

SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



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

IN THE PREVIOUS *Smokejumper* magazine, I provided some hints on how you could do some research on past events in your jump years. The following information is an example of research that I did in preparation for writing this article:

On August 8, 1959, I was part of a DC-3 load out of Missoula that jumped the Warm Springs Creek Fire on the Salmon N.F. Of the 16 of us who jumped, there is one that I remember in particular—**Ray Schenck** (MSO-56). Ray died at Bigfork, MT, in June 1994. We need someone to provide obituary information for Ray. Ray was a mountain of a man who was broad of shoulder, narrow of hip, and strong as an ox. It's believed he had worked as a tree top- per in the northwest and was fast up the trees, and even faster coming down. Ray could instill fear in anyone who crossed him. Case in point:

On one occasion a DC-3 load of jumpers was in flight when one member had bladder pressure that was in desperate need of relief. He made his way to the open door (safety strap in place) and took care of business. Unfortunately, the stream didn't go where it was intended. Rather, it was turned into a mist that was immediately distributed over everyone seated in the plane. Once the plane had landed, Ray sought out the guilty party and threatened to break him in half if he ever crossed his path again. The guilty party made sure he never crossed paths with Ray after that.

However, as we were coming off that Warm Springs Creek Fire, I saw Ray using two Pulaskis as canes as he backed his way down the side of the mountain. Years of hard use of his knees had taken their toll. Swollen and sore, Ray had to back down. There was no other option; there was no shame in it either.

I'm recovering from two surgeries on my left hip that took place in a six-month period - the first in July, and then a do-over in December. In between I experienced six dislocations. It's okay now, but it meant nearly a year of being sub-par and severely limited in what I could do. In short, I had to back down from where I had previously been and find a new place where I could

manage life as it had become for me.

I'm sharing this because I know for a certainty that wherever you are in your life's journey, that you either have had or will be coming to a series of times when you must back down that mountain you've been on. You will find a new place where you can manage life as it has or will become. There is no shame in that. We don't have to prove ourselves to anyone anymore. We passed the test and became part of an exceptional and elite group when we earned those wings as smokejumpers.

There is one thing, however, that I think we are all called to do at all stages of our lives and that is this: that we never cease to take what we have gained through our experiences as smokejumpers and use that knowledge and those skills to enrich the lives of those around us by giving back to our country, our community, and our ex-

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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

tended families. We are a “band of brothers” and as a group and as individuals we can and do make a difference. The NSA has identified values that well describe who we are in life. We value **comradeship, education, pride in work well done, loyalty and benevolence.**

In this issue of *Smokejumper*, you will see more of an emphasis on what the NSA is doing to preserve our history. It's an effort to focus on the first part of our mission statement:

The National Smokejumper Association, through a cadre of volunteers and partnerships, is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and rangeland resources, and responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families.

The past two years, I have included short sections from the writings of **Tom Decker** (IDC-64) titled *Fire Starters*. Tom has been working with **Stan Collins** (MYC-67) to prepare the collected writings for publication in book form, and I'm pleased to report that it is ready to hit the press very soon. This is my endorsement of this writing:

“Decker's *Fire Starters* is, at first look, a collection of images that spark the imagination, refresh memories, and bring a smile of familiarity to anyone who has loved their time in the woods, worked on a fireline, or shared in the close relationships of a ‘band of brothers.’

Decker then takes a second look at the images, and he challenges the reader to dig deeper for the treasures that can be revealed through the eyes of faith and the wisdom that comes through accumulated life experiences. Each short reflection can be used as a daily devotional to help one center their day around hope, courage and inner strength.” 🔦



Tom Decker

Enough Excitement To Fill Several Lifetimes—Seethaler Part III

by Karl Seethaler (Missoula '55)

In the Oct. 2016 and Jan. 2017 issues of “Smoke-jumper,” we followed Karl through his years as a smoke-jumper in the lower forty-eight and Alaska, where he was one of the few “Survey Jumpers.” He joined Air America and, over a nine-year stint, racked up over 10,000 flying hours and many close calls. Seventeen years after his time with Air America, Karl went to work for the U.S. State Department on a drug interdiction program in Peru, where he spent four and a half years. In Part III Karl recalls events from each of these experiences. Certainly enough to fill several lifetimes.

Silk Stories And Other Long Forgotten Events That Come To Mind

It's interesting how forgotten events do come to mind as you dwell on a topic. This happens more frequently as you get older and start to develop mild cognitive impairment – as they say, that's nothing to worry about; it's just old age. But dwell on it for a while and some of what you couldn't remember comes to the surface.

To some extent, that's happening to me as I think of these time frames and the experiences associated with them. For what it's worth, I want to jot some of them down. As with the parable of the blind men and the elephant, one event may give a misleading perception of the big picture. However, piecing together a number of events might project a broader mosaic from which some of the flavor of the experience might be extracted.

For whatever it's worth, the following are presented:

Ponderosa pine in New Mexico

When I did a parachute jump, I usually landed on the ground. But occasionally it happens that the parachute gets draped over the top of a tree,

not an uncommon occurrence. It would make for a lot softer landing than hitting the ground, which I appreciated.

Getting to the ground was never a challenge for me because we all carried a letdown rope. I found doing a letdown to be as gratifying as the soft landing. The problem was that we had to retrieve the parachute as we were packing up our gear after the fire.

Usually, that wasn't too great a challenge, but it could be if the tree was tall and the parachute was snagged and not about to be easily worked loose. We would be dropped a set of spurs to assist us in cases like that.

We were trained to use the spurs, but I didn't like it. Everything was unnatural. In order for the spurs to be effective and hold you up, it was necessary to lean back. Hugging the tree, which I would like to have done, was not an option; the spurs would not grip unless they were pressed into the tree at an angle.

Once you have climbed to the height of the parachute and are ready to do your work, you could lean back on straps that you could wrap around the tree at chest level. That felt secure enough, but you couldn't lean back on the straps and climb at the same time. And you couldn't climb unless you held on to the sides of the tree with your arms stretched out, which is particularly awkward while climbing a tree with a thick trunk. Then, step by step, you must let loose with one foot or one arm in order to make the climb.

On a fire jump in New Mexico in 1959, my parachute was caught up in a thick and tall ponderosa pine tree. I can't say for certain how high the parachute was, but my memory has me climbing about 50 feet to get to it. I did climb the tree and retrieve the chute, but it took a lot of concentration to overcome my fear of heights, which I felt more than I ever did when I was jumping out of an aircraft.

At the end of the fire season in New Mexico, when we had returned to Missoula, we happened to go out into the woods for an unusual training session on climbing with spurs. My experience with the ponderosa pine had apparently prepared me well because climbing a tree that was somewhat shorter and not so thick didn't inhibit me too much – but I still didn't like it.

Douglas fir in Northern California

Late in the 1959 fire season, after returning from New Mexico, they were having a lot of fires in Northern California. To help out, a planeload of us smokejumpers from Missoula flew to the Redding Smokejumper Base. While there, I was on a fire jump near Mt. Shasta.

The forest was thick and I happened to plow into a tall Douglas fir tree. I looked up to see the parachute neatly draped over the top of the tree. I took the end of the letdown line from the large pocket on my jumpsuit and proceeded to run it through the rings according to procedure.

As I was just about to punch the release, I felt the parachute slipping from its grip on the tree. Looking down, I could see that I was in for a long drop. This tree was tall; just how tall I don't know, but it was without doubt the tallest I had ever been up on. I remember thinking that the best thing I could hope for was a broken leg.

I wasn't looking up, so I don't know what the parachute was doing. I do know that the drop was slow and I was not accelerating, that I came to a soft landing, and was relieved that I wouldn't have to retrieve the parachute from the top of the tree. I can only assume that the parachute redeployed as I was coming down. I don't know if anyone else has had such an experience.

Search & Rescue in Southeast Asia

Air America provided a lot of support to the U.S. military operations at the time of the war in Vietnam, which has not always been understood or fully appreciated. An example of this is that

we would be called upon to provide search and rescue support for military personnel who had ejected from downed aircraft over Laos and parts of Vietnam.

It was logical for us to do that because we were closest to the incident with helicopters and other aerial support. It was an honor to be able to help in this way.

I observed one of these rescues. I was the kicker on a C-123 that was flying over the Plain of Jars in Northern Laos when we were diverted to the northeast near the North Vietnamese border where a search and rescue operation was under way. Our purpose was to be a presence there to observe, relay information by radio, and whatever else we could do.

Two military pilots were on the ground with the North Vietnamese military closing in on them. Two Air America helicopters were there and had located them. One of the helicopters was able to land and rescue one of the pilots.

I can't remember why, but the other helicopter was unable to reach the second pilot. However, the first helicopter was able to reach him and the rescue operation was a success.

Interestingly, one of the rescued pilots gave a talk expressing his gratitude at a meeting of the Air America Association that I attended. I believe that meeting was in Reno around 2005.

Downed Caribou in the South Vietnam Delta

In early 1966, I was the kicker on a flight in a Caribou from Saigon to Bangkok for some maintenance.

As we were flying south over the Mekong Delta, we became aware of a tragic event taking place on the ground below us. Another of our Caribous had either been damaged by ground fire or had a mechanical problem – I don't remember which – that caused them to make an emergency landing on a rice paddy.

The crew, consisting of an American pilot, co-pilot, and a Vietnamese kicker I had recently trained, were captured. I heard that their Viet Cong captors tied ropes around their necks, paraded them through the nearby village, where they

were publicly subjected to abuse, and then took them away. To my knowledge, the crew was never heard from again.

I doubt that I have all the facts completely straight on this incident, but I think they are pretty accurate overall. I know that everyone was very resentful of this outrageous behavior on the part of the enemy. Reminiscent of how **Gene DeBruin** (MSO-59) and his fellow captives were treated by the Pathet Lao, it illustrated the deplorable mentality of the terrorist-driven insurgency we were there to oppose.

To my knowledge, terrorism and inhumane treatment of prisoners were authoritatively sanctioned strategies of the enemy and served to reinforce our sense that we were doing the right thing by opposing these insurrections. Unfortunately, the governments we were supporting with billions of dollars were becoming more and more corrupt and their militaries remained dysfunctional even with the extensive military backing provided by half a million American troops.

As time went on and the political situation in these countries and in the U.S. continued to deteriorate, frustration caused our policymakers to sanction extreme and futile strategies of our own.

As was very common in World War II, we escalated our bombing, not always discriminately. It had no discernable military effect, but it produced collateral damage on the civilian population.

Another ill-conceived strategy was to try to deny the Viet Cong foliage cover by applying Agent Orange over great swaths of forest. That had little, if any, impact on the war effort while inflicting significant damage to the environment and creating health hazards and birth defects.

With respect to wars, we were on a learning curve in transition from the World War II mentality and whatever it is we have today. Knowing what we know now, we would almost certainly have done things differently. Still, we were facing serious Cold War challenges; I think it's best not to be too judgmental of our leadership or entertain second thoughts about our participation in this chapter of history.

Honda 65

After arriving in Bangkok, I ran into an ex-



Karl Seethaler (Courtesy J. Kirkley)

kicker whom I had worked with in Vientiane and had recently resigned. Before leaving Vientiane, he became acquainted with two traveling American girls.

Something apparently possessed him to propose that they accompany him on a motorcycle trip to Bangkok. They were agreeable to that. The problem was, he didn't have any motorcycles. So, in the spirit of the big-time spender, he bought three Hondas and away they went.

When they got to Bangkok, the girls split and he was left with three motorcycles. I agreed to buy one of them from him, a Honda 65. Honda 50 motorcycles were ubiquitous in Southeast Asia at the time, but I don't think I ever saw another Honda 65 which was, I believed, a step above the Honda 50.

That Honda 65, which I drove around Saigon and Vientiane, was my primary mode of transportation throughout the remainder of my time with Air America. Gas was very cheap there at the time, and the Honda didn't use much. I could fill the tank for about 15 cents, and on that it would run for a long time. It was for me a very good investment.

The Tet Offensive

Late at night on Jan. 30, 1968, during the days of festivity in celebration of the Vietnamese New Year, the Communist forces launched a surprise massive military offensive throughout South Vietnam. It was a major event of the war in which they occupied many parts of the country before they were beaten back in the following weeks. The course of the offensive and the atrocities committed by these forces on the local populations in areas that they controlled are well documented and can be easily researched.

The part of Saigon where I was living was not attacked, and when I woke up the next morning, I was unaware of what had happened.

It happened that I had planned to go shopping that morning at the Military Base Exchange (BX) located in the Saigon district of Cholon. Air America personnel had BX privileges. Accordingly, that morning I got on my Honda 65, taking the more scenic route to the BX that passed through the outskirts of Saigon. Everything seemed eerily quiet.

When I arrived at the BX, the American Military guard prevented me from entering. I asked him what the problem was. He asked me if I was unaware of what was going on. When I told him I didn't know, he briefly explained and suggested that I get back home as quickly as possible.

I returned by the shortest route, which took me through much of Cholon, one of the hardest-hit parts of the offensive within Saigon. Everything was eerily quiet on the return trip, as well, and fortunately the trip was uneventful.

After arriving home, I received word from Air America that I should stay put until I heard from them. A few days later, I was called back to the Tan Son Nhut Airport. Gradually, over the next couple of weeks, operations returned to normal.

"Oh Shit!"

For all the events I have described that occurred while I was working at Air America, most of the time things were fairly routine. It was a good job to have in a setting that I found agreeable.

At times, there was some discordance within the organization. Sometimes, someone in the group could be a bit overbearing and properly qualify as being a jerk. I'm sure that at times there were those who didn't have a high opinion of me, either. But overwhelmingly, I thought we were a very compatible group. I couldn't ask to work with better people. Moreover, we were professional at what we did.

That is particularly important regarding the pilots and mechanics that we depended upon to get us safely through thousands of hours of flying under frequently hazardous conditions. They did throughout almost all of my eight and a half years with the company.

When things go well, as they should, there isn't much to comment about. So, the fact that I describe negative episodes does not indicate that they represented the norm. Far from it, they are simply what provides the broad experience with a story to tell.

Pilot professionalism calls for a number of attributes, and I am not qualified to comment on all of them. But as people I entrusted my life to on a daily basis, two of these attributes stood out. One is skill at operating the aircraft and the other is judgment.

I am satisfied that Air America did a very good job of selecting, training, and checking out skilled operating pilots. Also, most of them exercised good judgment most of the time. But some did not.

As I've noted, flying below minimum elevations and convincing yourself that you know exactly where you are while in the clouds was my biggest concern and the greatest cause of death at Air America. Apparently, getting the load delivered was such a matter of pride that otherwise competent pilots were willing to risk their own lives and the lives of the crewmembers to get it done. It's a bigger problem than what it seems. For every crash, there were others where the pilot

made it through just by luck.

One day we were taking a load in a C-130 into Long Tieng, the major base in Laos surrounded by karsts where **Tom Greiner** (MSO-55) had his mishap. As we were making our final approach and committed to doing the landing, I heard the pilot on the headphone say, "Oh shit!"

I looked out to see that we were in a cloud. Fortunately, it cleared up in a couple of seconds and we landed without incident.

That word can get overused. There was another incident that would be humorous if it didn't have serious potential consequences. It didn't involve me, but it did involve two other kickers.

They were working on a C-46 carrying a load of rice when there was a mechanical problem that required feathering an engine before they were able to deliver the load. The pilot was skilled, but had a reputation for being cocky and short-fused.

The cargo was too heavy to permit continued flight on just one engine. He called out to one of the kickers. What he should have said was, "Jettison the load." Instead he impatiently yelled, "Get the shit out of here!"

The kicker misunderstood, put on his parachute, instructed the other kicker to do likewise and they both jumped out of the aircraft. When the pilot realized what had happened, he became even more agitated and instructed the co-pilot to jettison the load.

The co-pilot wasn't trained for that and had to do the two-man job by himself. I don't know how he did it, possibly without a parachute, but I understand he was quite exhausted before he managed to get it all out. Of course, the incident was investigated, but it was judged to be a case of bad communication and no one was disciplined for it.

I did have an experience – with this same pilot – that could have been very serious. Some of the pilots were checked out to fly more than one type of aircraft, and this incident involved a Caribou.

We were at a site in Northern Laos. They wanted us to take a load of lumber back to Vientiane. The Caribou is much narrower than a C-123, so it only has room for a single track with rollers lined up in the center of the cabin. The ramp at the back was partially open to provide a flat extension of the track as the lumber was being laid out on pallets.

We were sitting at the end of the runway in position to take off, and the pilot thought he would save some time by running through the checklist while we were still loading. We finished loading the lumber, and I started tying it down by putting on the forward restraints with chains.

Then, as I was walking down the left side of the cabin with the intention of applying the aft restraints, the engines suddenly got louder and the aircraft lurched forward. Fortunately, I had not yet reached the back of the load by then or I could certainly have been killed as the lumber shot out the back onto the runway and the aircraft took off. Actually, the lumber didn't move back, but it appeared to as we moved forward so quickly and it just dropped. As it was, my chest was pretty well scraped by the lumber as we pulled out from under it.

When I informed the pilot what had happened, he looked back and realized what he had done and said something to the effect of, "Oh, well. Let it be," and we continued on to Vientiane. He gave no explanation and no apology.

One day, within the first year of our employment at Air America, I was scheduled to work on a C-46 with **Billy Hester** (MSO-58), the smokejumper I had worked with in New Mexico in 1959. We were taking a load out of Udorn, Thailand.

Air America had a base of operations in Udorn, about a 20 to 30-minute flight south of Vientiane. We frequently would remain overnight (RON) there.

Our destination was a site up in Laos. We were told that after we delivered the cargo, we would be returning to Udorn to RON. The pilot was very upset about that because he had plans to be in Vientiane that evening, but he could not talk Flight Operations out of doing the RON. He was complaining about that during the entire flight.

When we arrived at the vicinity of our destination, there was a heavy cloud cover everywhere. The proper thing to do would have been to return to Udorn with the load. We soon found out that the pilot intended to burn up so much fuel that we couldn't fly all the way back to Udorn and would have to land in Vientiane. To do that, we flew around in circles with the pilot claiming he was trying to deliver the load.

When there was a brief opening in the cloud and we could see a little ground, he would say he thought he knew where that was and would descend into the clouds. We circled around for some time below minimum elevations, unable to see any distance ahead.

Hester and I definitely didn't like what was happening, but didn't know what to do. We put our parachutes on and considered jumping out, but we were inhibited from jumping by not being able to see a thing in any direction. The co-pilot was vomiting. Finally, we consumed enough fuel to preclude us from going all the way back to Udorn, and the pilot succeeded in remaining over-night in Vientiane.

Looking back, I certainly think we should have reported this. But we didn't. That pilot continued to fly until the final days of Air America's operations. I'm glad to say that I don't believe he's killed anyone yet.

The 55-gallon drum bomb

This one is really weird. Toward the end of Air America's operations in Southeast Asia, we would frequently spend several days at a time in Pakse, a town in southern Laos.

There seemed to be a fair amount of Pathet Lao activity in the vicinity. We provided a lot of good support there most of the time. Our operations followed the instructions of the customer.

However, on one occasion the rather unusual idea occurred to him that he could harass the enemy by dropping 55-gallon drums of burning fuel somewhere near the location where he thought they were. The jungle below gave plenty of cover and there was no way of knowing where they were actually located. As I'll explain, the idea came to an abrupt end after just a few days.

This is how it worked. A 55-gallon drum of some volatile fuel would be tied onto a pallet. I don't remember how exactly, but a tripflame would be positioned on the top of the drum. The tripping device would be activated by pulling out a cotter pin inserted into the tripping mechanism. The exposed end of the cotter pin was attached to the end of a bungee cord. The other end of the cord would be clipped to a ring on the overhead cable once it is loaded on the aircraft.

The execution of this "bombing" operation was like any airdrop with a parachute deployed by a bungee cord. The bungee cord was long enough so that the drum was well clear of the aircraft before the flare was tripped. As part of the preparation, the bungee cord would be folded several times so as not to be dangling freely and the folds were held in place by a rubber band.

As was standard procedure, when we reached the site of the airdrop the pilot would instruct us to prepare to drop. We would lower the ramp at the rear of the aircraft to a level position, remove the rear restraint from the cargo, and roll the pallet back on the track until the drum pressed against a cut-strap.

On the final approach when we were instructed to make the drop, the aircraft would be nosed up, the drum would press harder against the cut-strap, which we would then cut with a knife, and the load would roll out of the aircraft and drop. The force of the drop would be way more than sufficient to overcome the restraint of the rubber band, and the bungee cord would extend to its full length.

The grip of the tripflame holding the cotter pin should be much stronger than that of the rubber band on the folded bungee cord. The different strengths of these described grips means that the bungee cord should be fully extended before it is sufficiently taut from the weight of the falling drum to pull the cotter pin and trip the flare. When the drum hit the ground, it would burst open, spraying out the volatile fuel, which would be immediately ignited by the burning flare.

That was it – we had started a small fire in the midst of a large, forested area that might contain some Pathet Lao troops. I never heard of the fire spreading; I'm sure the conditions were not sufficiently combustible for that. I don't think anyone has any idea what demoralizing effect this may or may not have had on the enemy.

I don't remember how many times I was on a flight that performed this particular operation, but the number was very small. Then one day we set out to do it again, and things didn't go well.

The cotter pin had not been inserted into place properly and was not snugly attached to the tripflame. It was so loose, in fact, that the very light resistance of the rubber band on the folded bungee

cord was more than the resistance to removing the inserted cotter pin. As we moved the pallet back in preparation for the drop, the slight friction of the ring rubbing against the overhead cable as it moved along was stronger than the grip of the cotter pin on the tripflare.

The rubber band was no longer the weakest link and it kept the bungee folded as the shortened cord caused the improperly inserted cotter pin to be pulled loose from the tripping mechanism causing the flare to ignite.

I immediately informed the pilot, who was understandably quite disturbed to see those flames inside the aircraft right on top of the drum of volatile fuel. We made very rapid preparations to jettison immediately; the pilot raised the nose of the aircraft and I cut the strap. The cargo with its burning flare dropped out of the aircraft and a serious accident was averted. After that, this activity was wisely discontinued.

Shangri-La

It may appear that I've saved the best for last. In the summer of 1956, the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest was hit with a lot of fires to which Missoula responded by sending smokejumpers from our base to help those from the North Cascades. I was the last one on the jump list with that group.

I don't remember everything we did there, but there were so many small fires going that one morning a bunch of us boarded the DC-3 and went out to selected fires, while looking for any others that might be out there. One by one we dropped small sticks of smokejumpers on fires until we had covered all of them that we could find. When there were just three smokejumpers remaining, it seemed that we had gotten to all of the fires.

Besides me, there was **Dick Tracy** (MSO-53) and a new smokejumper that year named **Malcolm Montgomery** (MSO-56).

We were about to return to the base when smoke was spotted coming from the woods below. Since that seemed to be the end of it, it was decided that we would all three jump on this last fire. Dick Tracy and Malcolm jumped the first stick and I jumped alone on the second stick.

I should add that it's my recollection that the flight had been turbulent and the weather looked a bit dismal. Once I was out of the aircraft, everything changed.

As the din of the DC-3 faded, there remained a peaceful silence and the air was calm. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky. I had a soft landing on a meadow amidst gracious trees and mountains. Everything was in great contrast to the airplane we had just left. It reminded me of the movie "Shangri-La." But there was more to come.

After I had landed, Malcolm came running over to me, excitedly proclaiming that there were girls there. That didn't make sense to me because I knew that we were deep in a wilderness area.

It turned out that the smoke we had seen was coming from a campfire. A middle-aged couple were chaperoning a group of 10 pretty girls on a wilderness outing. They had a permit for their campfire. They were about as surprised to see us as we were to see them. The couple invited us to sit down for coffee.

After about 20 minutes, they thought they had better get on their way. We told them not to bother about the fire. We would put it out; that's what we came there to do. We gathered our equipment, which we left to be picked up. Then we walked 12 miles down a gently sloping trail through the woods to Lake Chelan to bring to a close an interesting interlude in what turned out to be an eventful summer.

Conclusion

I began writing these segments of my life history with writer's block. But as the picture came into better focus, submerged memories began to surface. I now feel reasonably good about the way that these written exercises have captured the flavor of my experiences.

Each facet presented here focuses on a specific part of the broader picture. I have tried to express my perceptions in their historical and cultural contexts. What has emerged are the most salient memories, facets that shed some light on what I have abstracted from a broad-based exposure to adventurous episodes that were not without inherent risk.

Some facets focus on positive and some on

negative events, some attempt to be simply descriptive of the challenges faced in getting the job done, and some highlight a few missteps or accidents that just happened. These facets focus on events that tended to make longer-lasting impressions and perhaps make better stories as well; but they can also skew the big picture.

What has surprised me the most about this written undertaking is how these specific memories have surfaced and dominated in this way, while everything else has just sort of blended into an overall positive feeling about the experiences. While I can visualize the environments, the procedures for executing the jumps, dropping the cargo, remember a lot of the people and recall snippets of other activities and observations, there is little recollection of many details that could highlight the unique qualities of most of what happened.

The number of days that were covered by the events described here, if grouped, could easily fit into a single month. Combining my time as a smokejumper, Air America kicker, and loadmaster in Peru, I spent about 15 years, or 180 months, accumulating extraordinary experiences. That leaves a lot unsaid about all the activities that proceeded routinely and successfully most of the time, as they should have when performed in the spirit of collaborative professionalism.

This narrative may not do proper justice to the important contributions of all the good people involved in these operations, but I hope it might provide some flavor to the historical *milieu* of our time. The experience of having been a smokejumper is one of great significance to all who have been there and done that. It has definitely influenced my selection of the “road less traveled by,” as I suspect it has for many other old smokejumpers.

The Road Not Taken

by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. 🌲

Are You Going To Be “Temporarily Away”?

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

If you are leaving your mailing address during the months of March, June, September and/or December, please let Chuck Sheley know. He can hold your magazine and mail it upon your return *OR* mail it to your seasonal address.

Please help us save this triple mailing expense. Or join our electronic mailing list (see page 47). Chuck’s contact information is in the information box on page three. 🌲

Fighting Fire In North Dakota – Not Just Another Smokejumper Fairy Tale

by Dick Rath (Missoula '73)

During the late 1960s and well into the 1970s, the crew fire – or “pounder,” as it became known in the jumper world – was often the real moneymaker for seasonal smokejumpers. Those crew fires almost always produced a new set of smokejumper fire stories and this is one of those stories.

Prior to the expansion of the Forest Service Type I Crew and Helitack Program, the smokejumper cadre filled these gaps. In the winter of 1976, **Larry Eisenman** (MSO-58) was selected to fill the position of parachute project superintendent, behind **Leonard Krout** (MSO-46). Larry was and is a “take no prisoner” leader, and most of us held a pretty healthy respect for his style of leadership.

With that in mind, it did not come as any surprise to us when Larry told those of us, going through the early refresher in 1976, that we needed to expand our willingness to take whatever fire assignments became available. He said that the “two-manner” in the Bob Marshall was an adventure, but would not make us the money that some other assignments might provide.

He also let us know that our tradition of drinking beer on the way home from a fire was a thing of the past. That speech certainly echoed within the AFD.

At that time, I had trained in the MSO rookie class of 1973 and by 1976, I was 26 years old and figured that I had become one of those “salty old smokejumpers.” My older brother, **Tom Rath**, had trained in 1971, and this was just one of a number of life experiences we had together as brothers with the smokejumper organization.

During the 1976 fire season, there was fire activity across the West and Midwest. This was due to a lengthy drought and fire season in Colorado, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, which brought numerous fire assignments to the Aerial Fire Depot.

Therefore, it did not come as a surprise that I received a phone call from dispatch, on a Saturday evening in October, asking if I was available for a crew assignment to the Custer National Forest Grasslands in western North Dakota.

Early the following morning, three crews assembled at that AFD; two were primarily smokejumpers and a third came from the Bitterroot National Forest. We boarded a contract Convair and in a few hours had made the trip across Montana and landed at Dickinson, N.D.

As we were landing in Dickinson, it quickly became apparent that something was amiss, as the pilots were putting a great deal of pressure on the braking system of the Convair. We were only to realize later that the Regional coordinator, Chuck Kern, had the Convair land on an airstrip that was too short for that aircraft. We did land safely, and then boarded a fleet of yellow school buses.

If you have not spent much time in western North Dakota, it is a large, sparsely populated state that in the fall takes on a real beauty of its own, with the fall colors and rolling prairies. This was one of those lovely, clear, sunny fall days that showcased North Dakota’s scenery at its best.

We assembled while gathering our gear and boarded the school buses to our first destination, a local diner. After the crews’ appetites were filled with a large breakfast, we boarded back onto the buses.

We headed west on Interstate I-94 Sunday morning and gradually downsized to pavement, and then to gravel. After a couple of hours of nonstop traveling, the coffee, which we had all consumed in large quantities during breakfast, was beginning to cause some discomfort.

One of our squad leaders, **Floyd Whitaker** (RDD-65), asked the bus driver to pull over, but since he only seemed to understand Norwegian, he seemed reluctant to do so. When we finally came to a crossroad, Floyd, in a move that only



*L-R: Tom Rath (MSO-71), Dick Rath (MSO-73)
(Courtesy D. Rath)*

a ballerina would love, jumped to his feet and opened the bus door, quickly exiting. The remaining 40 of us quickly followed him.

Now since we were in North Dakota on a Sunday morning, it usually meant folks were attending a church service. After a church service nearby, a number of churchgoing families had spotted the bus of smokejumpers traveling to a fire and decided to follow us.

One can only imagine the surprise on the faces of those families who witnessed 40 smokejumpers lined up along a yellow bus, relieving themselves. I was seated in the back of the bus, so I had a spectacular view of the line of cars filled with the churchgoing families. I then started laughing to the point I was not able to go ...

By that time, it was about 11 a.m. We knew that eventually we were going to see signs of a smoke column, or at least some drift smoke, but the day was clear as a bell.

Around noon, our bus turned into a driveway toward a set of ranch buildings. In the rancher's front yard was parked a 205 Huey Army National Guard helicopter. As we made our way off the

bus, a middle-aged man in a three-piece suit came to the door and started shaking our hands. He introduced himself as Arthur Link, the current governor of North Dakota. He took the time to shake each one of our hands and thanked us for coming to help out with the fire.

At this point, we really started looking for the smoke column, but the air still remained clear as a bell.

Shortly after noon, our foreman assembled the crews and proceeded to tell us that the ranch headquarters was the fire camp and that we would be sleeping where the ranch had stockpiled their winter hay.

In addition, we were told that a number of ranchers, with 4-by-4 pickups, would be taking us out to the fire. As we broke down into squads, we were finally headed to the fire.

After a slow drive across the prairie, we crested a butte and saw the remnants of a wind-driven prairie fire that had burned several thousand acres the day before. But like many prairie fires, it had gone out as quickly as it started. After we unloaded, we were told to start cold-trailing the perimeter, which we quickly jumped to do. A couple of us spotted some smoke working its way out of a crack in the ground and began digging it out.

We had been at it for several hours when we heard a noise from an engine; one of the ranchers appeared in his truck. When the rancher spotted us, he stopped and proceeded to stroll down to where we were working.

I remember him shoving his cowboy hat back on his head and said to us: "Well guys, I ain't real smart, but I am smart enough to tell you that the coal seam you're digging in was burning before I was born and probably will be after I am dead. So, if I were you, I would not put a lot of effort into putting it out."

With that, he smiled, turned around and got back into his truck and drove off.

That short speech put a real damper on our efforts, and we headed back to our drop point for pickup.

By the time we returned to fire camp, it was getting dark and cold. We were told that our supper was going to be served in a large machine shed. Over the years, seasoned smokejumpers were

used to sparse fire camp food from “C-rations” to freeze-dried food, to national caterers, but what we found even surprised us.

Inside the machine shed was a long line of rancher’s wives who had prepared a huge meal of home-style chicken, mashed potatoes and all the trimmings. At the end of the line were coolers for drinks – and one can only imagine our delight when we found the coolers filled with beer!

The following morning, we found ourselves back in the machine shed eating another large, ranch-style meal, with the beer being replaced by amazing coffee and ice cold milk.

The same cadre of ranchers and their vehicles transported us back to the fire. At that point, if there was any live smoke remaining from the day before, it had gone out over night.

During our crew briefing, our foreman, **Jim Cyr** (MSO-63), told us to resume cold-trailing, which basically meant “melt into the earth” until our pickup time of mid-afternoon. As a group that always followed orders, we broke into small groups. My group consisted of my older brother Tom, **Mark Romey** (MSO-75) and me.

The previous day, Tom and I had discovered some petrified wood, and we collectively decided to spend our remaining time here exploring the Little Missouri River bottom. Throughout the day, we found so much petrified wood that we could probably have filled a pickup truck bed. With our PG bags filled with rock specimens, we found our way back to the pickup spot.

The trip from the ranch to Dickinson was similar to the earlier trip, and we arrived by dinner, whereupon we were informed that the Convair could not take off from the local airport, so we would be bused into Bismarck. We then traded

in our yellow school bus fleet for a Greyhound.

As we finished dinner, some of the more perceptive types – that being Mark Romey – noticed that our foremen, Jim Cyr and **Larry Fite** (MSO-60), were purchasing a couple of six-packs of beer. Being the good little followers we were, some of us followed their lead. That acquisition made the trip to Bismarck go by much more quickly.

By the time we arrived in Bismarck, it was close to 10 p.m. We were then lodged in an upscale hotel, which had a great bar where we all mustered together for an evening debriefing. By this time, it was close to 11 p.m. and Floyd Whitaker told all of us that the bar was set to close in an hour, so we needed to order enough rounds of drinks to satisfy our thirst.

At midnight, the bartender blinked the bar room lights off and on, telling us that he was closing and that we all needed to leave. Well, one can only imagine what he thought when none of us budged from our seats and continued drinking.

At that point, he looked over at the forty-odd young smokejumpers and decided that it would be much simpler to just let us finish our beers, then close down the bar, which he proceeded to do.

The following morning, we arrived at the Bismarck Airport and loaded the Convair for our return trip to Missoula. Once in the air, the pilots followed Interstate 94 until we hit the Montana border.

As I sat in my seat looking over the eastern Montana landscape, I saw a huge area that one day I wanted to explore. Little did I realize that one day, through the Forest Service, I would be given the opportunity to do just that, but that is another story for another day. 🙏

The Fire In The Black Hills

by Jeff R. Davis (Missoula '57)

Nineteen sixty wasn’t a good fire season for me; I only made five fire jumps. I received a call at 5 a.m., Aug. 23, to come out to the Aerial Fire Depot in Missoula; they had

a walk-in fire for us in South Dakota and did I want to go?

I told them sure, and 16 of us took off in Johnson’s DC-2 at 6:30 a.m. We arrived in Rapid City

at 9:40 a.m., then bused to Hot Springs, a smaller town 40 miles south of Rapid City in the southern tip of the Black Hills National Forest. We got there at 10:50 a.m.

From there into a Forest Service truck, headed to the Green Canyon Fire. We arrived at 1 p.m. Lightning had started two major range and timber fires near Hot Springs: the 6,300 acre Green Canyon Fire and the 11,500 acre Wildcat Fire. They nearly joined at one point and threatened Hot Springs.

We started fire suppression at 1:45 p.m., and for the next seven days we fought fire. My memory holds brief, vivid vignettes of the next few days:

The man who owns the land appears, a big coffee pot in his hands. He thanks us profusely for trying, with tears streaming down his leathery face as he views his entire spread going up in flames.

Some of the acreage is burning on private rangeland. We're struggling against this monster range fire and we're losing. The man who owns the land appears, a big coffee pot in his hands. He thanks us profusely for trying, with tears streaming down his leathery face as he views his entire spread going up in flames.

Our crew is attempting a line on a grassy ridge. Suddenly, there's a cry. The fire's spotted out behind us, running down the slope and making a run right back up toward us, faster than a man can run. I run anyway, my memories still fresh of the 13 jumpers who died trying to outrun a grass fire at Mann Gulch.

The fire's snapping at my britches, but I get clear and check to see how the others fared. All OK, so we head back into the burn and the flaming front. It happens again and again. We finally complete a line that holds and move on.

The townsfolk of Hot Springs think we're heroes and can't do enough for us. The women line the highway near the fire camp for two nights,

holding out pots and pans loaded with casseroles and homemade goodies of every description. After a steady diet of C-rations, the home-cooked chow goes good.

It's Aug. 29, the last day on the fires for us. The fires are cooling; we've been mopping up the last 18 hours. The word comes down the line; they're demobilizing the fire and sending crews home. We're the first ones to go.

By 6 p.m. we're released from the firelines and allowed to go into town. I take the guys into town, still dressed in our dirty firefighting clothes, and we head for the first restaurant we can find, eager for a hot meal.

Before we can order, the owner of the place comes up to me and says, "We don't serve second-class citizens in here!" He actually said that. I hustle the guys back into the trucks and get 'em the hell out of there before they start a riot. We head back to the fire camp, where at least things are familiar and no knucklehead is going to call us second-class citizens.

We board a bus for Rapid City at 8 o'clock the following morning, and at 1:10 p.m. we gratefully board the familiar Johnson Doug, a DC-3 this time, for the flight home. Our first leg takes us over Mount Rushmore, and we give it the old smokejumper buzz job, as the pilots crank the Doug into a tight bank over the monument.

Standing on one wing, we roar down over the huge stone faces, fifty feet above Lincoln's head. We go around again, this time clipping the faces closer.

The pilots take the Doug down to 50 feet above the flat terrain. Ahead in a big field, we spot a man driving a tractor. He hasn't seen us yet. His head rears up as he hears our plane approaching. The pilots take it lower and shove the throttles balls to the wall.

As we roar past him, barely 10 feet over his head, he bails off the tractor and sprints across the field.

Finally the familiar hills of Missoula approach, and we land at Missoula County Airport (it's not Johnson Bell Field yet), head for the loft to fill out our fire reports and overtime sheets. The Black Hills Fire is behind us, and for a lousy pounder fire, it wasn't such a bad deal after all. 🔪

www.smokejumperphotos.com



New NSA Website Photos & Videos

• Smokejumper History In Photos •



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Webmaster: Mike McMillan

• 2017 Smokejumper History Project •

NSA History Preservation Project

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

WE CURRENTLY HAVE two photo preservation projects working:

1. Hard Copy Photos, Slides and Interviews

Bethany Hannah is dealing primarily with hard copy pictures. Go to her website <http://thesmokeygeneration.com> to see the collection that we have presently. About halfway down the home page, you will see the NSA logo. Click on that logo and you will get to see some great photos, many with historical significance.

Bethany has also done a great job with personal interviews made at the 2015 National Reunion. Click on the photo of the individual jumper and listen to some great interviews. If you want to take part in the interview process, contact Bethany. This can be done over the phone.

Guidelines and Procedures from Bethany Hannah

We ask that you go through your collection and send meaningful photos from your smokejumping career. **Slides can be submitted. Hard copy submissions will be manually scanned**, so please be selective. General guidelines for photo and video submission include the following:

- Please provide as much information as you can about each image: Names of people in the photo, dates, base (if applicable), location, and fire name (if you can remember), what's happening, etc.
- If you have any questions about submitting your photos electronically, please email Bethany at: bethany@thesmokeygeneration.com. Direct link to uploading your photos or video clips: http://thesmokeygeneration.com/photo_submit

It is important that you let Bethany know if the photos need to be returned. We are assuming that is the desire in most cases, but please let her know. Bethany recently scanned the Lufkin collection of photos, many taken from the startup days of smokejumping.

2. Smokejumper Photos

Refer to the new NSA website and information provided by webmaster Mike McMillan (FBX-96).

You have two options for your photos and slides. From my standpoint as magazine editor, I like to have photos of faces and names that go with those faces. In years to come, people will need to see those faces and names regardless of whether they rookied in the 40s or 2017. As Butch Cassidy (Paul Newman) said, "Who are those guys?" We're asking for the women, too.

Your donations for the History Preservation Project indicated a high desire to do this job. We have the talent and workers in place. Now it is up to you to get us those photos before they end up in the trash some day.



NSA History Preservation Project—Books

NSA Board and Life Member John Berry (RAC-70) is compiling a list of all books written by smokejumpers or books where smokejumpers are mentioned. The list below is a working document. Send your additions to John at jdberry50@yahoo.com or 11407 SE Cedar Way, Happy Valley, OR 97086.

History Preservation Project Book List

Arnett, Edward McC.....	<i>A Different Kind of War Story</i>
Beyer, Mark.....	<i>Smokejumpers</i>
Boddicker, Major L.	<i>Fire Call</i>
Castle, Timothy.....	<i>From the Bay of Pigs To Laos</i>
Cates, Allen.....	<i>Honor Denied</i>
Caxton Printers	<i>The Smokejumpers</i>
Cohen, Stan	<i>A Pictorial History of SJ</i>
Conboy, Kenneth	<i>The CIA's Secret War In Tibet</i>
Conboy, Kenneth; Andrade, Dale.....	<i>Spies and Commandos</i>
Conboy, Kenneth; Morrison, James.....	<i>Feet To the Fire</i>
Conboy, Kenneth; Morrison, James.....	<i>Shadow War</i>
Cooley, Earl.....	<i>Tri-Motor and Trail</i>
Cottrell, Robert....	<i>Smokejumpers of the Civilian Public Service</i>
	<i>In World War II</i>

Demarest, Chris *Smokejumpers One To Ten*
Dengler, Dieter *Escape From Laos*
Dixon, Jerry *Rocky Traverse*
Dodds, Earl..... *Tales From The Last of The Big Creek Rangers*
Doss, Pherron *Ole Freedom*
Dow, Rod..... *Just a Few Jumper Stories*
Driscoll, John..... "There I Was" *Smokejumper Oral Histories*
Egger, Bruce..... *G Company's War*
Emonds, Troop..... *Because It Is Mine*
Evans, Nicholas *The Smoke Jumper*
Faulkner, Dolly *Forty Years In the Wilderness*
Filler, Bud *Two-Man Stick*
Fowler, Frank *High-Mountain Two-Manner*
Garlicpress..... *Book of Gobi, Book 1*
Garlicpress..... *Book of Gobi, Book 2*
Garlicpress..... *Book of Gobi, Book 3*
Gowan, George..... *Talk of Many Things*
Gup, Ted..... *The Book of Honor*
Hamilton-Merritt, Jane *Tragic Mountains*
Hanson, Joan *Smokejumpers*
Henderson, Bruce *Hero Found*
Hill, Mary Lou..... *My Dad's a Smokejumper*
Holm, Richard *Bound For the Backcountry*
Holober, Frank..... *Raiders of the China Coast*
Hubble, Robert *Limey Smokejumper*
Hurst, Randle..... *The Smokejumpers*
Jenkins, Starr..... *Smokejumpers '49*
Jenkins, Starr..... *Some of the Men of Mann Gulch*
Jenson-Stevenson, Monika and Stevenson, William... *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*
Leary, Dr. William..... *Secret Mission To Tibet*
Lee, Patrick *Kickers*
Maclean, John *Fire On the Mountain*
Maclean, Norman *Young Men and Fire*
Mara, Wil..... *Smokejumper*
Matthews, Mark..... *A Great Day to Fight Fire*
Matthews, Mark..... *Smoke Jumping On the Western Fire Line*
McMillan, Mike..... *Wildfire West*
Moody/Longley..... *Spittin' In the Wind, Book 1*
Morrison, Gayle *Hog's Exit*
Morrison, Gayle *Sky Is Falling*
Moseley, Willie..... *Smoke Jumper, Moon Pilot*
Mundell, Asa..... *Static Lines and Canopies*
NSA..... *Smokejumpers & the CIA*
Parker, James Jr..... *Covert Ops*
Peterson, Justin..... *Smokejumpers*
Pictorial Histories..... *Sons of the Western Sky*
Ramos, Jason..... *Smokejumper*
Robbins, Christopher *Air America*

Robbins, Christopher *The Ravens*
Ryan, Ralph *Wildfire*
Santos, Fernanda..... *The Fire Line*
Sasser..... *Smokejumpers*
Shade, Gary..... *The Hotshot Chronicles*
Shannon, Terry..... *Smokejumpers and Fire Divers*
Smith, Steve *Fly the Biggest Piece Back*
Taylor, Murry..... *Jumping Fire*
Taylor, Murry..... *More Or Less Crazy*
Thiessen, Mark..... *Extreme Wildfire*
Wales, M.L..... *All Is Well*
Warner, Roger *Shooting At the Moon*
White, Dale; Florek, Larry *Tall Timber Pilots*



Traveling Smokejumper Exhibit

About two years ago Ben Johnson of the Springfield Museum in Springfield, Oregon, contacted me wanting to do a smokejumper exhibit. I worked with Ben at the museum to gather materials, but the bulk of the work for the NSA was done by **Stan Collins** (MYC-67) and **Tommy Albert** (CJ-64), who both live in the area. At the end of the Springfield run, the display was going to be put into storage. Instead, it was purchased by the NSA and our Traveling Smokejumper Display was born. Since that time, we have modified the exhibit to fit smaller venues and re-done panels on fabric to facilitate shipping. I'm estimating that over 200,000 have viewed the smokejumper display at various locations. A real bonus is that three venues have taken on the exhibit as a permanent display. Here is what we have done so far:

Chico Air Museum.....Permanent Display
Mt. Shasta Museum (CA)
World of Forestry Museum (OR)
High Desert Museum (OR)Permanent Display
Plybus Market Wenatchee (WA)..... Modified Display
Eastern Washington University.....Paired with Triple Nickle
Display
National Fire Heritage Center Emmitsburg, MD, Perm.
Display

NSA members **Scott Warner** (RDD-69) and **Jim Clatworthy** (MSO-56) are currently negotiating with museums in Redding, CA, and Port Huron, MI, about potentially hosting the smokejumper display.

My hope is that the USFS will team with the NSA on this project. This is an excellent way for the Forest Service to reach the public and feature one of the “tools” in controlling wildfire in the U.S. I gave an official from Fire & Aviation a complete package describing the display with hopes that some partnership with the USFS public relations people might develop. No such luck to this point in time.



NSA Website @ Smokejumpers.com

There is a wealth of information that has been added to our website over the years. The most used item is the “Jump List” search of our master database. Type in the last name of a person and you will find, if we have it, their current location, email and membership status. It is important to keep me updated with your email, which is the item that changes the most.

All of *The Static Line* and *Smokejumper* magazine issues can be found with many feature articles. The “Obits” section contains our efforts to record data in this area. There are many blanks here. If you see

a person whose obit is not listed and you have that information, please send it along.

The “Killed In The Line of Duty” document contains over 80 pages of information on smokejumpers killed on the job. The “Pilots Index” lists the pilots who flew smokejumpers over the years.

Roger Savage (MSO-57) has done extensive work with R1 and R3 fire and jump records. Please look over this information.

How can you help us add to our history? We would like to have a written history of each of the 13 smokejumper bases. It does not need to be detailed. If some of you could start a document, it could be updated and added to over time. Photos could be added to provide a visual record of changes to the facility.

The bottom line is that we can only be as successful as your input allows us to be. I am going to continue to publish your stories in this magazine. **Once published in *Smokejumper*, your stories will be a primary source of smokejumper history.** Pitch in, write, preserve your photographs, do an oral interview. The process and people are in place. The ball is in your court. 🏀



Historic Photo – Grangeville 1959 Crew

Front L-R: Bill Robertson, Tom Dolin, Ronald Baylor, Paul Nelson, Jim Elms, Dave Morton, Doug Getz. Back L-R: Jim Lehfeldt, Bob Wiseman, Bill Kolar, Bill Wendt, Gary Kuiper, Dean Black, Ron Stoleson, Charles Logan (Pilot) (Courtesy Bill Kolar)



RECORDING SMOKEJUMPER HISTORY



President Dwight Eisenhower's Remarks At Dedication Of The Aerial Fire Depot, Missoula, Sept. 22, 1954

*From The American Presidency Project
University of California, Santa Barbara*

Governor Aronson,
Congressman D'Ewart,
Mr. McArdle,
and my friends:

I am more than fortunate to be here today. Long have I wanted to have an occasion where I could join with other Americans in a salute to the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, and more particularly to the Smokejumpers of that organization.

I first heard about their work when I was still in the Army. They helped to train the paratroopers who were so valuable to us in the war – their techniques and their practices and all their experiences were passed on to us, to give us some of the finest organizations that America has ever sent to battle. (*Bolding mine-Ed*)

I am not at all astonished that it is such a good outfit. Within the last week I have had a little proof of the qualities of leadership of Mr. McArdle himself. It has not been my good fortune to know him, but only two nights ago, in Fraser, Colo., I was visited at my cabin by a cook, a cook in the Forest Service. And he said, "I read in the paper you are going to Missoula. There you will see my boss, Mr. McArdle. Give him my greetings and best wishes."

I was long with the Army, and I have seen some of the finest battle units that have ever been produced, and whenever you find one where the cook and the private in the ranks want to be remembered to the General, when someone sees him, then you know it is a good outfit. I pay my

salute to Mr. McArdle.

Incidentally, I think it is a happy coincidence that for the only time in my life that I know of, I have been introduced to an audience by an ex-Forest Ranger, my good friend Wes D'Ewart.

Now, I know the establishment of this great training center here is the culmination of long years of work – 20 years of work. With units scattered all over, they need a center such as this for training and other experimental and centralized work.

And I want to pledge, here and now, that this kind of effort will have the support of the Federal Government as long as I am connected with it.

To that extent, and in accordance with what Mr. McArdle has told us, possibly I am a vicarious member of the Missoula Chamber of Commerce. If so, I am proud of it.

Now these people, in the course of their service to us, have saved, as Mr. McArdle said, millions of dollars in property. They have saved a crop that means so much to us, not only because of its value as lumber and paper and all that, but the time it takes to grow. Forty years is an average time for a pine tree to grow, and down in the Rockies 150 years for pole pines to grow the way we want them. To think of what one devastating fire can do to such a crop in an instant, and what these people have done to save our crucial values!

Now, as I came up here today, I was told by Secretary McKay of the Interior, that in one year they have fought 12,000 fires. It seems like an incredible number, but I hope he is right, because I am going to quote him whenever I talk about them. And if he is wrong, I just hope they don't correct me.

Incidentally, you know, as I landed here and saw this great crowd, I was a little alarmed that

you expected me to take to a parachute and jump out. Not only had I no such intention, but I am also delighted that the demonstration was cut short of the place of taking any chances of injuring one of these men, none of whom can we spare.

Now, I am not going to try to recite to such a crowd as this all of the work that the Forest Service does. I think it is better – more appropriate – that I should call attention to this fact: each of us can do something to assist them, directly or indirectly, in their work.

For us, for our children and our grandchildren, they are saving the priceless assets and the resources of the United States. And we can help. We can help by avoiding any of those careless acts that

We can help by avoiding any of those careless acts that sometimes set these fires. We can help by joining in every kind of conservation practice and conservation organization that helps also to preserve these resources.

In so doing, it seems to me we cannot fail to think more objectively, in a more sincere way, about this country, what the good Lord has given us in the way of priceless resources.

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Certain it is that whatever we help to do engages our attention and our interest more deeply than those things that seem to us to be free and to

come without effort. We don't particularly worry about the air that we breathe, but we do worry and think about things we earn by the sweat of our brow and bring home.

Now when we are preserving these resources of the United States, we are helping by the sweat of our own brows or the concerns of our own minds and hearts to save them for the others.

This brings up the basic policy of the administration now in Washington. It is the intense belief that every citizen of the United States has a part to play in keeping this country great, that we are not wards of a centralized Federal system, that the Federal system is set up by the people to help, when help is indicated for us, but that each citizen in his own right is better qualified to look after himself than is some bureaucrat in far off Washington.

Now, in a very brief and homely way, that states the policy by which this administration tries to live. Never will we desert any section or any people who, through no fault of their own, suffer disaster and need the help of central Government. And by the same token, never will we step across that line that permits unwarranted Federal intrusion into your lives.

Lincoln said this better than anybody else. He said the function of government is to do for people and a community of people those things which they need to have done, and cannot do at all, or cannot so well do for themselves as can the Federal Government. And he went on to say when people can do these things for themselves, the Federal Government ought not to interfere.

And never has a better philosophy for America been stated than that.

My friends, I am on a hurried trip, and I hope you will allow me to thank each of you for coming out for these few minutes, so that I might greet you – to bring you greetings from your Government, to gain the inspiration that I always gain from association with great groups of Americans; and then, that you will permit me to go to my plane and be on my way, because I believe I am due in Walla Walla in a very short time.

I again assure you that to be here present at the dedication of this training center is a very great honor – one I shall long remember.

Good-bye and good luck. 🙏

THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE THE FENCE



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

IN 1985, *National Geographic Explorer* filmed a documentary on rookie training in Missoula. I am guessing it was originally broadcast in 1986. I have always thought that film was the best documentary on rookie training to date. The documentary focused on three of the seven rookies that year. For years I have wondered who they were? Earlier this year, I posted an inquiry on the NSA Facebook page, and someone stated that **Robin Embry** (MSO-85) was probably one of them. I contacted Robin and she confirmed that she was one of the rookies in the story. The other two were **Van Davis** (MSO-85) and **Corbet Ellenwood** (GAC-85), a member of the Nez Perce tribe from Lapwai, Idaho. **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) also had a speaking part.

The rookies that year were a mixture of minutemen and

BIA hires. Robin was hired by Grangeville and went onto a 32-year career, retiring as Operations Foreman. Van and Corbet did not return the following year.

Both **Dr. Charlie Palmer** (MSO-95) and I tried to find a copy of the documentary on the Internet, with no luck. I have a poor, grainy VHS copy. I hope the NSA can acquire an archival copy in the future. One of the problems with archiving material is keeping up with media as technology evolves.

This will be the final year for the P2V Neptune air tankers. Neptune Aviation is retiring them at the end of the season. Neptune currently owns a total of 7 P2Vs. As previously reported, one will be a static display at the entrance to the Missoula International Airport, two will be used at air shows, and four will be sold to museums or reenactors at the end of the season. It would be nice if one went to the Museum of Mountain Flying. When the Forest Service lets contracts for 2018, Neptune Aviation is hoping to be the winning bidder for nine or ten of its BAe 146 tankers. Neptune had a busy spring, operating in Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado and Texas. Thirty-three Single Engine Air Tankers will be on contract in 2017, the same number as 2016.

At the present time, the administration is proposing that

firefighting budgets will be held to a 10-year average. The Department of Agriculture was slated for \$4.7 billion, a 21 percent cut.

Due to the resounding success of the traveling exhibit at Eastern Washington University, I asked for and received permission to contact the major museums in the greater Yellowstone region to determine if they would be interested in hosting the exhibit, along with any displays they were planning to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 1988 fires in the Greater Yellowstone region in 2018. Regretfully, I got no responses. It was disappointing, but we will keep working to get the Smokejumper story told wherever and whenever we can.

I am aware of only two people who have been bestowed the honor of Honorary Smokejumper: President Eisenhower in 1954 at the dedication of the Aerial Fire Depot (see previous page) and Jedidiah Lusk in 2010 who was made an honorary Alaska Smokejumper. Does anyone know of anyone else? If you do, contact me.

The spring issue of *Fire Chief Magazine* is on the *Wildland Urban Interface*. It is well worth reading. It's available online.

"If you don't like change, you are going to like irrelevance even less." —General Shinseki 🇺🇸

Forest Service Museum Report to the National Smokejumper Association

by Lynn Sprague (McCall '59) & Fred Cooper (North Cascades '62)

At the March 8 NSA Board Meeting, a briefing was conducted by the National Museum of Forest Service History (NMFSH) to share status and plans the organization has for moving forward with completion of the National Conservation Legacy and Education Center (the main museum building) located on their Forest Service leased site, a quarter mile north of the Missoula Smokejumper Base. They also reported on their current museum activities and plans to open the site for visitors this summer (2017). Lisa Tate, Executive Director, provided the briefing with Tom Thompson, President, and Lynn Sprague, Board Member, offering answers to many questions after the formal presentation.

The presentation included some history of their work and activities from 1988 to the present, and the process and results of their recent strategic planning effort that envisions groundbreaking for the main building in 2018. Over a million dollars in infrastructure has gone into the site to date, including roads and parking to grade, trails, sewer, water, utilities, and facilities, such as the restored Bungalow Ranger Station building and a replica of a Forest Service L-4 lookout. The architectural design of the museum building has also been completed.

Current activities include raising money, developing an education program, developing partnerships and, of particular note, managing the 50,000 plus items in their collection (photos, documents, tools and instruments, and other artifacts). Work on the collection includes recording, cataloguing, archiving to industry best practices standards, and making it available online, with about 15,000 currently online accessible, and more being added daily. Archived information is available at <http://forestservicemuseum.pastperfectonline.com/>. Many of the archives include Smokejumper historical documents and photos that have been donated by Smokejumpers as well as from Forest Service historical records.

Finally, they discussed immediate short-term activities at the site preparing for the opening, previously mentioned, for this summer. This includes paving the road in from the highway and parking, installing sidewalks, landscaping, signage including a grand entrance sign, restrooms, and interactive exhibits and displays in the Bungalow Cabin and along a short interpretive trail. The exhibits will showcase some of the stories that will be told in the future National Conservation Legacy and Education Center.

Lisa was asked if NSA members could share or contribute historical information, documents, photos or memorabilia. The answer was yes, and items can be sent to National Museum of Forest Service History at PO Box 2772, Missoula, MT 59806-2772. Photos or documents may be sent to the same address or scanned and sent via email to office@forestservicemuseum.org. If NSA members have questions about Museum archival content, they may email Dave Stack, Museum Vice President and Archivist at dave.stack@forestservicemuseum.org.

The NSA does not have physical archival space or plans for storage of artifacts and memorabilia. The NMFSH has space available in a secure Forest Service facility, and current plans are to house the collection at the site, both in the museum building and another separate building to be built in the future to specific archival standards. Many items will be displayed, and the entire collection will be available for researchers and future generations to enjoy.

In the end, the NMFSH folks indicated their goal was to build partnerships with organizations of similar history, membership and interests. They view NSA as one of those and are hopeful our two organizations can explore ways to share ideas on how to best preserve our joint legacies and to continue the dialogue going forward. Your NSA board agrees with this approach and that down the road we may find ways to pool resources and efforts. 🧠



Great Basin Skydiving

Photos Courtesy of...



Malfunction & Letdown Training



Practicing Jump Counts



Garrett Kirpach (WYS-10)



Observing Practice Jump



Refresher Jump



smokejumpers

by Stuart Palley



Jerry Drazinski (FBX-91)



Tyler Kahn (MSO-13)



Practice Jump Near Emmett, ID



Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



SOUNDING OFF from the editor



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

"DEDICATED TO PRESERVING the history and lore of smokejumping." This is a very important part of our Mission Statement in my opinion. As I get older, it even becomes more important to me. If we (NSA) do not do the job of preserving smokejumper history, it will not be done.

Before NSA President **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) wrote his annual President's Letter asking for support of the organization, I asked him if he would also make an appeal to our membership for a history preservation effort. The response by you was tremendous and indicated your support for this effort. I'm going to use this column to update you with a report that I gave the Board of Directors in March.

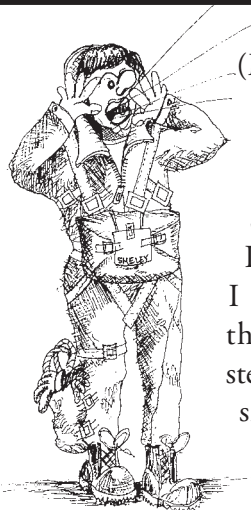
Last December **Stan Collins** (MYC-67), **John Berry** (RAC-70), and myself flew to Missoula to talk to the people at

the Mansfield Library at the Univ. of Montana. Many smokejumper-related items have found their way to Mansfield. They are cataloged and in boxes.

One of our goals is to have our history preserved, searchable, and available on the Internet. I deal with all the comments and requests that come over our great website. Requests come from individuals wanting to know how to become a smokejumper, teachers wanting more information for their students, and many news media types – TV, radio and newspapers. Our history needs to be accessible to anyone, anywhere. Documents in a box have their place, but I think we're moving past that with worldwide search and access being available to millions. Bottom line: Mansfield is not the place we're looking for at this time.

Developing a website or adding to our current website has to be in our future. At the board meeting we had an excellent presentation by the USFS Museum people from Missoula. I see the potential for the development of a great working partnership between that group and the NSA.

There are many other ways to record our history. From 1993 to the present, *The Static Line*, edited by **Jack Demmons**



(MSO-50), and *Smokejumper* magazine have covered the stories and events of smokejumpers. Stories tell our history. I've cut down on what I call "feature stories" in this issue and have, instead, included a bunch of shorter items. Many of these stories have been in my files for years.

Some of the authors have passed away and some are still with us, but what they have written tells our story.

Stan Collins is responsible for putting together our first NSA book, *Smokejumpers and the CIA*. It includes articles from *Smokejumper* published over the last 16 years. I spend about three hours a day, every day that I'm not on the road, on the magazine. Writing and editing takes a lot of time. Fortunately, I have photo editor **Johnny Kirkley** (CJ-64), Ed Booth (copy and format), and my wife, K.G. (proofing), to help produce this quarterly.

After working with Stan over the last nine months, I now can appreciate the time and skill it takes to arrange articles, outline and produce a book. There is a lot of work there. Can we follow this book with another? I hope so.

Refer to the History Preservation Project in this issue. I've tried to summarize and update you on our efforts at this time.

At the time of this writing, I had just returned from my annual smokejumper history presentation to the rookie class at the California Smokejumper Base in Redding. I appreciate the administration at the base allowing me to make this connection from the past to the current group of incoming jumpers. It is important to know that smokejumping has been built on the shoulders of those that preceded us. It's a rich history.

During WWII, the Civilian Public Service (CPS) men, 240 of whom served as smokejumpers, kept the program alive. Just as I was about to send this issue to layout, I received word that **Dick Flaharty** (MSO-44) had

passed away. Over the years I've watched the CPS-103 men dwindle as time and age takes a toll.

When I took over the job as editor in 1999, I noticed a disconnect between the CPS jumpers and the NSA. The CPS jumpers had been conducting reunions long before the NSA was formed in 1993. Wanting to learn more about this group, my wife and I drove to Oskaloosa, Iowa, in 2002 to attend one of their reunions at William Penn College. There we met a great bunch of men and their families. This reunion led to attending two more reunions before the group stopped in 2012.

What I learned about these men is significant. They were

not cowards as they were labeled at the time. They were men with strong convictions that they were willing to stand up to in the face of public ridicule. As stated in prior articles, they did not understand the eight-hour working day of the USFS, with many being mid-west farmers whose day started and ended in the dark. At that time, it was said that one smokejumper was worth seven other men on the fireline.

Most of all, I found that these men had a concern for their fellow man regardless of their race, creed, or the country in which they lived. A human being in need was a person in need, regardless of borders. Seems like this would be a good guideline for us all to follow. 🙏

UPDATE ON CURRENT SMOKEJUMPER PROGRAM

A briefing was provided to the NSA Board of Directors at the March 2017 meeting in Boise by **Todd Jenkins** (NIFC-98), BLM Boise Base Manager; **Roger Staats** (MYC-86), FS Fire and Aviation National Smokejumper Program Manager, and **Larry Sutton**, FS Fire & Aviation Operations Assistant Director.

Fire activity for 2016 was slow compared to 2015, including Alaska. Total number of fires jumped by Boise BLM was 90, and by all the FS bases was 118. Boise "pounded" an additional 22 fires. Todd feels the BLM's comparatively larger number of fires jumped was due to the use of spike bases. Fifteen spike bases were used in 2016 with eleven of them staffed by BLM and McCall, and four staffed by other Forest Service Bases. McCall and Boise are working toward coordinating overall staffing of fires in the Great Basin, which includes the use of Spike Bases. Proximity of jumpers to the requesting unit tends to increase their use.

Jumpers are increasingly being used for "Single Resource" purposes. Examples include Incident Commanders - Type 1, 2, and 3, Division Supervisor, Strike Team Leader, Task Force Leader, Logistics Section Chief, Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, Safety Officer, Public Information Officer and Fallers.

2016 was the "kick off" year for the FS Ram Air Transition, although R-1 has been in a test/evaluation phase since 2008. The 2017 plan is for 56 FS jumpers to transition (28 current and 28 rookies). The primary Ram Air parachute used by the FS is the Sierra 360 and for the BLM, it is the DC-7. However, both agencies regularly test new canopies and assess them for suitability for smokejumper use. The Ram Air provides the following:

- Increased opportunity for use in higher wind.
- Closer interagency alignment between FS & BLM.

- Ability to capitalize on emerging parachute technology.
- Increased number of jumpers per stick, resulting in less time in Fire Traffic Area.
- Increased safety and reduced injury rates (injury rates for both systems are low, but for the ram air it is much lower).

Todd and Roger think the level of unity and coordination of the FS and BLM smokejumper

programs are the highest they have ever seen.

The Forest Service aircraft plan is to replace 10 of their current planes with 10 of the new SD3-60 Sherpas. The first one is scheduled to be operational June 2017 with three or four more in 2018. Plans include evaluation of the rear door as a jump or paracargo exit, along with ways to lighten the aircraft to address higher density altitude concerns such as at West Yellowstone. 📌

Response To “Norton Creek Disaster”

by Ash Court (North Cascades '63)

I'm a bit slow in getting a response to you concerning Gary Watts (MYC-64) article “Remembering The Norton Creek Disaster And The Deaths Of Two Friends” since this article appeared in the April 2012 NSA magazine but, as they say, “Better late than never!”

For me, this event is comparable to the death of JFK or the Challenger disaster. I can remember exactly where I was when I heard the news. It was my third year of jumping at NCSB, and I was rigging parachutes in the loft when Loft Foreman, Dick Wildman (NCSB-61), came out from the office and gave us the few details known about the crash at that time. Maybe this hit home a little closer than most because in 1958 a Twin Beech had gone down on Eightmile Ridge, out of NCSB. One of the casualties, Keith “Gus” Hendrickson (NCSB-47), had been one of my dad's best friends. That had been very hard on my entire family, so the possibility this could happen to me might have been lurking someplace in the back of my mind. Not that I was going to stop jumping, mind you!

Back to the article. When I started to read Gary's story, I immediately sat up and took notice when in his lead-in, he mentioned Pungo Mountain. I had been hunting on Pungo Mountain since 1991. At first, out of Thomas Creek airstrip on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, and then from Indian Creek, nine miles upriver. Over the years several other jumpers Doug Houston (RAC-73), Gary Johnson (RDD-69), and Kevin Gilbert (LGD-79), had come in with us to enjoy the great deer and elk hunting we had enjoyed, at least until the wolves came.

We had no idea this accident had taken place so close to us and that Skip Knapp (Pilot) was buried right there at Indian Creek. One of my hunting partners, non-jumper Darold Brandenburg, had told me that he had found a grave down near the Forest Service ranger station during one of our earlier hunting trips. There were no details available other than the headstone. He did say it was outside the fenced in area of the FS compound, so was a bit removed from most of the activity associated with the ranger station. Indian Creek is one of the major “launching spots” for the thousands of rafters who float the Middle Fork each summer.

Darold was probably more excited about Gary's article than I was.

Last fall, Darold reprinted the article, sealed it in waterproof material, and left it on the front door at the Ranger Station in hopes that more people might come to know the story behind the mysterious grave located in their back yard. 📌



Byron Knapp Marker (Courtesy Ash Court)

A Little East Of Eden

by Bob Shackelford (Missoula '52)

This story – true, of course – involves a jumper fire discovered by the Kaniksu Air Patrol that was actually on the Kootenai N.F. a mile or so east of the Kaniksu.

Some of us old-timers on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest meet for coffee Wednesdays and review some of the good old days. **Paul Wilson** (MSO-50) was one of our regulars. He passed last summer; we want to share some memories.

I jumped my seven practice jumps with **Carl “Joe” Wilson** (MSO-52), Paul’s brother. Paul’s son, **Pat Wilson** (MSO-80), later jumped several years out of Grangeville after a season in Missoula.

The Wilsons fought a lot of fire and had a lot of adventures. Really good people who looked out for jumpers, knew how and when to call for jumpers, and got them back to Missoula quick time, with all their gear intact. Paul often flew the gear out with a chopper.

So, no long backpacks were involved. A jumper never had it so good. Well, almost never.

This story was provided by Larry Stone, Fire Management Officer in Sandpoint. Larry was a Class 1 fire boss when he retired.

Larry explained that he was FMO at Sandpoint when Paul Wilson was the air officer for the Idaho Panhandle forest in Coeur d’Alene. He said, “Paul was always on top of things and saved our bacon many times, because he anticipated and was ahead of trouble whenever we requested air support for a fire that was beginning to move during tough fire seasons.”

According to my research in the jumper fire records, this fire appears to be the Scotchman, Aug. 30, 1979. The jumpers were **Dana A. D’Andrea** (MSO-76) and **Thomas J. DeJong** (MSO-75).

The mistake that hurts me to think about is the jumpers went west to exit this fire instead of going east into the Kootenai.

“It seemed like it took the jumpers a very long time to walk out to the nearest road,” Stone said.

This is because they did not walk out. It was a clamber, using hands as much as feet and looking for a way down, going more north and south than

west toward the road. I would say more – but no one except the five humans, since time began, who have survived this route on the ground would believe it.

They finally showed up on the well-named Savage Creek Road.

“A couple of days later, Paul – being a working air officer – flew in by copter and picked up the jump gear,” Stone said. “He swung by Sandpoint and told us the fire was mislocated and was actually in Montana, well on the Kootenai N.F. We learned later that Paul had a serious talk with the air observers.”

Later that fall, some of the Kootenai fire overhead were bragging that their “let-’em-burn fire management plan” was a great success and how this particular fire went out by itself, due to expert fire prescription modeling.

Paul never let them know that the jumpers were the reason for their success – by and how this particular fire went out by itself due to “expert fire prescription modeling.” 🌲

BOOKS BY SMOKEJUMPERS

The Hotshot Chronicles by Gary Shade (MSO-69), Expediting Life @ 100km/hr., (2014).

The Hotshot Chronicles is a result of my attempt to keep from going brain dead as we drove our expediting freight truck the width and breadth of the North American continent for the past three and a half years.

We are Gary and Barb, a married owner/operator team, drivers of a straight truck that also serves as our RV and office. While driving, I would routinely create a “travel log” in my head describing experiences that we encountered in



running our “hotshot” trucking business. When it was not my turn to drive, I would write out the “log” from memory and apply pictures of the events. The final product became a travel log that I would send to family and friends, known collectively as “The Book Club.” Given the delight they experienced following our travels, travails, and lifestyle, Club members would often encourage me to write a book about our adventures. They also seemed to enjoy the literary style and attempts at humor.

All Is Well The Life Story of **Richard Dell** (MSO-53), (2016).

An inspiring account of one man’s remarkable journey through life. Born in the winter of 1935, Dick is thrown into a life of adversity: first the death of his admirable Granddad O’Shea, followed by his young, loving Mother, and eventually his struggling Father. Orphaned at ten years old, he and his younger sisters come under the wind of their fiery Grandmother on the O’Shea ranch.

After an adolescence filled with many moves, discovery, and hard work as a smokejumper, Dick begins a career with Mobil in the oil field town of Worland, Wyoming. Almost 40 years later, he retires as a high-level employee relations manager with Mobil Chemical. Filled with boldness and determination, *All Is Well* is an astonishing memoir that shows how life is often what we make it to be.

Ole Freedom by **Pferron Doss** (MSO-77), (2015).

When a fifteen-year-old African-American boy goes fishing on the banks of the Mississippi River in 1877, his plan is to help feed his church congregation. Instead, he is accused of murder and becomes the object of a man-hunt no one doubted would end in an un-ceremonious lynching.

After hiding in the bowels of a riverboat, then proving his worth to the captain by showing he could read, the boy finds himself facing a desperate life in central Montana on the upper reaches of the Missouri River. Based on a true



story, this historical novel chronicles the young man’s fascinating life as he stumbles across a kindly benefactor, then pursues a life as a farmer, a mule skinner and, finally, a military man who plays a key role in the evolution of American mechanized military tactics, only to find himself dishonorably discharged solely because of his color. *Ole Freedom* is also a tale of unrequited love, courage, faith and values that hold fast despite an era of primitive racial attitudes, behaviors and beliefs.

Pferron Doss is a University of Montana graduate who taught the history of the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps in the Black Studies Department there. He led a 1974 reenactment of the 1900-mile bicycle trip from Missoula to St. Louis that is chronicled in *Ole Freedom*.

Reminiscence Of Smokejumper Diversity

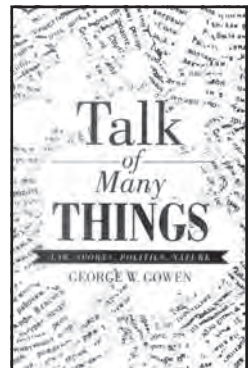
by **Lon Dale** (Missoula ’69)

Completion of a review of the book *Talk of Many Things*, by my friend **George Gowen** (MSO-54), has been on my to-do list since a commitment during a dinner discussion with George after the conclusion of the 2015 reunion.

After rereading George’s chronology of his many life experiences, including time as a smokejumper, I reflected upon the camaraderie among all smokejumpers, no matter ethnic origin, education, gender or economic status.

I recalled a discussion with **Doc Lammers** (MSO-71) relating how George extended his hospitality to Doc and his daughter. They had stopped in New York City on their way to visit Princeton University; the hospitality was based solely upon their smokejumper blood bond and Doc noting in a smokejumper publication that George was a Princeton graduate.

George finished *Talk of Many Things* in 2014 after his granddaughter urged him to document the significant accomplishments of his very interesting life. George is 87 and still practicing law in New York City with the law firm of Dunnington, Bartholow & Miller LLP.



When you think about it, smokejumpers enjoy the same spiritual unity lauded by Stephen Ambrose in his epic chronicles *Band of Brothers* and *Citizen Soldiers*. As smokejumpers our time together revealed our many idiosyncrasies and diverse backgrounds of ethnicity, education, geographic origin and diverse experiences, all coupled with the need to work together, look out for each other, and always care about each other, even after the USFS was in our rearview mirrors.

My first involvement with George was in 1992 after **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) came to my Missoula law office with a list of everyone who had ever been a smokejumper, while touting the need for a national smokejumper organization. One of George's many talents is creating and serving non-profit organizations.

George's expertise was of great benefit to the establishment of the non-profit status of the NSA. With George's able assistance, we pushed the envelope in a few aspects and successfully received the coveted non-profit, 501(c)(3) designation that allows tax deductions for donations to the NSA.

I was a little nervous about some of our paperwork, and George reassured me, with a retort, "What are they (IRS) going to do, spank us?" So NSA's success has in part evolved from Earl's idea and George's expertise, and of course the countless hours of service by many others, too many to name.

George devotes a chapter to his Missoula smokejumper experiences noting that he sought to become a smokejumper in part based upon "[a] vague feeling that, like the spoiled boy in Kipling's *Captains Courageous*, I would benefit by being knocked about a bit." A chapter in George's book is entitled *Reflections*, which has some sage advice for all of us.

George's greatest regret was that he never told his parents he loved them. Perhaps some readers will eliminate this regret from their own lives.

George wrote, "Advice is a malady for which there is no medication" but George offers Rudyard Kipling's poem *If* as his advice for one and all.

George went on to graduate from the University of Virginia School of Law, and has enjoyed an outstanding career as a corporate lawyer, including service for several years as general counsel for the United States Tennis Association, a board member of the National Park Foundation, and several high-profile years as associate counsel of the United States

Olympic Committee.

George's parents were in the diplomatic service and George was born in Italy. George relates about contacts with members of the Kennedy Family, and a lifelong friendship with William Simon, Treasury Secretary under President Ronald Reagan.

For those interested, copies of *Talk of Many Things* can be obtained through orders at xlibris.com. George's book serves to remind all smokejumpers of the uniqueness of the NSA and its members. This bond of friendship comes home to me every time our MSO-69 group unites for a summer NSA work project. 🦋

Picnic Jump – For Del Catlin

by Howard Chadwick (McCall '52)

We came down through windless sky
under white parachutes,
happy to be landing on an open, grassy hillside.

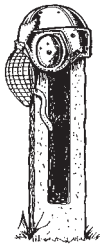
Our fire was still small, licking its way
through low brush and grass. Fanning out
from the base of a tall Doug fir where a bolt
of lightning had spiraled down the trunk.

After we put the fire out
with shovel and Pulaski, Del said,
do you think we should take her down?
Meaning the tree that was over two feet through.
Looking up, from the wealth of my inexperience
I said, I don't see any smoke. Del said,
I think we'd better cut that big tree down.

So we set to with our two-man crosscut.
We had the rhythm, the easy pull don't push,
let the saw do the work, singing its high thin tune,
sharp teeth raking out bright sawdust ribbons.

First the undercut chopped wide with Pulaskis
Then the backcut, the blade eating its way
to the heart of the tree then past until
a widening behind the saw that spread
until a cracking sound, a final parting,
the big tree leaning to its death bed,
its fall cushioned by the many branches.
We found fire in the top.

We sat around three days then, mopping up.
Feeling for hot spots with black hands.
Eating oyster stew, beans and canned peaches.
Drinking chocolate milk. Waiting for the packer.
Picnic jump. Easy money.



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

Garth L. Haugland (Missoula '59)

Garth, 81, died January 16, 2017, in Dillon, Montana. He grew up in Appleton, MN, and attended the University of Minnesota and St. John's University. Garth served in Korea with the 101st Airborne.

Garth moved to Montana to attend the Univ. of Montana and jumped at Missoula during the 1959 season. He worked for the state for 25 years as a game warden. In 1995, Garth successfully ran for a Beaverhead County Commissioner's position where he served for 22 years before resigning due to health complications related to cancer.

Robert E. "Bob" Cutler (Missoula '51)

"Dr. Bob" died March 20, 2016, in Albuquerque, NM. He served as a medic in the Army from 1947-50. Bob jumped at Missoula 1951-54 while attending the University of Montana where he graduated in 1954. Bob went to medical school at Washington University and opened his internal medicine practice in the Espanola Valley in New Mexico for the next 18 years.

His career in medicine extended another 20 years at the Los Alamos National Laboratory and in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he retired in 2000.

Richard C. "Dick" Kersh (La Grande '76)

Dick, 65, died January 2, 2017, after an 18-month battle with pancreatic cancer. He attended schools in Redding and graduated from Enterprise H.S. in 1969 where he was an outstanding wrestler. Dick served 32 years with the USFS on five forests. He worked in many areas of wildland firefighting: firefighter, engine crew, helitack crew, hotshot, smokejumper and operations chief.

Dick retired from the Six Rivers N.F. in 2004 and went to work with the BIA/Hoopa Wildland

Fire Program as Operations Chief until the fall of 2009. Dick is the son of Bob Kersh, the original Loft Foreman at Redding.

Robert M. "Mike" Bowman (North Cascades '55)

Mike, 81, died January 23, 2017, at his home in Moscow, Idaho. He attended the University of West Virginia and graduated from the University of Washington in 1959. Mike jumped at NCSB 1955-58 and Fairbanks 1964-65. He served in the Army 1960-62 and started his forestry career in Alaska with the BLM. Mike worked at 19 different locations for the BLM and USFS during his 30 years with the agencies before retiring in 1985. His last assignment was at Missoula as the Assistant Director of Fire Management.

During his career, he was instrumental in the development of the National Fire Academy and the National Fire Center. After retirement, he established the Community Forestry Program while working for the city of Lewiston, Idaho.

Lester F. Lowe (McCall '66)

Lester, 73, died February 5, 2017, in Boise, Idaho. He jumped out of McCall during the 1966-67 seasons before graduating from Lewis-Clark State College with a teaching degree. Lester taught for a few years before becoming a logger. He loved hunting and the outdoors settling in Riggins, Idaho. Lester was a lifelong learner and knew that life required the ability to apply knowledge and continuously taught those around him to do the same.

Lenn R. McNabb (McCall '87)

Lenn died September 8, 2016, at his home in Asheville, NC. He is survived by his wife, Marty, of 44 years. Lenn jumped at McCall 1987-91.

James F. Rathbun (McCall '58)

Jim died February 10, 2017. He was a graduate of the University of Idaho with a degree in Forestry. Jim spent his career with the USFS and retired in 1989 as the Supervisor of the Kootenai N.F. He jumped at McCall 1958-61.

Roger H. Borine (McCall '71)

Roger died February 21, 2017, in his home in Bend, Oregon. He attended Eastern Oregon College and graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in Soil Science in 1973. Roger jumped at McCall 1971-73 to finance his college education. He worked as a soil scientist in Baker City, Klamath Falls, Medford and Bend. Roger rounded out his career with wetland delineations and wildlife biology studies. After 35 years he retired and began Sage West, a soils consulting business.

Hiram B. "Doc" Smith (Missoula '59)

Doc died February 25, 2017, in Chandler, AZ. After graduating from high school, he went into the Navy where he served towards the end of the Korean War. When he completed his military service, he enrolled at Colorado A & M where he received his degree in Forestry in 1961. Doc was very involved in fire and was fire boss qualified while he was District Ranger at Lander on the Shoshone N.F. in Wyoming.

Doc was a District Ranger on the Wasatch N.F. in Utah and the Toiyabe N.F. in the Sierras. He then moved to the Kaibab N.F. in Arizona where he was fire staff officer retiring in 1994. Doc enrolled at Northern Arizona University where he received his Masters Degree in Forestry. He became part of the Ecological Restoration Institute, where he worked until he finally retired.

Doc was a member of the NSA and served on the Board of Directors for three years.

Gerald L. "Jake" Jacobsen (Missoula '63)

Jake died February 26, 2017, at his home in Missoula. He graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in Business Administration. Jake spent his career with the USFS and retired from the Northern Region Office in Missoula in 1998 after 33 years of service. He was a Personnel Specialist and an Ops Chief on a Type 1

Fire Incident Management Team.

Jake was a NSA member and jumped at Missoula 1963, 65-67 and at Grangeville in 1964.

Lawrence R. "Larry" Clark (Idaho City '51)

Larry, 89, died January 19, 2017, at his home in Baker City, Oregon. After growing up in the Rupert, Idaho, area, he was drafted into the Army during WWII where he served in Korea. Returning home, he attended Southern Idaho College and Westminster College in Salt Lake City where he received his teaching degree.

Larry taught in Fairfield, Idaho, and at the naval base in Iceland before moving to Baker City in 1963, where he taught middle school until retirement. He jumped out of Idaho City 1951, 1953 and McCall 1952, 1956-60. After smokejumping Larry was the foreman on the first helitack crew in Idaho, working out of Hailey.

Stanley W. Linnertz (Missoula '61)

Stan, 81, died March 20, 2017, in Loveland, Colorado. He attended Minot State Teachers College. Stan had a career that included railroad brakeman, smokejumper, military photographer, and Lincoln (NE) radio personality covering the Husker football teams coached by Bob Devaney and Tom Osborne. He was President of the Nebraska Broadcasters Assoc. and the Nebraska Pork Producers, a member of the Lincoln Board of Education, a driver for Berthoud Rural Alternative for Transportation, a participant in the NSA Trails Program, and active in Truckers Against Trafficking programs. Stan jumped at Missoula in 1961 and was an NSA Life Member.

Hans W. Trankle (Missoula '51)

Hans died March 8, 2017. He was born in Helibronn, Germany, and came to the U.S. at age four and resided in Billings, Montana. He jumped at Missoula 1951-54 and 56-58 before joining the first smokejumper crew in Alaska in 1959. Hans jumped out of Fairbanks 1959-60, 64-65 with a stint at West Yellowstone 1961-63.

On June 2, 1959, Hans, along with seven other jumpers, made the first fire jumps in Alaska as part of the new BLM smokejumper program.

Hans came home to Billings at age 40 and worked for the U.S. Postal Service. He and his

wife made many trips back to Alaska, where they had a second home in Kodiak.

Dean W. Ford (Pilot)

Dean, 97, of Bend, Oregon, died March 11, 2017. He joined the Army Air Corps in 1940 and flew "The Hump" in the China/Burma Theater during WWII. Retiring from the service after 20 years, he went to Oregon State University where he got his degree in Forestry. Dean flew smoke-jumpers, Suppression Crews, and lead plane out of the Redmond Air Center.

John V. Hawk (Missoula '51)

John, 86, died January 21, 2017. He gradu-

ated from Oklahoma A&M with a degree in forestry and served in the U.S. Navy 1953-56. John received degrees in Theology from Golden Gate Baptist Seminary and served as a chaplain at San Quentin and pastor of West Berkeley Mission. In 1956 John and his wife, Roma, were appointed as directors of the Oklahoma City Mission Center.

He returned to California in 1971, earned an additional degree, and moved to Fairbanks. John began counseling for the Army in 1986, was transferred to Germany in 1989, and moved back to the Navy Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA, in 1991. John retired in 1995 and lived in Rohnert Park, CA.

NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions

Donor

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Contributions since the previous publication of donors April 2017

Total funds disbursed to smokejumpers and families since 2004 - \$97,540

Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:

Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico CA 95926

T. Richard “Dick” Flaharty (Missoula ’44)

Dick, 96, died April 9, 2017. After his father deserted the family in the late 1920s, he grew up in a home for boys on the north side of Chicago. In that home he became interested in music and became a talented drummer, playing at many events in his late teens and early twenties. At the same time, he was an active member of the Methodist Church and registered as a conscientious objector prior to the start of WWII.

Dick spent four years with the Civilian Public Service (CPS), during which time he volunteered for the smokejumper program in Missoula. The CPS provided 240 men to the smokejumper program during WWII and was

instrumental in keeping the smokejumper program alive during the war.

After the war, Dick went to Roosevelt College where he received his BA in 2 ½ years and later his Masters in Social Work from the University of Pittsburg in 1951. His professional career was primarily in child welfare programs and involved work in Wisconsin and Michigan before moving to California and continuing as a Director of Family Services for the Volunteers of America.

Dick was very important in keeping track of the CPS jumpers for the NSA and involved in their smokejumper reunions that started long before the NSA was founded. 🕯

GS Fund At Work – Bob Charley Update

by **Leo Cromwell** (Idaho City ’66)

Bob Charley (MYC-93) was a wildland firefighter for 29 years until August 2016, when he discovered he was suffering from kidney failure.

Bob started his firefighting career in Ronan, Mont., in 1988 as part of the Indian Firefighters. From 1989 until he became a smokejumper in 1993, he was a member of the Krassel Helitack crew on the Payette National Forest. The only interruption during this span was 1991, when he worked on the Flagstaff Hotshot crew.

After 22 years of smokejumping in McCall, Bob noticed his strength was leaving him, and he was forced to work as a Payette N.F. engine crewmember based in Council. Bob knew he had two years to work to receive his Forest Service retirement, scheduled for 2016.

With 50 days left, he became too weak to continue. Bob returned to his home in Kaibeto, Ariz., on the Navajo Nation Reservation. The situation seemed hopeless and he did not want to talk to anyone, as he contemplated his life and the future for his wife, Priscilla, and five children. Their youngest, Patrick, is 8 years old and their oldest is 26.

Things seemed hopeless for Bob until he received help from the National Smokejumper Association, McCall Smokejumpers, and local

firefighters and friends. The Payette N.F. donated enough personal leave for Bob to receive full retirement from the Forest Service. With the help of the NSA, Bob was able to pay bills and start to put his life back together after such a change for someone only 48 years of age.

Bob endures dialysis three times a week, four hours each session. He is currently being tested to see if he can undergo peritoneal dialysis, a treatment for kidney failure that uses the lining of the patient’s abdomen to filter blood inside the body. If this works for Bob, he can perform his own dialysis at home, by himself, every day.

Bob hopes that someday he will be strong enough to build his own cabin on the Navajo Reservation. His real hope may occur April 3, when he travels to Phoenix to meet with a team of doctors to learn whether he can become a candidate for a kidney transplant.

Bob Charley was a big help over the years as a McCall smokejumper. We will miss his Native American artwork on t-shirts and designs for the Region 4 reunions. He also delivered a homily for his friend, **Mick Moore** (MYC-77), at the 2013 Region 4 Smokejumper Sunday Service.

Bob thanks the NSA and all his smokejumper bros for their support. 🕯

Thad Duel—Smokejumper

by Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)

August 6, 1974 – The Twin Otter circles low over the junction of the South Fork of the Salmon River and the Main Salmon.

There are two fires on the ridge just above the confluence. One is a four-manner and the other, further up the ridge, a two-man fire. It is one day after my 26th birthday and we all jump the same spot.

Thad Duel (MYC-56) and I float down to the ridge, above the rivers and then hike up to a snag that is burning. We have a crosscut saw to bring the snag down. It is steep, beautiful country and I enjoy fighting fire with Thad.

We camp on the ridge, where our gear was dropped, with the other four jumpers: **Bill Yensen** (MYC-53), **Bruce Yergenson** (MYC-54), **Jerry Blattner** (MYC-63) and **Don Ranstrom** (MSO-66). In the evening we sit around a fire and play cards while relating tales of jumping. His is a storied crew and Bill brings his movie camera with which we take footage, some of which makes it into the “Smokejumpers: Firefighters From the Sky” DVD in 2000.

Since we have just one book, we read a page, tear it out, and pass it to other jumpers around the fire. The last jumper burns the page after he finishes reading it.

This is a special spot as, just one year later, I would kayak the Class V South Fork Salmon River, the 17th kayaker to make the descent. It was great working with the crew on the fire, and I enjoyed the two-manner with Thad.

June 1971: I walk into the McCall jump base and **Larry Swan** (MYC-68) introduces me to **Del Catlin** (MYC-47). Having never worked for the Forest Service or on an organized fire crew, Del still gives me a chance to try out in the middle of training, as several rookies have not made it.

The first thing I must do is pass the physical that Thad is giving. Thad is exacting in what he expects. He describes each element to be passed in detail. For the pushups: “You must come up until your elbows are straight; when you come down

you must hit my hand,” which he places under my chest.

I do my first three pushups. “That’s one; that’s one; that’s one.”

Apparently I am not hitting his hand hard enough. So I start to fall on it hard: “That is two, three.” Finally they start to count. I just barely pass.

It was a tough two weeks of training for me. During lunch breaks, Thad’s beautiful young daughters bring him his lunch. I ended up doing practice rolls until dark. The first jump, neither **Dr. Sam Houston** (MYC-71), a decorated Green Beret, nor I got to jump because Thad did not think our Allen rolls were adequate.

Thad went by the book, but once you “qualified,” Thad accepted you as a jumper.

July 1971: The entire Ned class from McCall went to southern Arizona to fight fire. Thad was the crew boss for these rookie jumpers. We based out of Mirana and Flagstaff and worked on some intense fires. It was clear that Thad enjoyed working the jumpers he had just trained.

When I worked in the parachute loft, we had breaks at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. We would gather in the room downstairs for the 15-minute break and drink soda pop while telling stories. Thad always drank Dr. Pepper. He would touch no other drink.

July 14, 1972: McGrath, Alaska. We are loading into the DC-3 for a jump in Alaska’s interior. July 14 is Bastille Day, the day of the French Revolution. It is also my father’s birthday.

Thad turned 40 on this day. The USFS had a rule then that no jumper could parachute after age 40. The jump foreman ordered Thad, who had already suited up, off of the plane. Thad was furious and it was evident even though he did a good job of check spotting. That year the “40-year-old rule” was challenged in court and struck down.

Thad, Del Catlin and **Wayne Webb** (MYC-46) all started jumping again in 1973. It was a joy to jump with decorated veterans of World War II like

Wayne and Del. Now we have jumpers like **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65) who jump until they're 59.

Thad was a very good skier. Just like jumping, he had a style that was his own. I skied with him several times and his form was skis together, knees flexed, back straight, go for the powder snow. Just as in his smokejumping career, he was exacting in how he skied.

My last fire jump was in August 1982, and Thad was my jump partner on a two-manner near the headwaters of the South Fork Payette River. As

Thad said, "We have the fire contained. The snag is down; we will call it a day at 1900 hours."

He was a "by-the-book" firefighter, and though I didn't agree, I respected and liked Thad. So I spent the evening hiking the ridgelines and then after dark wrapped myself in my parachute and slept soundly.

The next morning, rosy-fingered, golden-throned dawn lit up the Sawtooths with a spectacular sunrise which I watched from my parachute-covered bag. We checked the fire to

When I leaped from the DC-3, I looked up to see the parachute deploy and the plane fly away; the first time since I started jumping that I had ever looked up to see that. A strong wind was blowing up-canyon and instead of a minute in the air, we had almost three, as the wind pushed up the steep breaks and held us aloft.

It was magic flying back and forth, losing very little altitude, and watching sunlight on the Sawtooth Range.

I stood first in the door, the entire esplanade of the Sawtooth Range was spread out before me, stretching horizon to horizon.

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Thad decided he had enough air time and pulled his shroud lines. He fell faster to the ground, releasing them just 100 feet above ground level.

We hiked to the snag that was on fire and worked all day containing the blaze and cutting down the snag. Then I suggested that we work later in the evening.

make sure it was out and then caught a helicopter ride to the South Fork Payette River and ride to McCall.

It was a memorable jump and fire, so I decided it would be my last. It was the middle of the week at the beginning of a pay period but I walked into the base, handed my gear to **John Humphries** (MYC-79) and told him I was done. We still talk about the surprised look on his face that someone would walk out in the middle of the week.

I have wonderful memories that will always be with me.

Thad was my trainer. I fought my first fire as a jumper with him and my last with him. There were many other fires that we worked on together. Thad was a jumper of merit and I will miss him. 🙏

Jerry passed away in 2010 and Thad in 2005. I've had this story in the files for a long time. This is a good issue in which to publish. (Ed.)

Order using the form on the insert!

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The SMOKEJUMPERS cap offers gold embroidery and trim with a velcro strap. The U.S. Forest Service cap has a brass buckle and green-and-white "sandwich"-style bill, while the 75th anniversary cap offers a lighter shade of khaki as it commemorates the storied history of smokejumping's establishment in 1940. Why not order one of each?

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Movie inspired many dreams of smokejumping for young men

Loosely based on the 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 1952. **\$15**



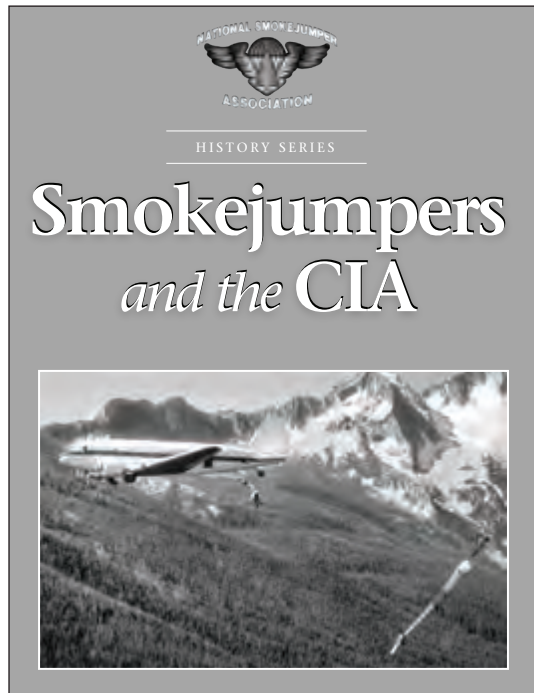
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Smokejumpers and the CIA

Over 25 Years of Service

Smokejumpers worked for the CIA (Agency) over a 25-plus year period. Beginning in the spring of 1951, the CIA sent two agents to the smokejumper base at Nine Mile, Montana, to be trained to parachute into mountainous and isolated terrain. The agents apparently reported back that there was a cadre of men already trained and willing to take on whatever the Agency wanted done. The CIA had realized in Smokejumpers men who were problem solvers and could get the job done under the most difficult circumstances.





ODDS AND ENDS



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to **Major Boddicker** (MSO-63), **Gary Hannon** (MSO-60), **Lyle Rice** (RDD-65), **Jim Roberts** (CJ-62), **Larry Adams** (MSO-67), and **Joe Sterling** (MSO-73) who just became our latest Life Member(s).

The NSA Good Samaritan Fund has aided jumpers in need and their families for over 10 years now. To date, this aid has totaled over \$92,000. Recently we had a chance to help **Bruce Marshall** (BOI-71) who was hit by a stroke last October.

I asked Bruce if we could share his email: "Chuck-I was shocked to receive your letter! Thank you and the NSA for your generosity. There aren't words to express my gratitude. I am sincerely touched.

"On October 8, 2016, I had a stroke. Still pissed but must deal with it. My left side was affected, couldn't walk, left hand was paralyzed, speech was slurred, and there was brain damage.

"I'm not who I was, but I'm alive, 'cheated death one more time.' I don't have to look far to see others in worse shape.

"It's been a rough journey. I live alone in a rural and isolated setting, plus it's winter. Everything is harder that it was. I've come a long way, can now walk without a cane, can open my hand, though it is very weak, swearing is as eloquent as it ever was. Also drive slowly, but as well as any other old geezer on the road. Still type by hunt/peck method.

"Working towards recovery, but it's very slow. Not much I can do except exercise."

Davis Perkins (NCSB-72): "Chuck, just letting you know that I leave in two days (Jan.) for Iraq. I'll be with a small (6 member) medical team traveling to Mosul. Our assignment is through the World Health Organization, and our task is to set up a Trauma Stabilization Point (TSP) outside the front lines in Mosul. The military campaign



against ISIS is causing significant numbers of civilian casualties, and our job will be to stabilize them before transport to definitive care. The nearest hospital is about 40 miles away. The team will have an armed security detail assigned so we should be fine. I will be gone at least a month."

Update March 1, 2017: "Our trauma team is set up near the Mosul airport. Intense fighting here and we're treating a lot of Iraqi soldiers, some with horrific battle wounds. We're also seeing more civilian casualties now that the fighting is reaching the inner city. I've been here a month now and have been asked to extend my stay for a couple more weeks due to increased casualties. These guys re Shia militia fighters (tough bastards!). They brought their comrade in who'd been shot. They captured this rig and gun from ISIS the day before and were now using it against them. Note the handcuffs (behind my head). Apparently ISIS is now chaining some of their fighters to their weapons for their "unwilling volunteers!"

Update April 2 2017: "I'm back from six weeks in Mosul with a medical team. It was the most intense experience of my life. We (8 of us) were with a Trauma Stabilization Point (TSP) right behind the front lines in west Mosul. We were treating horrific battle injuries to both Iraqi military and civilians as well. A busy time, and we were able to save many lives. The fight for Mosul continues, as you know. Narrow streets with thousands of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. ISIS bastards would intentionally target large groups of civilians, and we treated many woman and children suffering from gunshot and shrapnel wounds, a truly tragic situation. If the fighting continues into the summer, I will be returning with another team."

Bill Moody (NCSB-57): "In late Jan./Feb., **Jamie Tackman** (NCSB-75) and I spent 21 days in

Santiago, Chile, during their major fire episode. We were working for Global Supertanker Services - Boeing 747-400 air tanker (Supertanker). Jamie flew as a lead plane pilot with the Chilean Army and Navy directing the military pilots in low-level lead plane operations for the 747. The aircraft used was an Army Casa 235 and a Navy Casa 295, both fast turbines.

"I served as 747 mission coordinator, air attack and air attack support, prioritizing fires. We flew 43 Supertanker sorties throughout central Chile dropping 821,418 gallons of water as they ran out of retardant. The Russians, also flying out of Santiago, provided an IL-76, a 12,000-gallon air tanker. A Neptune Aviation BAe 146 was assigned to Concepcion, Chile, for fires in the south central area around Concepcion. Chile had record-breaking fire activity, nine times their average annual acreage loss - much like the Bitterroot in 2000 and north

central Washington in 2014 and 2015."

Jeff R. Davis (MSO-57): Concerning the NSA book *Smokeyjumpers and the CIA*, "Damn fine job, all the way around."

Les Joslin (Associate) has just published his new book "Deschutes National Forest." He covers the Redmond Air Center, RAC Smokejumpers and Redmond Hotshots on pages 39-42. You can purchase a copy at www.arcadiapublishing.com.

Ken Hessel (MYC-58): "Got word that **John Lewis** (MYC-53), **Darrell Eubanks** (IDC-54) and **Dave Bevan** (MSO-55) will have stars added to the CIA Memorial Wall in May." *All three were killed in the crash of an Air America C-46 on August 13, 1961, in Laos. (Ed.)*

Bob Graham (MSO-52) was recently awarded the Idaho Distinguished Service Medal by the State of Idaho for his 43-year service to Boundary County as Incident Commander for the county. Congratulations Bob. 🍷

Memories Of The Bug Job

by **Toby Scott** (McCall '57)

Mike Daly (MYC-57) called the other day, and we talked quite a while. One old memory we recalled was the bug job at Hole-In-the-Rock, Wyo. I think this was in April 1959, and hope my memory hasn't slipped too much.

Mike and I went to work early that year. **Del Catlin** (MYC-47) called and asked if I would like to go to work early. I did, and so did Mike. We went down to the Hole-In-the-Rock Bug Camp in my old black Ford. We would be contract checkers.

The Forest Service set us up in a big camp and hired about 120 people to spray trees - lodgepole pine - with ethylene dibromide, which is now outlawed. There was a big mixing plant where the "EDB" (that's what we called it) was mixed with water and an emulsifier, then transferred into five-gallon cans - "Jerry cans" - for transporting to the field.

It was then transferred into three-gallon pump-up sprayers with wands that would reach about 30 feet. If the bugs were above 30 feet, they would fell the tree, then spray it on the ground.

Before someone transferred the spray from the five-gallon can to the sprayer, and also occasionally while spraying, he had to shake the container vigorously so the EDB didn't settle to the bottom.

The Forest Service also hired several contractors, on a per-tree bid basis, to spray trees. The Forest Service provided the mixed spray, but the contractor had to transport it by pack mules to the spray sites. The contractor crews sprayed about four trees, while the Forest Service was spraying one tree, and did a better job. Does that sound familiar?

Back to the story. By the time Mike and I got to Mountain View, Wyo., we were getting pretty dry, so we stopped in at the Cowboy Bar. There were about 500 people in Mountain View with one bar, one bank, and one grocery store.

The bartender's name was Felix - he owned the place. There were several punchboards where you could pay your money and punch out a number and win money. Our beer of choice at the Cowboy Bar was Gluecksteidt malt liquor, about 8 or 10 percent alcohol. Four or five of those and you would take on

a grizzly bear with one hand tied behind your back.

We socialized with Felix a while and gave a little boost to the local economy. Finally we decided it was time to kick the tires and head for Hole-In-the-Rock – another 25 miles on a dirt road.

Unbeknownst to Mike and me, just before we left the Cowboy Bar, two men in a black car robbed the bank, about 50 yards from the bar. About three or four miles down the roller-coaster dirt road, I saw a station wagon about a mile away coming at us pretty fast.

I went through a low-water crossing. When I topped out, that station wagon was stopped in the middle of the road with the doors open, and four gentlemen were getting out with four guns. I geared the old Ford down and ground to a halt.

They were pointing two rifles and two shotguns at us, and said, “Get out of the car.” Mike and I were very accommodating and even raised our hands when they told us to do so. I had a rifle and a shotgun in the back seat – never know when you might shoot a dove or call up a coyote.

One of the men announced, “There’s two guns in the back seat.” I think we were just a hair away from getting shot right then. It took a while, but we got them to look at our orders to report to the bug job at Hole-In-the-Rock, showed them our identification, and about an hour later we continued on the last leg of our trip. I don’t think they ever caught those fellows.

We spent six or seven weeks there. On weekends we would go to Mountain View and have a few. Sometimes there was a local dance where we could have a few and show the girls how smart we were.

When we first showed up at the bug job, we were running string lines in the woods as boundary markers for the spray crews. We would put a big spool of string on the end of a six-foot pole and hold it in the air. We had a compass on a string around our

necks, and we would take a heading and go about a quarter-mile, then turn around and come back.

After we finished the string lines, we carried hatchets and checked to make sure the contractors were doing their jobs and mark any trees they missed.

The string lines were about 150 feet apart. A person couldn’t carry snoose in his shirt pocket or the lid would screw up the compass.

Hole-In-the-Rock was on the Wasatch National Forest, in the southwest corner of Wyoming, on the Utah border. I had never been in that country before and was surprised at the abundance of game –deer, elk, moose, beaver, and really good fishing for rainbow trout. Nice country. I haven’t been back since.

Some of us worked on the bug job for two or three years. Jumpers who worked on the bug job when I was there, including Mike, **Lonnie Park** (MYC-54), **Tex Lewis** (MYC-53), **Ralph Bowyer** (MYC-56), **Woody Spence** (MYC-58), **Dick Terry** (MYC-58), **Moose Salyer** (MYC-54) and **Glenn Hale** (MYC-57). There were several others, but I don’t remember their names.

One year, **Dick Graham** (IDC-58) and I drove two bomb carriers (four-wheel drive, two-ton trucks geared very low for heavy loads) from Boise to Hole-In-the-Rock. The top speed was 30 mph, wide open downhill; took us two days. They were used to carry Jerry cans from the mixing plant to the spray sites. They were Air Force surplus vehicles.

We would play volleyball every day after supper. There were six of us jumpers, and the Forest Service had about a hundred people to choose from for a team. We were pretty good athletes, and we didn’t lose a game in six weeks.

We lived in tents – there was a two-holer for an outhouse. I remember someone hung a rope in the outhouse with a sign that said, “All turds over a foot long, please lower with rope.” 🦌

A Tribute to Dick Courson

by **Don Thomas** (Cave Junction ’57)

On June 24th through 26th 2016, a reunion of Siskiyou Smokejumpers was held at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum near Cave Junction, Oregon.

This reunion was called “Last Of The Mohicans” because, due to the current ages of most of the jumpers who worked at the “Gobi” between when it opened in 1943 and when it closed in



L-R: Don Thomas and Dick Courson (Courtesy D. Thomas)

1981, there may not be enough left for another reunion.

During the 2016 reunion, I was asked to present a “Last Of The Mohicans” plaque to **Dick Courson** (CJ-46) who had jumped at Cave Junction from 1946 to 1950. I had met Dick at the 2002 reunion and have stayed in touch with him over the years and considered it an honor to be chosen to present him with the plaque.

Dick’s wife died a few years ago and due to his age—he turned 93 on June 26—he resides at an assisted living facility in Pendleton, Oregon. Dick was unable to attend the reunion, and since my wife and I were driving to Walla Walla, WA, we made the presentation.

For those of you who are not familiar with Dick Courson, he is a remarkable and admirable man. Dick was born in 1923. His parents divorced when he was very young, and he lived with his mother in Portland. This was during the “Great Depression” and, while his mother had a job, times were tough. To make ends meet, she rented two of her extra rooms to two USMC peacetime recruiting sergeants and, as part of the rental agreement, they had to help take care of Dick while his mother worked. Dick’s father figures were U.S. Marines!

When the U.S. entered WWII, and before he finished high school, Dick enlisted in the only branch of the service that he would consider—The Marines.

After completing boot camp and combat training, Dick volunteered for the Para Marines because there was an extra \$50 a month hazard pay.

After completing parachute training, Dick was

assigned to the Pacific Theater but did not go into combat until Feb. 19, 1945, when, as a PFC in Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division, he landed on Iwo Jima. He spent the next 30 days in the hell of combat on that God forsaken island before being evacuated to Guam due to illness and wounds.

After recovery, Dick was sent to Hawaii for additional training, but the dropping of the two atomic bombs brought the war to an end before the anticipated invasion of Japan.

Following the end of the war, Dick wanted to become a lawyer. To do so, he had to go to college but he had not completed high school. Being a creative young man, the lack of a high school diploma wasn’t going to deter him, and he figured out a way to enroll in Willamette University.

After two years he had to drop out to make a living. Still wanting to become a lawyer, he talked his way into Lewis & Clark Law School without finishing his undergraduate degree. Dick graduated from Lewis & Clark, passed the Oregon bar exam, and was in private practice for two years. He then ran for District Attorney in Umatilla County, won and served 10 years as D.A. before being appointed to the Superior Court bench by the governor of Oregon. Now Dick Courson is The Honorable Richard J. Courson—a remarkable man indeed.

I consider myself fortunate to have made the acquaintance of Dick Courson and, except for my father, I consider Dick the finest man I have ever known. 🙏

Paperwork

by **Ron Thoreson** (Cave Junction ’60)

The last issue had a bunch of wonderful stories about **Jim Allen** (NCSB-46). One theme was his willingness to give guys a second chance after they screwed up. I’m thinking that may not have extended to what he hated most about his job – PAPERWORK.

Jim could and would forgive almost any sin except actions which caused him to do paperwork, which he hated. A couple of instances come to mind.

I was with **Mike McCracken** (CJ-60) on the fire



Emily Allen, Joyce Thoreson and Jim Allen 1995 Redmond, Oregon. (Courtesy Ron Thoreson)

where he contracted the worst case of poison oak I've ever seen. It caused him to have to transfer from Cave Junction to McCall, where he spent the rest of his career. The fire itself was altogether forgettable, and I wouldn't recall it at all except that afterward I had to do an "accident" report.

I do remember Mac sitting in the day room, slathered in lotion, with his arms and legs resting on chairs around him. I never got any poison oak on that outing.

Jim approached me with some papers in hand and said that I needed to make out an "accident" report. I said I didn't see any "accident." Jim said, "I know, Ron. Just make out the damned report."

Since I hadn't really witnessed anything, I was left to make up the facts. My first effort was a tale of how Mac had been set upon by some giant poison oak vines and would have perished for certain if I hadn't come to his rescue and hacked those vines away from him with my Pulaski.

I turned in my report to a dour-faced Jim, who immediately and demonstrably made clear that he was less than pleased with my creative efforts. I don't recall his exact words, but I'm pretty sure that I then experienced one of his instances of giving me a second (and last) chance. I redid the report in a more USFS-prescribed manner, posthaste.

The other occasion was upon my return to Cave Junction from New Mexico. I had cracked my ankle down there and, after a short time in a cast, had learned to tape it sufficiently that I could make fire jumps with a modified flamingo landing. I had a couple of jumps after the injury and didn't tell Jim about it upon my return to Cave Junction.

It was a slow period and Jim decided we needed a practice jump at Seats Field. I had a dilemma. I

knew I couldn't make a normal landing. I had to either fess up or try to fake a landing sufficiently to get a chewing out but stay on the jump list. I unwisely chose the latter.

When we jumped I scooted the harness under my dumb butt a little further than normal. My plan was to quickly pivot and roll without putting pressure on my bum leg. I got the harness too far under me, wasn't able to roll at all, and landed on my butt with a compression fracture.

My career ended with a humiliating extraction by ambulance from a practice jump, followed by a month in the Grants Pass hospital. I remember during Jim's visits to my bedside that he was notably grim and not terribly sympathetic. He had a sort of Sgt. Friday approach – "Just the facts, man."

After my release from the hospital, I went my way and lost touch with Jim for more than 20 years. After we got back together, I was with my beautiful wife Joyce. Jim was, in the words of his wife, Emily, fascinated by her. Like my dear mom, Jim forgave me almost all my previous sins immediately since Joyce more than compensated for all of my earlier antics. We went on to have a great friendship, but Jim still had a sore spot.

One evening, over a splendid dinner, apropos of nothing in our discussion, Jim said, "So you lied to me?"

I didn't ask what he was talking about. We both knew it was about me not being forthcoming about my bum leg some 30 years earlier. I said, "Yes" – although I'd prefer he used a different term. In the end I guess my deceit was equivalent to lying.

He said, "I had to do a hell of a lot of paperwork." That was the end of our discussion. I think he just wanted me to know that he still harbored a grievance over all of that paperwork.

As so many others, I greatly admired and respected Jim. I well knew, however, that he did not forgive and forget if you got on the bad side of him. I think paperwork may have been the surest way of getting on that bad side. Not a perfect guy, but a giant among the rest of us mere mortals.

A postscript to the injury story: I was in the Marine Corps reserve, having done a tour before jumping at Cave Junction. When I was in the hospital, I was contacted by the Corps regarding my physical status and availability to return to active duty and go to Vietnam. My injury resulted in my discharge. 🙏

In Memoriam

Mike Walker

June 13, 1939 - July 2, 2016

La Grande 1976 - 1982

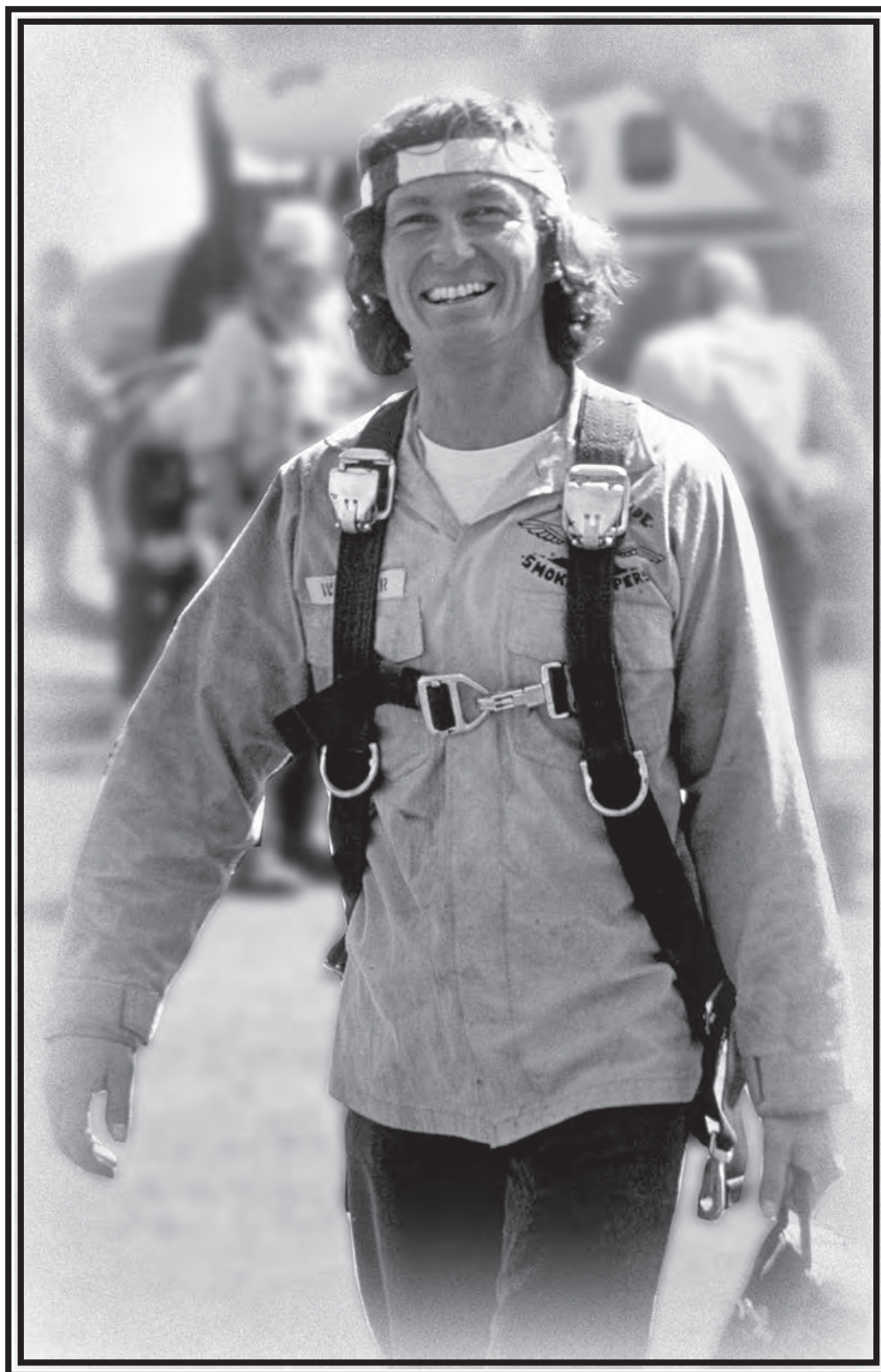


Photo Courtesy: Mark Corbet (LGD-74)

A Tribute To Mike Walker

From Steve Dickenson (La Grande '78)

Mike Walker was a La Grande smoke-jumper from June 1975 to September 1982. He was born in 1939 and died peacefully in Ogden, Utah, on July 2, 2016. Mike was a smart and witty man



who loved wildlife, his dogs, desert adventures and his partner Jeanne. He was unique for a large snake tattoo on his forearm and training as a rookie at age 36. Mike enjoyed smokejumping and working with smokejumpers. His career ended prematurely due to the questionable decision to close the base.

Mike was a boon companion on a two-manner and an accomplished fireman on crew actions, a trusted jump partner, and a true friend. We were fortunate to have sat in the door of an airplane with "The Snake."

From Gary Cordy (La Grande '75)

I jumped with Mike for five years in La Grande and was his roommate for part of that time. And as Steve Dickenson says, "Walker was WAY OLDER than any of the rookies." So some of us figured he might not last. Talk about wrong! In fact, we had to work extra hard to keep up with him. Mike had lived a lot of life by the time he rookie'd, but in smokejumping he found the perfect fit for his energy, love of nature, and need to be tested.

Mike had a big presence and didn't mind being a unique character. When others listened to rock and roll, he listened to American roots music. When others spent money on cars and clothes, he kept his VW bug, one dress shirt, and bought limited edition wildlife prints. Mike sized people up quickly, saw them keenly, and loved to verbally joust with his friends, with spot on zingers that were witty and which invited retaliation. But, damn it; he always had the last barb.

Years later my wife and family were able to meet

Mike and Jeanne a few times at their amazing rural home near La Grande. Our kids would say, "Can we see the Snake man and his snakes?" He had an entire room dedicated to housing venomous and non-venomous snakes. Don't know how Jeanne handled that part. Mike was a "smoke jumpers smokejumper" who was competent, committed, and just a little bit crazy, in a good way. Good memories will live on.

From Mark Corbet (La Grande '74)

In addition to his many years as an extraordinary smokejumper, Mike had a long line of other skills and interests that never failed to amaze those who got to know him well.

The following list of his work history and education sheds a little light on some of those skills and interests:

Bachelors Degree..... English Literature, Virginia
Masters Degree..... Environmental Education, New Jersey
Curator Thames Science Center, Connecticut
Field Researcher BLM, Arizona
Senior Technical Staff Edwards Air Force Base, California
Wildlife Refuge Caretaker Union County, Oregon
Research Assistant ... USDA Forest & Range Science Oregon
Administrative Assistant Conservation & Environmental
Studies Center, New Jersey
School Teacher Connecticut
Public Information Officer ... US Dept. of Health, Education
and Welfare, Washington DC
Logger Columbia Helicopters, Oregon
Fire Lookout Oregon

From a lifelong friend, who knew Mike Walker outside smokejumping

Mike was fascinated with snakes and took every opportunity to explore the woods, fields, and rivers of our local environments. But, make no mistake about it, Mike was the quintessential naturalist. There was nothing Mother Nature threw at him that he didn't want to know more about and that he didn't view as a minor miracle. Mike Walker, Naturalist extraordinaire. R.I.P. 🕊

BLAST FROM THE PAST

70 In Mass Fire Jump

by Jack Demmons (MSO '50)

From the *Daily Missoulian*
July 9, 1949

A CLOUD OF smoke over Blue Mountain southwest of the city Friday brought calls that there was a forest fire in progress and that the Forest Service should be notified. But the foresters already knew of the fire—they started it.

The blaze was used in a mass 70-man practice maneuver by nearly all of the Region 1 smokejumpers. The fire was started in the woods to test how quickly and efficiently the jumpers could put it under control. The men bailed out of two Johnson Flying Service planes.

Complete fire camp equipment was dropped to the



fire area near Blue Mountain about eight miles from the city. Coming down by parachute were radios, stoves, pumps, fire tools, kitchenware—everything needed to set up housekeeping in the woods.

The blaze was about seven acres in extent when first hit by the smokejumpers and they had it under control in about two and a half hours. They left the fire during the evening, a crew remaining behind to

prevent the remaining embers from spreading.

Fred Stillings, aerial fire control officer, was in charge of the operation. He said afterwards that besides proving that the jumpers knew how to handle fire, it disclosed solid evidence that the woods are dry enough to burn.

The jump was a graduation exercise for the smokejumpers. The men have all completed training at Nine Mile and are ready to go on calls throughout the region which includes parts of five states. During the next week they will be assigned to woods jobs at which they will work while awaiting calls.

The jumpers have not yet made an actual fire jump this summer in this region. An eight-man crew that has been in New Mexico since May already has gone to several fires. 🔥

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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 deliv-

ered 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): cnkgshaley@earthlink.net. 🔥

Paper Trail - 1951

by Pat Harbine (Missoula '51)

The stillness was deafening. The parachute spun slowly over my head as the Earth rotated far below my dangling feet. A wisp of gray smoke marked the fire's location. After a brief spell of silence, I heard the distant drone of the airplane as it circled for yet another drop.

Minutes earlier, I had been in the fuselage of the DC-3, sweating heavily in the confines of the canvas jumpsuit and web harness that held the main and reserve chute against my body. Fighting motion sickness, I was eager to get to the door and fresh air to avoid losing my cookies through the mesh facemask.

Following the three jumpers ahead of me, I stepped into space from a perfectly good airplane. Eleven others took the same risk along with me.

The mountainside lay beneath me as I searched for the open area where I was supposed to land. Fate took a different turn, as a strong gust of wind drew me away toward a steep ridge outlined by heavy timber. I tugged on the risers, to no avail, and I descended toward the forest and steep slope beyond.

Branches brushed against my facemask as I broke through the tree line. The down-swept branches of the hemlocks collapsed my canopy while I was still 20 feet above the ground.

Instead of the hard fall I expected, my feet slipped on the steep slope and thick covering of forest duff. The long slide toward the steep cliff below ended as my legs straddled a large tree trunk. The loose shrouds of the chute fell on my grateful face. I was down, lucky but unhurt.

The others had already arrived at the drop site when I stashed my gear by theirs. We all knew the drill – grab a shovel or Pulaski and start a fire line. We worked long into the night, turning up fresh earth and removing forest waste to deny the fire dry fuel. By midnight the flames were subdued and a barren trail surrounded the few burning embers. They could be mopped up in the morn-

ing; time now to get some sleep.

The foreman's angry curses echoed through the Bitterroot Mountains from peak to peak so that even God could hear. "These damned things are made of paper!" he bellowed.

"I'll give that **Bill Wood** (MSO-43) a piece of my mind," he yelled at the cold night as he went to the gear pile to retrieve a nylon chute for a night cover.

A few of the newbies, including me, rolled out our tired bodies into the paper creations. The construction was similar to a cardboard box, yet more pliable. A flannel strip covered the sleeper's neck, intended to keep cold breezes from entering, but the corrugated strips that separated the outer and inner covers of the devices seemed to funnel in the cold mountain air.

The worst complaints were registered at the noise rendered at every movement. The rustling sound, not unlike crumpling newspapers, brought groans from weary campers as they sought sleep in the cold night. In the wee morning hours, tongues of flames sprouted behind the fire line as sleepless firefighters dumped their paper sleeping bags on the fading embers to garner a few minutes of warmth.

"How did you sleep, boys?" the foreman asked. His smile indicated he and a few others had a fine night of sleep in their piles of parachutes.

Later that day, after a long, rough ride in a dirty mule truck, we arrived at the airstrip. The jump list was very short. It was likely we would be sent out again that day.

While we waited for our names to be called, I noticed our foreman was talking earnestly to a man with white hair. I later learned his name was Bill Wood and he was in charge of research and development. We had been the uncomfortable subjects of a malignant experiment.

There was a time when voices from the field were heeded. Thanks to one outspoken person, the paper sleeping bags met their demise. I never saw another one! 🙏