

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



by Jim Cherry
(Missoula '57)
President

RECENTLY I HAD the privilege of being part of a committee to name the 2017 recipients of the *Al Dunton Smokejumper Leadership Award*. It's uplifting to recognize the high quality of leadership rising in the BLM and the USFS represented by the individuals selected for this award - **Chris Wennogle** (FBX-07) and **Kyle Hoyt** (GAC-12). You can read about these leaders elsewhere in this issue.

Information about the NSA's scholarship program is now available on the NSA's web page at www.smokejumpers.com. Once again, the NSA will be offering a total of six \$2,000 scholarships to qualified candidates. At the meeting of the NSA Board of Directors in October 2017, a couple of changes were made to the scholarship criteria. The first decision was made with the intention of spreading these scholarships across a wide

range of qualified candidates. With that in mind, winners of the scholarships in 2017 will need to wait until 2019 before they will once again be eligible to apply so that all six 2018 scholarships will be accessible to new applicants.

Applicants from 2017 that were not selected are encouraged to apply again in 2018.

The second decision was concerning how NSA membership is interpreted. In 2017 the applicant needed to personally hold membership in the NSA as a jumper, pilot, or associate to receive points in the scoring matrix that is used in selecting scholarship winners. In 2018 an applicant who is a spouse, child, or grandchild of a current or former jumper or pilot *will* receive those matrix points if the current or former jumper or pilot is a member of the NSA. If there is any uncertainty regarding either of these changes, please feel free to contact me for clarification. You may reach me at jimcherry@wctatel.net.

In 2015 we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the first fire jump during an all-base reunion held in Missoula. It was remarkably successful and elicited many positive comments. Since that time, there have been numerous inquiries as when, where, or whether there are plans for another reunion. I don't have an answer

to any of those questions and to come up with some answers, the NSA Board will need to have input from you, our membership.

Some of you have expressed a sense of urgency because of advancing age, diminishing health, etc. In fact, we have lost many of our pioneers in smokejumping during these last few years, including some of those who navigated the 2015 reunion to such a successful conclusion. To hold another reunion, we will need to have leadership rise from our ranks to take the banner and move it forward. A reunion is a great idea - but someone must take on the task of putting the pieces together. How about it? Anyone out there feeling the call to the challenge? Let the NSA Board know.

Finally, I want to put forward an appeal to our NSA members to contemplate whether you could/should come forward and make yourself available to assuming a leadership position with the NSA

Board. Before the end of 2018, I will be turning 80 years old. I have notified the Board that I plan to step down from being NSA President when we meet in Seattle in October. It's time for some younger blood to move the NSA forward in meeting the challenges ahead. I am thinking particularly about those of you who have been able to take an early retirement and are blessed with health and vitality, as well as having a passion for smokejumping and its past, its present and its future. I would be most eager (as would any of the NSA Board members) to discuss with you what is involved with service on the Board of Directors.

Contact me at jimcherry@wctatel.net. 📧

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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

Do You Remember the B-25?

by Don Havel (Fairbanks '66)

I remember. I remember the jump shack at Fort Wainwright just outside Fairbanks, Alaska, in the 1960s. I remember the loud banging noises coming from the engines on the B-25s that were used to drop fire retardant on Alaskan forest fires. To me they were the Harley Davidsons of the Bureau of Land Management firefighting aircraft fleet. I remember jumping on fires and witness those 25s swooping down at near tree top levels and dropping their retardant on the fires' edge. But mostly I remember one B-25 in particular and its pilot, Jerry Chisum. He flew N88972 which used a call sign of Antique One and was owned by Bob Schacht, who owned North Star Aviation. Jerry was 25 years old at the time. His talent was unbelievable. To see him fly that plane reminded me of a swallow, easily skimming across the tundra, swaying this way and that way as if in a ballet.

I recently made contact with Jerry and he sent me the following information:

"Hello Don, I flew N88972, a B-25J, for Bob Schacht as 'Antique One.' I paint stripped it of the Canadian Air Force colors, with the help of prisoners, so I could polish it. It was later taken away from Fairbanks and restored as 'Grumpy,'



Antique One dropping retardant, Alaska 1968 (Courtesy Don Havel)

which I saw in Duxford, UK, about 8 years ago. The B-25s were outlawed from dropping in the US and Canada because the wings came off of a few while dropping. The cause was a major pitch-up due to the upset airflow on the bottom of the airplane when the retardant was dropped. The cure was a radical push forward on the yoke when dropping. I was paid \$100 per hour and my best day was 10 hours, which I have never equaled in all my career of 40,500 hours and I am still flying commercially”.

He also reminisced about his early flying days, stating: “Even as a small child of 3 years old, I flew with my dad. After World War II, he and friends in Shelton, Washington, bought surplus military trainers at bargain prices. Dad had a Fairchild PT-26 Cornell, ex RCAF. When I was five, I remember doing a loop with him in an Ercoupe. I got my private license at 18 and my commercial at 19. I first flew with BLM when I was 20. Did four seasons there flying 180s, the Goose, Aero Commander, and a P-51.”

Attached to this article you’ll see a photo of Jerry in Antique One dropping retardant on an Alaskan tundra wild fire.

Wouldn’t it be nice to know some history of this historic aircraft? Well, let’s go do that. N88972, serial number 43-3318, was built in

October of 1943 at the North American Aviation facility in Kansas City, Kansas. It was one of 9,816 B-25s built for the war effort. It was assigned to the United States Army Air Force and was used to train new pilots at their advanced flying school in La Junta, Colorado. In 1944 it was turned over to England’s Royal Air Force through the lend-lease program who in turn assigned it to the Royal Canadian Air Force.

In Canada, during the war years, it was used to train new pilots. After the war, it was used as a Canadian military defense aircraft and also spent some time in storage as a surplus aircraft. It was released from military service in 1962 and was sold and resold to private civilian individuals in the United States.

In 1980 it was purchased by Alaskan aviation legend Noel Merrill Wien who began a restoration project on it, and he later sent it to Aero Traders in Chino, California, to complete the restoration. In 1987 Wien sold the plane to the Duxford Fighter Collection in England. There it was repainted, using Royal Air Force coloration, and they gave it the logo of “Grumpy.” In 2008 they sold it to the Historic Flight Foundation in Mukilteo, Washington, where it still remains. I recently called this organization and was told the plane is still registered with the FAA under

N88972, is still painted in the RAF color scheme, and they provide rides in it on certain days. So, this is your chance, girls and boys, unless of course you've grown up and don't dream anymore. When I was in Fairbanks, I always wanted to sneak a ride on a B-25 during a fire run, but the BLM had really put its foot down on such a practice.

So let's not quit here. What really is a B-25? First of all, it was actually known as the Mitchell B-25. It was named in honor of Major General William "Billy" Mitchell, a pioneer of United States military aviation. The B-25s served in every theater of World War II, but primarily in the Pacific. It was considered a medium range bomber. The main users were the United States Army Air Force, the United States Marine Corps, the Royal Air Force, and the Soviet Air Force.

As with many United States military aircraft, the B-25 was made in several variations, depending on their intended use. The B-25J-2, for instance, carried a total of 18 Browning M2 .50 caliber machine guns: eight in the nose, four in the conformal flank-mount gun pod packages, two in the dorsal turret, one each in the pair of waist positions, and a pair in the tail. It was set up for strafing.

Here are the general B-25's specifications:

- Wingspan - 67 feet 7 inches
- Length - 52 feet 11 inches
- Height - 16 feet 4 inches
- Weight - 19,480 pounds
- Power plants - Two Wright R-2600-92 Twin Cyclone 14-cylinder air-cooled radial

engines, 1700 hp each. There were several design engine changes throughout its production.

- Max. speed - 320 mph
- Cruise speed - 230 mph
- Range - 1350 miles
- Crew of six
- Armaments - Twelve to eighteen .50 caliber machine guns
- A 75 mm cannon could be added
- Eight 5 in. rockets could be added
- 3,000-4,000 lbs. of bombs depending on the distance to be flown
- As a fire retardant aircraft- 1,000 gallons of retardant

During my research I read what seemed to be reliable accounts of the airworthiness of the B-25. It was one tough plane. It could keep in the air shot full of holes, punched through by flak, and running on one engine. One B-25C of the 321st Bomb Group was nicknamed "Patches" because its crew chief painted all the aircraft's flak hole patches with bright yellow zinc chromate primer. By the end of the war, this aircraft completed over 300 missions, had belly-landed six times, and had over 400 patched holes. The airframe was so distorted from battle damage that straight and level flying required 8 degrees of left aileron trim and 6 degrees of right rudder, causing the aircraft to "crab" sideways across the sky. With all this in mind, I'd say the B-25 was a natural fit for the historic Alaskan Smokejumpers. 🔦

California 2017 – The Thomas Fire Up Close and Personal

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

Even though you will be reading this in April, it is now the 2nd week in December. The smoke from the fire season is finally gone from Montana, Idaho and Oregon. Emails received from NSA members in the north indicate that winter has arrived.

However, in southern California things are differ-

ent. The Thomas Fire has destroyed more than 1000 homes and burned over 360 square miles and is only partially contained. Obviously there is more to come.

John Culbertson (FBX-69) lives in Carpinteria, California, in the heart of the Thomas Fire. I've asked John for an update as he protects his property. (Ed.)

December, 7, Day Four

Lots of fire here for everybody. At one point approaching us from the coast with spot fires blowing over from Rincon Mountain, spot fires along Highway 150 corridor coming from Ojai, and fire boiling over the top from Marilia Canyon at Divide Peak. Intense fire activity at La Conchita and Faria Beach, Casitas Pass, Davis Ranch, White Ledge. And that's just our end of the fire.

Fire blew a cork and went up Highway 33 at Wheeler Gorge and Rose Valley. Lord knows what is going on down Santa Paula way. The first night the fire burned from Santa Paula to old town Ventura with spot fires clear to the beach.

December 8

Fire now spotting into Carpinteria Creek. Our house looks like a fire camp. Culbertson boys and assorted other off-season Hotshots, fisherman, farmers in work boots. Hand tools, saws. Our trail tool cache in the field as young men range out to help. Yesterday the boys were sawing ranch roads open from downed trees and evacuating farm animals. They came in smelling like a barnyard after herding pigs and goats to safety. I was out helping folks make ready-set-go plans.

December 9

Streets are lined with people who have fled fire. Horse trailers, farm tractors, campers. People dropping off what they can and heading back for more. Highway 150 is a steady flow of headlights coming through the hills, the only exit not cut off by fire for the people of Ojai and Casitas Pass communities. At 2 a.m. I walk down a city street. Cars piled with stuff, sleeping figures in the front seats. A horse bumps against its trailer stall. The power is out. Ash is falling.

Tuesday and Wednesday night our young people were down at Padre Juan Canyon and along Highway 150 helping folks. All the ranches the kids and their friends worked on and built trails for over the years. Folks that have supported our trail building projects for the community.

Everyone knows of someone who lost a home. Last night we slept, but this morning it was 4% humidity and a 10-hour fuel moisture of 3 with wind NE 2-8 at sunrise. At noon it is 85 in sun and 66 in shadow of smoke plumes.

December 10

Just back from taking groceries to folks sticking with their houses in hills. Evacuation orders are non-sensical and starting to make it hard to move around. CONELRAD keeps going off on phones and media and gets on peoples nerves. Each alert contradicts the last or is past its meaningful time. As in the old days when the saying was, "All the happy people on fires don't have radio's," now the wise option is to turn off the cell phone. Sort of... Texting remains excellent communication between all of us civilian helper types.

Some good firefighting by our local LPF Rincon Station and Strike Teams of Santa Barbara, Ventura, LA County and Cal Fire Engines, all went right to work. When the system is not yet in place and Strike Teams do what they think is possible, a lot of work gets done. All crews combined yesterday - counted about 32 in Carpinteria, Hwy 150 and beach area - saved a bunch of houses and kept fire to one side of roads where they could.

Now that the system is up and running, road closures and public information are about 12 hours behind what is happening. Best news sources are informal twitter posts. On the positive side, more engines are pouring in and they seem to get deployed. Son Nick even has one at the ranch he is living on. If they can find that place, they are out looking.

Those that have stayed are resting, buying groceries. Even where I live in the flats, half the people have left.

Some of us just took a break and went body surfing at Carpinteria Beach - like a ghost town with perfect waves - the sea white with ash. Refreshed from the ocean. Sitting and waiting for the hot ember drop to start. But maybe it won't. So far the thermal column from Chismahoo Moun-



Thomas Fire above Carpinteria (Courtesy LPF Information)



Son Andy's truck (Courtesy J. Culbertson)

tain and Carpinteria Creek has stayed just high enough to cool before the embers hit ground, and now wind is backing off. Let's hope it stays that way.

Sixteen cats are building a line over to Franklin Trail and road system. Tying the pieces together like we did with Wheeler Fire in 85. I am sure they will try firing it out if need be. A lot of good firefighting happening under an incredibly huge fire spread over two counties, 40+ miles. Started in sage scrub 20 miles inland and now burning at the beach and burning in conifers at 6,000 ft. Fire is somewhere around 150,000 acres.

We are all hoping for a wind shift to onshore by this evening. But at 2300, the boys call me to the back porch and we watch 200-foot flame lengths pour through Alder Saddle at the top of Franklin Trail, 4,000 feet above us. Pushed by north to east wind, we know the trail we worked on as the boys grew up is finished for now. The benches and picnic sites, camp by Alder Creek, the trout in the stream, signs carried up on our packs over the years. I had carried one up to Mile 5.2 just last week. Proud that I had carved it with my pocketknife. All glory is fleeting. Sons Andy and Nick sawed the whole upper section that is burning now. Son Eric did the backcountry Audubon Christmas Bird Count for Carpinteria and was looking forward to the annual count next week. We sit and watch silently together.

December 11

All hell breaks loose at 0230. East Wind. Fire spots into Franklin, Toro, and Romero canyons and makes runs at houses on the mesas and hill-

tops of Gubernador, Chismahoo, Lillingston and Shepard Mesa. Engine companies are hard pressed to make meaningful stands, but do. I can see a line of headlamps as a crew fires some of the dozer line they worked so hard on all night. And in the mountains above town, twin lights of cats backing down, holding, moving forward again, trying to hold. People are really trying.

But it's a rough couple of nights. The fire gets very active. 150-foot flame lengths on the slopes, wind shifts, ember drop and spot fires in the fields, hedges, and fences along the edges of town. Ladders on roofs, garden hoses, horses in streets, cars running into phone poles, people making seemingly random shouts in the night to folks unseen by us.

The mountainside houses we tract home dwellers usually envy on the edges of the community are about to be hit by fire. Firefighters make great effort to save them. No sitting in folding chairs at fire camp here. Emergency alerts are getting timelier now - by the fourth day of fire in our area - but often designating wrong areas for immediate evacuation. One minute we are in it, next we are not. People who stay stop paying attention to the orders. Those that do have left. Town looks vacant.

Even my wife and I have packed bags and loaded the cars heading out. I thought I would never do that but the smoke alone will become a limiting factor at some point. We all have bad coughs.

December 13

And now the days are a fog of smoke inversion. Night is high fire activity. We wake to the hard rain of ember drop that puts us back into action. The thump of copters heavy with water and retardant passing overhead. We salute them and wave as though they can see us.

I get out my old fire pattern maps and notes from research projects. Drink a warm Sierra Nevada Torpedo. It is early morning. Not yet light. By headlamp I look at this stuff I will not take with me. My wife is choosing family photos, important papers, a few things to remind her of all her hard work and love of a lifetime.

I pack six, six and six, two long sleeve shirts, two pair wranglers, shorts, hooded sweatshirt,

stocking cap, pipe, tobacco, sleeping bag and a harmonica. My hiking pack, boots, running shoes, swimsuit and medicine already in the car along with an old fire shovel, Pulaski and folding saw. I will leave the rest behind. Sipping the beer and looking over the maps – my thoughts, memories are what I will take. Good enough. They will always be with me.

Fire has burned very patchy and hard runs occur miles behind in sectors burned days before. The front somewhere west of us now. 231,000+ acres, 800+ houses, over 100,000 evacuated. Like the Wheeler Fire in 85 and Matalija Fire of 1932. Burning the same footprints. We have three more nights of predicted winds and no clear fire perimeter.

All day, holding action continues along the populated Carpinteria front with helicopter long line bucket work and an air show of five air tankers. But the fire marches on to the west and continues to make runs in huge islands of fuel adjacent to town. This is an incredibly spotty burn with little wind down low, and a steady east gradient along the ridge tops. Local weather stations indicate RH as low as 1 and ten-hour fuel moisture of 2. Peak burning conditions are at night. Embers start spots on outfall from each thermal plume. A dehydrated and burned kangaroo rat lands on a neighbor's roof. A charred bird's nest sits along a sidewalk over a mile from the fireline.

Handcrews show up late in the day, tankers leave and firing begins. These are our local agency crews. They have a dozer in the lead, saw teams fit the pieces together in rock chutes and gullies, and a firing line is scribed along the base of the hills from an anchor point at a road and a storm drain, then up to include a mid-slope home and terminates at farm fields, picks up again along our Franklin Trail and heads for the black and more hilltop homes across another farm valley.

An odd mosaic of green has formed. Where homes sit on hills or mid-slope, the fire is largely held at adjacent canyon bottoms, dozer and road lines. The public lands are burned.

The islands are fifty-plus-year old heavy chaparral on 100 to 150% slopes. Firing is by section with pistol, followed by drip torch, letting each section run to the top of a hill 1500 feet above,



There's got to be a trail in here somewhere! Dozer crew and local farmer wait while John studies GPS at a property line split. (Courtesy Roger Brand)

then moving forward. Spot fires over the line are picked up by engines. Crews wait till a flanking burn is near, then fire around structures, letting the fire draw into the main fire and not the houses. The job is well done.

In the early morning hours, the firing has moved from a third of a mile from our neighborhood to a mile away, and we hit the sack. But sleep is hard with flames dancing on the walls.

Everybody is tired. People stop cars in middle of intersections, sometimes texting, but sometimes just looking off in thought. Others drive too fast. Some are testy. An angry man fires up a leaf blower and spreads ash from one house to another. I spend hours accomplishing nothing, and I know I am not alone.

And I guess I am sad. Fire has changed so much of the backcountry of Southern California in this past decade. The land that John Muir and Willis Jepson wrote about. The sky Islands. The creeks with native trout. The sandstone and granite ledges. Each of us has our place. Most of mine are burned.

December 14

A friend waves me down. Another friend has lost his home. It is so smokey, the morning temperature is 37. At the market, a woman is standing

with her groceries in her hand, softly weeping. I don't know her, but I ask, "You OK?"

"No," she says, shaking her head. I touch her shoulder and move on.

And now the system shows up again. With much of our fire area inactive, law enforcement has decided to restrict all access. Farmers are calling me, how do I get in to irrigate? Move a tractor, shut down/turn on electrical. Confusion. Anger.

We take groceries to the police line and hand them over to residents behind the line. A Highway Patrolman yells, "Keep it moving!" It would be easy to yell back, but we keep our heads down and finish unloading the groceries.

December 15

And that was yesterday. Now the wind is up, erratic, and it is hard to tell where the fire is coming from. Not here, but smoke overwhelms our area and to the west, the sky is black. I head to a knoll and watch Hotshots firing around homes in Romero and Toro canyons. Holy Shit! Intense firing indeed! 300-foot flame lengths around houses. I have never seen anything like that. Either they are really good or really gutsy, or more likely somewhere in between and figuring that is all they can do with fire scattered for miles above the homes! I drive away from my lookout and turn on my radio to classical KUSC to calm my nerves. They are playing a dirge! I shut it off.

At one point we had a smoke plume from the firing show traveling from the NW, a plume from Fillmore from the ENE, and a Plume from Rose Valley back in the Los Padres Forest traveling from the N. The three crisscrossed over the sun at 1530. I decided to go body surfing in defiance of the whole situation and saw this amazing smoke plume drama as I entered the water. This was followed by an ash fall from hell. Still in the water, I yelled "Shit!" at the top of my voice. No one answered.

Getting out, I was informed by a beachcomber of the death of a firefighter at Fillmore. I went home and put up the flag.

Late afternoon, walk up the trail with a shovel and scrape embers away from a bench that has survived, and a crew headed up the trail assures me they will do the same at our other benches and signs. Dozer line so important for the protection

of our community below has totally obliterated a section of trail. I have to study the hillside for a while to visualize where the trail had been.

Drive south to Ventura to a Christmas party through blackened landscape the whole way. Padre Juan Canyon seems like a long time ago.

Two people are not there because they lost their homes last week when the fire burned through Ventura. The party is in a waterfront home, wonderfully decked out for Christmas. Everybody brings something to share.

People talk in small groups. I wander around listening. Every group is talking about the fire. A woman speaks with great urgency while others lean in to listen. It's somber. After awhile, a young woman grabs a guitar and starts singing. She's good and fresh, and I think she knows she is of service to the group. Few are drinking. Tables of wine and beer are barely touched. We just want to sit and listen.

We drive home thinking maybe things are turning around.

December 16

But we wake to the CONALRAD before sunrise. Confused evacuation directions again. Outside the situation is clear. A vortex of smoke is bearing down on Summerland - Montecito - Santa Barbara. And, one seemingly independent column is heading east in our direction towards Toro Ridge.

Fire spots to Gibraltar Road above Santa Barbara. A rotating thermal column from Cold Springs Canyon looks like a bad dream. At the polo fields above Santa Claus Lane, winds are blowing at least 50 mph down canyon, yet it is calm in Carpinteria a half mile away.

Sundowner. Not a fire vehicle in sight, everything gone to the new blowup.

Head up the hill to make sure Nick evacuates ranch if fire crests Toro Ridge. He moved the animals back to the ranch when they lifted the evacuation zones in our area. Here we go again.

What a mess. While at Nick's ranch, it was raining black ash. Put the fire shelter back in the car.

A highway patrolman is standing in the middle of the road. He answers, "Beats me, I just drove up from LA," when I ask if this area is under

evacuation again.

He says, "I think I better just establish a presence," as he looks around.

I say, "Good call," and a lady comes out of a house and hands the officer a cup of coffee.

Fire burns hard all day and into early evening. Freeway off-ramps are shut down with cops so you can only exit the area. Ash falls constantly, and there is a somber feel to the whole world. It's getting harder to make a joke.

December 17

And then it ends. The fire just seems to go out. 272,000 acres. Day fourteen. Wind is stalled and the humidity rises. We are sitting in a gray world of hazy smoke and cold ash. People have stopped trying to clean up. I don't swim. And at night I don't feel like going for a walk.

But I go to the trail again with our little trail crew and put out smokes by signposts and flag the trail right of way for a dozer boss. He will put in a few water bars for us. Thanks! A wooden step is actively burning and I throw a shovel of dirt and chip away at the burned end.

December 18

Another sundowner blows down canyon and more ash covers everything. Strike teams move into place but few smokes pop up. There is a winter feel to the air. A new window grinds as I slide it. Rollers on screen doors fill with grit and freeze up. Get out brooms, shop vac and WD-40.

A ranch friend stops by. He tells of two more homes lost up a canyon where he works. Crop loss. The spotty pattern of fire in Avocados. We drink coffee and look out the window. Those homes survived the fire front, but nobody was around for the after fire.

"I couldn't get in there. Wouldn't let me in. Nobody was around."

Then he has to go back to work. The fire is 274,500 acres, 1,000+ homes, and still growing in the backcountry. It seems like I should learn something from all this, but at the moment I can't think and sweeping seems enough, so I grab my broom and get to work. 🔦

In the July issue John will continue this story with an opinion formed by his experience.

A Midair Collision Over The Methow

by Gene Jessup (North Cascades '57)

I was a fourth-year smokejumper in 1960. My luck finally ran out and I was injured on a fire jump. The fire was burning in the Toketie Ridge area in the rugged mountains southwest of Leavenworth, Wash.

To best describe this jump at Toketie, I'll borrow a few lines from the book *Spittin' In the Wind* by **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57), which is filled with NCSB smokejumping tales and stories. The book came out in 2007 in plenty of time to help NCSB celebrate its 75th year as a base a few years later.

In this book, the story "The Great Toketie Fire and Rescue Jump" probably best illustrates the fire jump which resulted in my injury:

"We circled the fire. **Hal Weinmann** (NCSB-47), our spotter, was in the door checking out the fire and terrain.

"I said to my brother, **Gerry Moody** (NCSB-59), 'Don't worry; we won't go out on this one – solid rock ridge, 1,000-foot cliff on one side, 45-degree slope on the other side, rocks, snags and fire ... we should be back at the base in time for breakfast.' "

"Hal threw out two streamers. I said, 'Ah, crap,' and decided to look for a jump spot with no snags or rocks; there wasn't any.

"**Tony Percival** (NCSB-54) and Bill Moody were the first jumpers out. After we circled the fire a couple of times I asked Hal if Tony and Bill were okay. He replied that he didn't know for sure, that they'd disappeared into the rocks and snags. But he was fairly sure they hadn't gone over the cliff.

"I quietly said, 'Oh, great,' and Hal said, 'Okay, Jessup, boys get in the door.' We all knew



L-R: Gerry Jessup (NCSB-59) Gene Jessup (NCSB-57) (Courtesy Gene Jessup)

why Hal wore those lace-to-the-knees, 20-pound jump boots and we didn't want to be on the receiving end of the infamous Weinmann aircraft-exit technique, so we scrambled for the door.

"Gerry said he was headed for the rockslide. I asked if he was crazy – how about the meadow in the trees? He said it was full of big rocks. I said that when he had more experience, he would be able to pick better landing spots.

"I was heading for the meadow. My chute opened and I maneuvered to locate the meadow. I didn't look for Gerry; if he was headed for the rockslide we'd probably have to pack him out anyway.

"As I got closer to the meadow I saw it was full of big rocks, looking like a General Motors parking lot. I considered the advice of Warren Schwab (NCSB-57), to scream going in, just in case I got busted up. But I didn't have time.

"My chute snagged a small pine at the edge of the meadow and I said to myself, *I'll swing like a pendulum to a 45-degree angle, the top of the tree will break off and I'll stream 40 feet into truck-sized*

rocks. In slow motion I swung like a pendulum to a 45-degree angle, the top of the tree broke off and I streamed 40 feet into a truck-sized rock.

"It was small consolation that this landing would have killed an ordinary jumper. My foot was numb clear to my knee and I cursed Gerry for not talking me into going for the rockslide.

"The boot came off and Bill Moody – with his extensive training in first aid – noticed that all the toes on my right foot were sticking straight up."

In the hospital, I later overheard the doctor tell a nurse that the toes were just dislocated and could have been popped back into place at the fire.

At the Wenatchee Airport a week later and wearing my new cast, I caught the Twin Beech jump plane, which was returning to NCSB from Oregon. I grumbled all the way back to the base as I knew my career was about to change from a tough, firefighting smokejumper to a sewing-machine trainee.

Francis Lufkin (NCSB-40) finally got tired of my long face and asked if I would like to drop some cargo. I couldn't get into the spotter chute fast enough. Fantastic! I was back in the air again, white boot and all.

I loaded up the 180 Cessna with several items to be dropped, hooked up my cargo harness and off we went to a Forest Service project fire burning in the mountains a few miles north of Mazama. I giggled all the way to the fire. They had more than likely asked for steaks and apple pie with ice cream, but were getting a couple of cases of World War II K-rations and paper sleeping bags instead.

The first drop went well, although I didn't like to throw out cargo with my back to the prop. The fire was at the top of a canyon and my pilot flew us through a cut in the ridge, dropped into the smoke and I threw out the bags and K-rations. We also dropped a few things to a lookout. He'd had a visit from Pasayaten Pete and wanted to go home. Pete was the ghost of a long-lost miner who liked to visit the lookouts after they had spent several weeks of listening to their lookout creak and watching blue St. Elmo's fire bounce around inside their little living space. We dropped him a steak, medium, and headed for the airport.

As the base came into sight, the pilot said he couldn't see any other aircraft in the sky and we could just drop straight onto the runway rather

than complete the required circle of the airport. As we began our approach to the airport I was thinking that dropping cargo was almost as much fun as jumping a fire.

Suddenly, it felt like we had hit something and the aircraft bounced and moved a little to the right. I said to myself, *There are no trees in the middle of the runway*, and I jumped for the door that had been removed for the cargo drop. I leaned out and realized we were only about 100 feet off the ground, not enough time for my chute to open.

I turned to look out the window behind the pilot and saw an aircraft falling away with a four-foot gaping hole in the leading edge of its right wing. Pieces of fabric were flapping in the wind as the tan-colored Mooney just cleared the barbed-wire fence at the north end of the runway and landed safely, in spite of the damage to its wing.

For a minute or two we flew straight down the valley toward the town of Twisp. The pilot had a death grip on the controls and hadn't said a word. I asked him if the controls were okay. He did a quick test and everything seemed to work as it should. I was hoping he would get us some more altitude in case I needed to leave the plane in his capable hands and go for help.

The Mooney was made with a wood frame and covered with fabric. It had been flying north along the east side of the valley and its tan color blended with the brown grass color of the hillside. We never saw him coming. The pilot of the Mooney never saw us as we made our approach from the north.

The Mooney had its wing under the cabin and as he banked his aircraft to his left to complete

his approach, his wing blocked his view of our aircraft. And, as he came from behind and a little below us, we couldn't see him. His wing hit our tail section on the left side.

I don't know that he ever saw us until the last second before the collision. *Terror* might be too strong a word, but who knows?

After we landed, I walked back to the tail section of the Cessna. The aileron had a few wrinkles but fortunately did not jam the movement. I really didn't feel like meeting the Mooney pilot or his wife and two children, or checking out the damaged wing. I walked to the loft to check out my jump suit and equipment. I was trying to keep busy doing nothing. I really didn't need or want any company for a while.

Later, as we were discussing the "midair collision," some what-ifs came up. What if his aircraft had a metal construction like the Cessna? We could've locked up and gone down together.

What if his prop had come into our cabin, or for that matter, any place on our aircraft? And, what if I had jumped, forgetting to unlock my cargo harness?

A few partial seconds one way or the other and my name would have been on the firefighters memorial in the Winthrop City Park. I don't recall an official inquiry but I'm sure someone spent a few miserable hours in the USFS hot seat.

As for me, it was time to take a bath in the laundry tub, grab my brother and head for the Antlers Tavern in Twisp to contemplate my second near-death experience and say, "Thank you, dear lord" several times.

At least this time, I didn't need stitches in my face. 🕯

Remembering Stewart "Lloyd" Johnson

by Wild Bill Yensen (McCall '53)

When I first arrived at the smokejumper base in McCall in early June 1953, I went into the office and there he sat. He

looked at me and said, "So you want to be a smokejumper?" I said, "Yes sir!" He told me to go to the upper barracks and pick out a bunk to stow

my stuff. That was the start of my smokejumper experience that lasted until September of 1986.

I had just finished my sopho-

more year at the University of Redlands. I had no fire experience but having grown up on a farm near Homedale, I had the experience Lloyd thought was most important, which was being able to do hard work.

During training, he was out there watching us and he taught a couple of classes. I was very impressed with his knowledge and experience. He treated us with respect and sincerity.

in a snow bank. It was July 11, 1953.

A few days after we got back from the fire, Lloyd left us. The CIA had started using smokejumpers in Southeast Asia and did not want that to be known. **Lavon Scott** (MYC-48), also from Homedale, who jumped in 1948-51, was one of them. The Forest Supervisor let it be known and the CIA was incensed. The Supervisor blamed

got Lloyd's old job should get the GS rating according to the rules.

They sent three letters: one to the Payette Forest Office, one to the Regional Office, and one to the Office in Washington. In those letters they said that if this was not corrected, all the smokejumpers at McCall would quit. That made the "fit hit the shan." Here came the R-4 and USFS big shots from the Washington Office. They shut operations down for two days and talked to all of us individually.

Wayne Webb told them the truth, which stepped on a lot of toes in the Payette and Regional Offices. That cost him the job of Base Manager, which he deserved, but they gave it to **Reid Jackson** (MYC-49).

I was a rookie jumper and told them I was going to be a teacher and was looking forward to jumping many years. That is what happened as I had 30 summers doing the best job there is.

I moved to Middleton in 2015 and was able to go to Lloyd's 99th, 100th, and 101st birthday parties at his place. I also saw him at most of the jumper coffees we have once a month. When a Ford Trimotor came to Nampa last spring, I was able to sit beside Lloyd during our half hour flight they gave old jumpers. Did that ever bring back memories. I also went to Lloyd's funeral, which was very well attended by old smokejumpers

Lloyd was a pioneer in smokejumping and a true gentleman and my friend. 🕯

He looked at me and said, "So you want to be a smokejumper?" I said, "Yes sir!" He told me to go to the upper barracks and pick out a bunk to stow my stuff. That was the start of my smokejumper experience that lasted until September of 1986

When training was over and we got a bust of fires, I got my first fire jump. The fire was already manned, but they needed help. So two of us were flown up near the War Eagle Lookout on the Salmon River. Lloyd was the spotter. There was no really good jump spot, so we just jumped into the area of the fire that had openings here and there among the jack pines and snags.

Lloyd told me to try to pick as open a place as I could find once I got near enough to the ground. I got in the door of the Travelair and he lined us up, gave me that swat on the back, and out I went. Being my first fire jump, I was naturally very nervous and did as best I could. My chute was an old silk FS-1, but it opened just fine and got me down. I missed the opening I had picked out and landed

Lloyd for the leak and Lloyd then quit. He said he would not work for a liar. That Supervisor never liked jumpers.

The jumpers gave Lloyd a party that was an all-time blast. Each jumper brought a fifth to the lower barracks, where there was a garbage can full of ice cubes and cases of mixers. Everyone stayed there until the bottles were empty, and then they spread out. Some woke up in Yellow Pine, Council, Boise, and all over the State. Lucky none in jail, but only a few made it to work the next day.

When Lloyd quit, **Wayne Webb** (MYC-46) and several of the older jumpers had known that things were not right in the smokejumper organization of the Payette Forest. Lloyd was a GS-7 running a forty-man unit which called for a GS-11. They knew that the guy who

The Whetstone Ridge Fire – Later Part of the Meyers Fire Complex – A Failure in Early Detection and Attack

by Ben Smith (Missoula '64)

On the evening of July 13, 2017, I was returning to my home SW of Philipsburg, MT, from a fishing trip to the Big Hole River. As I headed west on Highway 38, I spotted a smoke column which I guessed to be 10 to 15 miles away. Since it was so noticeable from the highway, I assumed that it had been called in, (it had been) but I did check the Smokejumper Status Report online (NSA website) when I arrived at home. The status report stated that there were 16 jumpers available in Missoula.

The fire was named the Whetstone Ridge Fire, and since it was 12 miles west of my home, I followed on a daily basis the lack of progress of containing this fire through *Inciweb* updates. When a public meeting at the Philipsburg High School was announced later in the month, I decided to attend. The first speaker was the Incident Management Team Type 3 leader (a Type 1 team was taking command the next day). When the Type 3 leader asked for questions, I asked him if he was in command during the initial attack phase? He was not. Another Forest Service employee stood and said that he led the initial attack. I was just getting started, asking him some questions about the apparent lack of aggressive initial attack, when I was interrupted by another FS employee saying that I could ask those questions after the meeting was over. Evidently the answers were too embarrassing to be heard by the public.

After the meeting, I did speak with the gentleman who had identified himself as the leader of the initial attack. I asked him if he was the Pintlar Ranger District FCO and when he looked confused, I said "Fire Control Officer." He said, "No." He was the Fire Management Officer. I guess that change in title from my firefighting days kind of says it all.

We were joined by the Beaverhead-Deerlodge



Ben Smith (Courtesy) B. Smith

National Forest (BDNF) Deputy Supervisor, and the three of us talked for about twenty minutes. I explained that my concern was the failure to detect this fire when it was a small amount of smoke coming from a burning snag and not a column of smoke, and that the initial attack failed to contain this fire while it was about 25 acres. They could not give me good reasons why smokejumpers were not ordered, why retardant was not ordered, and why the fire could not be contained considering the fact that there was a road that ended within a 1/4 mile of where the fire started. Also, as this was one of the early fires of this terrible summer, there should not have been any problem with available resources. Neither could give me reasons that made sense to me.

For the next couple of weeks as we sucked smoke,

I read the *Inciweb* reports with such phrases as: zero percent contained, expected containment mid-October, falling back with containment lines, too dangerous for a direct attack, point protection for the evacuated areas. I got more upset and decided to write a letter to Melany Glossa, the Supervisor of the BDNF. On August 24, 2017, I sent the following letter and copied by email our congressional delegation and the Chief of the Forest Service. Since I did not want Melany Glossa blindsided, I emailed her a copy also. The letter was published in the *Philipsburg Mail* a couple of weeks later:

Dear Ms. Glossa:

I have been following the fire suppression efforts of the Whetstone Ridge Fire (now part of the Meyers Fire Complex) since its discovery on July 13, 2017. The fire is approximately 10 miles to the west of my home. I have questions regarding the actions of BDNF personnel during the discovery and initial attack phases of this fire. I have spoken with several of your coworkers about my concerns, but have not received answers to my questions that make sense. I hope that you can provide clarification.

What was your plan of action to ensure early discovery of the fires that would most probably be spawned by the lightning storm that crossed this area a few days before this fire was discovered? I believe that you receive a daily report from the lightning detection network of where lightning strikes have occurred on the BDNF. Do you patrol the areas of heavy concentrations of lightning strikes by air or ground? I was told that this fire was approximately 25 acres in size when first reported. Why was this fire not discovered earlier?

I saw no urgency in the initial attack of this fire. No smokejumpers were ordered. I checked the smokejumper status report on July 13, and there were 16 smokejumpers available in Missoula. I believe there were jumpers also available at West Yellowstone. No retardant drops were ordered for this fire. As a side note, within the next two weeks after the Whetstone Ridge Fire was discovered, there were three fires discovered within 30 miles of the Whetstone Ridge Fire. The Old Dominion, the Butler, and the Morgan Fires were all attacked with smokejumpers and retardant drops; all three fires are now cold. Why were the three mentioned fires

hit with "Shock and Awe" and the Whetstone Ridge Fire was not given the same priority?

Forest Road 5110 ends within 1/4 mile on the same ridgeline that the Whetstone Ridge Fire started. On July 19 the Whetstone Ridge Fire was 374 acres (the Meyers Fire was 69 acres). My question is, with road access to this fire and with only moderate growth for six days, why was this fire not contained?

Finally, can you give me a ballpark cost analysis of what it cost to contain any of the three fires mentioned above and the cost incurred so far of the Meyers Fire Complex. I request just the suppression cost, not the cost of timber lost, the human cost of evacuation, or the health cost to our families and animals of a month of poor air quality alerts.

Sincerely,

Ben Smith

cc: Senator Tester, Senator Daines, Rep Gianforte, Mr. Tidwell, Chief US Forest Service, The Philipsburg Mail

I received her answer to my letter on October 1, 2017:

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you for the time you spent in service as a firefighter. I know that you, more than most, understand when I say that we are in the middle of a historic fire year in the Northern Rockies. Over a million acres have burned in Montana alone. This has been fed by a variety of factors such as weather and fuel conditions, and is far from a normal fire year. Your interest seems to be focused on our actions around initial attack of the Meyers/Whetstone fires.

We have faced multiple lightning storms this season which produced multiple starts on the Pintler Ranger District and the greater area, as we also assist with fires on state protected lands. All firefighting resources are limited, including aerial detection flights. Our aerial detection flights are fully engaged on patrol after lightning storms but cover a large area. Areas with greater lightning activity are emphasized. We successfully put out 10+ starts from that same lighting storm that started the Meyers/Whetstone fire. Fessler Spring, Fuse Lake, Happy Peak, Swamp, and Princeton are just a few examples of fires which were successfully put out

on this district. The Meyers/Whetstone fire area is lightning prone as evidenced by the fire scars and history of initial attacks. It is worth noting that the same storm that started the Meyers/Whetstone fires also started the eight large fires and numerous small fires, on the Lolo National Forest to our west and several fires to our north on the Helena Lewis and Clark National Forest.

The Whetstone fire was reported by a member of the public at 20:32 the night of July 13th and located by our personnel 10:18 the morning of the 14th. Meyers was discovered by our personnel at 19:42 on July 14, 2017. Air support was ordered the morning of the 14th and actively working the fire with water drops. Full suppression strategy was, and is, my direction for this fire and every other fire this year on the forest.

Many tools including smokejumpers are used for firefighting. We had two hotshot crews on site by 16:00 July 14, 2017. To assume jumpers could have been more successful than the multiple hotshot crews we had on site is unrealistic. Our initial incident commander was a former smokejumper and is well versed in their abilities and safety issues with jump spots in a forest dominated by dead trees.

At 20:43 July 14, 2017, radio traffic reported Whetstone at 25 acres. Active fire behavior coupled with ongoing lightning in the area and heavy standing snag loading, created an extremely dangerous situation for our firefighters. The strategy on every fire on the forest places the highest regard on firefighter and public safety. Once the Meyers fire was found we ordered air resources for recon. At that time the Meyers fire was approximately 10 acres. Weather continued to impede progress and at 20:50 all resources were pulled off the fires due to lightning. At that time the Whetstone Fire was reported at 60 acres. By 21:57 the night of July 14, 2017, we had ordered up a type III incident management team to take over suppression of both fires

As of now the Meyers/Whetstone fire spanned more than 62,000 acres at a cost of \$32 million over the course of 67 days. The Butler Fire you mentioned spanned 17 acres at a cost of approximately \$400,000 over seven days.

Questioning the urgency or commitment of our firefighters in the middle of this historic fire season, particularly given the number of fires that have been

successfully put out, the dangerous and exhausting conditions, the limited resources, and recent fatalities is disheartening to hear. Perhaps especially disheartening since you have fought fire and understand the difficulty of the task, our historic fuel loading from bug kill, and how extreme fire behavior in early July is well outside our norms. I do understand that you are personally impacted by the fires as you live in the community and you are especially eager for these fires to be put to bed. I can assure you that every one of our employees and firefighters impacted by this fire agree. Safely suppressing these fires has been my priority since July and it will continue to be until the last smoke rises.

My understanding is that you have had the opportunity to raise your questions during our public meetings in Philipsburg. Please feel free to contact the Pintler District Ranger, Eric Tomasik, 406-859-3211 for more immediate questions on the Meyers/Whetstone fires. If you'd like to talk to me about my philosophy around fire suppression, I'd be happy to chat with you as well, 406-683-3973.

Melany Glossa
Forest Supervisor

The next day, October 2, 2017, after constructing a timeline using statements from Ms. Glossa's letter and calling the Granite County 911 dispatcher, I called Eric Tomasik, the District Ranger as suggested by Ms. Glossa. After talking with him, I called Ms. Glossa and left a voicemail. After 24 hours of waiting for a telephone call from Ms. Glossa, I decided to move up the "chain of command" by sending an email to Ms. Glossa's boss, Leanne Marten, the Regional Forester of the Northern Region. The following email will explain how unsuccessful my conversation with Eric Tomasik was:

Subject: BDNF Supervisor Letter of 9-22-17
Date: October 3, 2017 at 11:21:54 MST
To: "Marten, Leanne - FS" <lmarten@fs.fed.us>
Cc: "Glossa, Melany I -FS" <mglossa@fs.fed.us>
Dear Ms. Marten,

I recently received Ms. Glossa's letter in answer to my letter of 8-24-17. In her letter she asked that if I had more immediate questions to contact Eric Tomasik, the Pintler District Ranger. I called Eric yesterday and first apologized for not being able to talk in person, as I am in Arizona for

the winter and will not return to Philipsburg until the spring. I started our discussion of the Whetstone Ridge Fire by telling him that Ms. Glossa stated that the Whetstone Ridge fire had been reported by a member of the public at 20:32 on July 13, 2017. I didn't think this was correct as I had spotted the fire from the Skalkaho Road while returning to my home at approximately 19:30 on July 13th. This is what prompted me to check the smokejumper available report online when I reached home. Yesterday I called the 911 dispatcher at the Granite County Sheriff's Office and they confirmed that a call reporting the fire to the southwest of the Moose Lake area was made at 16:42 on July 13th. They also said the caller had already called the Ranger Station. The dispatcher said she called the Dillon Dispatch Center (DDC) as was her protocol and in fact she had received a message from the DDC a week earlier reminding her of their contact number.

Eric did not know why there was a discrepancy in the report times. I also told him that when I had a conversation with his FMO at the first public meeting at the Philipsburg High School, and that the FMO had told me he had spotted the Whetstone Fire while leaving one of the four fires he had already contained that day. I continued my conversation with Eric with some questions on what the plan was for early detection and questions on the initial attack of the fire. It was obvious that he was frustrated with some of my questions but he was always very professional and polite. When I told him that I might write another letter to the Philipsburg Mail he decided that he needed to contact his information officer and Ms. Glossa for guidance on how to proceed with me. I understand "chain of command" as I was a USAF fighter pilot for 20 years and commanded two F-16 squadrons towards the end of my career. When he called me back he told me that Ms. Glossa had told him to tell me that if I wanted any more information that I could file a Freedom of Information Act request. I was stunned and I think most Montanans would agree with me that this smells like a coverup tactic straight from The Swamp.

I called Ms. Glossa's direct line and left a voice-mail at 14:15 yesterday requesting that she call me. I have not heard back from her, so I guess she is serious about the FOIA statement.

Her letter to me was full of non-answers. For instance my first question was "What was your plan of action to ensure early discovery of the fires that would most probably be spawned by the lightning storm that crossed this area a few days before this fire was discovered?"

I expected an answer from Ms. Glossa (Supv. BDNF) that *might have been* something like the following:

In early July I contacted my staff, the DDC, and the district rangers of the BDNF and told them unless we received some rain we were in for a very unusual, early, and dangerous fire season.

Unusual circumstances call for unusual plans and execution. I reiterated my direction of full suppression strategy on all fires, and asked for ideas of how we could detect fires as early as possible and contain them while they were small.

As only a small portion of the BDNF has lookout tower coverage, we discussed IR flights, contracted small aircraft flights with a FS observer, road patrols after a lightning storm, and even asking for volunteers from the public to help us with the road patrols when needed.

We put these suggestions into a plan of action which was in effect when the Whetstone Ridge Fire popped up. Unfortunately this one fire slipped through our net, but was reported by a member of the public. Fortunately, with a very aggressive initial attack, we were able to contain both the Whetstone and Meyers Fires at under 100 total acres by July 15th.

Instead, her answer was about IR flights covering large areas, and concentrating on areas of greater lightning activity. She continues to say "the Meyers/Whetstone Fire area is lightning prone as evidenced by the fire scars and history of initial attacks." This begs the question as to why this area was not under very close observation.

On the subject of the initial attack of the Whetstone Fire, she explains to me that smokejumpers are only one of the tools used in firefighting. Yes, but their primary job is initial attack and as far as I am concerned they are the best initial attack tool in our quiver. She goes on to scold me for being unrealistic to believe that smokejumpers could have been more

successful than the two hotshot crews that arrived on site (does this mean on the fire line swinging Pulaskis?) at 16:00 on July 14th, over 23 hours after the fire was reported.

I would propose a different scenario:

With five hours of light available after the 911 call, we dispatched people by road or air to confirm the location of the fire. With any luck we might have enough daylight left to order up a load of smokejumpers. At the worst, they would be able to jump at first light the morning of the 14th, ten hours before the hotshots arrived on site. The initial incident commander that she mentions that was a former smokejumper and is "well versed in their abilities & safety issues..." was the leader of the Type 3 IMT team that wasn't even ordered until 21:57 on July 14th. Since the fire was reported at only 25 acres at 20:43 on July 14th, I am confident that the smokejumpers, reinforced by the two Hotshot crews, could have had this fire contained by July 15th.

Ms Glossa scolds me again in her letter for "questioning the urgency or commitment of our firefighters in the middle of a historic fire season..." I have never questioned the urgency or commitment of the firefighters; I am questioning the decisions of their leaders. She did answer the question I asked about the cost differential between one of the nearby fires that were contained by an aggressive initial attack and the Meyers complex - her answer was the Butler Fire cost \$400,000 and the Meyers Complex cost \$32 million, a differential of \$31.6 million. Who were the decision makers that will be held accountable for that huge sum? I understand that firefighting resources are not unlimited. I understand that the fire could have blown up shortly after the smokejumpers or ground personnel arrived on site. I understand that I don't have the big picture that you have and might be missing a part of this story that would completely change what I propose could have happened. If you or a member of your staff could show me why I am wrong, I will be happy to write to the *Missoulian*, the *Philipsburg Mail*, and our Congressional delegation and apologize for writing the letter questioning the detection and initial attack decisions for the Whetstone Ridge Fire.

This is the timeline that I constructed. The

hours are rounded to nearest hour with zero being the 911 call:

Whetstone Ridge Fire Timeline 2017

- July 13, 16:42 - fire reported by member of public - 0 hour
- July 13, 21:24 sunset - 5 hours
- July 14, 05:55 sunrise - 13 hours
- July 14, 10:18 - "located" by FS personnel - 18 hours
- July 14, morning - air support ordered and actively began water drops - 18 hours
- July 14, 16:00 - Two Hotshot crews on site - does this mean fighting the fire or at base camp? - 23 hours
- July 14, 19:42 Meyer Fire "discovered" FS personnel. 3 1/2 mi from Whetstone Fire - 27 hours
- July 14, 20:43 - Whetstone reported at 25 acres. Meyers at 10 acres - 28 hours
- July 14, 20:50 all personnel pulled off fires due to lightning - 28 hours
- July 14, 21:57 - ordered Type 3 Incident Management Team - 29 hours
- July 19, 11:09 - Whetstone 374 acres, Meyers 69 acres - 6 days (*Inciweb* report)

On October 6, I received an email back from the Regional Forester that said: "Thank you for your email. I, or a member of my staff, will respond in the near future."

The same day, I received a voicemail from Melany Glossa, BDNF Supervisor (obviously the designated staff member) asking to arrange a telephone appointment. We arranged the telephone appointment for October 10, 2017.

On that day we spoke for approximately 30 minutes before she had to attend another meeting. The conversation was cordial but without direct or detailed answers to my questions. For instance, I started with asking what actions the Dillon Inter-agency Dispatch Center (DDC) took when they received the fire report. She deflected to another subject. When I asked why smokejumpers were not ordered, her answer was the two Hotshot crews that had been ordered were two of the best. When I pointed out that it took 23 hours for them to reach the fire, there was no comment. When Ms. Glossa described two flights she had taken over the fire, I



Ben Smith (Courtesy) B. Smith

felt she was truly distressed by the destruction she observed. I might be reading too much between the lines, but I felt that she was not happy with the way this fire was handled from the start, but that she was not going to tell me what went wrong, who was accountable, or what was going to change for the fire season of 2018.

Another fire that received much scrutiny on the lack of an initial attack was the Lolo Peak Fire. There were many letters to the editor of the *Missoulian* newspaper from locals in the Bitterroot Valley that asked why this fire went so long without an aggressive initial attack. Because of the public outcry, I expected some sort of public statement by Leanne Marten, the Regional Forester, but so far only silence.

I would much prefer to be an advocate of the

Forest Service and not a critic. I grew up in a Forest Service firefighting family. My father, Glenn, was a pioneer smokejumper in 1939, jumped the first fire in Region 6 in 1940, and I grew up in late 40s with memories of Nine Mile and Hale Field. My brother, Mike, made a career of the FS with positions from lookout, to smokejumper, to lead plane pilot. My FS paychecks from five fire seasons (Sula pounder, Nine Mile Hotshots, three years as a Missoula jumper) made possible my obtaining a degree and a USAF commission from Montana State. Like most people who write articles for *Smokejumper*, I can say those were five of the best years of my life.

I ask the Forest Service leadership to make me an advocate again, by making the pendulum swing back away from this “let it burn -good for the health of the forest” policy. Let’s set up a robust early fire detection plan and have lots of two-manners instead of these huge fires that cost so much and are so dangerous to fight. Just think about how much thinning, prescribed burns, early detection assets, and initial attack assets the \$31.5 million differential between the Butler Fire and the Meyers/Whetstone Ridge Fires could pay for.

In the year 2017 we, as Americans, saw accountability in many forms, from cabinet officers being fired for using less than \$1million of private air travel, to Navy Captains and their bosses being relieved from command for accidents at sea. Where is the accountability in the US Forest Service for spending \$32 million dollars on a fire that should have had the same aggressive initial attack as three other nearby fires that cost less than \$400,000 each? 🙄

How Do You Stop Fires Under Our Current Climate Conditions?

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

I expect that a large part of our membership spent a good number of days this last summer under a blanket of smoke caused by wildfires burning in their areas. In some cases, the fires were over 100 miles away – smoke blows. As a result of this, I’ve been receiving emails and copies

of newspaper articles from our membership in the Pacific Northwest and California, all with the same theme – why can’t we put these fires out?

I’ve been reading letters to USFS officials from our membership, some of whom are pretty firewise and have an extensive background in

wildfire. The answers they are receiving all have the same theme: extreme burning conditions, lack of resources, and concern for the safety of their firefighters.

The most important part of this equation is missing: the time between detection and initial attack (IA). Go to the InciWeb (Incident Information System) website and look at all that information. Now try to find detection and IA information. There is a reason that information is not listed.

We are all aware of the extreme burning conditions and extended fire seasons. With this in mind, wouldn't good fire management people plan on the quickest initial attack possible in order to preserve valuable personnel and keep these same people operating in a safe environment?

Back in 2002, the Biscuit Fire burned 500,000 acres in Oregon and cost more than that in dollars. Even though the USFS claimed there was a lack of resources, including smokejumpers, daily status reports showed many hand crews and over 100 jumpers available. Grayback Forestry, one of the largest private fire suppression outfits in the U.S., is located within an hour of the fire area. Still, the company line was lack of available resources.

Ben Smith (MSO-64) and I were communicating this July about the fire situation in Montana. If you want to see how people can become frustrated with the fire situation, just read his page 14 article in this issue on the Whetstone Ridge Fire. Knowledgeable questions are kicked up the line. Timelines for discovery were not accurate. A person can logically wonder if this was intentional. Like the Biscuit Fire, smokejumpers were available but not used.

The 2017 Chetco Bar Fire (191,125 acres) in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, burning in the footprint of the 2002 Biscuit Fire, was reported by a private pilot 10+ days after it started. Fire officials explained that steep terrain and extreme danger in fighting the Chetco Bar Fire's early stages kept them from snuffing it when it was less than an acre in mid-July.

This is the same story we heard during the Biscuit Fire. I wonder how smokejumpers from Cave Junction jumped fires in that area for 38 years? I always thought the mountains grew steeper and higher as we grow older. Guess it is the other way

now for the USFS. Another 61 million spent.

With lookouts being a thing of the past, wouldn't it seem logical to have the forests flown over for several days after every major lightning storm? One of the responses to Ben Smith was the aerial detection resources were limited. If so, why not contract local pilots to fly over the forests after lightning storms? With the increasingly disastrous fire seasons we're having, I'm sure the public would gladly join in the efforts to save our forests.

The Civil Air Patrol, conceived in the 1930s, has as part of their Mission Statement "to provide an organization to aid private citizens of the U.S. in voluntarily contributing to the public welfare." Wow – any potential for a working agreement here?

I'm most disappointed by the response given to Ben that indicates that the Forest Service, in the Whetstone Fire case, was satisfied with the arrival of two Hotshot Crews some 20 hours later than a load of jumpers. To me it is a question of time, not the type of resource. If reversed, I would take a smaller number of Hotshots or an engine crew 20 hours before 40 jumpers.

Look back on your own experiences – how many times have you gotten out of your jump gear, grabbed a Pulaski and shovel, and caught a fire just before it started a run? How many times did you arrive 20 minutes too late? Bottom line, time is important and is getting more important each year.

Accountability seems to be the factor that is lacking. I'm not advocating that people be hung out to dry, but if fire management is your profession, there needs to be accountability.

Each fire that turns into a major project should be evaluated at some point over the winter. Factors to consider:

- When was the fire reported?
- Could aerial detection be improved?
- What resources were available at the time of detection and how were they used?
- When was initial attack made?

The bottom line might be that everything was done as best as could be done under the circumstances. However, I think that in many cases lessons could be learned that would prevent some major fires in upcoming seasons. 🧯

Volunteer Trail Work

by Bob Shackelford (Missoula '52)

Reading of volunteer trail work in the last issue of *Smokejumper* reminds me that jumpers and ex-jumpers looked out for and understood each other, especially in the backcountry. All volunteer trail work is not so smooth and efficient as the ex-jumpers' experience related in the magazine.

My volunteer experience was mostly with the Panhandle Back Country Horsemen and Women – PBCH – from my time as recreation and trails staff officer on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. The district rangers were too smart to deal with the PBCH, so I got much of the job by default.

The PBCH leader was a strong-willed person who would show up at the supervisor's office and gripe about no place to ride and no open trails. They'd help, if we would just cooperate.

Their best help was packing in trail camps and tread timbers to replace the old, rotted-out Civilian Conservation Corps cribbing across the mud bogs on places like the upper Joe. Their favorite outing was cutting about six logs out of a 20-mile ride and whacking a few nasty branches with a Swede hook, while staying in the saddle.

One outing on the upper Joe got way out of hand. For some reason – maybe because it was about the first big outing of the

season and the PBCH was really growing – about 50 showed up, many more than expected.

The Coeur d'Alene Back Country Horsemen quickly grew to 60 riders. Most of the 60 – with friends, extra horses and bottles – showed up for a large work effort at our chosen camp. Most of the Avery District people were busy elsewhere, and there were not enough Forest Service people to go with each of the four work parties.

One job was to repair 400 feet of washed-out tread on a high, steep mountainside. This assignment was mostly riding, with some two hours of work for the 17 horsemen who chose this task. Of course, this is the one group that rode on its own.

After a nice, uneventful ride to the work site, the PBCH riders decided the tread work was not really necessary. The first three horses made it across with the riders not dismounting. However, the fourth horse was not so nimble as it rolled down the hill a few hundred feet and came to rest in a small creek.

Then a big wreck ensued as one horse after another rolled down the hill and into the small creek. A following horse hit a seventh rider as he was foundering off his own horse. The horse rolled right over the man, moving rather fast at the time. The rider on the bottom of the

pile was a big, strong man and would've been killed if not for this fact. He did suffer a painful back injury.

Not having a litter, and wanting to do everything on a horse, his buddies just put him on a scraped-up horse and brought him down some six miles to camp.

There was a considerable medical bill that the government paid. I felt I was responsible. A discussion with **Paul Wilson** (MSO-50) about the problem with PBCH safety led Paul to loan me a Stokes litter and a large white box with a red cross on it. The box must have been a relic from the CCC days that he'd stored among other valuables at his airport stash.

At the next outing of North Idaho PBCH, the Stokes litter and big box first aid kit were prominently displayed in the center of camp. We had a nice, old-fashioned safety meeting and practiced packing each other on the litter around rocks and over logs.

The litter supplied by Paul was a lifesaver and got the attention of the horsemen. I don't remember any more serious accidents with them.

Doing any trail work with civilians is more difficult than with jumpers, I believe, and not all backcountry trail work always goes really smoothly, no matter who does it. 🪖

Small World

by Earl Dodds (McCall '49)

I recently received a copy of Earl's book "Tales From The Last Of The Big Creek Rangers." In 1958, the Chamberlain District, Payette N.F., was combined with the Big Creek District, and Earl headed up an area of almost 800,000 acres as District Ranger.

As a continuing part of preserving smokejumper history by this magazine, the last of three stories from Earl's book follows. (Ed.)

You who are old enough to remember things about World War II might remember the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, the Ski Troopers, and particularly so if you have an outdoor bent.

This outfit trained for mountain warfare at Camp Hale in Colorado's high country. Incidentally, the initial recruitment for the 10th Mountain Division came from the ranks of the National Ski Patrol cadre.

The division was sent overseas to fight in Italy. They had only limited opportunity to use their skis on the battlefield, but they did take on the German Army in the mountains of northern Italy, some of the roughest terrain in Europe. The country was so rugged that the troops couldn't use wheeled or tracked vehicles and had to resort to pack horses and mules to supply the front lines.

When the war was over the old sergeants, who were in charge of the pack and saddle stock (P&S), saw to it that their charges were returned to Colorado and not abandoned in a foreign land. However, once back in the U.S., the army decided that they had no further use for pack and saddle stock and decided to disband the entire unit.

It was reported that this upset the old mule-whacking sergeants who, like most packers, had grown downright fond and protective of their animals. The sergeants persuaded the army to at least look around for another government agency that would provide a good home for their P&S.

And that's where the U.S. Forest Service came into the picture. The old Chamberlain Ranger District on the Payette National Forest received

two of these "army mules," as the Forest Service crews first called them.

One of the Chamberlain "army mules," which we named Dan,

had a very distinctive split

ear that made for easy identification. Bill Cluff, the trail crew foreman on the district, became quite attached to Dan and made a riding mule in addition to a pack animal out of Dan.

I still remember Bill riding into the Chamberlain Station singing: "Oh, Dan and I with throats burning dry and souls that cry for water – cool, clear water" to the tune of one of the Sons of the Pioneers cowboy songs.

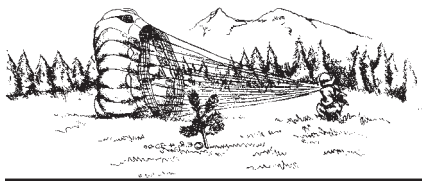
As Chamberlain is so remote we seldom had many visitors, except at the start of the big game-hunting season. At that time, it was not unusual for a hundred or so fly-in hunters to be camped around the airfield. Occasionally, out of curiosity, some of the hunters would wander around the station.

One fall day during my first year of serving as a ranger in the backcountry, the district packer was working with some of the mules in the corral. One hunter sauntered over to the corral, leaned on the fence, took in the scene and then suddenly became very excited. He said: "Hey, I know that mule! He was an ammunition mule in Fox Company, 3rd Battalion, Field Artillery in the 10th Mountain over in Italy!" He went on to tell us some war and mule stories.

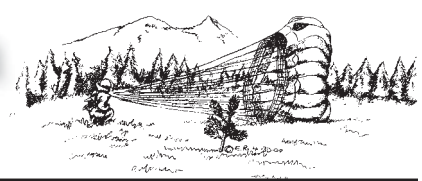
We treated Dan with a little extra respect from then on, now that we had found out that he was a combat veteran. 🪖



Earl Dodds (Courtesy E. Dodds)



Snapshots from the Past



by Jeff R. Davis
(Missoula '57)

Jumpin' With Beer

IN NOVEMBER OF 1963, I was working in the loft at the Aerial Fire Depot in Missoula under **Delos Dutton** (MSO-51), loft foreman. On November 4th, Dee came to me with a repair problem. A number of FS-3 reserve parachute containers, used with the 28-foot FS-2 main canopies, were damaged. The V-rings on the containers that hooked to the Hubbard snaps on the H-2 harnesses had torn loose, causing large rips in the canvas container material.

Repairing them was difficult. The containers had many rows of stitching across the back of the fabric. Before repair, at least five hundred rows of stitching had to be carefully cut and removed. There were a number of torn containers. It took me and another jumper assigned to the loft five full eight-hour days to repair them.

Dutton was really pissed

off. I remember we had over fifty containers damaged in an identical way. He couldn't figure out what had caused the unusual stressing of the V-rings. It had never happened before.

It took me awhile to solve the mystery, but it finally dawned on me. I wished I could tell Dutton what had caused the damage because it would have made me look pretty good as an efficient "loft rat" under his command, but this was one of those secrets I damn well better keep to myself.

It was pretty simple. The weight of the parachute itself could never have been sufficient to cause that stress on the reserve. There had to be a greater weight being imposed on the V-rings. I checked the records: All of these reserves had been used by the New Mexico crew, where I was foreman. Suddenly the mystery became clear. The extra weight on those reserves was caused by six-packs of beer. Many of us in New Mex, certainly myself included, jumped fires with a fresh, cold six-pack slung under our reserves in our personal gear bags. We had little use for PG bags in New Mex with the rapid return off fires we experienced in those years.

Opening shock did the rest. Those old FS-2 parachutes

were canopy-first-deployed - no deployment bag - and when those babies opened, everything on us shook, rattled and rolled. The extra weight of the beer gave one hellova yank to the containers, and presto - one out of every two reserves we jumped ended ripped clear across the back.

I shared my little discovery with my loft partner, and Dutton could never figure out why us two ornery loft-rats were having such a good time for the next five days, clearly enjoying what most would consider a shit-detail in the parachute loft. 🍺

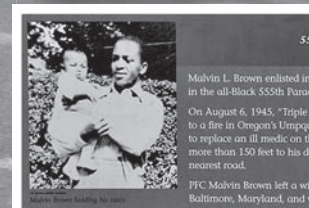
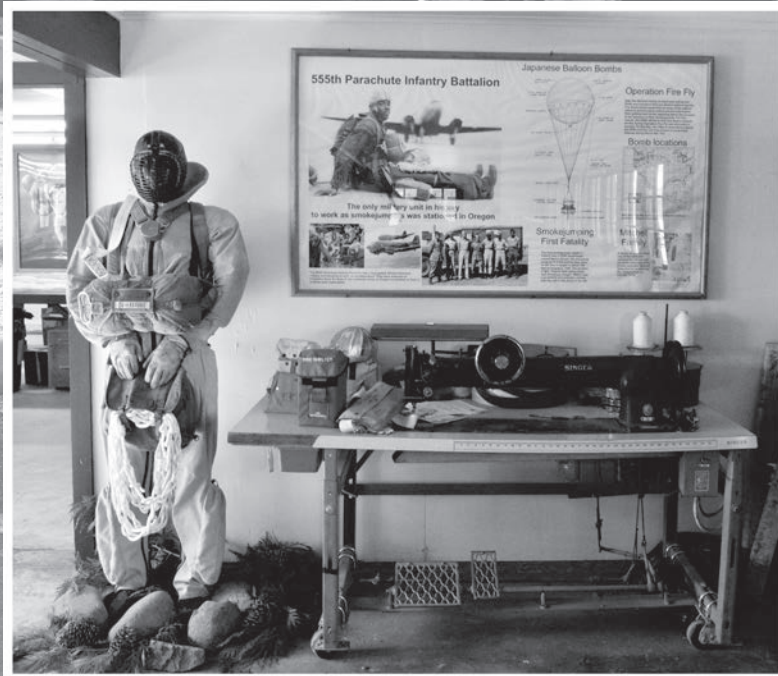


A patch collector thinks this might have been a smokejumper patch from some era. Any ideas, please contact the editor.



Triple Nickle Memorial Dedication

Photos Courtesy



Layout Design: John

@ Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum

by Tom Young



PFC Malvin L. Brown
55th Parachute Infantry Battalion
(1921-1945)

in the US Army late in 1942. After qualifying as a paratrooper in the 55th Parachute Infantry Battalion, Brown trained as a medic.

"Nickles" paratroopers based at Pendleton Field responded to a National Forest fire near Roseburg. PFC Brown volunteered to jump first. His parachute caught in a tall tree and he fell to his death. Fellow paratroopers carried his body several miles to the

son and daughter. He is buried near his hometown, and the first smokejumper to die on a fire jump.

Tommy Kirkley (CJ-64)



Kyle Hoyt Receives Al Dunton Leadership Award

by Mike Blinn (Redding '01)

Kyle Hoyt (GAC-12) is the embodiment of a humble, yet exceptionally talented and capable smokejumper. He is a quiet and confident leader who relies on hard work and technical proficiency in order to show others the most efficient way to accomplish any task. Kyle's most outstanding leadership characteristic is his lack of interest in seeking credit for his accomplishments, of which there are many.

Kyle is constantly available throughout the course of the year for any assignment. If he has an opportunity to assist in any fashion, be it through volunteering or through nomination by supervisors, he is willing and eager to do so. This is evident in the qualifications that Kyle has accrued over the years. He is currently an EMT-F and serves as the lead medical contact at the Grangeville Smokejumper base. This was not a role that Kyle aspired to, but he noticed that we were lacking in that arena and took the reins of the program. He is a practicing EMT in the off-season as well, serving as a ski patroller at Snowbowl Ski area outside of Missoula.

In the medical arena, Kyle is constantly working to provide quality training and continuing education for our EMTs, as well as those EMTs present on the forest. He has helped to author patient care and advocacy protocols for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest and the Region 1 Smokejumper program. On several occasions, Kyle has served as a patient advocate for injured firefighters, both district and smokejumpers alike. Kyle took the roles at the request of Forest Leadership with no hesitation. He did this knowing that more money would have been made by staying out on assignment rather than travelling with patients with whom he had no personal attachment to, other than duty to fellow firefighters.

Kyle is also sought after on the zone by Incident Command 3 and Type 2 Incident Management Teams in order to facilitate proper functioning logistical operations. He has been called upon to in-brief incoming logistics section chiefs on the

proper ordering channels for supporting remote large incidents in central Idaho on several occasions over the last several years.

In 2017 he took over the logistics role on a transition from a Type 2 to a Type 3 team for the Hanover Fire. He did this at the request of Forest leadership, although there was still significant initial attack activity that would have provided more glamorous and financially beneficial opportunities.

Kyle participates equally well as a subordinate, providing mentorship and strong input for those in command while functioning as a team member. He is active in the training realm, providing leadership in Rookie training Cadres, suppression course unit instruction, and any other facet of fire and EMS training that he is invited to participate in.

Kyle is the quintessential Smokejumper. He functions at a high level in every aspect of his job and represents the smokejumper program in an admirable fashion at all times. He is an excellent example of what every smokejumper should aspire to be, regardless of how long they've been doing the job. 🧯



Kyle Hoyt (GAC-12)

NSA Scholarship Program Expanded—Take Advantage!

At the October 2016 Board of Directors meeting in Seattle, some major changes were made to the NSA Scholarship Program. The addition of Grandchildren to the eligibility list now opens the opportunity for at least 90 percent of our members to participate in this program. Up to this time, due to the aging of our membership, very few of the members who make up this organization and contribute 100 percent of the funding were able to participate in the Scholarship Program as their children were beyond college age.

There is an excellent scoring matrix that awards points for NSA membership (only seven of the twenty-seven past winners have been NSA members), serious scholars, and expanded evaluation of the essay.

With the increasing expenses of getting an education, the NSA has increased the available scholarships to six \$2,000 awards.

Application packages are due by June 15, 2018. Last year we had nineteen applicants for the six scholarships. That was up from five in 2016. The change in eligibility allowing more of our membership to take part has paid off.

None of the 2017 award winners will be eligible for the 2018 scholarships. There will be six new winners this year. The NSA membership of a parent or grandparent will suffice for the membership points in the scoring matrix.

The complete Scholarship document is online at the NSA website www.smokejumpers.com under "Outreach." 🔦

Chris Wennogle Receives Al Dunton Leadership Award

by Bill Cramer (NIFC-90)

Chris Wennogle (FBX-07), Alaska Smokejumpers, was selected from the BLM due to his leadership attributes displayed on multiple challenging assignments during the 2017 season. Chris's nomination cited his ability to perform under extreme pressure, problem solve, and overcome obstacles while leading by example with a strong work ethic, determination, tactful honesty, and a commitment to bettering the program, his peers and himself.

His completion of a Master's degree in Natural Resource Management, while performing at a sustained high level, serves as a further positive example to jumpers throughout the program. 🔦

Chris was a NSA Scholarship Award Winner in 2013 and 2015. (Ed.)



Chris Wennogle (NIFC-90)

Rescue 1952

by Pat Harbine (Missoula '51)

Many of us had the opportunity to work with the late "Smokejumper Research and Development" man, **Bill Wood** (MSO-43). Some of the devices he worked on were zany and proved too unwieldy for reality, but others proved very useful and are still in use today.

Occasionally small groups of us were used as Guinea Pigs to test his theories. I remember testing a mobile stretcher for rescues. The stretcher was supported by a pneumatic tire Bill had stolen from a surplus wheelbarrow and cushioned by two coil springs. A rescuer at each end balanced the unwieldy thing. Our group tested it on narrow trails running as fast as we could and slowing to a walk on rough sections. It seemed to work, although the trailing rescuer had no visibility and was prone to trip. None of us volunteered to be the passenger.

Later that year, I was with a small group that dropped into the New Meadows area to assist in the rescue of a ground crew member who had suffered a broken hip. As the plane circled for the equipment drop, I recognized the gurney that I had worked with the previous year, supported by two cargo chutes. One of the ground crew had applied first aid and instructed us about group lifting the injured man on to the stretcher while balancing

the device at each end. When the patient had been loaded, we began the journey to a vehicle waiting several miles away.

Several features of Bill's creation had changed from his original version. The handles were longer, allowing the rear bearer to see his feet. The single tire was much softer, allowing it to flex and squirm across rocks and branches, and two coil springs were adjusted to soften the ride for the patient.

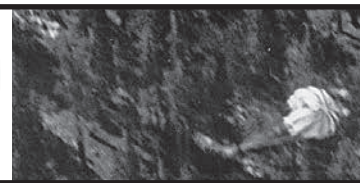
The lead bearer set the pace running in places where the trail widened and a third and fourth man had room to run alongside and steady the stretcher.

When the trail narrowed, the pace slowed and the sidemen dropped back preparing to spell the two main stretcher-bearers when they got tired. Surprisingly, the pace was quite rapid and smooth over terrain that motorized vehicles could not access. The occupant of the stretcher was well medicated and voiced no complaints. The four-man team made remarkable progress, and we soon heard the siren of an ambulance approaching our meeting place.

I venture to say the rest of the patient's ride to the hospital over 20 miles of washboard road was not as smooth as his ride through the wilderness. Good job, Bill Wood! 🧠



THE JUMP LIST



The "Jump List" is intended to bring you up-to-date on your fellow NSA members. Send your information to Chuck Sheley; see his contact information on page 3 of this magazine.

DON GORDON (Missoula '59)

Bases jumped: MSO 59, GAC 60, MSO 61-65, FBX 68-69.

Now living in: Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada

Since jumping: Earned a bachelor's degree in

Zoology from University of Montana in 1964 and a bachelor's degree in Education from Montana State University, June 1969; also worked for Intermountain Aviation in 1966-67 at Marana Air Force Base in Tucson, Ariz., doing systems development for aerial delivery, training others in specialized jumping (HALO/LALO) and took own training in Virginia and in Central America. We were supposed to move to Laos in 1967 but decided against it because of family needs. Don

also served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1957 to 1966.

Don says: My first fire jump was out of Cave Junction in 1959. I was on the Higgins Ridge Fire in 1961 and almost lost my life. I was part of 20 men who were choppered out of the fire by **Rod Snider** (NCSB-51) against all odds and who won the Carnegie Medal for bravery. Two of us wore glasses and could see; the rest were blinded with eyes shut by ash and smoke. We led them to the helicopter.

I did training and two exhibition jumps in Tulsa, Okla., in 1968 out of the former belly turret of a B-26 and then flew to Alaska with the aircraft for the fire season, where I trained jumpers in Fairbanks to jump from it. My wife and young boys were in Alaska for several fire seasons and were part of the Fairbanks "family."

My fondest memories jumping are out of the Ford Trimotor from Missoula and Grangeville. I jumped from seven different aircraft over 10 years. After the season in Fairbanks in 1969, I emmigrated with my wife, Janet, and two sons, Jerald and Douglas, to Canada where I got a job

teaching high school science and physical education for 10 years in the mountain communities of McBride and Valemount, British Columbia. In the summers I went to the bush logging where I became a proficient faller. We bought a chain saw shop and general store in 1979, which we ran for five years, but unfortunately lost due to the recession caused by wood tariffs during the Reagan years.

I had a profound conversion experience in 1982 and became a follower of Jesus Christ. This reoriented my life in a whole new direction. My wife and sons experienced the same. This resulted in short-term missionary service in Haiti in 1983, and in 1989, Janet and I went to serve as long-term missionaries in Indonesia. We returned to Canada in 2002 and lived in Cranbrook, British Columbia, where I worked as a faller in the logging industry. We retired in 2004. With sadness, I lost my wife and best friend in 2009 due to heart complications. I live near my son and his family in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, where he is a church pastor. My oldest son, Jerald, and his family reside near Elk, Wash., and he is a nurse in Spokane. 🕊



1957 West Yellowstone Crew L-R: Larry Brown, Jim Manion, Glen Marlowe, Cole MacPherson, Lyle Brown. (Courtesy G. Marlowe)



SOUNDING OFF

from the editor



PUTTING TOGETHER *Smoke-jumper* magazine is a lot like building a house and, at the same time, working on a 1,000-piece puzzle. The magazine needs a foundation and a framework like a house.

The “feature” articles are the foundation. I choose five or six of these pieces in each issue. Then there are the “quarterly” articles – pieces like the President’s Message, Off the List, Odds/End - that must go in each issue. These also add to the foundation.

The framework is made up of what I call the “other articles” – pieces that are shorter and, in most cases, do not have a photo to go with the article.

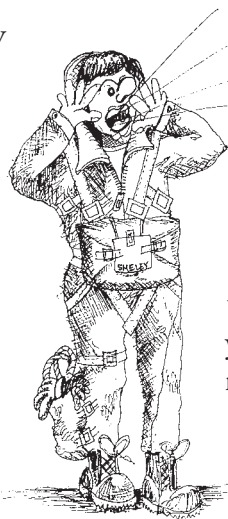
Last come the photos. I try to get one or two photos to go with each feature article, maybe one for specific “other” articles. Each photo needs to be cropped, sized, and changed to black and white. Photo Editor **Johnny Kirkley**

(CJ-64) is the key guy in handling this end of the construction. Captions and credits for the photos are very important. Getting the wrong caption or credit leads to unhappy readers.

Johnny and I then need to brainstorm and select a cover photo. Sometimes it relates to a “feature” article, sometimes not. A key portion of the magazine is the centerfold page. After we select a subject, Johnny arranges photos into the final layout for this portion of the magazine.

Many articles come in as emails, typed pages/hand-written documents. They go to **Ed Booth** (Assoc.) who formats them, reduces space and does the initial cleaning.

From Ed they go back to me. I try to clear up anything that might be confusing to the reader and, in most cases, try to cut the word count. Space is money and I’m working on a goal of 48 pages since we can get the biggest bang for our buck with that number. Any multiple of 16 pages is the least expensive to print. We can do 48 pages at less cost per issue than we can do 40 pages.



All of these pieces then go to my wife, K.G. for proofing. Over the years, she has developed an eye at catching mistakes after I have done my edit. It is amazing how you can read an article with a mistake, correct it in your mind, and continue reading. That is where a good proof editor is invaluable.

My wife is that person.

Once the entire framework has been done, the house turns into a puzzle. It goes to Larry Jackson, who has been doing the layout and printing for the past 17 years. Larry then does his magic. The first draft comes back to me.

After all of these years, I’m pretty good at getting close to the 48-page goal. The first draft might have 46 pages or 52 pages. Here’s where the puzzle continues. Once the framework has been established, you just don’t add two pages or cut four pages. If you add articles, they need to fit the space – word count. Same with cuts. There are articles that are not time-sensitive. They can be cut and moved to another edition. I usually work two issues ahead, and there are articles from a future framework that can be moved, if we need to add.

All in all, there are many moving parts and processes that need to work to get this

publication out on time. Some writers are disturbed if I don't get their pieces in right away but, thankfully, that does not happen often.

After the draft copy is ready and the page count adjusted to 48, another edit is done on the digital document, then it goes to press.

The last part is the mailing. We have 70-plus members who get their magazine electronically. I send their issue about a month ahead of the postal mailing.

Larry Lufkin (CJ-63) sends me the current membership

list in an electronic format. I need to go over that list and change address for those who move in the winter. Here's where I need your help. If you are going to be "**Temporarily Away**," please let me know. I can adjust the mailing or hold your magazine until you get home. The post office charges a first class mailing for all returned magazines. The re-mailing is also charged first class making about a \$5 expense total.

I appreciate all of your comments and contributions in the way of articles for this

publication. A publication is our means of communication and connection. The NSA is an amazingly strong organization. We have about a 50% or more membership of the potential members. Other organizations would be envious of that number. Keep up the good work.

This current April *Smokejumper* is the 100th edition. The first 24 were titled *Static Line* with Carl Gidlund its inaugural editor in April 1993. All issues are available from NSA Merchandise as PDFs on a thumb drive. See page 45. 🔦

Canadian Smokejumpers

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks-69)

Smokejumpers have a long History in Canada starting in Saskatchewan in 1949. The Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resource Jumpers operated through 1967 at La Ronge using Norseman and Beaver aircraft on floats that utilized a floor exit. Typical of Canadian Forestry operations, the jumpers were divided into small, pre-designated four-man crews.

In 1974, the Yukon Forest Service began using contract jumpers at Whitehorse with International Forest Fire Systems providing both the jumpers and a DC-3.

In 1978, the jumpers moved from Yukon (YT) to Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories (NWT). Kusawa Contracting provided the jumpers and an Islander jump ship to the Territorial Government.

Kusawa returned to Whitehorse in 1984 through 1996 with a DC-3 and full facilities, including training units. The jumpers used a floor mount static cable during this period. An experimental Alaska Fire Service Spike Base operated at Dawson Yukon Territory in 1989 in addition to the Whitehorse base.

In 1998, smokejumping in British Columbia (BC) began after several years of planning. The BC Forest Service operation started at the Smithers Fire Centre using a Cessna Caravan, then switched to Fort Saint John with a Twin Otter to be more centrally located for the higher fire activity in British Columbia's largest forest region.

Fort Saint John has a spike base at Fort Nelson and a base west of the Rockies at Mackenzie. These bases and the crews assigned to them comprise the North Peace Smokejumpers that the BC Forest Service calls Parattack Crews. The bases operate much as the US bases did in the past in that the bulk of the jumpers are seasonal. They continue the small crew concept using three-person crews with two crews on board a Twin Otter or four crews on board a Turbo-3.

The base switching of the past was due to home rule coming to Yukon and Northwest Territories and the ensuing local hire regulations that complicated smokejumper operations. Through it all, Region 1, 6 and Alaska Fire Service bases cooperated with and provided support to the Ca-

nadian bases with gear and training.

During the 60s and 70s, Alaska Fire Control jumpers staffed fires in Yukon along the border, and Yukon retardant bombers dropped across the border in Alaska by mutual agreement for initial attack. These events helped pave the way for further work and the cooperation improved over time. 1999 marked the first BC boost to the Lower 48 and 2004 marked the return of US jumpers to Canada.

Today Smokejumpers, Rapatack (rappeller) units, American Hotshots and Canadian Unit Crews, Air Tankers and Bomber Groups, Scooper Groups, Bird Dogs and Air Attack, overhead and dispatch work across the border each season. All involved can take pride in the excellent mutual aid enjoyed today between our two countries.

The two following stories reflect some of the



North Peace Jumpers at Fort Nelson Spike Base following chin-up contest. L-R: Al Silver (Whitehorse/Yukon-89) Fort Nelson Zone FMO, North Peace Jumpers Daniel Gnapp, Michael Moen, Colm Gallen, Ross Gooddard, Logan Ralph, Wendy Morrow. (Courtesy J. Culbertson)

above history starting with **Bob Quillin's** (FBX-71) historic account of the Dawson Base, followed by my search for the Whitehorse base. 🔦

Dawson Spike Base

by **Bob Quillin** (Fairbanks '71)

In the late 80s, Yukon Territory (YT) Forest Service officials began considering alternatives for smokejumper delivery in the Territory. Smokejumpers had been used since the 70s in Yukon through a private contract based at Whitehorse.

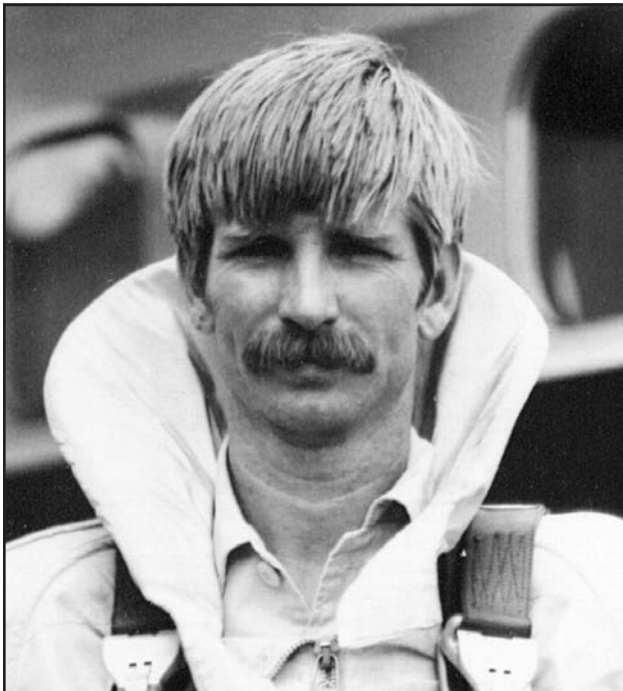
*Yukon Forest Service Fire Manager Keith Kepke and his staff, Neil Wortley and Paul Butra, traveled to the Fairbanks Smokejumper Base to learn about the Alaska smokejumper system. As part of the process, **Andy Anderson** (MYC-74) trained the three men to jump and*

get a feel for the operation. With that success, the Yukon managers returned to Whitehorse and worked out a deal to exchange the use of Yukon retardant bombers in Alaska for a trial BLM Smokejumper spike base in the Yukon.

*This account was originally written by **Bob Quillin** (FBX-71) in 2000 on a bet with **Don Bell** (IDC-69) in a downtown Fairbanks cafe. They challenged each other to write three hundred pages in one year. Bob dug out old pocket notebooks, calendars, and*

spotter notes and began writing. We join Bob on page 306 of his narrative, 13 July 1989, at the Fairbanks Smokejumper Base. (John Culbertson)

July 1989: The next morning, 7/13 at 0900, I was back at work on standby. A new agreement with Yukon Forest Service allowed for an exchange of work forces. Alaska had worked out a deal with Yukon Territories for the use of their retardant bomber fleet to augment our U.S. contract Air Tankers and, in exchange, offered a jump ship. I had been selected to run the mission. I was to take Casa 49CA with two pilots, eight jumpers, an assistant spotter, and the necessary equipment I'd need to set up a self-sustained smokejumper operation for the Yukon fire organization. Yukon had helitack set up in various bases around the territories and a private contract smokejumper group in Whitehorse with their own hangar, loft and paracargo capabilities. There were a lot of holes in the plan that I'd have to figure out once I got there. It would be flattering to think I was singled out as an honor, but I suspect that once the depth of responsibility and creative problem solving load was recognized, the other spotters that were in the front office at the jump shack backed out and I got this assignment by default.



Bob Quillin 1973 (Courtesy Mike McMillan)

We loaded up with all the gear and hopped over to Fairbanks International Airport, cleared customs, and then flew to Whitehorse. A meeting was set up for the next morning. A vehicle was arranged and I drove the boys to dinner and back to the runway where we received a fire call and made a dry run to Beaver Fire #4.

The next morning I met with Keith Kepke and his staff for the briefing. Keith, Neil Wortley, and Paul Butra had come over to Fairbanks to learn parachuting and the particulars of smokejumping in the U.S. in order to knowledgeably contract jumpers in Yukon Territory. These were brave, straightforward men whom I have always held in highest regard. Their methods of firefighting were meager compared to the U.S., but thorough and readily assumable.

After lunch we flew to Dawson City to set up operations on the small runway next to the fleet of retardant bombers. I was able to store my extra main chutes, reserves, and cargo chutes in a shed behind the ready shack. Neil Wortley had acquired an empty house in Dawson for us to live. There were no beds, but we slept on the carpeting in sleeping bags in the living room/dining area with a few boys in the bedrooms. It was comfortable and convenient. The fire operations offices were on the second floor of a small government building a few blocks away. Dawson is a tourist Mecca with restaurants, bars, hotels and Diamond Toothed Gertie's – a gambling house with a floor-show. The boys and I were in paradise.

7/15: We were driven out to the runway to stand by and take care of gear during the morning. The airstrip at Dawson is up a gold-mined valley created by a dredge that flattened the bottom of the canyon years ago by scooping out dirt ahead of it, sifting out the gold, and creating a pond for bulldozers to pull it into to scoop up the drainage. Bulldozers could flatten the resultant piles of rock dumped out the back into a nice, flat surface for planes to land on. There was still a slope to it, high sides and a canyon – but serviceable, nonetheless.

My job never stopped. When I wasn't spotting, I was chauffeur, housemother, arbiter, organizer and accountant. Meals had monetary limits and required that I pick up a meal chit for the restaurant at the headquarters (there were always

disagreements on where to eat), then make sure everyone signed the chit and turn it in after we'd eaten. Daily costs for the crew and aircraft had to be submitted at the close of each day. Parachutes had to be rigged, jump packs assembled and strapped for dropping.

Our first day at Dawson had us on yellow alert (an indicator not to wander too far from the ship) from 1200 to about 2000. We finally loaded up and headed to town, only to be called back to fly a false alarm at Hanson Lakes, then back to town by 2300.

7/16: We only worked the morning and got the afternoon off.

7/17: As required by U.S. regulations, I got two replacement pilots flown in from Alaska so

the two I had could take their required rest. The morning saw no activity, but at 1406 we got a fire call, piled into the plane and headed for the reported coordinates. By 1442 we were over the fire and getting ready to drop jumpers when I got a call from Dawson to hold off for retardant. I suspect we shocked the laid back, retardant bomber pilots with our rapid response and that a little behind the scenes whining caused that decision. I held off and let the retardant planes drop first and then dropped jumpers. Retardant is like laundry detergent - pretty effective, but not without the onsite agitation. We'd found the best results in Alaska from getting ground forces in place earlier to work the retardant line, but the retardant contractors had a pretty strong grip



Dawson Crew Yukon Territory 1989 Top: Leonard Wehking (FBX-85), Kevin Stalder Pilot, Tom May (NIFC-87), Troop Tom Emonds (CJ-66), Mel Tenneson (FBX-86), John Dube (RAC-70), Bob Quillin (FBX 71). Middle: Bill Rappa Co-Pilot, Eric Shoenfeld (CJ-64), Doug Swantner (RDD-82), Unidentified Pilot. Bottom: Dalen Romero (FBX-83), Al Seiler (FBX-85)

in Canada and believed that they could put the fires out from the air.

I got the jumpers off the fire and we repacked the used chutes. New jump packs with sleeping bags, tools, food, and water had to be built and strapped for dropping, but we were still well ahead of the game. The supplies were readily available in the helicopter cache and from local grocery stores.

7/19: We had a fire call at 1426 and we waited dutifully for the retardant bombers to take off. It turned out to be a false alarm, and we were back on the ground at 1500 for standby until 2100.

By now the shine of Diamond Tooth Gertie's was wearing off. A sensible gambler, who still had money in his pockets, could see the eventual bankruptcy in store for those who made it a nightly occurrence. The dancing girls were charming, but the floorshow was always the same and the chances of making it big at the gambling tables over time were nil. I struck out to find other after-hours entertainment and ran into the two pilots and a wealth of local color at the Westminster Hotel bar.

The main entrance to the bar was the street corner door of the old building. Inside the dark bar was the usual arrangement: booths and tables, a bar cluttered with years of mementos, colorful bottles, and stools occupied by men with no place better to go and unaware of any place better to be. I wandered back to the better-lighted pool table where the pilots Stalder and Rappa were shooting. I put my four Canadian quarters down by the coin slide and my name on the chalkboard to play the winner and had a seat on the benches that looked like pews from a defunct church. Kevin Stalder was born in Alaska and lived in Chitna long enough to never want to eat salmon again. He would be the first to find the most Alaskan bar in town. The floors may slant after more than fifty years, but the pool tables are always level.

"One ball by the elephant standing on the pancake," Kevin declared, and then made the side pocket shot and set up for his next.

The boys were playing one-and-fifteen-in-the-side-pockets eight ball. On the wall some local artist had tried to paint an early hunting scene with a wooly mammoth on an ice floe. Two other equally bad renderings, totally devoid of the illusion of depth, of earlier times grace the walls.



Doug Swantner 1992 (Courtesy Mike McMillan)

Stalder had a poetic humor.

I asked where the restroom was and was told to go out the door by the chalkboard, around the glass counter and in the other door, and the restroom would be on the right. I walked out into what had been the mid-block entry to the hotel in one of its former stages. The glass case was filled with prehistoric bones and horns dredged up by gold miners over the years. The other side door led to a second, quieter bar with a few of the younger crowd gathered. The restroom had a homebuilt, poured concrete urinal affixed to the wall and the thought of desecrating a child's sarcophagus came disturbingly to mind.

Back at the pool table I was up. Some more of the crew wandered in and good fellowship reigned. I was asked the directions to the bathroom and incorporate the word "ossarium" in the directions to Stalder's delight. We talked of the local artwork, and I was told to pay particular attention to the portraits in the bar when I went back in for another beer.

A short, peppy French Canadian with a pencil moustache and badly fitting polyester pants stormed in from the dark bar and bellowed, "Twenty minutes. No more. A pool game should take twenty minutes!" He glared menacingly at us briefly, then stormed back into the bar. Stalder

calmly chalked his cue while studying his next shot.

"That was Mister Fabian. He owns the hotel." This place was priceless.

The portraits that lined the walls of the dark bar that hadn't caught my attention on the first pass were indeed an art find. Prominent citizens of Dawson had been rendered flat as if pressed against a glass pane one by one. Identifying characteristics - volume, military dress, hair length and such - gave clues of who these people were before the unkind accident of their painting.

Mister Fabian was the true treasure. We couldn't disguise our joy and fascination at his very existence and he couldn't resist the center stage of our attention. He fashioned himself a pool player and I was always able to defeat him.

"I shoot ze peegeons now," he would announce haughtily when he had a run of balls. Alas, to no avail. Somehow I always managed to get the eight ball down just before he could. He would storm off to get more quarters.

One night while we were playing, a drunk was asleep on the bench. The drunk would come to from time to time and ask Mister Fabian for twenty dollars until Thursday, then go back to sleep. Early in the game, when Mister Fabian had a chance at winning, he would ignore the requests, but as the game progressed and his chances were diminishing, his silent irritation showed. Finally, he missed a shot that set me up for my final run just as the drunk awoke.

"Mister Fabian. Mister Fabian lend me twenty dollars until Thursday..."

"No! Ten times already I tell you no. You maniac!"

Mister Fabian's temper was in full storm later when he wanted a rematch. Another fellow had staggered in and written his name on the chalkboard for the next game, then politely waited his turn on the bench. I lined up a bank shot into the side pocket with the eight ball and when it dropped, Fabian stormed around the table, while fishing four more quarters out of his pocket near where the drunk was stooped over, carefully placing his own quarters in the coin slide. Fabian took the drunk by the hair and slammed his head down on the slide and then flung him back onto the bench saying, "You're drunk! Get out!" and put



Mel Tenneson (Courtesy Mike McMillan)

his own quarters into the table.

Moral indignation in someone else's land is best served cold. I beat Fabian again and then departed champion of the evening. The boys and I drifted to other evening amusements for the rest of our stay in Dawson.

7/20: We stood by all day with no action.

7/21: The bombers got a fire call to Carmacks at 1432. We got a fire call to the same fire, Carmacks #23 at 1436. Apparently, someone wanted retardant laid out on the ground before jumpers were on hand to beat it into the oncoming flames, perhaps to see its effectiveness alone. Once again the observed results from the air wouldn't reflect what actually was taking place on the ground. The fire would slow when it hit the retardant allowing a quick holding action. But it still worked its way through sections where the jumpers were faced with the slow work of beating out hot flames until they got to a portion that hadn't made it through the retardant. They then moved more swiftly up the line until they reached another section that had broken through. Failure to catch the fire isn't an option with the jumpers whether the work was



Dalan Romero (Courtesy Mike McMillan)

assisted by the retardant drop or not. But Alaskans were and still are convinced by experience that having ground forces in place before retardant drops is the best use.

I dropped the load and returned to Dawson to rig chutes and cargo and pack jump packs for a fresh load when the jumpers returned.

A DC-3 load of Yukon jumpers landed and I got a call to ride along and evaluate their system. They had avoided the strong-point cable attachment problem by going to a floor cable. The jumpers adapted to the system safely, but the cargo drops involved standing the boxes on top of their cargo chutes which were only held in their containers with 8 cord.

7/22: I got the call to fly down to Carmacks, so we flew down to pick up jumpers and do initial attack from there. The small town and its residents were a pleasure to work with, although they were understandably loyal to their own helitack organization.

The Alaskan boys came in off the fire dirty and happy. The boys of Yukon Territories lacked the tax base and long-term infrastructure of the US

wildfire organizations. They made up the difference with heroic individual effort and responsibility. An example of this was how forces are fed on fires. In Alaska we had C-rations rotated down to us from unused military stores, a cost efficiency on food that has a long shelf life. Yukon Territory didn't have our access to these inexpensive stores, so they shipped fresh food out to project fires and sent cooks to prepare meals, much as the US had back in the old days. With road accessibility in the lower 48, catering services with kitchens, tables and mess tents, all contained in semi trailers, drive to the nearest road access to large fires and set up large feeding facilities. Crews are transported long distances from these elaborate camps to the fires and back again each night. It's a thriving industry, and large fires down there have become catering-dependent. In Alaska and YT, roads are few and the fires are still too remote for that option and food is still dropped on fires. The boys and I were delighted with the Canadians.

7/23: At 1850 we got a fire call to Carmacks #24, where I dropped two jumpers, **Mel Tennesson** (FBX-86) and **Doug Swantner** (RDD-82), on a small spot south of Rowlinson Creek, then flew back to Carmacks.

We stood by in Carmacks the next day, and Mel and Swannie came in by helicopter and joined us late that afternoon.

7/25: We were sent down to Minto, a deserted village of log cabins on the bank of the Yukon in YT. I had thought that Minto was an Indian name. Minto was, I recollect from my queries at the time, a bishop that wandered the Hudson Bay Company portion of the north dispensing western religion and attaching his name to gathering places.

We parked the plane on the dirt strip behind the village and wandered the empty streets and cabins, then settled down to wait. The village sits on a cut bank of the Yukon River with the highway on the opposite cut bank. The frequency of vacationers canoeing from Whitehorse to Dawson and beyond was rare enough to hold our interest in each party and frequent enough to fill the afternoon. At 1559 we got a fire call to Mayo #20, a 50-acre fire creeping along in the Clarke Hills. I dropped all eight jumpers and flew back to Dawson.

7/26: The day was lonely but busy. **Dalan Romero** (FBX-83) and I flew down to Mayo to pick up the parachutes that had been ferried back by helicopter and brought them into Dawson to repack. A food order from the fire had to be picked up at a local market and strapped for a drop to the fire. The people at the supermarket had boxed the food with great skill; the egg cartons were surrounded by bread and cookies. I still had some doubts and was assured by the grocers that it was the way the jumpers in Yukon did it. Dalan and I cargoed the food up carefully, but when it came to the large grill and stovepipe, the packaging had to be pretty creative. I wrapped the awkward chunks up in a canvas sling and attached the chutes. The whole thing looked very “experimental.”

We flew down to the fire that night and dropped the boxes first. When it came to the ugly grill/stovepipe container, I had Dalan go forward. I guided the mess vigorously down the track and out the door, watching it freefall until the chutes opened and it all settled into a lumpy sack sus-

pended beneath two good functioning parachutes. What a relief. We headed back to Dawson to wait three days for the boys to finish up their work on the fire.

7/29: At 1824 we flew down to Mayo to pick up the jumpers. The first thing I wanted to know was about the cargo drop. It was perfect. All the cargo made it in safe and sound, even the eggs.

We stood by all day Sunday and then got the word we would be released back to Fairbanks on Monday morning. We cleaned up the house we'd been staying in. We'd just mown the lawn so the place looked pretty good. The boys wanted a memento, so we all ran down to a tourist picture parlor in Dawson and put on costumes for a turn-of-the-century posed photograph. Then we drove out to the plane, packed everything aboard, and flew back to Fairbanks International Airport to clear customs and then hopped over to Fort Wainwright runway and home.

Nineteen days as Chief of Party, no matter how wonderful the assignment, takes its toll and I took a day off. 🧠

Finding The Whitehorse Base

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

Many jumpers, hotshots, and pilots have met Canadian jumpers as both groups migrate between summer jobs in the north and the winter camps of Baja and points south. At mutual friends houses and the many campgrounds along the way, the stories are told and shared experience strengthened.

In recent years, the stories are energized with jump experience as Americans and Canadians boost bases across the border. And for some older jumpers sitting on the edge of the campfire, this brings back memories of work with Canadians in an earlier time.

On a recent summer, I returned to Fairbanks from my home in California for a summer of writing. My wife, Kathy, joined me at an old homestead on Chena Ridge where I had lived over forty years before. I worked in a room overlooking the Tanana Valley and Alaska Range and planted

flowers in boxes below windows. Kathy made rhubarb pie from the plants explosive growth around the cabin. We walked in fields and through woods in silence and met with old friends in the mid-night sun.

When the rains came, Kathy flew home and I drove south. The gloom of cold wet reminded me I don't have what it takes to stick it out in Alaska year-round. Like a youthful jumper with cash in his pocket headed south in the fall, I looked to the Canadian border and was gone.

Out past Northway, the drone of tires on a sleet covered road took hold of my thoughts and I caught a wheel in the gravel, over corrected and then had a second chance as I slid to a halt along the shoulder. I got out and took a blow. The car was safe, so I walked up the road to clear my head.

Even with the sleet, the view was spellbinding and, through breaks in the storm, Tetlin Wildlife

Refuge before me and the distant Kluane National Park in Canada was stunning in its vastness.

Memories of jumping across the border caught me, and I looked up a ridge as though I could see those times now - the vastness of the place focusing my mind's eye.

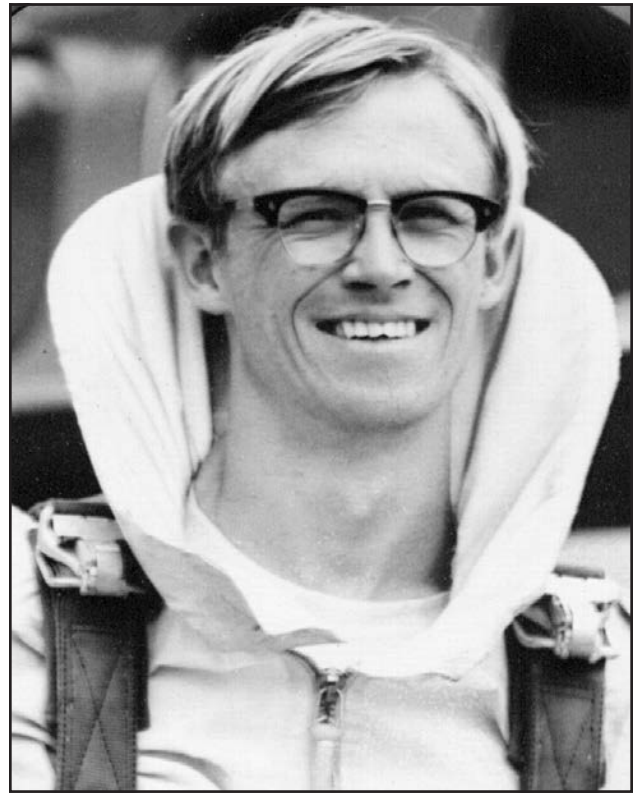
I believe it was 1970 and a lightning bust east of Eagle had spread fires along the border. One fire over the border was building fast. A decision to jump half our Doug load of sixteen was made after communications with BLM and Yukon fire dispatch.

A number of fires were staffed that day and, although by luck we caught ours, many fires in both countries popped a cork and put up headers. After several days of mopping up, it became clear our location had been mis-plotted as no aircraft came over to check on us. Radio batteries went dead. Fire aircraft were seen at a distance, but our signal mirrors did not make contact. Finally, a helicopter on a beeline from a fire to our north made a hard turn and headed to our flash. All red with a Canadian maple leaf on the tail, the ship belonged to Parks Canada. The pilot promised to come back for us, and before evening our crew was hauled out to Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory.

In those days before Yukon self rule, the Territory had a Federal Forest Service with a station at Beaver Creek near the old border crossing. At the station, both Yukon Forest Service and Canadian customs officers seemed preoccupied with phone calls to Fairbanks and their own headquarters seeking guidance as to how to send us back to Alaska. A worry was that we were carrying handguns. Something you don't do in Canada.

But in true Canadian fashion, the officers defaulted to friendly hospitality insisting they buy us a meal at the local café. Joking they must feed prisoners, they asked us to bury our pistols in our PG bags and say nothing more of it. We were escorted to the border by our dinner hosts with a Mountie thanking us for our service and a US Customs official looking like he needed a few aspirin. We climbed aboard some non-descript US government stakeside and headed to Tanacross and a flight home.

I continued to see the Canadians, both at the Whitehorse Base and in later years as I hitchhiked and drove up and down the Alcan Highway.



John Culbertson 1973 (Courtesy Mike McMillan)

Back to the present, hands cold, visibility quickly degrading, I fired up the car and proceeded south to the border. My mind mulling over Whitehorse with some intermittent attention held back for the road.

It seemed to me that on one of those long ago nights migrating south, I had sat on a jump tower in the woods near Whitehorse. I had a clear picture of looking out over the units, drinking beer and laughing. Forty plus years ago. I wasn't sure. Maybe my mind was playing tricks on me, one wheel spinning loose in the sand. Too many hours over too many years breathing campfire smoke. Stories told and retold. But the thought didn't leave me.

At the border, the Mountie joked, "Put it back, you might need it, eh?" When I showed him my can of bear spray to his request of, "weapons?" I gave him the high sign, and he replied, "Welcome to Canada." I decided to look for the base in the woods.

Whitehorse is a town I wish Fairbanks had remained. It is small, has a center, a college, and sits on the river surrounded by vast public lands. Art is dominant and even the graffiti looks inter-

esting. It is a popular destination for both English and French speaking Canadians seeking a place to make a stake.

Despite the upbeat atmosphere and friendly conversations, nobody seemed to know a thing about the Whitehorse Smokejumpers. At the airport, I traced down some old hangers once used by the Yukon Forest Service and a newer facility of the Yukon Protective Services that now provides wildfire protection for the Territory. At the fire warehouse and air attack base, stories were related of more modern times, many introductions made, invites extended, but no trace or even a memory of jumpers.

Two bomber group pilots directed me to the Yukon Forest Management Branch that replaced the land management side of Yukon Forest Service. Being local private contract, they had been around through some of the changes in government. They pointed out that there was an office of Indian and Northern Affairs there, a last vestige of Federal Forestry in the Yukon, and that the office occupied an old Yukon Forest Service building.



Jump tower at the Whitehorse Smokejumper Base. The Boreal Forest in command. (Courtesy J. Culbertson)

Indeed the building was familiar, still having some look of a combined ranger station, dispatch office, and warehouse with loading dock typical of northern forestry facilities in earlier times. Inside though, the past was gone and all were busy with the business of lands and timber and minerals. I was directed to an information officer who, although new to the job, expressed a desire to uncover the smokejumper story and was quick to point out that jumpers were active in British Columbia. After some thought and digging through old papers in the basement, she directed me to a multi-story general services building across the street where she hoped some former Yukon Forest officers were still employed.

Up and down the hallways I walked, knocked. “Jumpers? Odd, never heard of them. Try Bill upstairs, or is it Jim in Bridges and Mines?” Jim wasn’t there. But a helpful fellow eating his lunch at his desk said, “Gunner Nilsson Research Forest has some old training gear. Hard to find. I wish I could go.” He looked around at his desktop, “Paperwork!” He dug out a map, pointed, “Take a lunch, it’s in there a ways.”

So I stopped for a pack of Uncle Bens and a packet of Hawkins Cheesies, the ubiquitous Canadian snack, then headed up the road. At the edge of town, along the Klondike Highway at the intersection of Tahini Hot Springs Road, was the research forest. Again, nobody knew anything about smokejumpers. “Not here eh?” On the advice of many people I had met that day, I first set up camp at the hot springs campground then returned armed with map, beer, cheesies, rucksack, and struck off with confidence.

I walked through lodgepole Pine Provenance studies, acid rain early warning systems, assisted migration adaptation units, something called the Invertebrate Decomposition Study and eventually, after several kilometers, missed turns, overgrown trails and myriad write-in-the-rain placards bearing detailed notes from graduate students, I arrived at the general area described to me by the helpful desk-bound forester. The Boreal Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Project.

It appeared the Boreal Forest had won. Roads and trails were entirely overgrown so that walking at will and getting a complete view was not an option. Bending to the scientific nature of the place,

I embarked on a targeted transect of sorts, grid-
ding out several hectors of paths of least resistance
via animal trails. I stopped to rustle through my
pack and pulled out the bug dope, “Bens” in the
familiar orange bottle. I wondered if there was a
relationship with the beer I was packing around
with the Cheesies. I munched a few, noting the
indelible orange and red dye on my fingertips. It
seemed like a sign, so I proceeded on course.

A few more squirts of Ben’s, a little back track-
ing, plowing through an overgrown clearing - And
there it was! A jump tower sticking out of the
woods and the boreal forest reclaiming the units
with birch, poplar, pine, spruce and willow. A
picnic table, no doubt the scene of many a jumper
meeting, crumbled as I sat on it. The buildings
were even there. Quonset huts left over from
WWII Alcan Highway construction. I climbed
onto the jump tower and popped an Uncle Ben’s,
called “Just say uncle,” in my best Canadian ac-
cent and lifted my can in toast to those times that
really were.

I sat on the tower till dark taking in the won-
derful sub-arctic light. Drank the second beer,
then pulled out my headlamp and proceeded to
camp.

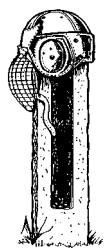
As I bombed down the Alcan Highway in the

following days, I visited the Fort Nelson Spike
Base and the home of the North Peace Jumpers at
Fort Saint John. Canadian Jumpers are alive and
well and growing in British Columbia.

One is struck by the efficiency of the opera-
tion, sewing machines whirring, all manner of
equipment being made or modified. A fire bell
made from an H-cylinder, hit with oriental style
hanging hammer – the whole loft filled with
sound. Jumpers laughing as they play through a
pickup game of stickball on the ready room floor.
This is the spirit we remember from our days as
jumpers.

And at Fort Nelson, something that I thought
I would never see again. A chin-up contest at a
hand-built jump shack. A few derelict fuel bar-
rels scattered about. An FMO that looked like he
could still jump and a boreal forest so vast and
overpowering that another fire call must be just
around the corner. It could have been Galena,
Soldatna, McGrath, Fort Yukon or Dawson. Or,
that place you remember. The names change, but
the faces remain the same. 🔦

*View a fascinating 1964 CBC newsreel made with the
Saskatchewan jumpers at [http://www.cbc.ca/archives/
entry/smokejumpers-get-the-drop-on-forest-fires](http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/smokejumpers-get-the-drop-on-forest-fires)*



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

John W. Brinkerhoff (Missoula '47)

John, 94, died October 5, 2017. After graduat-
ing from Flathead High School in 1941, he joined
the Navy in 1942 and spent three years with the
Seabees in the South Pacific during WWII.

After the war, John graduated from the Univer-
sity of Montana in 1950 with a degree in forestry.
He was called back into the Navy during the
Korean War and served another year and a half.

John began his career with the Forest Service
in 1951 and moved to Missoula in 1963, retir-

ing in 1977. After retirement, he returned to the
Flathead Valley where he would live the rest of his
life. John jumped at Missoula during the 1947-48
seasons.

John W. “Mike” MacKinnon (Missoula '57)

John died October 23, 2017, following com-
plications from heart surgery. He graduated
from the University of Cincinnati in 1958 with
a degree in Industrial Management. While in
college, he joined ROTC and served in the active

and Army reserves for 11 years attaining the rank of Captain.

John jumped at Missoula 1957-62 before moving to Denver, where he worked with Samsonite Co. and the U.S. Small Business Administration. In 1967 he was transferred to Helena, Montana, where he worked until his retirement. He was active in the NSA Trails Program, Helena School District, and the Helena Visitor Center.

A tribute to "Mike" was written by Don Courtney (MSO-56) and published in the January 2018 issue of *Smokejumper*.

Roscoe B. Rowney (Redding '75)

Roscoe died on August 31, 2017, after a year-long battle with cancer. Born in Mariposa, California, in January 1953, Roscoe attended Mariposa County Elementary and High Schools. He graduated from Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, with a degree in Forest Management.

Roscoe began a lifelong career in the fire service working on the Sierra N.F. at the Jerseydale Fire Station. He jumped at Redding from 1975-77, attaining his 50 Jump Pin in 1977. Roscoe received his Professional Forester's license from the State of California and worked for California State Lands Department for approximately two and a half years. In 1980 he started a career with the California Division of Forestry (now CAL FIRE) working in Eureka, King City, Fresno (Region) and Mariposa. Roscoe retired from CAL FIRE as a Division Chief in 2011.

Leas D. Dickey (Redding '61)

Leas died November 21, 2017. He attended Shasta H.S. and Shasta Jr. College in Redding before getting his Bachelor's Degree from Chico State University. He jumped at Redding 1961-67 and 1973.

After graduating from college, he joined the Air Force and became a fixed-wing and helicopter pilot and flew both large transports and helicopters in Vietnam.

Leas then worked for the USFS as a pilot and flew jumpers out of Redmond 1992-96. After retiring, he taught English to non-English speaking people at Rogue Community College in Oregon.

Clarence H. Beavers (PNOR-45)

Clarence died December 4, 2017, in Huntington, New York. He was the last living member of the original Test Platoon of the 555th Parachute Infantry known as the Triple Nickles. He was interred at the Calverton National Cemetery in Calverton, New York.

Clarence was born in Manhattan June 12, 1921, the 15th of 16 siblings. His maternal grandfather was a former slave who fought for the Union in the Civil War. He joined the New York National Guard in 1939 and was drafted into the Army two years later. After his discharge as a staff sergeant, he worked for the Veterans Administration for many years retiring in 1978

Gene W. Hobbs (Idaho City '61)

Gene, 76, died December 26, 2017, after a battle with cancer. He grew up in Boise, attended Boise State Junior College, and graduated from Idaho State University in 1964. Gene later earned his master's degree from the University of Idaho.

He joined the U.S. Army Reserves in 1964 and was called to active duty in 1968 at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Gene began a 31-year teaching career in 1966, working in the Orofino school system as a teacher, coach and principal.

Gene jumped at Idaho City 1961-66 and Fairbanks 1967-68, 1970-73. In 1973, while spotting a load of jumpers in Alaska, his spotter's chute deployed inside the aircraft pulling him through the door. Severely injured, Gene's recovery took months of hospitalization and rehabilitation.

James W. Anderson (Missoula '58)

Jim, 85, died December 22, 2017. He graduated from Memphis State University in 1956 and served in the 82nd Airborne from 1956-58. Jim later earned his Master's Degree in Education Administration from Memphis State. He worked in the Shelby County (TN) school system for thirty-eight years beginning in 1959. Jim started teaching high school history and worked his way up to Superintendent of the school system, where he served twelve years before retiring in 1997. Jim jumped at Missoula 1958-59 and 1961-62.

Greg J. McWade (North Cascades '75)

Greg, 62, died June 27, 2017. He graduated from high school in Gold Beach, Oregon, where he played baseball and ran cross country. Greg jumped at North Cascades in 1975 and got his degree in accounting from Southern Oregon College in 1977.

He started his accounting career with the Arthur Young firm where he spent nine years. In

1990 Greg started his own business, building it up to nearly 500 clients at his passing.

Greg was involved in many boards over the years, but his two passions were Community Vision, an organization that helped physically and mentally challenged adults live and work on their own in group and individual homes, and the Portland Rescue Mission where he served the underprivileged and homeless. 🕯

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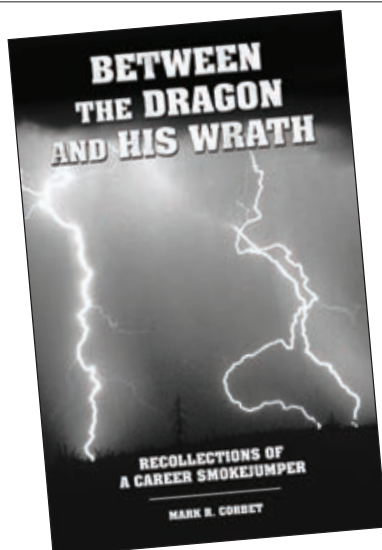
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Top of this license plate frame reads "Jumpin' Fires" while the bottom reads "Smokejumpers." White letters on a black background. **\$3 each, or 2 for \$5**



Historical bases coin makes an outstanding gift

This challenge coin features images of the "round" and "square" parachutes to signify the types of canopies jumpers have used over the decades. The 1¾-inch coin also features the names of all permanent bases around the edge. Inscription on back reads "The greatest job in the world." Order some as gifts for friends!

\$5



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**" was released in 1952.

Starring Richard Widmark. **\$15**



Exhaustive DVD tells the story of smokejumping from beginning

"**Smokejumpers: Firefighters From the Sky**" is a definitive record of smokejumping, featuring 120 minutes of history from 1939 to 2000. Interviews with many former jumpers. **\$10**



ODDS AND ENDS



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to **Kenneth Keefe** (MS-60), **Charlie Yeager** (RAC-65), **John Bernstein** (Assoc.), **Jim Meier** (MSO-55), **Jim Schmidt** (CJ-63), **Ken Poole** (RAC-77), **Bob Bartlett** (Assoc.), **Tara Rothwell** (RAC-92), **Joe Lyons** (MSO-69) and **Frank Just** (MYC-54) who just became our latest Life Members

An update from **Tony Sleznick** (RDD-92):

"Greetings Chuck - This time of year, most of our smokejumper aircraft are in winter maintenance and most of the Bro's are either deep in hibernation or suffering behind sewing machines turning out new ram-air equipment.

"I haven't checked in with you in a while, but it was quite a momentous year for me. I received blessing as a Smokejumper Pilot Captain early last summer, testing out of Redding. This closed a personal goal of mine, roughly nine years in the making. The circumstances were strangely familiar in that the aircraft I flew was N175Z (aka Jumper 51), the same plane I jumped out of as a Rookie some 25 years ago.

"The jump scenario was at Slate Creek, another familiar jump spot I had not seen in 25 years. The trees have grown since my last memory! Everyone made it into the spot just fine under light wind conditions, and I was able to get all cargo on the ground. Anyway, I flew as Captain operationally for the rest of the fire season. It was an active and very smokey summer in Oregon, testing many aspects of our mission.

"The satisfaction of becoming a SJ pilot Captain is still settling in, kind of surreal actually. I thank all those, including the NSA, who supported me throughout my pursuit. Am already looking forward to next year's fire season. Cheers, and thanks again."

Joe Cayou (MSO-59) in note with response to President's Annual Letter: "I look at this con-



tribution as a little payback to the smokejumper organization in helping me get a job with the National Park Service in 1961. I spent 39 years with the Park Service.

"My granddaughter was a recipient of one of the NSA Scholarships several years ago. She is now pursuing a Doctorate at UC Berkeley.

"I continue to enjoy the magazine and still recognize many of the names that come up."

Michael Steppe (IDC-61) is one of the top Doctors of Veterinary Medicine in Southern California and runs the Chino Hills Equine Hospital. He forwarded an email concerning the loss of 46 horses at the San Luis Rey Downs racehorse training facility during the current fire situation. I do not know if a fire plan was developed but it sure does not look like it.

One of the major problems with the rapid spread of the flames was the quick ignition of the palm trees surrounding the property and the dropping of the palm fronds onto the facility.

Does anyone remember the Oakland Fire of 1991 that killed 25 people and destroyed 2800+ homes? One of the major culprits in the spreading of that fire was the very flammable Eucalyptus trees.

Somewhere along the line, people are going to have to realize that having trees and other vegetation near property creates a fire hazard and cuts down your defensible space.

There is an old commercial line that goes "pay me now or pay me later." Can be adjusted to the current fire situation in the west to pay me now (less via planning and prevention) or pay me later (millions spent on suppression and loss).

Amy Sorensen: "I received the December *Smokejumper*. Thank you so much. It really meant A LOT to me to read about my brother (*Chris Sorensen-Associate and writer for the magazine*). Please thank the President for his mention, too."

Bill Fogg (Associate): "Chuck - Just got my copy of the NSA magazine. That cover really looks great with the big, old Ford Trimotor and wagon wheel in the background. However, I am a little prejudiced. (*photo from the Fogg Family collection-Ed.*) I know that both Dad (*Bob Fogg Pioneer Mountain Pilot-Ed.*) and Bob Johnson, who were both flying this Ford at that time, would feel very humbled, but at the same time honored, if they were both with us today. Neither one of them ever sought to be in the spotlight or the news. However, with their type of flying at that time, it was practically unavoidable. To them backcountry flying was the kind of flying challenges that both of them as Pioneer Pilots loved, and it was all in a day's work."

George Harpole (MSO-49) has just published a new book "Lovell Canyon Nevada – From Conquest To Conservation" which is available on Amazon.

It is available for \$7.50 which includes Prime shipping.. 📦

Get *Smokejumper* One Month Earlier

Many NSA members are switching to the digital version of *Smokejumper* delivered by email instead of the printed edition. It is sent as a PDF identical to the hard copy issue.

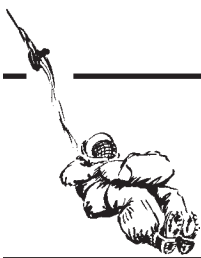
Advantages include early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings.

To request email delivery contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) cnkgsheley@earthlink.net. 📧

New NSA Life Members Since January 2017

Thanks for Your support!

325	EGAN.....	TERRY.....	CAVE JUNCTION.....	1965
326	BLANTON.....	RICK.....	MCCALL.....	1974
327	SHIPLEY.....	JEFF.....	REDMOND.....	2001
328	WILKEN.....	BOB.....	CAVE JUNCTION.....	1978
329	COLLINS.....	STAN.....	MCCALL.....	1967
330	BODDICKER.....	MAJOR.....	MISSOULA.....	1963
331	HANNON.....	GARY.....	MISSOULA.....	1960
332	RICE.....	LYLE.....	REDDING.....	1965
333	ROBERTS.....	JIM.....	CAVE JUNCTION.....	1962
334	STERLING.....	JOE.....	MISSOULA.....	1973
335	ADAMS.....	LARRY.....	MISSOULA.....	1967
336	LANCASTER.....	JIM.....	MCCALL.....	1962
337	KEEFE.....	KENNETH.....	MISSOULA.....	1960
338	YEAGER.....	CHARLIE.....	REDMOND.....	1965
339	BERNSTEIN.....	JOHN.....	ASSOCIATE.....	
340	MEIER.....	JAMES.....	MISSOULA.....	1955
341	SCHMIDT.....	JIM.....	CAVE JUNCTION.....	1963
342	JUST.....	FRANK.....	MCCALL.....	1954
343	POOLE.....	KEN.....	REDMOND.....	1977
344	BARTLETT.....	BOB.....	ASSOCIATE.....	
345	ROTHWELL.....	TARA.....	REDMOND.....	1992
346	LYONS.....	JOSEPH.....	MISSOULA.....	1968



BLAST FROM THE PAST



Fire Fighter Flies Like Bird

by Jack Demmons

(Missoula '50)

From the Daily Missoulian

November 15, 1949

A FOREST SERVICE firefighter has learned to fly like a bird—a little bit, that is.

Bob Nolan, a smokejumper for the Siskiyou National Forest, glided 300 yards through the air by waving homemade wings. He had to use a parachute to alight, though.

The “wings” were made of nylon webbing: one sheet attached between his legs, and




the other fastened to his wrists and hips.

He leaped from a plane at 6,000 feet altitude in a test conducted near the Redwoods Ranger Station of the Siskiyou N.F.

Manipulating the webbing,

he glided for about 300 yards, losing altitude, but moving against the wind.

Then he opened his parachute and came down the regulation way. 

Bob was a squadleader at the Cave Junction base and jumped 1947-50. He won a national championship in the early days of “skydiving” and jumped county fairs and other events in southern Oregon. Given the choice to give up skydiving or smokejumpers by the Forest Service, Bob quit and started the successful Nolan Logging Company in the land of the big trees. (Ed.)



Historic Photo Cave Junction 1953 crew. (Courtesy J. Dollard)