from 1943-49. He was the foreman of the Mann Gulch crew in the 1949 incident.

Fred Barnowsky (MSO-42) returned after the war to Missoula (46-56) and went on to become the first Base Manager at Redding in 1957-60. From there he

went into the CIA/smokejumper work. Fred died July 15, 2008.

Longtime smokejumper and loft foreman **Jack Nash** (MSO-42), returned in 1946 and worked through 1969. Jack died December 20, 1990.

Jim Waite (MSO-40) jumped and worked at Missoula 1940-53. He died June 4, 1999.

Art Cochran (MSO-42) jumped at Missoula 1942-51 and died October 3, 2008.

The men listed above actually started the smokejumper program or were involved early on for many seasons. In my opinion, they are the “Pioneer Smokejumpers.” Regardless of the information that is coming out of the current day USFS, the foundation, equipment and operation of the smokejumper program was set by these men. There have been improvements in equipment but the fundamentals are the same. 🧑

Pioneer Smokejumper Pilots

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

The working relationship between smokejumpers and smokejumper pilots has to be close. Skilled mountain pilots are a different breed of pilot. When discussing smokejumping, you have to include the Johnson Flying Service.

In 1923, **Bob Johnson**, who was running a Texaco garage in Missoula, got the flying bug. By 1924, he had completed his pilot's training under **Nick Mamer** in Spokane and returned to Missoula with a new plane, an OX-5 Swallow that he purchased for \$2,500. The Johnson Flying Service was started. His brother, **Dick**, did maintenance in return for flying lessons.

In order to keep in business, Bob infrequently flew passengers and gave lessons to student pilots. In 1926, he was able to land a contract with the USFS to fly fire patrols after lightning storms. Throw in a few missions of mercy, where Bob would fly into remote mountain airstrips and bring back people in need of medical attention, and his reputation grew. So did the business. Soon he opened up the interior of Montana to sportsmen, ranchers, prospectors and rangers.

With the purchase of a Travelair in 1929, he started a passenger service. The business expanded into Idaho with freight and mail delivery contracts. While competitors sat on the ground, Johnson maintained his mail schedule through extreme cold and snowstorms.

In 1930, with the possibility of getting a Forest Service contract to fly fire crews into small backcountry

airstrips, he added his brother, **Dick**, to the roster. The Johnson Flying Service (JFS) hauled sixty-five tons of freight and 300 fire personnel their first season, and a tight working relationship was developed with the Forest Service.

As business continued to increase, new pilots needed to be added. Anyone submitting an application had to have 1200 hours of mountain flying to even be considered. If hired, they flew co-pilot for two seasons learning the remote airstrips and their characteristics. Johnson pilots were known as some of the most skilled mountain pilots in the U.S.

In order to continue the business in Idaho, Bob brought on **Penn Stohr**, an experienced mountain pilot, to handle the Idaho snowline run. Stohr had also learned to fly from Nick Mamer in Spokane and would become a legend in Idaho mountain flying. Penn would work for the JFS for 24 years.

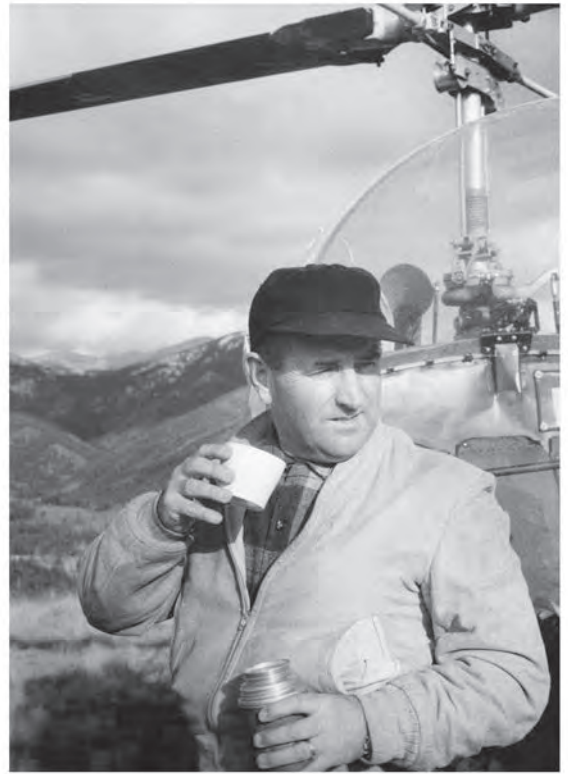
Earl Vance and **Larry Florek** were the next to be added to the pilots' list. **Jack Hughes** (Montana's first rated helicopter pilot), along with others, followed. Jack would move up to the chief pilot's position after Dick's death in March of 1945.

When the smokejumper program was started in 1940, the Johnson Flying Service was awarded the contract that would run until 1975 when Christler Flying Service (Thermopolis, WY) got the contract.

Continued on page 8



Bob Johnson



Jack Hughes



Pioneer Pilots

Photos Courtesy Dick Hughes & Bill Fogg



Bob Fogg



Dick Johnson

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

In October 1975, the sale of JFS to Evergreen from McMinnville, Oregon, was announced.

The early Johnson Pilots listed from *Fly The Biggest Piece Back* by Steve Smith: **Jack Hughes**, Dick Johnson's stepson, who would become chief pilot; **Penn Stohr**, the "Miracle Pilot of Idaho"; **Earl Vance**, who had been one of Montana's best-known barnstorming pilots; **Larry Florek**, who had trained under Dick Johnson; **Everett "Slim" Phillips**, a one-time Montana barnstormer who became an expert Trimotor pilot; **Hoyt DeMers**, a man said to be impervious to nervous tension; and **Frank Wiley** who had flown in Missoula in the early days.

They were Dick Ogg, Jerry Verhelst, Merle "Abe" Bowler, Warren Ellison, Bob Fogg, Clarence Jones, "Red" Mathews, Ken Huber, Orman LaVoie, **Bill Yag-**

gy (MSO-41), **Chet Derry** (MSO-40), Bert Walker, Ernest Kaiser and Ray Kaiser.

Dick Johnson was killed March 2, 1945, (age 58) while conducting an aerial count of elk in northwest Wyoming. Dick had survived previous crashes early Sept. 1938 at Big Prairie and August 1939 at Roaring Lion Canyon, southwest of Hamilton, MT.

Penn Stohr was killed in 1957 near Townsend where he was flying a sagebrush-spraying job.

Missoulian, November 6, 1975: "After 20 months of litigation, the formal announcement of the sale of Missoula's Johnson Flying Service was made by Jack Hughes, president of the airline, and Robert R. Johnson, 82-year-old veteran pilot who started the firm 52 years ago."

Bob Johnson accumulated 17,000 flying hours. The JFS stopped using the Ford Trimotors and the Trave-lairs in the summer of 1969. 📌

EARLY SMOKEJUMPERS PILOT STOHR WAS ONE OF IDAHO'S MOST-ADMIRED FLIERS

by Arthur Hart

(The Idaho Statesman Copyright 2014. All rights reserved. Printed with permission.)

Penn Stohr Sr., Idaho's most famous mountain pilot, learned to fly in 1923 in a Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" under the tutelage of Nick Mamer, of Spokane, a pioneer stunt flier who performed in small towns all over the Pacific Northwest.

Nearly 7,000 Curtiss Jennies were produced in 1917-18 after the United States entered World War I. They were primarily used to train pilots. When the war ended on Nov. 11, 1918, several thousands of these planes were declared surplus. This gave young pilots a chance to buy planes of their own for a few hundred dollars.

Even as late as 1920, a million or more rural Americans had never

seen an airplane, much less flown in one. It was then that the age of barnstorming began, with air shows booked into small towns all over the country. Pilots could show off their skills with loops, dives and barrel rolls, and make a little more money by taking local people for short rides, usually for \$5 per person.

Stohr, like most of the others, started this way until he got steady employment working for Johnson Flying Service of Missoula, Mont. **Bob Johnson**, himself a pioneer mountain pilot, established branch bases in Boise, Cascade and McCall in the 1930s.

Frank Wiley, longtime director of aeronautics for the State of Montana, in his book *Montana and the Sky*, says Stohr was second only to Johnson as a mountain pilot. This was a personal judg-

ment, of course, and old-timers still argue over who was the greatest. Certainly Stohr received more national press than most.

Stohr and Johnson were among the 15 pilots who flew the mail into Boise's riverside field to help celebrate National Airmail Week, May 15-22, 1938. They lined up their planes near the Broadway bridge and what is now Albertsons Stadium. Stohr was flying the mail from Cascade to Deadwood in 1940 when he landed at Elk Creek Ranger Station to rescue an injured man.

In February 1943 he rescued five crewmembers of an Army B-23 bomber that had gone down on the edge of Loon Lake in a rugged mountain area north of McCall. Stohr spotted the wreck and some of the crewmembers on his regular mail run from Cascade

to Warren.

"I noticed that the tops of a string of trees had been clipped off on the south shore of Loon Lake," he told a reporter on the evening of Feb. 13, 1943. "When I got over the lake, I saw the Army bomber. It was a two-motored plane, and it was lying on its belly at a 45-degree angle to the lake, and about 50 feet from the shore. The fuselage did not appear to be damaged. I saw three men while I was over the spot. They had a flagpole stuck up on a log stage they had built on the ice of the lake, with one of the men's shirts flapping in the breeze."

Stohr made two landings on

the frozen lake in his ski-equipped Travelair 6000 to take off five crewmembers still with the plane. Three others had left to walk out through deep snow and were later found by rescuers. This was only one of his many rescues and mercy flights, however, and as John Corlett of the Idaho *Statesman* wrote after flying with him, "He's the idol of Long Valley and the pack horse and oft times savior of the primitive area. Today he is indispensable. ..."

Stohr died near Townsend, Mont., on June 20, 1959, when the Ford Trimotor he was piloting crashed on takeoff. (*The plane*

actually crashed during the spraying operation-Ed.') That he is not forgotten is evidenced by the fact that the new airport at Townsend was dedicated on Oct. 7, 2006, as "Penn Stohr Field," with Penn Stohr Jr. and his family present. (*The airport at Plains, Mt., was dedicated on Oct. 7, 2006, as "Penn Stohr Field." It was a fitting honor as this is where he was raised and began his aviation career. All of his children and grandchildren were present-Ed.')*

Idaho had honored Penn Sr. in 1992 with his induction into the Idaho Aviation Hall of Fame. His photo and citation are in each of the state's major airports. 🔔

After The Experimental Program- Then What?

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

Even though the 1939 experimental smoke-jumper program at Winthrop seemed to be a success, nothing was determined as to what was going to be the next step. The idea of dropping men by parachute to fight fires had been run up the flagpole before. The Russians were in their seventh year of smokejumping. Another good idea but who's going to do it?

Finally, six months later, Otto Lindh, Head of Fire Control R-6 in Portland, Oregon, writes a letter to **Frank Derry** (MSO-40) who had returned to his business at the Los Angeles Municipal Airport. Thanks to **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57) for supplying the documents from which we can follow the path that ended with the creation of the smokejumper program. These letters have been condensed to get to the bottom line. Underlining is mine.

To: Frank Derry-Derry Parachute Service Los Angeles

From: Otto Lindh-Head of Fire Control R-6 (May 3, 1940)

I've been intending to write

you for sometime regarding plans for this season's work, but the whole project has been so uncertain I have hesitated doing so. It now develops that funds are being made available for the purchase of equipment. It is very likely we will have a project at Winthrop, and the boys in R-1, Missoula, will also carry on a project. It is expected that we will train four to eight men in each project.

I am wondering what your plans are, and if you might be available to work with us this summer as an instructor-rigger. We would plan on using an instructor-rigger to work between Winthrop and Missoula to assist in training and to oversee the work of the riggers on both projects.

We can make no definite commitments as to employment right now



1941 Crew: Back L-R: Roy Abbott, George Honey, Jim Alexander. Front L-R: Francis Lufkin, Chet Derry, Fred Brauer, unidentified.
(Courtesy Jim Alexander)

but should be able to do so by June 1. I would be glad to hear if you might be available. Could you also let me know where Glenn Smith is, as well as your two brothers? Do you think one or more might be available to work with us?

**To: Otto Lindh-Head of Fire Control
R-6 (May 14, 1940)**
**From: Frank Derry-Derry Parachute
Service Los Angeles**

I am sure I can arrange things here to take an active part in the Forest Service Program. The question of remuneration was brought up in Portland, and I figured I should have about \$325.00 per month to start with.

As I understand, you would want me to oversee the instructing of smokejumpers in Regions 6 and 1. You asked about the boys that were jumping in Winthrop. Chet is here (LA) and Bus (Virgil) said he was going to stop in and see you on the way up to Wenatchee.

If I leave here, I will have to make some disposition of my business.

Where Did The Name “Smokejumper” Come From?

Walt Anderson (Chelan N.F. and Leader of the 1939 Experimental Program) was credited with “coining” the term Smokejumper. In 1982 Bill Moody asked Walt where he came up with that name.

From Walt: “Seems you are interested in learning how come the Smokejumper name. That’s easy since it came about naturally. Smokejumpers get up in the air in a hurry. From there they can see the smoke and go directly to the fire, no hunting or detours. When they get to the fire, the smoke tells them which way the wind is blowing. Of all the ways to get to a fire in a hurry, smokejumping tops them all. You better call that hardy firefighter—SMOKEJUMPER.”

Crew Critique of First Season

On September 21, 1940, Project Leader Albert Davies sat down with the first-ever crew for what he called “a conference and beef session.” In a long memo to Otto Lindh in Portland, Mr. Davies lists criticisms and suggestions from the four-hour session with the jumpers. This memo has been shortened to get to the “beef.”

1. All were emphatic that the *training period should be longer*.
2. Jumpers should have scheduled *practice jumps* every three weeks.
3. Jump as often as possible. Jumper learns more on two consecutive jumps than one now and one later.
4. Training too fast for new men.
5. More training and practice in descent from trees.
6. Less interference with training from higher officials.
7. Should be trained by fire season so everything will be in readiness.
8. Have only one instructor for each phase of the training.
9. Need more training at spotting.
10. Should have calisthenics every morning.
11. Should have more pre-season and after-season work for the jumpers in order to keep them. A well-trained jumper will cost the USFS between \$1000/\$1500. Men are a valuable investment.

1941 Season Two Smokejumper Roster

NAME	JUMPS	AGE	
Frank Derry	175	36	Instructor

Glenn Smith	62	27	Rigger
Chet Derry	60	25	Rigger
Rufus Robinson	18	36	Squadleader
Francis Lufkin	14	26	Squadleader
Dick Lynch	13	33	Squadleader
Earl Cooley	22	29	Died 11/9/09
Jim Alexander	11	23	Died 6/23/14
George Honey	15	35	Died 12/3/01
Jim Waite	19	23	Died 6/4/99

ROOKIES

Merle Lundrigan	7	34	Project Leader
Karl Nussbacher	8	27	Died 8/3/06
Ward Zehner	8	23	
Bill Musgrove	7	24	U of Idaho
Everett Flint	6	36	
Roy Mart	6	26	Died 5/23/01
Roy Abbott	7	33	
Bob Brennan	8	22	Died 6/9/04
Roy Mattson	6	31	
Howard Brist	7	26	
Bob Martin	6	24	
Wagner Dodge	6	25	
Fred Brauer	7	23	Died 6/25/07
Bill Yaggy	7	22	Died 2/46
Francis Link	7	29	
Lewis Clark	7	30	

Let's Record It Before History Is Changed

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

As you can see, the theme of this issue is Smokejumper History. It is important to get it written correctly using primary documents whenever possible. With that in mind, I want to condense the following written by Roy Mitchell. Roy was the Assn't Supervisor of the Chelan N.F. in 1939 when the experimental program took place. Due to the length of the document, I'm giving you the Reader's Digest version below. I've shortened sentences and changed some of the wording, but the bottom line is still the same.

The Coming Of The Smoke Jumpers

by **Roy Mitchell** (USFS)

During the fall of 1939 an experimental parachute program was conducted on the Chelan (now Okanogan) N.F. Parachute jumping was not new. Neither was the proposal to use parachutes to transport men to fires as other regions had discussed it for several years. However, the proposals for this mode of transportation "jelled" in the following manner:

During the summer of 1939 the Washington office assigned to R-6 an aircraft piloted by **Capt. Harold King**. It was first used in R-6 to drop water and chemicals on dummy fires, but effective and favorable results were not obtained in these tests.

Melvin L Merritt (Assn't Regional Forester) discussed problems with **Capt. King** and **Jack Campbell** (R-6 Fire Control) that perhaps the plane could serve its most useful purpose by dropping a man or men on a fire. **Campbell** and **King** went to **Merritt** and asked permission to drop men on fires from planes.

It so happened that **Roy Headley** (fire chief from WO) was in Portland. The proposal was put up to **C.J. Buck** (Regional Forester). With agreement, **Mr. Headley** said the Washington Office (WO) would finance the project if R-6 would arrange to have **David Godwin** (Assn't Chief Fire Control) present during the trials.

Merritt asked **Capt. King** to secure the necessary parachutes. **King** ascertained that no parachutes were available from the military. Specifications and bids

were sent to several private companies. A few days later **Beach Gill** (Eagle Parachute Co.) personally came into the office and said that he would not only bid on the chutes but start by furnishing a few experienced jumpers.

Mr. Gill's bid was accepted. The contract provided for parachutes, two jumpers, protective clothing and a rigger. One of the first things that had to be done was to prepare protective suits and equipment for the jumpers. Protective clothing and equipment, making it possible for the jumper to release himself from the harness and descend to the ground, had not been developed. It was decided by the Regional Office to conduct the experimental program on the Chelan N.F.

I first became "air-minded" in 1919-20 when I was one of the R-6 personnel assigned to take the US Army airplane observer course at Mather Field, CA. **Walt Anderson** and I became so enthused (with smokejumper experimental program) that we each took a practice jump one morning at the Winthrop Airport.

Lage Wernstedt was a most efficient Project Leader. Lage had uppermost in his mind the safety of the men assigned to this project. One afternoon, while taking photos of the jumps, Lage suffered a slight stroke and was not able to continue on the project.

Four types of parachutes were used on the project. One was the 7 ft. x 7 ft. burlap drift chute, another a condemned military chute to determine chute damage from tree landings. Eagle furnished a 30-foot main and a 27-foot reserve. Both chutes were constructed so that they could turn left or right by pulling on guidelines.

The crew was surprised at the small amount of damage caused in tree landings. The chutes received more damage when they were being retrieved.

The original protective suit was one-piece, heavy canvas made in Portland. A stiff 10-inch leather collar was sewed to the suit. After initial jumping, the suit was redesigned at Winthrop. It was made into a two-piece suit of lighter, more flexible material, padded at important points of contact, webbing sewn into the crotch and suspenders added. A football helmet with a hinged wire mask protected the head and face. A pocket was added to the leg for the letdown rope.

It was found that when the jumper landed in

a tree, it was difficult to extract himself from the parachute harness. A detachable riser with snaps was developed.

After initial jumps were made at the airport, subsequent jumps were made in timber and extremely rugged terrain. All personnel were surprised and pleased that the jumpers were able to land so near the spot selected and marked. Many were on the "bulls-eye." Most of the jumps were within 100 feet of the spot selected.

Frank Derry was in the plane and directed each jumper when to jump and emphasized waiting three seconds before pulling the rip cord. About 60 live jumps were made during the experimental program

without any serious injury. This experiment showed quite conclusively that firefighters could jump and land safely in most timbered terrain.

All the men working on this project were wonderful. Frank Derry was chief rigger. He and Glenn Smith repacked the chutes in the ranger station warehouse. Richard Tuttle and Allen Honey were local boys who made timber jumps.

In the spring of 1940 the Johnson Flying Service provided a Travelair at Winthrop for training, after which it was moved to Missoula. The men responsible for initiating the 1939 project and the crew who conducted the experiment achieved their goal with marked success! 🇺🇸

PIONEER SMOKEJUMPER GLENN HARRISON "SMITTY" SMITH 1914-1988

In order to fill in our historical "blanks" about the four professional parachutists who came north from Los Angeles to Winthrop in 1939, I asked Ben "Snuffy" Smith (MSO-64) to give us some memories about his Dad. (Ed.)

Dad was born in Weirton, West "by God" Virginia (as he would say). Early in his life, his father moved the family to Southern California, where his father worked in the oil fields.

Dad attended and graduated from Gardena High School in the Los Angeles area. He lost his left eye in a basketball accident while in high school. I never thought much about it as a kid, but later in life I admired him for doing the dangerous things that he did (barnstorming, smokejumping, CIA) without being overly protective of his only good eye.

Sometime after high school he learned to parachute and would perform at county fairs, etc. When I asked him about this time period, he told me he would do things like a wing walk, pretend like he fell off and then open his chute. These were the "barnstorming" days!

According to history, he worked for Frank Derry (MSO-40) at the Derry Parachute Company in Inglewood, California, about ten miles from Gardena. In 1939 the Eagle Parachute Company obtained the contract to conduct parachute tests in Winthrop, Washington, to determine the feasibility of the idea to drop firefighters by parachute. Dad told me once that he made the first timber jump during the tests and that there was a plaque on the tree where he landed. I would like to see that some day if it is still there.

On August 10, 1940, Francis Lufkin (NCSB-40) and dad made the first fire jump in Region 6.



Glenn Smith Prior to Spotting a Load (Courtesy Ben Smith)

Dad, as did most of the original smokejumpers, left in 1942 to serve in the war effort. Dad once told me that

he wanted to be a submariner but couldn't because of the loss of one eye. I believe he served as a civilian instructor for parachute rigging during the war. I know he spent time in Chandler, Arizona, and San Diego, California. I was born in San Diego in 1944.

As far as I can tell, it was back to the smokejumpers in 1944. Some of my early memories include airplanes, lofts, the sounds of the inertial starter for the Trimotor being cranked, and poker night at the house with all his great smokejumper buddies. I was allowed to listen in to the "silk stories" as long as I was quiet and delivered beer as needed! I can remember many special days at the loft at Hale Field. I have been told that I was allowed to run up and down the packing tables, but no one else was allowed to even sit on the tables.

Sometime in the 50s, the CIA recruited dad, and we spent many years living in such exciting places as Japan, Okinawa, Washington D.C., Texas and Arizona. (*According to other Agency Smokejumpers, Smitty worked in the Agency loft in Okinawa and was loft foreman at Marana, Arizona*). Ed.

One of the things that most fascinated me about dad was his skill with a sewing machine and his ability to design and create anything out of fabric. He was a wizard. I still have many of the things he made for me: including

a knife sheath, a backpack, and a wooden fabric-covered file case. They all work as well as they did 30 years ago. I am sure he had much to do with the early design and manufacture of the jump suit and all the gear the early jumpers used.

Dad died of natural causes in Tucson, Arizona, March 28, 1988. 🕊

Ben "Snuffy" Smith jumped at Missoula 1964-66 and graduated from Montana State University in 1966, where he was in ROTC. He then went to pilot school at Reese AFB, Texas. He flew F-100s in his first tour of Vietnam in 1968-69 and F-4s in his second tour in 1970-71. Ben retired as a Lt. Col. in 1987 and then spent 19 years as a financial consultant for Merrill Lynch. He now spends summers in Philipsburg, Montana, and winters in Wickenburg, AZ. He is an NSA life member and on the investment committee.

Smitty's second son, Michael Ray Smith, was born in Missoula in 1948. He rookied at Missoula in 1969 and jumped that season before heading to California, where he did stints on helitack, law enforcement, and was an aviation advisor for a fire team. He also became a pilot and was killed June 21, 1995, when the USFS lead plane that he was piloting collided with a DC-4 retardant plane approaching the airport at Ramona, California.

Description of The First Actual Fire Jump in The United States

by Rufus Robinson (Missoula '40)

Reprinted from "Smokejumper" magazine January 2004

On July 12, at 2:00 p.m., **Merle Lundrigan** (MSO-41) asked me to go to a fire on the head of Marten Creek, Section 35, Township 31 North, Range 11 East. I started collecting my jumping suit, fire pack and equipment to take to the fire. Rest of the crew helped haul all equipment out to the airport.

Dick Johnson arrived from Missoula at 3:05 p.m. with plane. One of the crew helped me dress and get into the harness of chute. At 3:21 p.m. we left the ground. Johnson headed the plane downriver to gain elevation. Turned at Goat Mountain and headed back toward Bear Creek. Turned again and followed Ditch Creek, over top of Moose Ridge close to Wyles Peak lookout. Spotted fire on east slope of Marten Creek. Johnson circled fire at about 7,000 feet elevation. Fire looked to be about two and one-half acres in green timber, fairly open. I asked

Johnson to take plane up higher to around 7,600 feet. He circled over fire once more and spotted alder patch of about two acres, above fire, to jump into. Dropped burlap test chute at 3:55 p.m. Chute drifted down into Marten Creek, north and east of the fire.

I bailed out at 3:57 p.m. Wind had changed between time of dropping burlap test chute and when I jumped, I caught a downdraft and heavy ground wind, carrying me over alder patch half mile north. Landed in small green tree, 25 feet tall. My feet were about two feet above ground. Unhooked harness and set up radio. Talked to ship at 4:03 p.m. Lundrigan reported **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) had landed northwest of me in tree. Lundrigan agreed to hold up dropping of fire packs until I reached Cooley. I misunderstood location of Cooley, and, after waiting 15 minutes, Lundrigan dropped fire packs near Cooley.

We started on fireline at 4:45 p.m. Cooley started



July 12, 1940: Earl Cooley (left) and Rufus Robinson waiting for the plane at Moose Creek while Frank Derry checks their equipment. (Courtesy Earl Cooley collection)

working around north side of fire, throwing dirt on hot spots and building some fireline. I took the south side, cooling down hot spots and building some fireline. Worked until 7:00 p.m. when I sent Cooley back to find the other fire pack. He met four-man maintenance crew 300 yards from where his chute was hung up in the tree. They said they would be down to help us early next morning. Cooley did not find fire pack, so came back to fire at 9:00 p.m. We worked on fireline until 10:00 p.m., ate lunch, and watched the rest of the night for snags falling across fireline. Had coffee at 3:30 a.m. Started building more fireline at 4:00 a.m. Fire controlled at

10:00 a.m. Four-man crew took over at 10:00 a.m. Had lunch at 12:30 p.m.

Cooley and I started after chutes with one mule at 2:30 p.m. Arrived back to fire at 6:30 p.m. We spent one hour looking for saw and climbers. Thought Lundrigan had dropped them, although neither Cooley nor I saw them dropped. Maintenance crew found second fire pack on their way to fire.

Packer Howard Engle, Earl Cooley and I left for Moose Creek at 7:50 a.m., July 14. I arrived Moose Creek, 3:10 p.m. Cooley and Engle stayed at Toney Point lookout overnight. 🌲



July 12, 1940: Rufus Robinson just before takeoff. (Courtesy Earl Cooley collection)



Frank Derry inspecting jumpers, Fred Brauer back facing camera. (NSA File)

The Death of Chet Derry

Chester "Chet" Derry (MSO-40) was among four people killed when two airplanes collided over the airport in Hamilton, Mont., April 20, 1947.

Derry was piloting a plane for Missoula-based Johnson Flying Service and preparing to land on a flight from Missoula. His craft met another almost head-on at about 1,000 feet altitude; the planes crashed about 600 yards apart and were demolished.

The other aircraft, a Piper Cub training plane, was flown by Gordon Wetzsteon, a student pilot on his second solo flight. He was an appointee to the Naval Academy in Annapolis.

The passenger in Derry's plane was chiropractor E.L. Williams of Missoula.

Derry was 31 at the time of the crash. He was born in Wenatchee, Wash., April 16, 1916,

and was an expert parachutist. He and his brother **Frank Derry** (NCSB-40) made experimental jumps for the Forest Service in Winthrop, Wash., in 1939, leading to the establishment of the smokejumping program.

Chet Derry spent 1940-42 training smokejumpers. He joined the Army Air Corps – the predecessor of the U.S. Air Force – in 1942 and was a pilot with the Air Transport Command in China and Burma.

He spent a year in Tulare, Calif., as an instructor at the Rankin Aeronautical Academy, a civilian flight school for the Army Air Corps. Upon his discharge from the military in 1946, Derry returned to Missoula and joined Johnson Flying Service as an instructor and pilot. Derry had more than 100 jumps and 3,000 hours of flying time to his credit.

NEWLY MINTED SMOKEJUMPERS MAKE FIRST-EVER RESCUE JUMP AFTER CIVILIAN CRASH

(This article was published July 16, 1940, in "The Missoulian," Missoula, Mont.)

Robert Maricich, 26, Missoula manager of the Northwest Airlines division, was killed Monday in a plane crash near Cub Point, 25 airline miles due west of Darby, when a private plane he was piloting for the Forest Service was believed caught in a "down-draft" and crashed as it circled over a "pothole" between a 700-foot wall of rimrocks and a heavily wooded section of forest land.

Dell Clabaugh, "cargo dropper" and brother of Civil Aeronautics Inspector C.L. Clabaugh of Helena, was "badly injured" in the crash, which smashed the left wing of the plane as it made a forced landing in the 400-foot pothole clearing.

Clabaugh was given first aid treatment by Harry Neilsen, lookout at Cub Mountain, and later by **Chet Derry** (MSO-40), who dropped from a plane piloted by Earl Vance. Maricich and Clabaugh left here at 6:30 o'clock Monday morning, and the crash occurred about an hour later.

Neilsen said that he saw two bundles drop from the plane as it circled. He said that he did not see the plane after the bundles dropped and "believed he heard a crash." He immediately telephoned Hamilton officials, and they in turn relayed the message here. Hamilton authorities instructed Neilsen to hike to the scene so that he could be of help to the men.

He started from his lookout point and reached Cub Point and administered first aid.

At 11:40 o'clock **Earl Vance** flew to Moose Creek, an emergency landing station, and picked up Parachute Instructor **Frank Derry** (MSO-40) and two jumpers, **Chet Derry** and **Richard Lynch** (MSO-40). Vance had trouble getting his plane into the air because of the "hot, dead air conditions" and had to circle constantly for elevation before he could turn his plane in the direction of Cub Point.

It was shortly after 2 o'clock when the men spotted the wreckage. As they circled they could see a man waving to them from the ground and a radio was dropped to him. The plane continued circling above. There was no word from the ground via the radio. The plane then started to climb.

Parachutist **Chet Derry** dropped from the plane and landed near the wreckage. He made contact with the

circling plane almost immediately and reported that Maricich had been killed and that Clabaugh was suffering from broken ribs and internal injuries.

A first aid kit was dropped to him, and he administered treatment to the injured man. Then blankets, water and food were dropped. They fell in a densely wooded area but were found easily by **Chet Derry** and **Neilsen**, who were given instructions from the plane via radio.

The gas supply in Vance's plane was diminishing and a squall was reported over the Moose Creek area, so he headed his ship for Missoula.

Hamilton dispatched Ranger **Bert Waldron** and **Alvin Renstraw**, dude rancher, to the scene of the accident with pack mules with which to carry the body of Maricich and to get Clabaugh. The men were to have been put on stretchers and carried between the mules, but because Clabaugh was in a serious condition, the plan was abandoned and it was decided that more men would be sent to carry Clabaugh.

The men trekked 20 miles to Shearer's emergency landing field with Clabaugh. Arrangements were being made Monday night to take a doctor by plane to the landing field.

Robert George Maricich was born here February 22, 1914, and was educated here, graduating from Missoula County High School with the class of 1931. Since that time he has been intensely interested in aeronautics and has been manager for the Northwest Airlines. 📍

Are You Going To Be "Temporarily Away"?

As more of our membership moves with the weather, we are getting an ever-increasing number of *Smoke-jumper* 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. Or join our email list. Chuck's contact information is in the information box on page three. 📧

The First Fire With Wagner Dodge

By James Budenholzer (Missoula '73)

A Pioneer Remembers Wagner Dodge And Escape Fires

Reprinted July 2004 *Smokejumper*

On August 5, 1949, a massive blaze on Montana's Helena National Forest overran and killed 12 smokejumpers as they fled, the first major catastrophe to befall the nine-year-old smokejumper program. More than 50 years later, the Mann Gulch Fire remains as one of the worst incidents in Forest Service history.

The fire left three survivors, including crew foreman Wagner Dodge. Dodge had joined the jumper program in 1941, and by 1949 had mastered the art of fighting fire. He knew how to improvise, how to be part of a team, and how to relate to a buddy. He also knew a thing or two about survival, having learned hard lessons on the high peaks of the Washington Cascades and on the rugged terrain of the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana. Seasoned and knowledgeable, he was invaluable on a force that had become younger and less experienced since the war years. Yet even Dodge's expertise wasn't enough to save the young jumpers who died at Mann Gulch.

Jim "Smokey" Alexander (MSO-40) helped Dodge learn the ropes. A member of the first smokejumper force in 1940, Alexander spent a season with the soft-spoken Dodge in 1941, getting to know him perhaps as well as any jumper ever did. Alexander recently sat down with James Budenholzer (MSO-73) to share his memories of Dodge—and to reflect on what went so wrong at Mann Gulch.

“Wagner Dodge joined the smokejumper squad in 1941. I first met him when he appeared out at the Nine Mile Remount, an old CCC camp west of Missoula, MT, where we did spring training in 1941. Wag was a very quiet, unassuming person....a ‘yup and nope’ guy like John Wayne.

“Dick Lynch (MSO-40) became the squadleader for Big Prairie, and I was his assistant. Both of us made a decision to take Wagner up there. Big Prairie was way up on the headwaters of the South Fork, at the edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. It was only accessible by air or by foot or by horseback. They had a couple of strings of mules in there and horses, too. It was a big deal, because they had to supply all those lookouts and guard stations by mule.

“We only made two fire jumps that summer. The first was far away, all the way over to Methow, in Winthrop, WA, in Region 6, north of Lake Chelan. We flew in a Ford Trimotor. It was a long flight. We landed in Spokane, refueled, and went on to Winthrop.

“After we got there, they had a lightning fire about 20 miles north of Lake Chelan. They decided to jump two guys in there. This was now with a static line. So they chose me and Wagner to make this jump. I was the ‘old man,’ meaning I was the only one up there from the first season in 1940, so they put me in charge of Wagner. They cranked up the Ford Trimotor. It was getting pretty close to dark, and we got in the plane and went up there.

“It was very rocky; the peaks [were] very tough. It wasn't easy finding a jump spot. There was a cliff with a flat top that had to serve as a jump spot. We jumped at about 500 feet. I went first, and then they made two more passes. Then Wag got out, and we



L-R: Glenn Smith and Wag Dodge (Courtesy Earl Schmidt)

both made it safely.

"So we went to work. We jumped almost right on the fire. We were really high, like around 9,000 feet. We were busy trenching this fire. We had to put a trench along the bottom of the fire to stop it from rolling. The problem they had with fires in the high Cascades was burning materials rolling downhill into the timber.

"He was a nice, kind person, very unassuming, and he was a good worker, and he was savvy about fire. He knew what he was doing. Wag and I talked all the time during the night, not much about personal background or his family, but more about how to put the fire out and how we got in there and how we were going to get out of there.

"We got it completely out and stayed there that night. We slept in our jump jackets. He was a good helper and a good worker, and he followed orders, even though up there alone you are a team, anyway. Nobody's really in charge, just two guys getting a job done.

"We left early the next morning, and we had to climb down these cliffs and crevices and get down into the timber line. We worked our way down to the bottom of this thing and struck a trail of sorts and walked towards Lake Chelan. We hit a logging camp that had good food and good beds, where we spent the night.

"The next day, we walked into the Lake Chelan Ranger Station [and] spent the night and a boat that comes up two, three times a week with mail and supplies came up and picked us up. We went down to the town of Chelan, where there was a pickup waiting for us that took us back to the Winthrop Ranger Station, where we rejoined the crew.

"We talked about various things. He liked the smokejumping and the firefighting. I'm not sure which forest he came from; the first two years you came from a forest, but then after that people came from everywhere, like the conscientious objectors. I'm not sure what he did during the war. I'm sure he was from Montana. Then we came back to Big Prairie Ranger Station, and we worked trail while we waited for a fire call."

The Second Fire With Wagner Dodge

"There was one other fire we all jumped on, the Dean Creek Fire in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. In the middle of August, we got the call. They had brought an additional smokejumper crew in from Winthrop, WA, from the Chelan National Forest to help us fight the fire. Merle Lundrigan (MSO-41) was

the fire boss, with **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40) from Region 6 and **Dick Lynch** off the Flathead Forest, so we had a pretty big crew as far as smokejumpers were concerned, about 25 guys in there, and Forest Service crews, too.

"There were no roads; it was all mule or aircraft. At the end of the summer, when crews left out of Big Prairie, each guy was given the option of either flying out, or taking two days' pay to walk out. Most guys liked to walk out north to Spotted Bear, where the road ended. It was a nice trail.

"Anyway, the Dean Creek Fire was a lightning-caused fire. It was a clear, beautiful day; the sun was shining. **Dick Johnson** came in with a Trimotor and within a half-hour we flew straight east to the Chinese Wall. It was the dividing line between the Flathead Forest on the west and the Lewis and Clark Forest on the east, with lots of bears. About as rough country as you get in America. The cliffs were awesome as we flew in. It was kind of a humbling experience to look at it.

"My crew jumped in first, early in the morning while it was still calm—not much of a wind, because we got there early enough. A second crew jumped at midday, when the winds had come up. They had problems.

"All 12 jumpers from the crew I was with in Big Prairie got jumped in. Dick Lynch was the crew leader, so he did the spotting, and I don't remember the sequence. We just wanted to get out and get it over with. This was my fourth and final fire jump of 1941. We had a nice meadow to jump in, banked up a little.

"The only guy I remember jumping, besides Wagner Dodge and myself, was Dick Lynch, who spotted himself and jumped in last. We were maybe about a quarter of a mile from the fire. The fire gear was dropped. I was the crew leader, and we headed to the head of the fire to try and knock it in the head and get a line around it and slow it down.

"It was a hot fire. The fireline had to be cut in dirt and rock, and we got a trail down to mineral soil. We limbed up the spruce and cut the boughs clean so there was nothing burnable. The wind kind of took off at midday. The second crew jumped in later in the day, and that was when **Roy Abbott** (MSO-41) hit the slide rock and broke his leg. We had to carry him out. We were at it right into the night. Ground crews were walking in from Big Prairie and Spotted Bear."

Emergency Exit Procedures

"After we had the fire knocked in the head, we had time to talk, as guys do. We discussed a number of times the emergency exit procedures on fires. The discussions I had with Wagner Dodge also came later

back at Big Prairie, often in groups of three or four, with guys who were much better trained than the guys who would lose their lives at the Mann Gulch Fire. But that was later, when they were hiring 18 and 19 year-old kids who wouldn't obey his orders. But they panicked and headed up the hill and died.

"See, in 1940, every guy had to have had at least five years of firefighting or lookout work. The first year, they had 100 applicants and chose 16, all pretty seasoned guys. Then, after 1941, there were some light fire seasons, and the Forest Service started hiring kids. During the war, the conscientious objectors did the job, but as soon as the war was over, they couldn't stay because there were veterans coming back from the 82nd and 101st Airborne who wanted those jobs, who were tough guys. They were pretty good with the rifles, but they had no fire experience, so they weren't so great with the shovels. Pretty hard to control too.

"The conscientious objectors, who were experienced, wanted to keep the jobs, but they weren't allowed to. The vets and the kids were not necessarily the kind of people who would listen to Wagner Dodge when he gave orders. And Wag was so soft-spoken, not like me. I have a big bass voice that booms out, not that I have much to say. Wag had a soft voice, and even if he was the most knowledgeable guy, he wasn't the sort who would have an authoritative voice. You'd have to listen, want to listen.

"We talked about that when we went on that trip north of Lake Chelan. Coming off those cliffs, we both

decided we could escape from a fire, because we had experience. We talked about going into a burn and scraping a spot down to mineral soil, because there's a lot of oxygen in soil, and you could breathe it, and a fire would burn over you.

"With escape routes, the problem in the North Cascades was that the fires ran downhill, whereas in Montana, the fires ran uphill. So in the Cascades, you would trench a fire at the bottom instead of the head—otherwise, the fire would roll down the hill and get it started down below. In Montana, you'd line the head of the fire to rob it of fuel.

"We were talking about escape routes. I had done that several times on big fires I was on in the late '30s. Wag agreed that that was the thing to do, and if the time came and he ever had a crew, he would instruct them to scrape out a spot. The ashes could be a little warm. We always wore gloves so you could scrape things away pretty good. It was okay to throw away the shovel, the Pulaski worked better. There are always low spots in a fire, that you could head for and find air to breathe—even if there was a lot of smoke in the air—by getting your face down to the soil. You never went up against a rock cliff, because that acted like a chimney. An experienced firefighter knows this, and the poor kids later didn't know of this. They didn't die of the fire, they died of asphyxiation.

"After the Dean Creek Fire in 1941, I never saw Wagner Dodge again. Never talked to him, but I followed everything we talked about." 🔑

SMOKEY REMEMBERS JIM WAITE

Reprinted from October 2004 *Smokeyjumper*.

Jim Waite served on the first smokejumper crew back in 1940. Waite continued his jumping career through the 1951 season, later working for the Air Force and NASA, where his duties included testing parachutes for the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo projects. He retired at the end of 1973 and died in Washington State in June 1999.

Also on that first squad was Jim "Smokey" Alexander. Alexander recently sat down with James Budenholzer (Missoula '73) to share his memories of Waite, that first season and what it was like to make history.

"I met Jim Waite out at Old Fort Missoula, the summer of 1939. We all came in from our various forests and reported for our physicals. I was the youngest guy on the squad, and Jim was the next youngest.

"Jim Waite came off of the Clearwater Forest, with

headquarters, I believe, in Orofino, Idaho. He had been a smokechaser and a lookout. He did the same thing all of us had done, whatever the forest ranger or assistant ranger wanted us to do. We strung wire, did lookout work, smokechasing, trail building. He did that kind of work. I don't believe Jim Waite ever went to college. He came out of high school [and went] into the Forest Service. [He] may never have gone [in] to the military service.

"He worked straight through for the Forest Service after our first season in 1940 and was a squadleader for the conscientious objectors starting in '43. Those conscientious objectors didn't get anything except what the churches supplied those guys with, their clothes and boots, and that's all they got for all their work. They never got any pay from the Forest Service for the work they did.

"We ourselves had regular boots, generally from White Boots out of Spokane, and we'd put ankle braces

on the boots; it was easy to turn an ankle, and then you were no good to anyone. Ankle braces were mandatory.

"I first met Jim when we took our physicals. He was very quiet, very unassuming. He was one of the leaders and was a real nice guy. He entered into everything, all the work we were doing and the training. He was very cooperative. None of us were smoking.

"In addition to being a nice guy, he was very handsome. As Dorothy, my wife, would say, 'good looking!' Dorothy went to school with his wife, and [they] were close friends in high school and college.

"Luckily for the rest of us, he had a steady girl back in Idaho. As you can see from the photos, he was indeed very photogenic.

"After we took the physicals, we all went up to the Seeley Lake Ranger Station, where we did map reading and got ready for our first parachute jump. **Frank Derry** (MSO-40) was very thorough with all the equipment, the 'chutes and all, because we didn't have static lines. The riggers, **Chet Derry** (MSO-40) and **Glenn Smith** (MSO-40), showed us exactly how the parachutes worked.

"Frank Derry had brought his brother Chet and Glenn Smith up from California to ramrod this outfit. During the time we were at Seeley Lake, Frank received a telegram from California and [learned that] one of his cargo drop-pers had fallen out of his plane without a parachute and been killed. In the middle of training us, Frank had to go back down to California for the funeral arrangements for this guy who had been killed. Even without him, we kept on training, doing calisthenics. He came back, and we finished the training and took the plane down to Moose Creek. Maybe this made the danger of what we were doing a little closer.

"During the training, men jumped off a 20-foot platform [attached to the] end of a regular rope, to simulate the jarring. Then, on a pulley, slid down the rope and practiced a roll.

"Was Jim Waite worried about the first practice jump? Jim was noncommittal about the first jumps. [He] just took it all in, did what we were supposed to do. We were all the same way, didn't talk much, except for that one man, **Bill Bolen**, who didn't fit in and got washed out early. There wasn't a lot to say. We kept it inside if we had fears."

Jim Waite Makes The First Practice Jump

"Another thing was, when we were making our first practice jumps at Seeley Lake, he made the first practice jump.

"The night before, we were sitting around the campfire, and we drew straws. We had five guys, but **Rufe** (**Rufus Robinson**) wasn't there for some reason, (*he had*

trained earlier at Winthrop-Ed.) so four guys drew straws. There was Jim Waite, **Earl Cooley**, **Bill Bolen** and myself.

"Jim Waite got the straw. He was the right guy for the job, very nice man."

Jim Waite's Fire Jump

"Jim went on the trip over to Lake Chelan and didn't jump. Only Wag and I jumped. We only made the one jump. Then we all went back to Big Prairie.

"The Moose Creek Air Field was a one-way entrance. You had to land and take off one way on a short runway, because it was [on a] bluff with the Selway River right below you and trees behind. You'd take off over the river. The field was built by the CCC kids.

"We took off in the morning, so it was nice to get off [when it was] cool. Takeoff by the Travelair was easy. This was the second time we jumped on a fire. The first time, it had been hot when **Rufe** and **Earl** took off for their fire, and the plane had really struggled in the hot, thin air to gain altitude.

"**Dick Johnson** was the pilot. He lasted for another year, then he got killed down in the Jackson Hole country, counting elk in the fall of 1945 in a snow squall.

"When we got to the fire, we threw our own burlaps. We were about 2,000 feet above the terrain. We'd keep our eye on that burlap, watch it float down for maybe a minute or a minute-and-a-half. If the spotter was on the plane, he would throw the burlap, and if the spotter wasn't there, we'd throw them ourselves.

"These were small parachutes, four corners of a burlap tied to about ten pounds of rocks or a bag of dirt. We made them ourselves. They were very effective. We held it by the apex and tossed it out, and the wind would immediately get it and inflate [it]. They worked very well. I don't know why they discontinued them. Things happened.

"I didn't catch any wind. We both landed in this little meadow.

"We were jumping 30-foot-diameter chutes...and the fact that you opened at different altitudes away from the plane meant you'd get different shocks, depending on how long you waited to pull the ripcord. The longer you waited, the heavier the opening shock. Some guys got out of the slipstream and then pulled [the] ripcord. You were supposed to count to three [and] not get caught up in the tail of the plane. I heard one story, not related to us, about a guy who opened his chute in the plane and then threw it out and followed it out. But that wasn't what we did.

"We had a going bet. We all tried to bring back our ripcords, [and] if you didn't, you had to buy the other guys a case of beer. Most of us just carried that ripcord in our right hands, or stuffed it in our jackets. He brought back the ripcord. I believe we all did.

“Just get out, count to three, and it always worked.”

The First Snag

“One thing I do remember was that when I landed in this meadow, as I started to take off my suit, a little field mouse ran up the left pant leg of the jumpsuit! So I got out of that suit fast. Those little field mice were hopping all over the meadow, hundreds of field mice.

“We both jumped on this fire, but Jim got hung up in this snag. Jim was the first guy that hung up on a snag. Nobody got hung up in training, and we’d all made one previous fire jump, so this was on the second fire jump.

“He let himself down 100 feet, and when he ran out of rope, he had to freefall the rest of the way, 30 feet, so he was protected by his jumpsuit when he hit. The procedure was, on our right leg there was a pocket down over the right boot where we had 100 feet of sturdy rope. We had the detachable risers. It was good sturdy rope. We’d attach it to a ring on the left [or right] riser and then detach the riser, take the tension off, then detach the other side. Then having tied it to the ring, take off the tension, then let yourself down hand-over-hand, wearing your gloves, down the rope. There wasn’t a rappelling ring. It was no big deal. Bad part about landing in a snag was having to chop down the tree to bring the chute back. We had to bring back the entire chute and everything we jumped in with. Every smokejumper knows about that.

“If Jim was bruised or in shock from the letdown, he didn’t show it. We were in absolutely top physical condition. He was in good shape.

“We had one of those radios, which was a monstrosity, which was in the left calf-pocket. The rope was in the right. That radio required line-of-sight visual contact with the plane. It weighed six or seven pounds. It worked well. It was an important part of the jump. We used it to tell the pilot that we weren’t hurt and that we’d retrieved our packs and [to ask if] they could tell us anything about the fire and how to attack [it].

“So we had one radio on the ground, one in the ship. We could hear the radio from the ship, but if they got over the hill or behind the trees, we were done. We called it the Lizard Creek Fire.

“There was one man on the fire, a smokechaser that had been at a lookout nearby. At the time, the Forest Service would have a lookout tower with a lookout and a smokechaser. The smokechaser, would be dispatched from the lookout tower. It made a lot of sense. He knew we were coming in, because he could see the plane and see us jumping.”

The Lizard Creek Fire

“This was a big fire, by that time about 20 acres. We took control of the fire. With Jim and me, there wasn’t a

fire boss. We just did it. The smokechaser was a trained guy who knew what to do, too. But the fire was too big for us to contain. They didn’t call the smokejumpers in until it looked like it was going to go somewhere.

“Then a crew of hotshots showed up, and we turned the fire over to the foreman, and then we did what he wanted us to do. As a foreman, he seemed competent. I don’t remember much about him. In all the seven summers I worked for the Forest Service, I never met anyone I had serious problems with. You had a job to do, and you just did it. We couldn’t have held it with just the three of us. We worked all day and practically all night. The hotshot crew had two packhorses and asked if we’d take back the horses. We did. We went back to Kelly Creek Ranger Station. We got to Kelly Creek...and flew back into Moose Creek.”

A Visit from Dorothy Taylor Alexander

“While at Moose Creek Ranger Station at Big Prairie, we heard that **Dick Johnson** was flying in with Dorothy [Taylor Alexander].

“Jim Waite was the rigger. He got us all slicked up, so we could have lunch with Dorothy. This was a big deal, getting everyone slicked up and their hair combed, including fire crews, the ranger crew, guards, other firefighters and the assistant ranger.

“The Johnson family was friends with the Taylor family. [Dick] called Dorothy and asked if she’d like to go as his ‘co-pilot.’ She agreed. They were bringing in a cement mixer in the back of the Trimotor. It got loose and rolled around, until it lodged itself in a corner.

“As Dick flew into the field, there was a crashed red Trimotor that Dick had crashed earlier. He pointed it out to Dorothy as he was coming in. Dorothy said she was scared to death.

“We took Jim Waite up to Big Prairie in 1941. Chet Derry trained him to be a rigger. So he was a ‘rigger-jumper,’ certified. He could jump, or he could rig. One reason Jim became the rigger was he liked to work around the sewing machine. The first year, we just had one sewing machine. The second year, each squad had a machine. With a rigger the chutes were patched and repaired. I think Frank Derry saw that Jim showed an aptitude for rigging, even though all of us were interested. Later on, they kept the guys away who weren’t good at it, so they wouldn’t see how the ‘chutes were packed and repaired.

“Jim Waite stayed [years] in the Forest Service. He died a couple of years ago, had Alzheimer’s I believe. After 1941, I went back to school. I got married. I never saw Jim Waite again.” 🌲

Rufus Robinson-Pioneer Smokejumper

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)



("Smokejumper" April 2010)

With the passing of Earl Cooley (MSO-40), news media have also been asking about Rufus Robinson (MSO-40). We did not even have a date of death in our NSA database. Thanks to research done by Jim Allen (NCSB-46), we have the correct date of May 3, 1987.

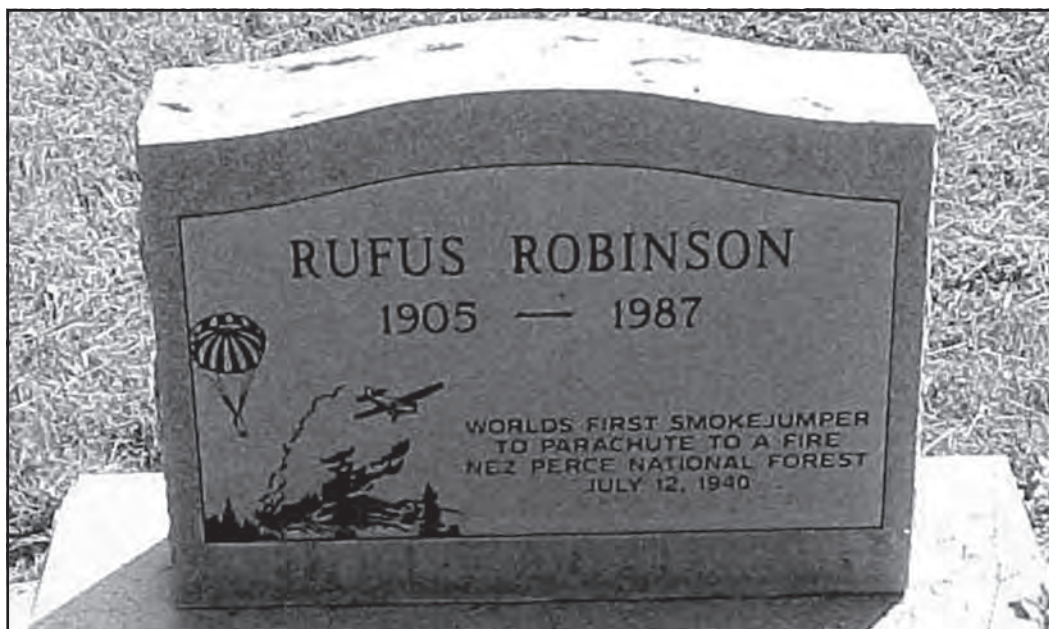
Rufus was the first of the 1940 Missoula crew to receive smokejumper training, going over to Winthrop to do so. He then returned to Montana to start construction of the parachute loft at Moose Creek.

On July 10, 1940, Earl Cooley, Jim Waite, Jim Alexander, Dick Lynch and Chet Derry joined Robinson at Moose Creek. Merle Lundrigan (MSO-41), not a jumper at that time, was assigned as the squadleader for the group.

On July 12, 1940, Rufus Robinson and Earl Cooley made the first fire jumps on a fire in the United States.

Rufus was born in 1905 at Wallowa, Oregon, and the family moved to Turlock, California, in 1919.

Robinson only jumped the 1940 and '41 seasons before moving on to pursue work in the roofing business. He married in 1942 and lived in Santa Cruz, California, and Pasco, Washington. In 1958 he moved to Klamath Falls, Oregon, and in 1966 to Lenore, Idaho, where he worked as a roofer until he retired. He is buried in the Wallowa Cemetery. 🕯



Early Smokejumper History

by Earl Cooley (Missoula '40)

The following article was printed in the January 1997 issue of "The Static Line." It has been edited slightly for clarification purposes.

In the fall of 1939, a group of "barnstormers" was dropped into timbered areas on the Chelan National Forest – now named the Okanogan National Forest – near Winthrop, Wash., to determine the feasibility of dropping firefighters by parachute to combat forest fires.

This original crew of barnstormers included instructor **Frank Derry** (MSO-40), along with **Chet Derry** (MSO-40), **Virgil "Bus" Derry** (NCSB-40), **Glenn Smith** (NCSB-40), **Richard Tuttle** and **Allan Honey**. **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40), a Forest Service employee, made one jump during the last part of the experiment.

This experiment proved to be very successful, and it was decided that Region 1 and Region 6 would each have a small group of jumpers to continue the experiment in 1940.

Region 6 built its crew around a nucleus of the original barnstormers, with **Lufkin** and **George Honey** (NCSB-40) – **Allan Honey's** brother – being trained to jump out of Winthrop, Wash., along with **Smith** and **Virgil Derry** during the summer of 1940.

Tuttle and **Allan Honey** dropped out of the program in the fall of 1939, as they were not Forest Service employees.

Region 1 had sent **Rufus Robinson** (MSO-40) from the Nez Perce Forest over to take his training at Winthrop, and to be available to go to Moose Creek and start construction on a parachute loft. **Rufus** came back to Seeley Lake, northeast of Missoula – selected as the Region 1 training base for 1940 – and made one demonstration jump on the Seeley Lake Airport. He then went on to Moose Creek to start work on the loft building.

Region 1 was to select one key fireguard from each of the seven forests. They included **Jim Waite** (MSO-40) from the Clearwater Forest, **Jim Alexander** (MSO-40) from the Old Cabinet Forest, **Bill Bolen** (MSO-40) from the Kootenai Forest, **Dick Lynch** (MSO-40) from the Flathead Forest, **Leonard Hamilton** from the Lolo Forest, and **Earl Cooley** from the Bitterroot Forest, in addition to **Robinson**.

Chet Derry was to be the parachute rigger for the

Region 1 crew. **Frank Derry** was retained to serve both regions and was, like his brother **Chet**, already an accomplished parachutist.

When we reported to Fort Missoula to take the regular ROTC cadet physical, **Hamilton** was diagnosed as having an enlarged heart and had to drop out.

Maj. William Lee Carey had been present at Seeley Lake to observe the training jumps and cargo drops. He would return to Fort Benning, Ga., and begin establishing the first U.S. Army parachute unit.

It was decided that Region 1 and Region 6 would each have a small group of jumpers to continue the experiment in 1940.

During the time at Seeley Lake, **Bolen** made three training jumps and decided to drop out for personal reasons. On his first jump, he freefell almost a third of the distance to the ground before he pulled his rip cord; this may have influenced his decision to drop out. He had also been dragged by his chute in a strong wind and suffered scratches and severe bruising.

Alexander had caught his arm in the load lines of his chute and got a bad sprain, so he missed several of his training jumps. **Lynch** had pulled his legs up on a strong-wind jump and landed on his tailbone, and also missed several jumps.

However, by July 10, 1940, we went to Moose Creek. **Waite** and I had 10 jumps each – the only two to have achieved this. **Alexander** and **Lynch** were to finish their training after we got to Moose Creek, whereas **Chet Derry** and **Robinson** had made all their training jumps.

They left six jumpers at Moose Creek Ranger Station for the summer. We were bunked in the ranger's dwelling since his family did not come in that season.

Merle Lundrigan (MSO-41) – not a jumper at that time – went in as squadleader for the summer. However, **Merle** made several training jumps in the spring of 1941, before he was called into military service.

George Case (MSO-44), the Moose Creek ranger, was selected as project leader. He had spent some time during training with the jumpers at Seeley Lake to familiarize himself with the jumping process. 🪂

National Smokejumper Association Reunion Agenda • July 17-19, 2015

Friday, July 17

Time	Activity	Location
Noon-1 p.m.	Vendor/Silent Auction Setup	
1-6 p.m.	Registration/Vendors Open	Adams Center
3 p.m.	Silent Auction Opens	Adams Center
4 p.m.	Happy Hour	Oval
6 p.m.	Barbecue	Oval
	Blue Grass Band • Bonfire • Ken Wabunsee/Everett Winneger Presentation	
7 p.m.	Caterpillar Awards (Tom Harbour, Fred Donner, Bob McKean)	
10:30 p.m.	Last Call	

Saturday July 18, 2015

Time	Activity	Location
1-5 p.m.	Vendors/Silent Auction Open	
3-5 p.m.	Registration	Adams Center
4 p.m.	No-Host Bar	Adams Center
5 p.m.	VIP Reception	Adams Center Sky Room
5:45 p.m.	Dinner	Adams Center
6 p.m.	Silent Auction Ends	
7 p.m.	Speakers Fay Kruger, John Maclean and Others	
9-10 p.m.	Silent Auction Items Awarded	
10:30 p.m.	Last Call	



Sunday July 19, 2015

Time	Activity	Location
9:30 a.m.	Brunch	Adams Center Ballroom
10:30 a.m.	Memorial Service (Bill Duffey)	Adams Center Ballroom

2015 National Reunion Group Rates

Hotel name	Phone	Rates (1/2/3/4 people)
Americas Best Value Inn	(406) 728-4500	80.00/80.00/80.00/80.00
Best Western Plus Grant Creek Inn	(406) 543-0700	139.00/139.00/139.00/139.00
C'mon Inn	(406) 543-4600	137.99/137.99/137.99/137.99
Comfort Inn University	(406) 549-7600	109.00/109.00/109.00/109.00
Courtyard by Marriott	(406) 549-5260	159.00/159.00/159.00/159.00
Holiday Inn Express	(406) 830-3100	119.00/119.00/119.00/119.00
Holiday Inn Missoula Downtown	(406) 721-8550	136.00/136.00/136.00/136.00
GuestHouse Inn & Suites	(406) 251-2665	74.00/84.00/84.00/84.00
La Quinta Inn	(406) 549-9000	110.00/110.00/110.00/110.00
Staybridge Suites	(406) 830-3900	139.00/149.00/149.00/149.00

Ask for the National Smokejumper Association group rate. Group rates will cut off as early as 45 days prior to the event start date. The earlier you book your reservations, the better.

Univ. Montana Knowles Hall – \$22 single/\$29 double. To make a reservation, submit housing application by July 1, 2015 with payment in full. This form will be on our web page. The rooms are not air-conditioned and do not have private bathrooms.



*Al Boucher (CJ-49), Gerald Mahoney (RAC-65) &
Jim Gardner (RAC-65)*



Kevin Gilbert (LGD-79)



*John Moseley Receiving Cha
Athlete Award from D*



Mike Carnahan (RAC-72)



Pat McCauley (NCSB-63)



Smokey Cranfill (RAC-66)



*Jay Decker (NCSB-63), Fred Cooper (NCSB-62) &
Randy Tower (NCSB-63)*



Jim Gardner (RAC-65) & Don Baker (MSO-65)



John Twiss

Redmond Air Center

Photos Courtesy Fred

Layout Design: John



*Arley Moseley Smokejumper/
Doug Houston (RAC-73)*



Steve Forkel (RAC-Pilot) & John Packard (RAC-65)



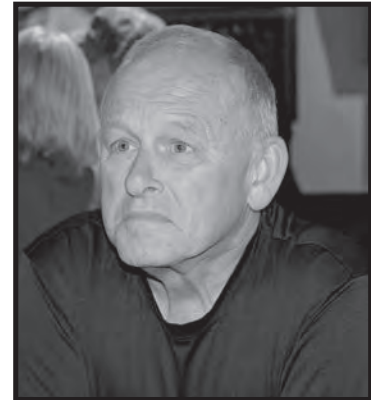
Mark Corbet (LGD-74) & John Berry (RAC-70)

Winter Reunion 2014

and Cooper (NCSB-62)



Jim Hansen (RDD-87)



Dave Laws (RAC-66)



Garrett Allen (RAC-10)



s (RAC-67)

Tommy Kirkley (CJ-64)



Rob Collins (RAC-69) & Don Skei (RAC-69)



Ron Morlan (RAC-69) & Dave Wood (RAC-66)

Operation Firefly-Triple Nickles *Myth, Fact and Common Sense*

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

Over the years Mark Corbet (LGD-72) has sent me information on the Triple Nickles and Operation Firefly that he has obtained by doing good, basic research. I consider Mark to be the NSA Triple Nickles expert. At the same time, I've come up with more information on Firefly.

With the recent release of two books (information covered in my editorial) on the Triple Nickles, I feel it is very important to do a piece on Operation Firefly. Not just the Triple Nickles (TN) involvement but the whole program. There is just too much history being changed. The efforts of our Pioneer Smokejumpers are being forgotten. We're losing our roots. The USFS can lose or change its history, but it is important that we, as smokejumpers, stay knowledgeable and true to "the best job we ever had."

This article is not meant to downplay the historic actions of the Triple Nickles and never would have been written without the release of books that portray our "Pioneers" in a negative light. Operation Firefly was a political smokescreen over which the TN had no control. They were asked to do a job for which they received little smokejumping and firefighting training. However, when history is changed, someone needs to challenge those changes.

Some statements are being used in the current books about the Triple Nickles (TN) that are not based on fact:

- *Smokejumping was relatively new in 1945.* Smokejumping was actually well established and in its 6th year of operation by that season.
- *Triple Nickles were on the cutting edge of learning this new method of fighting fires.* You will see that their training in smokejumping was marginal at best and that their operational techniques were standard military, not USFS, procedures.
- *The TN played an integral part in pioneering the field of smokejumping.* Refer to reports below. They were military Airborne pioneers, not pioneer smokejumpers.
- *They (TN) tested equipment and techniques that are now standard in smokejumping.* Completely false! You will see it was the lack of using standard smoke-jumper techniques (cooperative jumper/pilot work, small sticks, low cargo drops, quick response to fire

calls, small number of men on a fire), through little fault of their own, that was the biggest detriment to their efforts.

- *The TN used football helmets with facemasks and the USFS adopted the practice.* The helmets with facemasks were developed in the 1939 experimental program.
- *The TN learned new techniques that "actually hadn't been tried yet."* I can find no evidence of any smoke-jumping techniques developed by the TN that were used by smokejumpers.
- *USFS had been using steerable parachutes for "about a year now (1945)."* Frank Derry invented the Derry-slotted parachute in 1942 and even the 1940 chutes were steerable.

In this piece I'm using information from: *Final Report Firefly Project* (2/5/46 by Neal Rahm, Liaison Officer USFS), *Fire Control Narrative Report R-6 1945* (Guy B. Johnson, Admin. Assistant R-6), *Summary of Fire Suppression Activities 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion-1945*, *Silent Siege III* by Bert Webber, *Silver Lake Firefly Project Log-1945*, *Trimotor and Trail* by Earl Cooley, and *The Triple Nickles* by Bradley Biggs.

Fires Jumped By The Triple Nickles

Here's where fact and history have a real problem. Books and written articles have listed the TN for jumping 32 fires and 1220 fire jumps. I, also, have been using those numbers for years. In reading the books and fire reports for this article, I noticed that the TN did not jump all their fires. They were driven to a number of fires. I cross-checked some of those references and these fires were listed as jump fires.

Going back to the *Final Report Firefly Project*, we have the actual number of fires involving 555th personnel as totaling 28; 10 by the Chico group and 18 by the Pendleton soldiers. *Out of the 28 fires, the number jumped was 15.* The number of jumps was 444 by enlisted men. They had been averaging an officer for each 25 men, so that would add 18 for a total of approximately 462 fire jumps.

Without some fire reports from 1945, it is impossible to total the exact number of fire jumps, but 460-470 is

reasonably accurate. I have the fires, dates, and number of personnel but do not know which fires were jumped and which ones were pounded.

I'm going to outline Operation Firefly, list some of the myths, state the facts, look for reasons for problems and, by using some common sense, see if we can't come up with answers not found in the data.

Background

Between November 1944 and April 1945, the Japanese launched approximately 9,300 balloons into the Jet Stream. These paper balloons carried one 33-pound high-explosive bomb and four 11-pound incendiary bombs. The balloons would take about three days to reach the continent and landed in all the western states, Hawaii, Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and as far east as Michigan. Only 297 of these balloons were known to have reached North America. Our forests were wet and snow-covered during these months. The Japanese did not consider the project successful and abandoned the balloon attacks on April 20, 1945. No fires were attributed to the balloon incendiaries during the period Firefly was activated. *Actually, no fires were attributed to the balloon bomb program at any time.*

Myth or questionable: The USFS requested the help of the military for the 1945 fire season in order to combat the balloon bomb program.

From Firefly Summary:

- Army Intelligence *was aware* that *no new balloons* had arrived over the continent since the middle of April (1945); this fact being later verified by information reaching this country from Japan since the war.
- *The offer of the Army* to assist in the protection...
- *The military plan* was designed to provide Army assistance to civil agencies.....
- As a supplement to the *Ninth Service Command Plan* for Fighting Forest Fires, *a Joint Air and General Assistance Forest Fire Fighting Plan* was formulated by the *Fourth Air Force*, Western Defense Command, and designated as the Fire Fly Project....

Conclusion: I see *no* evidence that supports the USFS claim that the USFS requested help from the military. The above indicates it as a military plan.

Common Sense: The Triple Nickles (TN) had been active since December 1943. However, the military was not integrated and there was a strong resistance to having African-American troops in combat positions. It has been stated in other publications that the military leaders in Europe feared racial tensions would disrupt operations. Would it be any different in the Pacific Theater? Of course not! Since the war in Europe was almost over (VE Day 5/8/45) and the Pacific was nearing the end (Manhattan Project),

what better way to avoid this issue than to assign the TN to an operation of "national importance." I don't think the USFS had much choice in the acceptance of "the offer."

We were not short of manpower to fight forest fires. The reports say that many loggers did not like the military coming in and taking their jobs. We had over 425,000 German and Italian POWs in the U.S. at that time. POWs were used to fight fires. We had Italian POWs on the military base where I grew up. They were actually issued passes to visit relatives on weekends in a town 40 miles away.

Mexican crews were also used. A shortage of manpower? That thinking is one step short of a yard.

Organization of Firefly

Plan: Facilitate close coordination with the military forces and the United States Forest Service. To facilitate such movement a rather centralized system of control was believed necessary. Basically, control was vested in two fire control sections – one stationed in San Francisco, California, and the other at Silver Lake, Washington.

Dispatching of ground troops for all agencies within a region was done by the USFS. The Fire Control Section held highly centralized control of Air and Paratroop dispatching.

Fact: Sounds good, but there were many problems with coordination between military and civilian organizations. Civilian control over the military was a dream and not a reality. I get a bad feeling each time I read the *Silver Lake Firefly Project Log-1945*.

Common Sense: Can you really picture military taking orders from civilians or vice versa? Do you think the USFS guys, who had been doing the job for four war years, appreciated the inference that they needed military help to do their job?

Personnel

Ground Troops: 3171st Engineering Battalion

Ten units of 273 men, four officers per unit, stationed from Chico, CA, to Fort Missoula, Montana.

Paratroops: 200 at Pendleton, Oregon, and 100 at Chico, CA.

Air: C-47s at Walla Walla, WA, Chico and Hamilton Field (CA)

Fact: *There were close to 3,000 military personnel involved.*

Common Sense: Do you see a problem with aircraft not being located at the same place as the Paratroops?

Training

Nine days with a minimum of 16 hours in the fundamentals of fire. Additional course given in smokejumping, but no days or hours listed. Documents say three

practice jumps were taken on flat ground, none into timber or in the mountains.

From the Project Report: "The principal difficulty in training these troops was weaning them away from Army methods which are not always adapted to our conditions. *There appeared to be a tendency to disregard civilian instruction.* It is strongly recommended that paratroopers for fire duty be given more training in jumping in mountainous country."

Common Sense: With bomb disposal training and other aspects of being military, how much actual training did these troops get in wildland firefighting and smokejumping? Only two USFS personnel were listed as training these men: **Frank Derry** (MSO-40) and **Jack Allen** (MSO-44). Realistically, how much effective smokejumper training could two men give 300 paratroopers in such a short period of time?

Pilot Training

The C-47 pilots were given *no special training*. These officers had little prior training in reading USFS maps, which were in section, township and range, and they were *unable* to read the latter to the nearest mile.

Common Sense: The success of any smokejumper operation is tied into the working relationship between the jumpers and our pilots. We have to be a tight knit team. Skilled mountain pilots are rare and essential to the smokejumper program.

Results: Cargo was dropped first and from the same altitude as the jumpers. It seems that, in many cases, the pilots determined when the jumpers were to jump. They did not slow the aircraft and cargo was separated from the parachutes and spread over the mountain-side. Jumpers did not jump one or two at a time, as normal smokejumper procedures. I'm guessing, that at best, there were sticks of five or more jumpers.

Paratroops - Value and Use

This part of the report shows evaluations at either end of the scale. Region 1 was very critical and did not have good results. Region 5 rated these men right up at the top. Read the report—food for thought.

From the Firefly Report:

"Value in Region 6 (Oregon/Wash) varied from very good to very poor. On some fires action was prompt, without accidents, and suppression work effective. On other fires everything went wrong. *As a whole, benefits outweighed liabilities by a narrow margin.*

"Region 1 was extremely critical. Training and instruction given were nullified, on *the two occasions when jumpers were used*, by the pilot and jumpmaster disregarding instructions, resulting in scattering

which caused injuries and required extra hours to assemble. Effectiveness on the fire line was very poor.

"In Region 5 (California) the colored paratroopers, both officers and men, were *considered superior* in morale, physical condition, efficiency and officer leadership *to the other troops*. Forests using them could not speak too highly of their services, in some cases maintaining that *this unit was superior to any trained group they had ever used*. The officers were interested and cooperative, maintained fine discipline and were *out on the line with their men every minute*. Effectiveness on the *few fires in Region 5, where jumps were made*, was *hampered by injuries*. Paratroopers would have been more widely used in several instances had *C-47 planes been available*.

"To increase the efficiency of initial attack, it is strongly recommended that *a Forest Officer jump with troops*.

"Their greatest value results when used in the control of remote fires, *providing men are better trained and jumps more carefully made*.

"The value of making jumps in force is *difficult to measure*. Two such jumps were made in Region 6. One hundred troopers were used as follow-up on a 300-acre fire in the Chelan National Forest where the initial attack by 10 Forest Service smoke jumpers failed to hold the fire. For the first time in the Region's history, a large fire in the inaccessible area was controlled within the first work period.

"The other mass jumps by 50 paratroopers in the rough, inaccessible Mt. Baker area proved unsuccessful because of injuries, scattered jumpers, lost equipment and low morale. The size of the landing area should determine the number of passes necessary to assure placing the jumpers in the desired location."

From the R-6 Report: "The paratroopers were not well equipped in all respects, poor jumping techniques were used, and *jumpmasters and pilots had different ideas as to when and where to jump*. In several cases actual or assumed accidents resulted in more man hours being given to taking care of the injured than man hours spent on fires. Jumping equipment was often so badly scattered that an inordinate amount of time was required to find and gather the items together."

Thoughts: I need to get more records from R-5 but leadership seems to be the difference between the two groups (Pendleton/Chico). As you will see further in this article, injuries are much higher than normal smokejumper operations. Available aircraft is again a problem. You can read between the lines to see that they (TN) were dropped in much larger sticks than USFS smokejumpers, resulting in scattering of jumpers and equipment.

Accidents

From the Firefly Report: "No accurate accident record is available. Some reports listed only serious accidents and others included those of both a serious and minor nature. A number of accidents occurred and consisted of wrenches, sprains and broken limbs. One fatality was recorded when a paratrooper slipped as he was lowering himself by rope from the tree in which he landed. Many of the accidents were attributed to tree landings and could have been avoided had the men availed themselves of the *guiding apparatus on the Derry Chutes*. Additional training is the solution for reduction in accidents."

Parachutes:

I'm *not convinced* that the Triple Nickle used USFS chutes with Derry slots that often and widely. The FS smokejumpers were having problems obtaining enough parachutes for their operation. There would be a tremendous amount of time involved for the extensive modification to install Derry slots and guidelines. With this in mind, does it seem logical that the USFS modified 600 parachutes for the TN? *Impossible!* The USFS and the military did not even give the TN regulation smokejumper jump suits. The TN used military flight suits with no leg pockets and the letdown rope was tied to their harness or PG bags. I doubt if D-rings were sewed inside the flight suits for letdowns. If the TN could not be provided regulation smokejumper gear, how could they be provided Derry-slotted parachutes?

Let's go to the visual evidence. One of the most viewed photos of the TN shows them standing in front of a C-47 at Pendleton. They are wearing a military T-7 parachute assembly. Look at the straps, webbing and three-point clip attachments, one at each leg and one at the chest. More identifiably, look at the way the cover is closed with break cord going down the outside grommets. Compare that with the USFS chutes. The final evidence is from a photo from *Courage Has No Color*, page 80. A great shot of the parachute loft at Pendleton. Note all of the camouflage parachutes.

If you have evidence to show the TN were using USFS Derry-slotted parachutes, please step forward.

From Fire Suppression Training Plan for Specially Designated Army Personnel (Triple Nickles) 1945: "from 8 June to 15 June were oriented in the use of the *T-7 assembly*** after jumping three jumps, one of which was in heavy timber."

****T-7 Parachute:** Replacement of the *Military T-5 model parachute*. Static line operated with break cord.

I can't find any record that the timber jump was actually made. The T-7 designation indicates that USFS

Derry-slotted chutes were not used in training.

From Fire Report Aug. 21, 1945, Mt. Baker N.F.: "13 *T-7 parachutes*, 11 G-canopies (cargo chutes) and 5 helmets with masks *lost* in mountains." The T-7 is a military chute and does not have Derry Slots.

General Problems

From the Firefly Report:

"Jump masters were not sufficiently familiar with mountainous and timbered country to properly judge safe landings and have a greater familiarity with ground cover in the back country."

Cooley: Jumpmaster did not have ANY drift chutes. Would use a man to test the wind. Told Cooley that he (Cooley) was along to tell them WHERE to jump, NOT HOW. "I was just to stay out of the way." Pilot determined when to jump by rigging a bell and using a red signal light. First stick landed beyond the jump spot into dense small pines. Second stick landed in crags near the edge of a cliff. Third stick had problems and fourth stick decided to stay in the plane.

From the Firefly Report:

"Principal Army training had been on flat terrain; boys were timid to jump in mountainous country; need thorough practice jumps in areas of this nature."

From R-6 Report: "Plane radioed to McCall that territory too rough for jumping and will bring the Paratroopers back to Boise."

From Silver Lake Report: "Aug. 21, 1945, Mt Baker N.F - 34 enlisted men and two officers, dropped. Casualties (read injuries): 3 by parachute, 1 from letdown procedure, 1 enlisted man broken leg above knee, 1 enlisted man knee out of place, 1 enlisted man crushed chest. 13 *T-7 parachutes*, 11 G-canopies and 5 helmets with masks *lost* in mountains." (36 jumpers, 24 parachutes lost, 7 serious injuries)

Chelan N.F.-22 men dropped, eight serious injuries.

From the Firefly Report:

"Lack of confidence in the Derry Chute. Paratroops should have considerable practice and observation of the successful use of this chute." (*I question the availability of this chute-see above*)

"Tendency existed for the Army to jump too many men at a time, frequently resulting in scattering, especially in fast ships. More passes should be made over areas where suitable landing areas are limited."

Pilots - (Big Problems)

From the Firefly Report: Many of the criticisms from the field involved C-47 ships secured from whatever

source available to meet emergency situations. Pilots not connected with the project had no great interest in these jobs; *they were impatient to complete the tasks and rapidly returned to their bases.*

“Cargo dropping efficiency varied from 60-90 percent. Better results could have been secured *had the crews been trained in precision dropping prior to the fire season.*”

Kenneth Diller (CJ-43-45) July 28, 1945, Bunker Hill Fire:

“About sunup, five DC-3s flew over. One started dropping *equipment* about a mile from us and the fire before we were able to direct their attention to the landing area near the fire. By this time the wind had died down providing ideal conditions for the 100 all-black airborne group from Camp Pendleton to land.”

From the Firefly Report: “Dropping efficiency during an emergency situation on any one Forest *did not improve* because of the *practice of continually replacing pilots and crews.*

“*In some cases pilots insisted on dropping a large number of chutes at a single pass.* This created serious difficulties, for ground crews necessarily had to retrieve the scattered cargo in rough, heavily timbered terrain.

“Many failures in Region 5 can be attributed to the small burlap chute which was used. They cannot withstand the strain of drops from *fast planes.* It is recommended that the large commercial parachute be adopted.

“Pilots should be alerted at all times. *Considerable time was lost in trying to contact pilots after 5 p.m.*

“Of the seven C-47 planes assigned to the project, 50-70% were normally out of commission. Dispatching was frequently delayed because of lack of project planes and need to secure ships from other sources and *inability to contact flight officers at night.*”

The report continues: “*Paratroops and troop carrier planes should be stationed at the same base.*”

From the R-6 Report: “losses of equipment (from Army airplanes) were higher than usual in dropping.”

Aircraft

From the Firefly Report: “Of the seven C-47 planes assigned to the project, 50-70% were *normally out of commission.* In August four additional ships were received but were *so badly in need of major overhauls* that no relief to the project resulted.

“Dispatching was frequently delayed because of lack of project planes and inability to contact section or flight officers at night.”

From the Firefly Report: “The pilots of the L-5 (Stinson

used for observation and patrol) planes are to be commended for their interest and fine cooperation. Of the 32 ships assigned, *19 were surveyed for condemnation during the middle of July.* Of the remaining planes, an average of *46% were usually grounded.*”

Thoughts: The failure of this part of the program was easy to pick up early on. Pilots were obtained from any available source and had no connection to the Triple Nickles. They certainly were not trained in mountain flying and dropped the cargo and men from the same altitude and at a high speed. It was noted that the pilots seemed to be in a hurry to complete the mission and return to base.

In one report I read, the military pilot said he would fly any place the FS smokejumper pilot would fly. When he saw the FS pilot go down into canyon to drop his cargo, the military pilot went home.

Racism was evident in Pendleton and the military. The TN officers were not allowed in the Officers Club at Pendleton. It seems logical, that under these conditions, the pilots in the front would have little or no connection to the men in the back. Note the mention of their impatience to complete the task and return to base. This translates, in my opinion, to dropping men in large sticks and at a fast rate of speed with little or no concern about their safety.

Fire Control Sections

From the Firefly Report: “Regions 1 and 6 were critical of the Fire Control’s place in the organization. Excessive time (was) required for coordination and the many time-consuming long distance telephone calls. Region 5 had unusually fine success with the San Francisco Fire Control. The Section was staffed by top-flight project officers with overall authority. The headquarters was within walking distance of the Regional Office. The *officers were direct actionists, impatient with delay* and, when emergencies were severe, flew the ships on long night flights and on difficult dropping jobs.”

Conclusion

I think that we can see that Operation Firefly was an intent by the *military* to put armed forces, and, in particular the Triple Nickles, to use in something of “National Importance.” This type of an operation required a tremendous amount of planning and *cooperation* between the USFS and the military. That did not happen.

As far as the Triple Nickles go, I would make the following conclusions:

Their involvement in Firefly was totally an effort to keep them from being integrated into combat units in the Pacific Theater.

Operation Firefly was *not* an idea thought up by the USFS.

The TN were rushed into a job (smokejumping) for which they were given little and insufficient training. They had to be trained in bomb disposal plus wildland firefighting plus smokejumping. They were trained paratroopers.

They did not have proper smokejumper equipment. Film and photos show Army A.F. flight suits with no leg pockets. Information on letdown ropes vary from 100' to 33' (100' cut into three pieces for the R-5 group). Film shows individuals popping a reserve and sliding down the suspension lines to the ground instead of using USFS letdown techniques.

Their aircraft and parachute availability was such that quickly answering a fire call took a matter of a day or so. They were not off the ground in a short period of time.

The availability of parachutes was also another problem. For reasons as stated in the text, I don't believe that they had more than a few USFS Derry-slotted parachutes. Dispatches were delayed for lack of parachutes. In a time where the USFS jumpers were operating with a slim number of parachutes, many TN chutes were left hanging in the trees.

The lack of willingness to take advice from civilian (USFS) spotters shows that it is tough to give suggestions to the military. "You are here to show us *where* to jump, not *when*."

Being a trained paratrooper does not make a person qualified physically and mentally to be a smokejumper. Jumping into timber, mountains, rocks and cliffs is a very different situation.

The coordination between the pilots and the Triple Nickles was so poor that it almost doomed them to failure. Pilots should not determine when the jumper leaves the plane or where the jump spot is located. If they are not skilled enough to drop the cargo at a lower level, equipment will be scattered over miles. Miles in the mountains translates into days recovering that equipment.

There is so much documentation that I did not put into this article as it is running too long at this point. I've tried to present an overall picture of Operation Firefly. To call it a success, a person would have to be wildly optimistic.

What we do need to do as smokejumpers is to keep this in perspective. The Triple Nickles were involved in five months of the 75 years of smokejumping. They were not "Pioneer" smokejumpers and did not develop or test new equipment and smokejumper techniques.

We should also recognize that they were put into a very difficult situation with little or no help. None of us would have been able to do the job of smokejumping if we were placed in the same circumstances. They are Pioneer Airborne Troops and have established their place in military and U.S. history.

There will continue to be books written on this subject based on myth and inaccuracies and the USFS will continue with press releases based on sources 70 years removed. I hope some of us can set the record straight.

The United States Forestry Service needs to recognize this and honor those who were the Pioneer Smokejumpers. Do not forget Francis Lufkin, Frank Derry, Earl Cooley, Glenn Smith and the others. They are our roots. 🌲



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Cave Junction jumper fought fire before going to the moon

Smoke Jumper, Moon Pilot: The Remarkable Life of Apollo Astronaut Stuart Roosa by Willie Moseley is the family-authorized biography of Apollo 14 Command Module Pilot Stuart Roosa. It's the quintessential, All-American chronicle of the life of an Oklahoma farm boy whose initiative, drive and personal integrity earned him a place among the 24 individuals who made the most dramatic voyage in human history after parachuting to fight forest fires from Cave Junction in 1953.

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1952 movie inspired many dreams of smokejumping

Loosely based on the tragic Mann Gulch Fire in which 12 jumpers and a firefighter died, "Red Skies of Montana" fascinated many young men about life "out West." Released in February 1952. Color.

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ODDS AND ENDS



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to **Bill Baden** (MYC-59), **James Coleman** (MSO-53), **Jerry Schmidt** (CJ-62), **John Manley** (CJ-62) and **Ron Donaca** (CJ-60) who just became our latest Life Members.

From the Bend Bulletin: "The Redmond Air Center dropped 950,797 gallons of retardant this year. Throughout the Northwest, air tankers dropped 2,028 loads this fire season, costing more than \$11 million."

Interesting fact when we hear about how much the smokejumper program is costing the government. Air tanker industry must have some good connections.

Davis Perkins (NCSB-72) working with volunteer medical team in Liberia to treat Ebola patients: "Still in Africa. Three of my original team are in Liberia, helping staff an Ebola treatment unit run by the Int'l Medical Corps. A great bunch of dedicated folks from several countries. All's well, however, and we're getting some good work done. Some tragedies but also triumphs! Should be home in a couple of weeks."

Chuck Blanton (MYC-47) was recently honored by the Idaho State Bar Association. Chuck, a University of Idaho graduate, has been an active member of the bar for 62 years.

Dick Flaharty (MSO-44): "I've had the time to read thru the January 2015 issue of the Smokejumper and I want to express my appreciation of your 'Peacemaker' article. It has elements of insight, understanding, and acceptance which many of us hoped we would encounter in our social interaction following WWII. You did us a great service."

Denis Symes (MYC-63): "The column 'Off the List' is starting to worry me. I note that the years the guys started jumping is getting closer to my first year and this is making me think of my own mortality. I don't want to be mortal. if you stop publishing the column, will this extend my life indefinitely? Just a random thought."

(We need to do our best to stay alive for the reunion this July-Ed.)

Karl Brauneis (MSO-77): "Hi Chuck. I just got the January issue and read your article on the CPS Smokejumpers. Outstanding! I remember our loft foreman,



Hal Samsel (MSO-49), saying 'Menonite smokejumpers were the toughest jumpers that ever lived. Those boys grew up on the farm using only hand tools. They would put a hump in their back and never take a break. They could work anyone into the ground'"

Luke Birky (MSO-45): "Chuck: Thank you so much for your fine article in the Jan 2015 issue of the *Smokejumper* magazine titled *Blessed are the Peacemakers*. I'd like to comment on a few things that came to mind as I read these reflections:

1. Recorded history is important— your point that omissions can be as misleading as false statements is well made.
2. Your comments about the CO position not being appreciated is true.
3. But I would hasten to add that, without exception, the trainers and supervisors I had in the Forest Service, the Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Reclamation were always fair and respectful. They did not agree with our position, but they were fair.
4. The Missoula community was a bit unique. I never felt the same negative attitude toward CO's there as I did in my own home community. I assumed that it might have had to do with it being a University town and the strong pride and concern for their forests and the good work of the Forest Service over many prior years. And the Smokejumpers were thought of as a sort of elite fire control unit.
5. I know that men like **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) and other supervisors did, on occasion, need to interpret the CO position to community members
6. And finally, Chuck, I want to thank you for your fairness and good reporting of the firefighting task and the persons engaged in fire control—and the short but important role played by a few of us CO's who marched to the tune of another drummer. But as you report on the CO's, please do not forget that some of us had the strong support of our own denominations—Friends, Brethren, Menonite—but there were many others as well—men from the Methodist, Catholic, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, Hutterite faith traditions and non-church affiliations, etc, who also served well."

From The University of Montana: "Stories of climate, communities and conservation in the Crown of the Continent will be the focus of a new journalism fund at the University of Montana. The innovative mentoring model is made possible by a generous gift in memory of **Ted Smith** (MSO-62), a tireless and strategic advocate for climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation."

Congratulations to **John Bernstein** (Associate) who retired in August after 35 years with the Houston, Texas, Fire Dept. John is Airborne from Vietnam service and has been a long-time supporter of the NSA.

On the Oregon State Advisory Committee on Historic

Preservation's recommendation, the boundaries of the Historic Siskiyou Smokejumper Base have been expanded to include the barracks, bathhouse and exercise area. Include the base on your travels this summer, five miles south of Cave Junction, Highway 199. Received info for **Reggie Jardon** (MSO-62) for the "Jump List." Reggie is living in Elk Grove, CA. He is a retired USAF Lt. Col and flew O-2s, C-130s and C-5s in Vietnam. After the war he flew for United Airlines and was Chief Pilot for Intel Corporation. He was diagnosed with cancer as a result of Agent Orange but currently is in remission after chemo and a stem cell transplant. 🙏

Smokejumper Community Will Get Stronger At Reunion

by **Jim Phillips** (Missoula '67)

I'm delayed in writing you a personal invitation to attend the National Smokejumper Association Reunion in Missoula, July 17-19, 2015. My pause in not writing sooner is due to many factors, but mostly from my hunt for a topic to organize this invitation's content.

It was during the memorial service for **Bob Sallee** (MSO-49), as I watched multiple generations gathered to remember Bob's life, when an idea grew. The notion was to posit smokejumpers as an elite community in a larger network of wildland firefighters.

It seemed to follow that – like all communities – ours needs refreshing and remembering to ensure its place in our personal histories and to assure its place in the nation's memory. Please, come to the reunion and insert stories and ensure your place in that history.

The 2015 reunion is timed to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the first fire jump by **Rufus Robinson** (MSO-40) and **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) at Marten Creek on the Nez Perce National Forest July 12, 1940.

From the initiation of the smokejumper program in 1939 to today, there have been nearly 6,000 persons who have trained as smokejumpers. There is a continuous line from Rufus and Earl to you and beyond, from which so many transformational concepts have taken form. Those ideas need to be remembered, recollected and refreshed. Come help us do that.

Our smokejumper community needs to periodically embrace and memorialize the idea of parachuting to fires as a successful experiment.

More so, however, of the Black Americans in the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion taking a role to meet a national threat; of conscientious objectors proving up the idea of smokejumpers as a viable means of fighting wildfires during World War II; of 12 smokejumper deaths in Mann Gulch that served to propel and promote wildland fire managers to embrace fire safety and science; of continuing smokejumper innovation and adaptability to meet changing wildland management realities and policies; of cadres of smokejumpers recruited to the clandestine services; of an integrated program open to all qualified persons; and, of the evolutionary development from seasonal to full-time professional smokejumpers.

This smokejumper community is rich in history, special in the character of its members, and unique in the world of wildland firefighters. This community of men and women need to meet and refresh the glow of greatness that is the smokejumper history.

There is a reunion management team composed of **Jim Scofield** (MSO-66), **Dwight Chambers** (MSO-66) deceased, **Sandy Evenson** (Associate), **Jim Sweaney** (MSO-67), **Geno Bassette** (MSO-80) and me, who have enlisted and engaged more than 60 former and current smokejumpers dedicated to provide you and our jumper community with a reunion in which the camaraderie and conversation will enrich and enliven your jumper friendships.

The reunion team will provide you the opportunity to socialize with one another; to recognize those past presidents who have worked hard to retain the value and vigor

of the NSA; to learn about those who survived crippled aircraft and are being inducted into the Caterpillar Club; to access the smokejumper archives in the Mansfield Library at the University of Montana to see video interviews of those who served in the CIA; to take away souvenirs that document that first fire jump at Marten Creek; to have revealed the progress to preserve the Mann Gulch site for future generations; to hear the insights of John N. Maclean, nationally recognized journalist and author; to remember and memorialize those smokejumpers who have died; to hear a smokejumper-guided bluegrass band; and to create visiting opportunities at the Missoula Smokejumper Base, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Museum of Mountain Flying.

And if that doesn't fit your fancy, you can go to the University of Montana Campus Recreation Center and at student rates rent rafts, bicycles, pool privileges and other stuff while hanging with your rookie bros doing your own thing.

Destination Missoula and the University of Montana are our hosts. Both the business community and the university folks are excited to have us and have been terrifically accommodating and helpful. This is a first for the University, and they have let us use the University Oval for beer, barbecue and tall tales around fire pits to pulses of bluegrass music.

The University's Adams Center will house our sit-down banquet and be the forum for Region 1 Forester Faye Kruger to speak about Mann Gulch initiatives, and to hear journalist and author John N. Maclean give us unique insights into the Western wildfires and the community of people standing between it and us. And for those of our guild who have died, the University Ballroom will adapt for the memorial service and a brunch.

As I write this I am acutely aware that my university English professor would have scalded my hide for constructing run-on sentences. I have for a lifetime tried to honor my old professor by trying to perfect the nine-sentences, three-paragraph communiqué. I can't do that here and be of service to you or do justice to the scope of this reunion.

I can tell you, though, that this Smokejumper National Reunion is a special opportunity, a really big deal – complete with range, integrity, and testimony to the extraordinary people who have earned the title *Smoke-*

jumper. I hope you will join with us to hoist a beer and heave a prayer of thanks as we recount our near misses, acknowledge our history and memorialize our comrades.

To help you attend the reunion, you will find a website beginning in January 2015 at: smj2015reunion.wordpress.com, where you can view the itinerary, the venue and download the registration form. There also will be listed suggested accommodations, your selection of which will help determine the dollar value of a financial grant the Missoula Business District is willing to provide us to offset our costs. A Facebook page – *Smj2015reunion* – is being fashioned to allow you to post your reunion plans, connect with your smokejumper bros and update your smokejumper friends.

The NSA website, www.smokejumpers.com, will carry information to ease the registration process, and Sandy Evenson and her registration team will take your calls, answer your e-mails and reply to your letters. Contact her at (401) 531-8608, sandy.evenson@gmail.com or 6230 St. Thomas Dr., Missoula MT 59803.

The reunion team wants you to come, to enjoy, to share, to be a fully contributing part of this, our community – but, it is important you understand that your reservation is your ticket to on-campus food events. We will have to cut off registration a few days before the event date to finalize the food orders, secure tables, chairs, wait staff, etc.

So, register early. Do not delay and expect you can walk in, sit down and be fed. That said, register, show up with your silk stories polished and practiced, knowing it is the lore of smokejumping that cements the independent elements of our community together.

The reunion team is excited in anticipation of your joining the smokejumper community and us to remember 75 years of aerial wildland firefighting. It is imperative we all remember our wildland firefighter population, as former smokejumper **Dr. Charlie Palmer** (MSO-95) did in 2014 when he organized a memorial and headstones for Hjelmer (Harry) Halvorson and Charles Allen, two of five men who died on the 1931 Wilson Creek Fire near Choteau, Mont.

So, we're anxious to hear your stories and share laughter with you. We want the opportunity to tell you how proud we are to be associated with folks like you. See you at the reunion – and check your canopy. 🐼

The Tribal Council

by Dan Cottrell (Missoula '01)

The summer of 2008 was playing out to be not the most memorable one, but we

were staying plenty busy and it had potential. I had four fire jumps under my belt by the end

of July and lightning had sparked plenty of work across the Rockies. I remember thinking we had



Shane Ewing (Courtesy Kurt Rohrbach)

a pretty good load on that day because jumping fires with **Shane Ewing** (MSO-04) was always interesting. I wish I had known then that it would be my last with him. Within a few short months, Shane would be taken from us, struck by a car as he crossed Brooks street in Missoula, on a cold and dark rainy night in December. Merry Christmas everybody! Gone in a second. Friend, father, jump partner, basketball teammate. I remember thinking how unfair it was that such a profound loss could hap-

pen so incredibly fast.

Shane could run a saw and he worked his ass off, but mostly he knew how to laugh. Plus, you never knew what was in store for you when Shane was part of the demob process. Sure enough, the siren went off after lunch and we were fresh off a couple of gut-bombs from Taco del Sol. "A state fire up on the Kootenai, in mountain lion country," I remember **Knute Olson** (MSO-00) saying.

As usually happens, I don't remember many details about the

fire. It was a six-manner called "Wolf Point." Shane was first in the door, which is where he operated the best, and he set the bar pretty high by nailing a tight ridge top jump spot. The most memorable part of the fire was a stout mountain lion that showed up at dusk and glided through our camp. Nice call, Knute. The lion made sure we knew we were the intruders, and skulked around the fire for the next day and a half. Even **Tim Wallace** (MSO- 2006) moved his sleeping bag a bit closer to the fire. About a half-acre of mop-up and two restless nights later, we were headed for demob while larger fires, like the Chippy Fire, raged on the horizon north of us. At the last minute a helicopter materialized, so we hightailed it down the ridge to a suitable helispot Shane had scouted a day earlier.

The Kootenai had a command post set up outside of Libby at a campground, so we all rolled into there for a hot meal and to rendezvous with other jumpers coming off of other fires across the forest. Jumper style, we grabbed a shaded spot off on the periphery for a sleeping area and then headed for the chow line. Crews were rolling in to staff those larger fires and, as usual, school busses and green rigs were crawling everywhere. A crew from the Northern Cheyenne Reservation joined us in line, and the first thing they asked was if Shane Ewing was around. Shane grew up on the Northern Cheyenne rez near Busby and his roots ran deep in that part of Montana. Within seconds, I could hear Shane laughing and high fives and handshakes were flying. We got through the chow line pretty quick and got caught up and swapped jump stories with all our MSO bros that were trickling

into the camp. After a chicken fried steak and a pudding cup, I was ready to go find my sleeping bag.

It was almost dark by now and, to my surprise, there were still probably 15 people lined up waiting for food. I turned to **James Francis** (MSO-91) and bagged on the servers for taking so long to serve such cold food to people, but James just laughed

at me. Dude, those guys haven't even eaten yet, they're waiting in line to talk to SHANE. Sure enough, Shane had spent the last hour catching up with friends, answering questions, and just being who he was. Shane was that kind of guy, always quick with a smile and friends with everyone he met. People on and off the rez loved him for it and looked up to him.

I headed off to my sleeping bag, but one of my fondest memories of Shane is seeing him sitting on a picnic table, outlined against the sunset, surrounded by that crew, holding his impromptu tribal council. Long after I crawled into my sleeping bag, I could still hear the distant voices, occasionally broken by Shane's deep and infectious laughter. Rest in peace Shane. We miss you! 🙏

Smokejumpers Honor Fallen Comrade

by Jake Brollier (Redding '95)

It was a hot and muggy morning in Boise, Idaho, May 16. Walking along Hearthstone Drive toward Bob's Trailhead in the Boise Foothills, I could hear the slap of hands connecting in high fives as bros greeted each other in traditional smokejumper fashion. It was the start of the three-quarter-mile hike to where they would begin work on the Urban Connection Trail.

About 50 smokejumpers from the Boise and McCall smokejumper bases gathered to honor the memory of **Mark T. Urban** (NIFC-03) and build a nearly one-mile trail in the Boise Foothills, dedicated to him, and adopted by the Boise BLM Smokejumpers to maintain on an annual basis. Mark died Sept. 27, 2013, during an evaluation jump near Prairie, Idaho, about 45 miles east of Boise.

"It will be our link to Mark," said **Joe Wyatt** (NIFC-06), who helped complete the trail-building effort by coordinating with Ridge to Rivers Organization director Dave Gordon. The bros decided that the best way to remember Mark's legacy was to build a trail for him in his much-loved foothills.

It all "came together" in October 2013 and the plans to start building a trail for Mark began. "It is what he liked to do," said Rebecca, Mark's wife and childhood sweetheart.

Mark was a vigorous bicyclist and outdoorsman who enjoyed contributing to the Boise Bicycle Project, an organization started by ex-hotshots to promote bicycle education and availability to the Boise community through repair and maintenance classes and donations.

The new Urban Connection Trail is an improvement on an existing trail that was rerouted to include more switchbacks in areas that were closed for rehabilitation

and erosion control. The trail upgrades create a loop linking Bob's Trail and Corrals Trail in the 150-mile system of trails surrounding Boise and the Treasure Valley.

The Ridge to Rivers Organization that manages and oversees the maintenance of these trails was created in the early 1990s as a partnership between the Bureau of Land Management, Ada County and the City of Boise. Fittingly, the Urban Connection Trail is located on BLM land since Mark, too, was a BLM jumper.

Mark was one of the most respected and skilled smokejumpers the Boise program has ever had. He jumped 11 seasons and totaled 324 jumps, with 102 of them being fire. An avid bicyclist, who also enjoyed skiing, surfing, running, and playing his guitar, Mark is greatly missed by his friends, family and colleagues but will always be remembered at a special place called the Mark Urban Connection Trail in the Boise Foothills.

This is the perfect way to honor Mark and keep his memory alive year after year, doing what he would have loved to do himself. He is survived by his wife, Rebecca; his parents, Tom and Pam Urban; and his sister, Sara Quaglia. 🙏



Mark Urban 2005 fire in Brooks Range Alaska (Courtesy Mike McMillan)

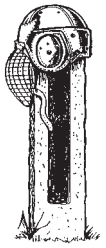
NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions

Contributions since the previous publication of donors January 2015

<u>Donor</u>	<u>In Memory/Honor of</u>
Charlie Rodgers (MSO-64).....	Ron Curtiss(GAC-61)
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Lynn Biddison	Gar Thorsrud(MSO-46)
Chris Sorensen (Assoc).....	Jedidah Lusk(FBX-10)
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Linda/George Vensel.....	Gar Thorsrud(MSO-46)
Brad Willard (MSO-58).....	John Rolf.....(MSO-57)
Jane Wall.....	Gar Thorsrud(MSO-46)
J.L. Scott (MYC-48).....	Gar Thorsrud(MSO-46)

Total funds disbursed to smokejumpers and families since 2004—\$55,340

Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to: Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico, CA 95926



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

Asa Mundell (Missoula '43)

Asa died April 19, 2008. He lived in Lafayette, Oregon. He grew up in Colorado, the son of an itinerant minister. After two years at Kansas Wesleyan University, he was drafted in 1942 and reported to a CPS Camp at Downey, Idaho.

In 1943 he was accepted into the smokejumper unit in Missoula, where he jumped that season. After the war he finished his degree at Kansas Wesleyan and then graduated from the Iliff School of Theology in Denver.

Asa pastored many churches in Oregon, worked for the headquarter office of United Methodist Churches and retired from the ministry in 1987.

In 1993 Asa wrote and published *Static Lines and Canopies*, a collection of remembrances of the CPS-103 Smokejumpers who kept the project alive during WWII.

Fred H. Rensmeyer (McCall '58)

Fred, 76, died November 3, 2014, in Glendale, AZ after a short battle with brain cancer. He was a graduate of Boise Jr. College and the University of Idaho. Fred jumped at McCall in 1958 and Idaho City 1959-62. He was in the Army National Guard for 27 years, a Chief Warrant Officer 4, Master Army Aviator, and graduated from helicopter flight school at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Over the years, Fred worked for Intermountain Aviation, Sperry Flight Systems, Bell Helicopter Textron and Bell Lexus. His passion in life was flying helicopters, and he was able to fly into his early '70s.

Homer W. "Skip" Stratton (Missoula '47)

Skip died October 30, 2014. He graduated from Missoula County High School in 1940 and completed the Aviation Cadet program at the Johnson Flying Service after the start of WWII. He then completed military pilot training at Kelly Field in Texas. After the war Skip returned to the University of Montana, where he received his master's degree in Forestry. During this time he was a jumper at Missoula from 1947 through the 1950 season.

Skip was one of the four jumpers who participated in the demonstration jump on the Ellipse in front of

the White House in Washington, D.C. in 1949. Ironically, he headed up a crew to recover the victims of the Mann Gulch Fire, one of whom he had made the D.C. jump with weeks earlier.

Skip made his last fire jump in the Bob Marshall Wilderness in 1950 before accepting an appointment as a forester on the Coeur D'Alene N.F. He spent 26 years with the Forest Service before retiring as Assistant Chief of Fire Control in R-1 in 1973. Skip was carded as an Incident Commander and was in charge of some of the largest fires in the region as well as in California.

Stanton D. "Stan" Tate (McCall '53)

Stan died November 3, 2014. He was a smoke-jumper, Episcopal priest, a county magistrate, a college professor and a juvenile justice advocate. Stan graduated from the Princeton Seminary in New Jersey as an ordained minister. He worked a pastorate in Montana and returned to a parish in McCall, which allowed him to continue his summer work as a smokejumper. Stan continued to work with the jumpers as a chaplain for local and national reunions, marriages and funerals.

During the Vietnam War he served as chaplain for the 124th Fighter Interceptor Group of the Idaho Air National Guard. He completed his Doctorate in Bio-medical Ethics at San Francisco Theological Seminary and U.C. Berkeley.

He was the author of *Jumping Skyward* and honored nationally by the Idaho State Historical Society at their annual national meeting in St. Louis as an "Idaho Legend, Smokejumper-Priest." Stan jumped at McCall for the 1953, 55, 58, 59, 61 and 1963 seasons.

Earl C. Schmidt (Missoula '43)

Earl, 94, died November 5, 2014, in Lancaster, PA. He was a CPS-103 smokejumper, one of the conscientious objectors from the Peace Churches that filled the ranks of the jumpers to keep the program alive during the war years. Earl was a Mennonite from Kansas and one of the few CPS jumpers who jumped all three years from 1943-45. He was active in the CPS smoke-jumper reunions at Oskaloosa, Iowa, in 2000 and later at Hungry Horse, MT. It was a letter from Earl that

told of Wag Dodge introducing the “escape fire” during jumper training in 1943, years ahead of its use at Mann Gulch.

Clem LeRoy Pope (Cave Junction '46)

Clem died October 10, 2014, in Hood River, Oregon. He was a WWII paratrooper and the second known smokejumper to serve with the OSS in China. Clem jumped at Cave Junction after the war and continued his education in Forestry, receiving his Bachelor's from Purdue and a Master's degree from Michigan.

He was well known in the Oregon logging and lumber industry throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Perhaps most significant in his career during that time was his role with Hult Lumber and Plywood of Horton and Junction City, Oregon. Clem's grandson, **Clem V. Pope (GAC-03)**, is an NSA Scholarship winner and jumps at Grangeville.

Rodney P. Linton (Missoula '49)

Rodney, 84, died November 12, 2014. He jumped at Missoula during the 1949 season and attended the University of Montana and Montana State. Rodney served in the Army during the Korean War and was discharged with the rank of Staff Sergeant.

He later graduated from Eastern Washington University and got his Masters from Whitworth College. He taught at the elementary and junior high school level at schools in the Spokane Valley. Rodney retired from teaching in 1990.

Garfield M. “Gar” Thorsrud (Missoula '46)

Gar died November 23, 2014. He was living in Tucson, Arizona. Gar was born in Watford City, ND, to Norwegian immigrant parents and moved to Missoula when he was 8 years old. He was a graduate of the University of Montana in 1951.

Gar began working for the USFS at age 16 on blister rust and fire crews and became a smokejumper in 1946. He jumped at Missoula from 1946 through the 1951 seasons. He received his “wings” in 1955 and flew in both the Montana and D.C. Air National Guard Units.

Upon government retirement, Gar founded Mountain West Aviation in 1975, which later became Sierra Pacific Airlines, and served as its president until his death.

The major portion of Gar's obit will have to be written in later years in bits and pieces. The 35-year plus Smokejumper/CIA connection has been covered in many articles in *Smokejumper*. Over 90 smokejumpers have worked overseas for the agency in many operations in Cuba, South America, Tibet, and throughout

Southeast Asia. Gar was among the first to be recruited by the agency and headed up many of these operations, starting with the Taiwan Project in the early 50s.

He was apparently recruited, along with another jumper, by the CIA in the early 50s when some of that organization came to Missoula for parachute training. The agency decided that there was no reason to train their people in cargo dropping and parachuting into remote and mountainous terrain as the USFS already had those trained individuals. The whole story could fill a book. Who knows if this important part of U.S. and smokejumper history will ever be told?

James M. Spence (Missoula '53)

Jim died November 23, 2014, at his home in Wenatchee, WA. After graduating from high school, he joined the Army Air Force during the last days of WWII. He jumped at Missoula for the 1953 and 1957 seasons and at West Yellowstone during the 1954-56 seasons. He shattered his left ankle on a jump and was on crutches for 18 months.

During that down time he enrolled in the University of Montana where he earned his degree. Jim served as an administrative officer for the USFS and later worked on the Alaska pipeline.

Kent A. Petersen (Idaho City '68)

Kent died October 9, 2014, in Olathe, Kansas. He had battled multiple myeloma for nearly eight years. Kent graduated from Valley City State University and did graduate work at St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Kent taught special education and coached in Sauk Center, MN, and worked part time in the insurance business. After retirement from teaching, Kent went into the insurance business full time and was presented a lifetime achievement award earlier this year. Kent jumped at Idaho City for the 1968 and '69 seasons.

Dale E. Landis (Missoula '45)

Dale died of pneumonia October 26, 2014, at age of 91 in Polk, Wisconsin. Dale graduated from Bridgewater College in Virginia with degrees in sociology and psychology. He got his Master's from the University of Tennessee and did postgraduate work at The Family Institute of Chicago.

Dale was a member of the CPS-103 smokejumpers and jumped at Missoula during the 1945 season. He worked with the Dept. of Public Works in Virginia, Child Guidance Clinic in Ohio, Racine Mental Health Clinic in Wisconsin, and as a therapist at the Norris Adolescent Center in Mukwonago, Wis., before retiring.

Dale was a member of the Methodist Church and committed to his “Stand For Peace” ideals. 🕯

THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE THE FENCE



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

SINCE OUR LAST issue, **Davis Perkins** (NCSB-72) has spent six weeks in Liberia providing medical support to Ebola patients through Heart to Heart International, an international medical relief agency based in Kansas.

Davis, 64, is a retired firefighter and paramedic from San Carlos and Belmont, Calif., and has training in handling hazardous materials. He has also been an Army paratrooper and jumped out of Winthrop for two years and Fairbanks for 10 years.

Davis is a very accomplished artist. Many of you have seen his work portraying smokejumpers; he is currently working on a commemorative print for the 75th-anniversary reunion.

After retiring, Davis deployed to Haiti, following the 2010 earthquake, and joined medical teams providing aid in Ethiopia and Cambodia. In an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Davis said, "It can be challenging, but at the same time it's rewarding. The people I'm with are just top-

notch and we get a lot of good work done."

Davis said that while most of his friends are supportive of his most recent trip, his 23-year-old daughter "was nervous as hell" when she learned he was going to Liberia. But he said he felt he had no other choice.

"It's who I am and it's what I do," he said. "What is it they say about firefighters? They run into the building when everybody is running out," Davis chuckled. "This is so damned frightening, what this epidemic is. There is a desperate, desperate need for people on the ground right now, and I just felt that if anybody is going to do it, it should be me.

"I have been fortunate enough to have some of the skills that are going to be needed," he said. "I hope I can do some good."

Cynthia Lusk (RAC-87) has written a book, *Remember Me Always: The story of Jedidiah Lusk*. Cynthia has reached deep down and with great faith, a great family and smokejumper courage she has done what few have been able to do: openly shared with the world the loss of a child.

Jedidiah (FBX-10) was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer at age 10. Jedidiah's Make-A-Wish Dream was to become a smokejumper. Jedidiah and his family traveled to Fairbanks and the Alaska Smokejumpers made Jedidiah their 650th smokejumper. Jedidiah was the only Fairbanks rookie in 2010.

After reading the book I have been left with great admiration and respect for Cynthia and the Lusk family. The book is available

on Amazon and Kindle. I highly recommend it.

On June 23, 2014, Utah Rep. Chris Stewart, apparently in response to the Bundy Standoff in Nevada, introduced H.R. 4934: The RAD Act, or "Regulatory Agency Demilitarization Act."

The act intends to "prohibit certain Federal agencies from using or purchasing certain firearms, and for other purposes." The RAD Act would stop any federal regulatory agency from purchasing or even using a firearm within 30 days of its enactment.

In addition, the agency is required to report a description of each unit, details of their training, and the hardware and weapons they use in the line of duty. Numerous Western congressmen signed on to this bill including then Rep. Steve Daines (R-Mont.), now a senator.

Among the federal agencies the bill would disarm are the Forest Service, the BLM, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

If you have any concern about federal law enforcement officers being armed, I direct you to an interactive series in *High Country News*, "Mapping Threats on Public Lands." According to the Fraternal Order of Police, the most dangerous job in law enforcement is National Park Service ranger.

The NSA Facebook page is approaching 500 likes. We would like to see more photos posted over the next few months – preferably with captions including who, where, etc. All eras are welcome. 📌



Touching All Bases



Alaska

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

Chris Silks (FBX-91) made the decision to turn in his jump gear and officially retire after making more than 200 fire jumps. Chris has been our Paracargo Supervisor since 2007 and an important part of our crew for over 20 years. He will be sorely missed. He started his fire career with the Chena Hotshots in 1989 and earned his rookie wings in 1991. His determination, hard work, and commitment to the base have been seldom equaled.

Our re-organizational efforts over the last few years have resulted in a headcount increase from 64 to 73 with added temporary and a few short-term permanent positions. Aside from the increased operational capability, the higher headcount will give the base more flexibility in supporting external details to assist the agency in filling critical gaps, while providing professional development opportunities for jumpers. The base received excellent feedback on individuals who participated in details in 2014 and their work reflected very positively on the jump program.

Brandon Kobayashi (FBX-05) will be taking over the Lead Rookie Trainer role from **Chris Swisher** (FBX-03) this spring. Eight to twelve rookie candidates are expected to be hired for the 2015 class. Rookie selections remain extremely competitive with significant numbers of highly-experienced and highly-recommended candidates applying to the program.

During the off-season a number of our parachute instructors attended a course that provided insight into instructional techniques utilized by the military. Our training section did an excellent job identifying the opportunity and moving the class from an idea to a reality. Many instructional similarities exist, but the exposure to different techniques and approaches provided a broader perspective for our parachute instructors and some ideas that can be incorporated into our own parachute training.



Grangeville

Michael Blinn (RDD-01)

Nothing much is going on in Grangeville these days. We're currently working through our rookie cert to find the next generation of lawn darts. We haven't lost any folks yet, so we don't really know if we'll be hiring for 2015.

Pat Gocke (RDD-09) is headed back to the Davidson River Handcrew to provide leadership, support, and that special ginger stoicism that he's famous for. We have several other detailers that are headed back to work

on the Davidson River later in the spring. We'll also be filling a few slots on each module headed to the sunny south from R1 starting the end of this month.

Dan Mooney (WYS-07) tied the knot with his beautiful wife, Allison, on October 4 of 2014. **Matt Smith** (GAC-02) completed several hundred hours of Twin Otter pilot time on his sabbatical in 2014 with nary a fatality or serious accident. The verdict is still out on whether he'll be flying or jumping this coming year.

Shane Ralston (RDD-03) detailed into a WO training position from September to the end of December in 2014. He has been working on policy and training documents for the Smokejumper Program and the greater fire service. We figured that getting him a keyboard job was the best motivation to get that left arm going full strength. We're anticipating a more rapid recovery from Ol' Hunt-n-Peck after his stint in the typing pool. **Chris Young** (GAC-91) got a new puppy, so now he has someone to blame when there's a mess on the floor in the loft. Shrewd move, Youngster. Past that, were just haggling over budget and waiting on the new season of American Idol.

Missoula

Nate Ochs (MSO-11)

This spring, for the first time in its history, Missoula will be training a rookie class on the Ram-Air

parachute system. This will be an event that utilizes the skills of just about everyone at the base in one way or another, as preparations are made building and inspecting equipment, packing parachutes, organizing logistics, and training the candidates. Thanks for everyone's hard work.

The loft is busily preparing for the change. This winter loft personnel are doubling their regular pre-season run of harness production by manufacturing 40 new harnesses. They are also training smokejumpers from lofts out of region on how to manufacture Ram Air equipment and how to inspect it with rigorous attention to detail.

Region 1 will also be transitioning 14 smokejumpers from the FS-14 round to the DC-7 Ram-Air system. If there are more interested candidates, there may be additional opportunities to complete the training in Boise or Fairbanks.

Missoula sent four modules to Region 8 for prescribed fire/fuels work the last week in January and going steadily through mid-April.

The blasting program at MSO is growing as six smokejumpers train to complete their certifications.

After over 30 years, Missoula is giving its Ready Room a facelift with 75 new jump gear lockers.

The 2015 fire season will likely mark the final run for the DC-3 aircraft which, if projections hold, is scheduled to be replaced by B-Model Sherpas beginning in March 2016.

Congratulations to **Will Burks** (MSO-11) and **Tyler Kuhn** (MSO-13) on their promotions to permanent seasonal status in Boise. We'll be seeing you in the smoke.

Congratulations also to **Jake Besmer** (MSO-03) and **Jessie Thomas** (MSO-04) on their new baby, and **James Muir** (MSO-10) on his baby boy.

Great Basin Smokejumpers

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

Fire season 2014 for the Great Basin BLM Smokejumpers turned out to be anticlimactic. For the most part, the deserts of the Western US did not burn in 2014. This allowed us to assist our FS brethren with more boosters than we can usually let go. We sent boosters to RDD, RAC, NCSB, MSO, and WYS. Overall, in the Basin we staffed 73 total fires with 397 jumpers out the door. This was significantly below our 10-year average of 133 fires staffed with 713 out the door, but, as all of you know, you gotta roll with the punches.

The GB Smokejumpers also saw many of their long-term employees moving on to bigger and better jobs in the BLM, FS and beyond. The following is a list of jumpers who left and where they went:

Hector Madrid (MYC-89)

New Mexico BLM State FMO

Derek Hartman (RDD-98)

Channel Islands NP FMO

Mark Skudlarek (MYC-02)

GB Training Unit Coordinator

Derek Bohan (NIFC-10)

Boise City Fire Department

Robert Miller (FBX-05)

Boise City Fire Department

Dale Springer (NIFC-01)

Boise City Fire Department

Quincy Chung (NIFC-03)

Boise NF District AFMO

Jeran Flinders (NIFC-04)

San Juan NF AFMO

Matt Matush (NIFC-12)

Chena IHC Forman

Kevin Maier (RDD-02)

USFS AFUE Diagnostic Specialist

We appreciate the tremendous service that these men gave the smokejumper community over the years and look forward to working with them in the future. It is always beneficial to the smokejumper community overall when we can encourage our employees to step outside of the smokejumper organization and accept other challenges in the fire community.

The large number of departing jumpers left us at a deficit in jumpers to staff loads and fires in 2014. We will be hiring upwards of 20 new employees for the 2015 season to make up for those who left and bring us closer to our overall headcount of 81. The departure of some of these jumpers also left holes that were filled with the following:

Jim Raudenbush FBX-82)

Smokejumper Chief

Todd Jinkins (NIFC-98)

Deputy Chief

Phil Lind (NIFC-01)

Training Manager

Ben Oakleaf (NIFC-05)

Assistant Training Manager

2015 marks the 30th year of the Great Basin BLM Smokejumper base, and we look forward to hosting an anniversary party this fall. 🍷



SOUNDING OFF from the editor



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

Smokejumper History— Don't Ask The Forest Service

THERE HAVE BEEN articles and books that have come out in the past few years dealing with smokejumper history. A lot of it is factually untrue. When I contact the writers about their source of information I'm finding out a very sad fact: Their source is the U.S. Forest Service.

Last year NSA Board Member **John Marker** (Associate) sent me an article from the online version of *National Geographic*. The theme of the article related the way the USFS has incorporated military tactics into the wildland firefighting process. When it came to the part on smokejumping, I was astounded at the statements.

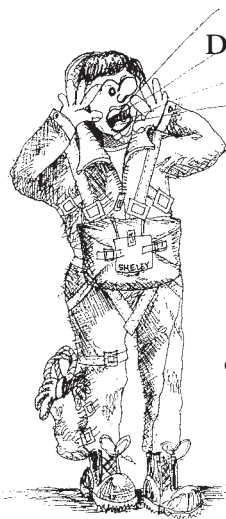
The first thing that catches my eye in reading is the term

"Smoke Jumpers." When I see the spelling as two words versus "Smoke-jumpers," I know the author is behind times. The term Smoke Jumpers comes from the 1940s.

Under that heading was an interview with a member of the USFS involved in the "Technology and Development Program." The author led into the statement with:

"The idea of smoke jumping grew out of the World War II fighting experience." Then came the quote from the USFS official: "After World War II, people who had parachuting experience out of the war started thinking how that could be adapted to firefighting."

I contacted the author and told him that smokejumping (one word) had started with the experimental program in 1939 and the actual operation started in 1940 at Winthrop, WA, and Missoula, MT. In June 1940 Major General William Lee (known as the Father of the U.S. Airborne) was in Missoula that year observing the USFS Smoke-jumper program. In a quote from the Missoula Sentinel after the war, General Lee "told the world that *the Forest Service parachute training assignments and experiments had stepped up or speeded Army parachute developments by six months.*" In 1942, Lee commanded the *newly formed* 101st Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Please read "Blast From The Past" by Jack



Demmons (MSO-50) in this issue for more background information. A big problem is that many people do not know when WWII started for the United States - Pearl Harbor anyone?

I asked the author to check back with his USFS source and got the following: "I spoke to (name withheld) yesterday, and he said he sticks by his statements and he believes them correct

based on the history he's read. He says the army was using aerial troops *before* smokejumpers were around, and that they did a lot to improve its design (smokejumpers?) during the Second World War."

Recently there have been a couple books released on the Triple Nickles (555th Parachute Infantry Battalion), an African American Airborne unit from WWII. The Triple Nickles were involved in Operation Firefly from May 1945 into October 1945. Most reports have them jumping anywhere from 32-38 fires with over 1200 fire jumps. Research of Operation Firefly has shown there were 15 fires jumped and less than 500 fire jumps.

With so much misinformation coming out about the Triple Nickles' role in smokejumping, I did my best to review Operation Firefly in another article in this issue.

A new book, "Courage Has No Color: The True Story Of The Triple Nickles," was released recently. It is well written and the

photographs are really of historical value. However, there were some statements in the coverage of Operation Firefly that I felt were completely inaccurate (italicizing mine):

1. "Since smokejumping was a *relatively new* practice for the Forest Service, the Triple Nickles were on the cutting edge of learning this *new* method of fighting fires."

Fact: Operational smokejumping started in 1940 and was in its 6th season of operation. CPS-103 jumpers made over 1,000 fire jumps in the 1945 season alone. The program was being run by some outstanding individuals including Pioneer Smokejumpers **Frank Derry** (MSO-40), **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40), and **Glenn Smith** (MSO-40) who had returned in 1944. The smokejumper program was on solid ground. These men knew what they were doing. The cutting edge had been well rounded by 1945!

2. "The Triple Nickles (TN) also played an integral part in *pioneering* the field of smokejumping..... They *tested equipment and techniques* that are *now standard smokejumping practices*."

Fact: Completely false. One of the biggest problems with the Triple Nickles and Operation Firefly is that they *did not* use smokejumper equipment and techniques. More on that later.

THE AUTHOR WAS very positive in her responses to my questions about her sources. I felt that getting it right was important to her. I question two main points: the TN being "pioneer smokejumpers" and "tested new equipment and techniques."

She replied, "Regarding my saying that they tested equipment

that became standard, I believe I was referring to things such as Frank Derry and his newly designed chutes."

I would counter that the Derry-slotted chutes had been in use successfully since 1942 and were standard equipment. I've actually found no evidence that the TN had Derry-slotted chutes. Those are certainly military T-7s in all the Triple Nickle photos.

Regarding calling the Triple Nickles "pioneer smokejumpers," the author listed three sources. Guess what? They were all from the Forest Service

Smokejumpers certainly did not have camouflage parachutes.

Regarding calling the TN "pioneer smokejumpers," the author listed three sources. Guess what? They were all from the Forest Service:

1. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell August 25, 2009 USFS Forum: "...during World War II, African Americans made up the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion which helped pioneer smokejumping."

2. USFS Kathy Sosbe (4/5/10) "Triple Nickles Bring Smokejumper History to Life" in which text uses "pioneers."

3. Jesse Burns, a member of the Missoula Smokejumpers: "They (TN) are some of the pioneers (referring to smokejumping), and it was great to listen to some of their stories."

THIS IS HOW history changes. It is the same as sitting a group in a circle, whispering a sentence into the ear next to you and so on, around the circle. What comes

out is far from what went in.

I just finished *Freedom From Fear* by David M. Kennedy. On page 848 of this lengthy and well-researched book was a statement dealing with the Japanese Balloon Bomb program: "They (balloon bombs) ignited some minor forest fires, many of them promptly extinguished by the "Triple Nickles..." Besides spelling Triple Nickles incorrectly, he was wrong

on the fires caused by the balloon bombs as there were none.

One of my main goals with *Smokejumper* magazine is to record smokejumper history accurately. Over the years I've accumulated many copies of original documents and read books by people who made that history. In today's internet age, many authors are using sources of information twenty times removed from the primary source and talking to people who have little or no knowledge of smokejumper history. Those far-removed sources then become primary sources for the next writer. That is how history changes.

The Smokejumper program holds one of the most unique and interesting parts of USFS and US history. We need to hang on and defend it against those who do not have the background to speak about smokejumping.

The Marine Corps grounds every grunt marine in Marine Corps history. They had better know it. Wouldn't it be great if our current smokejumper rookies would have to know smokejumper history to the same degree? 🇺🇸

MURRY TAYLOR HAS NEW SMOKEJUMPER BOOK

*I've asked Murry, the author of the bestselling smokejumper book ever, *Jumping Fire*, to give us an idea of his new book. Here it is.*

In *More or Less Crazy* I return to the summer of 1973. It is my first as an Alaska smokejumper, and a wild and freewheeling time in and around Fairbanks. It's the beginning of the construction of the Alaska pipeline. From our comfortable barracks and tent frames on the green banks of the Chena River, a new and clueless District Manager moves the crew to a deserted old hangar on Fort Wainwright. He is bent on ridding Alaska of smokejumpers. They just cause too many problems. The T-hangar has no running water, no electricity, no heat. The crew is made up of Vietnam Vets, ex-Air America bad boys, and transfers and no-rehires from the jump bases in the Lower 48. Being stuck on Fort Wainwright in the old T- Hangar, surrounded by chain link fences and gravel lots, and under the eye of the Military Police is a recipe for disaster.

Al Matlton, our new base foreman, is a different kind of boss. One who senses the value of the individual spirit.

Crew meetings begin. Trust builds. Strong personalities come forward, then together in an outrageous testimony to the joy of living life fully in one of America's last great true-life adventures. In an odyssey of movement and beauty we jump fires from Kodiak Island to the shadows of Denali, and in the winds of Isabel Pass. By early August we are jumping fires out of the North Cascade Smokejumper Base in North Central Washington, then La Grande in Northeastern Oregon, then on to Missoula, Montana to finish the season.

I don't claim this to be the complete/definitive story of the T-Hangar Days. There's just too much to contain in one book. It is but a mere glimpse. Spend a summer with a crew of special characters and witness, not only its ability to perform minor miracles stopping wildfires, but also to laugh and play in a raucous celebration of the human spirit. I hope you enjoy it.

This is the link to the paperback. There's no hardcover at this point: <http://bookstobelievein.com/MoreorLessCrazy.php>. You can also call 303.794.8888 to order directly. The link, or a phone call, is my preferred way for you to buy the book which is also on Amazon. 📖



NSA Scholarship Chairman Gary Baker (MSO-67) and scholarship recipient Erin Springer (RAC-08) and Eli Schned (MSO-11). (Courtesy G. Baker)



BLAST FROM THE PAST



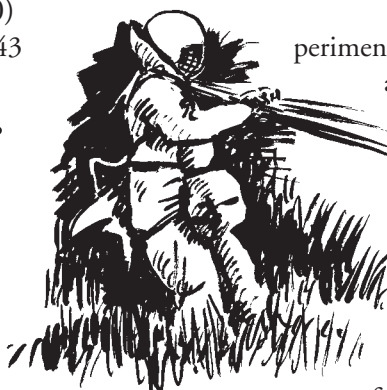
by Jack Demmons (Missoula '50)
The Daily Missoulian, September 2, 1943

Parachute Center of Nation Is Established Here

Recognition of the Missoula District as the parachute jumping training center of the nation has come from Alaska, Canada, England and points in this country, say USFS officials.

Major General William Lee, of the Army Air Force, recently told the world that the Forest Service parachute training assignments and experiments had stepped up or speeded Army parachute development by six months.

He is an officer who knows more than most about it, as in 1940 he was in Missoula and in Nine Mile with the original parachute jumping squadron ex-



periments in this region, which have since been adapted generally.

Alaska sent a Coast Guard detachment to serve as a Forest Service auxiliary parachute squadron while learning the details of jumping in all of its phases. They will return home this fall to be ready for rescue work throughout the north.

Another similar detachment has come from the northland in recent weeks to take up training at Seeley Lake.

Various regions of the U.S. have assigned their officials and men to the training at Seeley Lake and Nine Mile, working with the USFS jumpers.

(Lee used his observations to establish the first paratrooper facility at Fort Benning, Ga. He became known as the "father of the airborne paratroopers," and commanded the 101st Airborne Division, the "Screaming Eagles," during WWII.) 🇺🇸

Hosts Needed At Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum

Smokejumpers and friends have done a terrific job of restoring the historic buildings at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base in Cave Junction, Oregon. Although it is still a work in progress, the museum has to be the best smokejumper museum in existence.

That said, we need your help. The museum is open from March 15 to November 15 and located on the busy Redwoods Highway leading from the coast to I-5. Hosts to help us keep the doors open are needed.

We have an apartment with kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom at the back of the Visitor's Center. An RV hookup is also available.

Duties would include welcoming visitors and

guiding tours through the three buildings. As with campground hosts, we also need to keep the lawns mowed and the place clean.

Within driving distance, you could visit Crater Lake, Oregon Caves, Redwoods and the Oregon Coast. Coverage would be provided if you wanted to take time off to be a tourist.

You can host anywhere from a day to a week to a month. We will provide a tour outline with historical background. Although it helps to be a jumper, non-jumpers have done an excellent job of hosting.

Give us a hand in preserving smokejumper history. To get on the hosting calendar, contact: **Wes Brown** (CJ-66) at (541) 592-2250 or alphaa@frontiernet.net.

THANKS TO THE HOSTS - SISKIYOU SMOKEJUMPER MUSEUM 2014

We had a great response from a lot of people when we asked for hosts for the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum at Cave Junction. **Wes Brown** (CJ-66) sent a list of these people so they could be recognized.

A big thanks to the following:

Harold (CJ-59), Ed and Carol **Schlachtenhaufen**

"It was a good week with just the right amount of tasks and guiding. In a few years you have collected lots of relevant equipment and put together many displays and posted many great pictures to illustrate the job and the 'glory days' of smokejumping."

John (FBX-69) and Kathy **Culbertson**

"We loved our stay. The people of Cave Junction and the airport community were all welcoming. We must have met fifty local folks!"

Rich (MSO-71) and Faye **Krenkel**

"Both Rich and I enjoyed our hosting at Cave Junction. It was fun, educational and interesting. Gary (Buck) and Dave (Laws) are fun and easy people to work with. There were lots of compliments on the museum grounds/buildings. Please do include us on next year's recruiting email."

Murry Taylor (RDD-65)

"For my part, it's a fine thing to be part of such a great testimony to the life and times of so many fine folks. Again, really glad and proud to be part of your great effort on the Gobi. What you've done is preserve something wonderful for now and all time. You didn't let it just blow downwind like smoke from a fire. You've kept it alive. Great stuff. We are all blessed by it."

Terry (CJ-64) and Sandy **Mewhinney**

"We will definitely be back next year. What a gem of a place! Thanks to all who have done such a wonderful job in preserving this important piece of history."

Thanks to the other hosts:

Dwight Fickes (retired forester), **Mike** (CJ-59) and **Terressa Cramer**, **Ron Price** (CJ-56), **Bob** (RDD-63) and **Lucille Wilcox**, **Tom Hunnicutt** (RDD-78), **Steve Baumann** (CJ-73) and **Karl Hartzel** (BOI-70).

We are looking for hosts for next year, May through September. There is lodging provided. Help keep the museum alive. Contact **Wes Brown** at: alphaa@frontiernet.net or 541-592-2250 📞



Wilderness Canoe Base Project 2014 Back L-R: Dave Readinger, Don Havel (FBX-66), Ron Thoreson (CJ-60), Larry Spragle, Jerry John (CJ-62), Don Rudrud, John Twiss (RAC-67). Middle: Judy Cherry, K.G. Sheley. Front L-R: Marv Lindseth, Bob Aldrich, Jim Cherry (MSO-57), Jackie Twiss, Brian Willhite, Chuck Sheley (CJ-59). (Courtesy J. Cherry)



Pioneer Smokejumpers
Glenn Smith (MSO-40) & Wag Dodge (MSO-41)