

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
JANUARY 2019

# SMOKEJUMPER

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## Message from the President



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

IN MY LAST message to you—in the October 2018 edition—we were in the process of selecting the individuals to receive the 2018 NSA scholarship awards. The selections were completed, and those awarded the scholarships are now hard at their studies. I want to introduce them to you with excerpts from their applications.

*Lee Boyle (MYC-15) is an active McCall smokejumper enrolled at the Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine, located in Las Cruces, N.M. Lee wrote in his application:*

As a physician, I will be in a position to positively impact others and my community. I've spent my entire life in service, fighting fire and volunteering in my community, while studying to eventually become a doctor. I've realized my happiest, most fulfilling times involve helping others. Assisting family,

friends, and complete strangers has helped me in difficult times and stressful situations. It is a simple formula, but the more I help, the better I feel. This odd, self-serving selflessness is at the core of my endeavors. I wish to help the underserved, and the places I've lived, worked, and traveled have shown a dire need for medical assistance.

*Robert Rosenthal (NCSB-10) jumped during 2010-17 at North Cascades and is studying dental surgery at University of Washington School of Dentistry. He wrote in his application:*

I chose the University of Washington's RIDE (Regional Initiatives in Dental Education) program because it seemed to embody the same core mission of the jump program – protecting and improving the lives of rural communities. Its purpose is to increase the number of rural dentists in eastern Washington, Montana, Idaho and Alaska. Accordingly, the eight students who are accepted into the highly competitive RIDE program per year are trained on the east side of Washington and fulfill their clinical training at rural community clinics. While ranchers, miners, loggers, farmers, and laborers all have teeth, the members of these noble careers are much more than their teeth. These professionals carry out laborious work for their communities and are often

faced with a lack of connection to their health care professionals. With me as their dentist, they will have a health care professional in their life who can relate to their work.

**Justin Horn (RDD-03)** *rookied at Redding and jumped for 14 years. He is enrolled in the nursing program at Flathead Valley Community College and wrote:*

I am completing the remaining prerequisite courses for the Registered Nursing Program that is available here at Flathead Valley Community College. I will be starting the two-year Associate in Nursing Program in the Fall 2018 semester. My plan is to continue working as a paramedic with the fire department, which will elevate my medical skills while attending nursing school. Eventually, I see myself working in the emergency room or the intensive care

unit. There are many similarities with nursing and wildland fire. Nurses often make critical decisions based on experience and knowledge. There are endless opportunities to excel in a variety of areas. The satisfaction that you earn by helping a person face possibly the most difficult fight of his/her life is difficult to explain, but it is what nurses do every day.

**Taylor Schiltz** *is a full-time graduate student in Elementary Education at the University of Montana. She writes:*

My husband, **Caleb Allen-Schmid (MSO-15)**, is a fourth year smokejumper in Missoula. I landed a position as a teacher's aide at Clark Fork School. Teaching felt natural and I loved how classrooms act as a blank slate. Educators harness the potential to paint their classrooms with wonderful things like positivity, curiosity, inclusivity and empathy. But, the magic goes beyond this. One day I watched a seemingly uninterested student struggle with math. After offering another explanation to him, the abstract concept "clicked" and the following day, the child danced through his assignment, engaged and excited. Wonderful moments like these, combined with my love for kids and deep moral understanding that I want to dedicate my life to helping people around me, are the reasons why I am working towards my master's in education. I can hardly wait to teach!

**Cody Skinner (NIFC-11)** *jumped out of Boise during 2011-15 and is enrolled at the University of Wyoming in Civil Engineering. He wrote:*

Flying from fire to fire, whether admiring the vastness in Alaska or the rocky terrain in Nevada, I always remembered looking down to the rivers and streams and admiring their laminar flow from above as it meanders about, creating a path into the distance. Like a river, life meanders and flows changing its course throughout its journey. I am still interested and have been studying water courses since returning to school, but I am not working on a master's degree in Hydrology. Instead, I am pursuing a second bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Wyoming, with my focus being on water resource engineering. In the engineering profession, each job has a project manager who oversees the entirety of the project. This includes, but is not limited to, talking to and fulfilling the

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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

client's wishes, keeping on task the engineers who are working on the project, and keeping track of the logistics – all while trying to stick to a budget and a timeline. While I will not get to become a project manager for several years after graduation, it is a goal of mine, and I feel that I can use my previous years as a smokejumper to my benefit in the engineering profession.

**Julian Dow** *is the son of a former jumper and is enrolled at Washington State University. He wrote:*

In my senior year of high school at Naches Valley High, I was elected the ASB president, and so was placed in a constant leadership role. When I first took office, I discovered very quickly that the best way to be an effective leader was to personally connect with each social demographic in my school. The stereotype that high schools are socially segregated, and cliquey to the extreme, holds up very well in the real world. Connecting and establishing relationships with each group, and the individuals within them, was the only sure way to make their voices heard within the ASB board. This meant a lot of my time was occupied by getting to know people whom I wouldn't otherwise meet. I learned that simply sitting down and starting a conversation – about anything, really – was the only sure way to properly represent the concerns of my peers. Once I graduate from WSU, I hope to use my degree to join the Army Corps of Engineers. My eventual goal is to use my professional experience to volunteer for Engineers Without Borders. As a child I knew that whatever I ended up doing, I wanted to help the less fortunate. EWB will allow me to use my love of mechanics to improve the infrastructure of impoverished nations.

**Ryan Cherry** *is the grandson of a former jumper and enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville in Computer Engineering. He wrote:*

I have built and sold a number of computers, counseled friends and family on the best computers and accessories to buy for certain budgets, attempted to teach myself Python and JavaScript, and coded a few minor projects, and even used this knowledge to help with my senior-level engineering class project. For the better part of a semester, the class was

completely devoted to creating a product to solve some problem we had identified in the world. My knowledge of computers and limited knowledge of programming helped me and my teammates to successfully design and prototype a solution that helps to increase traffic visibility when driving, decreasing traffic-related accidents. I look forward to receiving a structured education in this field and receiving a degree. One reason that I greatly wanted to pursue my love of computers in college is because this is a growing field in our world. I like to look at it as a growing opportunity to help people. Earlier in high school, I told myself and others that the one thing I wanted more than anything else was to change the world. And though that dream has not left me, I now understand how improbable that is. But what I understand now, looking at my life experiences, is that you don't have to change the world to make a difference. While I may not be able to affect the whole world, I have found that it is often more satisfying to help individuals you have met, even if only on trivial matters or only for a day. This scholarship would help me to be able to focus on my classes, which in turn would help me learn more about the world and field of computers, which in turn will enable me to be better able to help people. And who knows? Maybe I will do something that changes the world, something that lights a spark in others. 🔦

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*“To all our scholarship winners for the 2018–19 school year, we wish the very best and are confident that all of them will do nothing less than change the part of the world they touch, and that they will light a spark in others.”*

*—Jim Cherry, president*

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## NSA Scholarships 2018

*Photos Courtesy Recipients*



**Justin Horn**



**Lee Boyle**



**Taylor Schiltz**



**Cody Skinner**



**Robert Rosenthal**



**Julian Dow**



**Ryan Cherry**

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

# Achieving Resilient Forests Through Effective Biomass Uses: Part I

by Michael Rains

This is the first of a three-part series about the role of biomass uses in helping achieve healthy, sustainable forests that can be more resilient to disturbances, such as wildland fires. Biomass use is the outcome of restorative actions that represents active forest management. A dictionary definition says biomass is "... a renewable energy source from living or recently living plant and animal materials which can be used as fuel."

I have always looked at biomass as the "woody biomass" that is part of a forested ecosystem. And, when this biomass is sustainably removed, forests are healthier and a growing America prospers from productive forestland and a wide range of products, including clear air and water, diverse and abundant wildlife, wood products, and recreation opportunities.

My background is in forestry. I am a professional registered forester. So, when I think of sustainably removing biomass from our forests, I think of actions such as merchantable timber harvesting, thinning for stand improvement, the salvage of dead and dying trees, and the removal of hazardous fuels.

Accordingly, the uses of these biomass removals represent a wide range of wood products, including traditional lumber, wood for energy, and pulp for paper.

Recently, biomass uses have turned to more innovative solutions such as wood-based nanotechnology; "green" building construction, including advanced composite materials; and certain aspects of energy production, such as torrefaction, which removes moisture and volatiles from woody biomass, leaving bio-coal, an advanced, more-efficient form of wood for energy.

In this three-part series, I will try to highlight some of these new innovations in biomass uses that have the potential for high-value, high-volume, economically viable products, such as improved concrete when cellulose nanomaterials

are added to cement.

However, the real brass ring we should be searching for is effective fire management that results from aggressive forest management. Biomass uses are a critical part of any aggressive forest management strategy. Simply put, we can't fix the current fire situation we are witnessing across our country, especially in the West, without first fixing the forests.

Currently, we are facing what many consider to be the greatest conservation issue of our time. Wildfires are destroying America's landscapes. But, there is a way out of this dilemma.

That is, America's forestlands – especially our publicly owned national forests – need aggressive management so that wildfires remain smaller, less destructive and begin again to be a tool for improved forest health as opposed to destructive behemoths that destroy lives, communities and landscapes.

To be clear, over the last 30 years, America's forests have *not* been well-maintained, are becoming clogged up, and are actually contributing to large fires that are very hard to put out. We need to turn this around through restorative actions.

Again, biomass uses – and their associated markets – are outcomes from restorative actions to our forests and are fundamental to the success of sound forest management.

## Introduction

During my time with the Forest Service, I was not part of what I called the formal "fire organization." My fire experiences, as one person noted, "were limited." That is true. However, in a career that spanned almost 50 years, I often intersected with those in fire.

For example, in 1999, while director of the Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry, I was asked to lead an analysis of the Kirk and Big Bar Fire complexes, in which \$178 million



Michael Rains (Courtesy M. Rains)

and 227,000 acres were consumed in total. The costs—viewed as alarmingly high at that time—represented 30 percent of the Forest Service’s total fire-suppression expenditures for that year.

In 2001, I intersected again with wildland fire as the lead author of *Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment*—also, known as the National Fire Plan. A critical element of the plan was that hazardous fuels reduction will improve forest health and increase resiliency to disturbances, such as fire.

I concluded that a cornerstone to a successful hazardous fuel reduction program was the expansion and new development of high-value markets from this low-value wood. We thought then (and now) that by creating cost-effective ways to enable enough hazardous fuels to be removed from America’s forests, wildfires would remain smaller and begin again to be a tool for improved forest health.

In serving as deputy chief for the Forest Service’s State and Private Forestry mission area, detailed discussions about “improved fire management” were commonplace. Although the notion that the agency needed to create cost-effective

ways to enable enough hazardous fuels to be removed from America’s forests—so wildfires could be more manageable—was widely accepted, real change was, and continues to be, marginal.

## Hazardous fuels

At the time when the National Fire Plan was written, there were about 38 million acres on our National Forests considered to be at high risk from destructive wildfires. Today, the estimate is 80 million acres. So, after spending about \$5 billion on hazardous-fuels treatments since 2001, today there are 42 million additional acres at high risk to fire on our national forests!

To be fair, part of the issue is the level of funding for and treatment-area focus on hazardous fuel removal. When the National Fire Plan was written, it was thought that about \$850 million annually was required to more effectively address the issue of hazardous fuel removal.

More recently, in 2013, the General Accounting Office (GAO) concluded it would take about \$69 billion over a 16-year period—\$4.3 billion each year. Relying on taxpayer dollars, the Forest Service has managed an average of about \$300 million annually for hazardous fuel treatment.

To perhaps overstate the obvious, one cannot address a problem of this magnitude with such excessively inadequate resources—money and lack of markets—and not targeting only the highest priority areas.

## A Destructive Trend Continues

Almost continually during the last two decades, we are seeing the devastating impacts of fires with lives lost, homes destroyed, and millions of acres blackened.

Recently, the Carr Fire in Northern California was declared 100 percent contained. In its wake, this *one* fire killed 6 people, burned almost 230,000 acres, destroyed 1,077 homes, caused \$1.658 billion in damages, and cost \$158 million to put out.

There are currently five active fires in California and 80 large fires across the country, burning almost 2 million acres. So far in 2018, 47,623 fires have burned 7,182,984 acres. The fire season is far from over. The destruction will continue.

In a recent letter to the President of the United



States, I concluded: "... if you want the wildfires to slow and become less destructive, you have to emphasize forest management." At a recent Cabinet meeting, the president spoke about the need to improve the *maintenance* of the forests, and Department of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke stated that the current situation of uncontrollable wildfires is due to "gross mismanagement (of the forests) for decades."

Actually, what Zinke said is not true. It is not *mismanagement*. It is little or no management. I worked for the Forest Service for almost half a century. Nobody knows how to manage forests better than the Forest Service. But, "... you cannot do when you do not have."

Forests cover about one-third of the United States – about 885 million acres, including the 138 million acres of urban forests. The Forest Service has some type of stewardship role on about 80 percent of these forests and thus has a unique role and responsibility to help create healthy, sustainable forests that are more resilient to disturbances so the linkage between environmental health and community stability can be more fully realized. America is looking to the Forest Service for leadership and help.

## **Additional Funding Requirements**

To deliver this help correctly and efficiently, additional funds are required, by my estimate, more than \$2.2 billion each year, beginning now. If this is done, our forests will begin to be healthy and more resilient to disturbances, now and ahead.

Goods and services from these forests will increase. And, the incredible damages to people and their property we are witnessing in real time, across the country, will decline.

I fully understand that an increase of \$2.2 billion in the annual appropriation for the Forest Service may seem significant. But, the amount is small when compared to the losses America's taxpayers are experiencing each year in wildfire-related damages to infrastructure, public health, and natural resources – \$70 to \$350 billion.

It is estimated that well-managed forests could help reduce fire suppression costs by as much as

23 percent. This year, it is projected that about \$5 billion will be spent on wildfire suppression. Thus, well-maintained forests will save more than a billion dollars each year in just firefighting costs.

Projecting this to reduced damages for the American people – in the range of \$10 to \$50 billion annually—the benefit to cost of sound forest management is overwhelming. Simply put, it makes great economic sense to invest in aggressive forest management.

## **Investment Strategy**

During my career with the Forest Service, which began as a wildland firefighter in California, I had the privilege of working in every major mission area of the agency: National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, Research and Development, and Business Operations. This allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the many components of the Forest Service land stewardship mission and where investments can be best targeted for maximum gains.

Accordingly, here is how I think an additional forest management investment of more than \$2.2 billion should be targeted:

- \$97 million for "federally assisted state programs [the Forest Stewardship Program]" to address "... strengthening the stewardship of private lands," as recently stated by Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue.
- \$600 million for hazardous fuels reduction, bringing the overall level for the Forest Service to about \$938 million.
- \$26 million for fire science and technology development, including defensible space protection in the wildland-urban interface.
- \$45 million for the cooperative fire programs.
- \$14 million for forest health protection – specifically, invasive species control.
- \$1.385 billion for management actions on the national forests.
- \$33 million for biomass uses that include wood-based nanotechnology – cellulose nanomaterials – specifically addressing low-value wood, such as hazardous fuel.

## **Biomass Uses Investment**

The last item mentioned above, the \$33 mil-



lion for biomass uses, offers an incredible forest maintenance opportunity. Finding economically viable uses for forest biomass from hazardous fuels reduction and other forest restoration activities has been identified by Forest Service land managers as one of the most important barriers to overcome to help ensure our forests are more resilient to disturbances.

By creating high-value, high-volume markets for a wide-range of biomass uses, we enable enough hazardous fuels to be removed from America's forests so wildfires remain smaller, less intense and begin again to be a tool for improved forest health. 🌲

## Next Stop

In Part II, I will discuss a suite of potentially high-value, high-volume biomass uses in more detail:

- Wood-based nanotechnology
- Green building construction through advanced composites
- Torrefaction

In Part III, I will discuss "Now Is Our Time," then draw some conclusions to consider.

*References for this article are available upon request.*

### FUEL REDUCTION SPECIAL ARTICLE

# Four Decades Of Forest Thinning And Fuel Reduction On Cielo Colorado

by Murry A. Taylor (Redding '65)

“Hey, you knucklehead. Not *that* side of the line – the *other* side,” I yelled down the hill, wringing my hands and wishing smokejumpers had better (or, in some cases, any) listening skills. That moment remains seared into my burn boss brain to this day.

Minutes before, I had just given a thorough briefing on our plan – who would light what, where, and who would hold this and that with pump, hose, or shovel.

Once I'd finished, my crew bolted off down the hill eager to see smoke, fire – whatever. And that's when it happened – one of my best buddies, ex-smokejumper and retired FMO (name withheld), took his drip torch and lit our burn on the wrong side of our control line.

No doubt, while I was covering the critical details of my burn plan, my burn pals were contemplating other details, such as whether to have two or three beers with lunch.

Once our crew had heroically contained the offside fire and I had regained my senses, my buddy lit the right side and we had a successful burn of about two acres. Moral of the story: Burning on

your land can be risky.

Other sordid tales aside, my 40 acres of ponderosa and sugar pine, Douglas fir, incense cedar, and some white fir have received a bunch of good work from jumpers down through the years. My land, Cielo Colorado (Colored Sky in Spanish), is named for its pastel pink, yellow, and orange sunsets in the fall. It's in Siskiyou County, Calif., mid-point on the Oregon border in beautiful Scott Valley right on the eastern edge of the Marble Mountains.

Siskiyou County is also home to the Klamath National Forest; thus, I've had to hunker in the shadow of that forest's catastrophic fires of the past 10 years.

When I moved here in 1975, we had fires typical of pre-drought times. Then came 1977 and the Hog Fire. Since then a fifth of the Klamath has been burned in a pitiful demonstration of wrong-headed, “too steep and too rough,” back-off and slack-off firefighting. At times – especially in the last five years – those fires put people like me in peril of being burned completely out, losing everything – my home, my community, a life's work.

So, as you might imagine, I'm glad I did what I

did over the years to make my land more fire safe. The work began immediately after purchase – felling snags, collecting firewood, thinning small stands of reproduction, and burning burn piles. As a graduate forester, I saw right off the need for a whole lot of labor-intensive forestry work.

My land has roughly 30 acres of moderately steep hillside with about 10 acres of flat along the creek. It had been logged lightly a couple times, the logs used to make lumber for a few homes that belonged to an extended old-time family. Logging left a moderate amount of slash and general forest debris, mostly on the flat part.

For the next 35 years, I thinned and piled and burned mostly on my own, averaging between 55 and 65 piles (four feet high and six feet wide) per year. Doing the math, that equals around 2,100 piles. Meanwhile, I broadcast-burned three to four acres, twice.

Now and then I had help with that. But one night, alone, around 11 o'clock, a wind came out of nowhere. My creeping ground fire with one-foot flame lengths suddenly went to three and four feet, covering two and a half acres, and burning two cords of stacked firewood. Good thing the burn was inside two roads where I could hold it. Still, it was silly and reckless and I learned not to burn alone after that experience.

By 2010 I had accomplished the burning mentioned above, was 69, and had accepted that I'd never see Cielo Colorado get the treatment it needed. Then came some good news: The Natural Resources Conservation Service had EQIP, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

I applied for and was awarded a \$20,800 grant to thin, pile, and burn 20 acres. The rest is history.

Working together, the forester and I divided the 20 into four units. We then marked it, using 10- to 20-foot spacing between trees. I thinned and piled unit three (three and a half acres) myself. A local contract crew did the rest of the cutting and piling.

My jumper bros and I did all the burning – approximately 1,500 piles total. In 2016 we did 550 piles, hitting the burn window just right. The out-of-pocket cost to me was around \$2,000 – the food/refreshments for the four “work parties” held during the five years of the contract.

I recently contacted the NRCS office in nearby Yreka and learned the program is still available. Not

sure where you live but it's worth a check.

Seeing what I was doing encouraged my neighbor, who applied and received more than \$150,000 to do the same on his 140 acres. I can't tell you how much difference it's made. The sun shines down through the forest, grass is growing, mountain lilies have returned, and most importantly, the land has responded with increased tree vigor and overall forest health.

As a result, we have nearly no bug kill, even with the drought. Also, of course, is the feeling of being better protected from wildfire.

The guidelines to thinning property and cleaning out around your home for fire safety are online or available from any fire agency. With our ongoing big fires so threatening, I've put in a home protection system at the house, comprising of a 4.5-horsepower Honda pressure pump, fittings, nozzles, 400 feet of inch hose, and 200 of pencil line. I (for years) have had a three-quarter-ton pickup fire unit, 250 gallons, another 4.5-horsepower Honda pump, and about the same hose complement.

Having the pickup pumper has been a good deal when burning with the bros. Not that it gives them more courage; it just gives me more confidence.

The story of my land was featured in the July issue of *New Pioneer* magazine this summer. The article is entitled, “A Smokejumper's Log Home.”

The article tells the story in more detail – the whys and wherefores kind of stuff. A photo of my back deck is the cover and there are several photos. The writer, Paul Fattig, has enjoyed a long friendship with the Cave Junction smokejumpers. Paul heard about me through them.

Things have changed in the wildfire world. When I moved here 43 years ago, I didn't live in a fire regime. Now I do. Many of us do. This summer was another driving home the point that we are living in different times regarding wildfire.

Every evening it was on the news and in the papers. Afternoon after afternoon, I saw giant plumes from Duzel Rock Lookout. It's time for everyone to consider stepping up. If you're inclined to do the right thing for your land, your community, and your peace of mind, I suggest you take a good look at fuel reduction on your property. Hardly any work is more satisfying.

And I like to say, “What's good for the forest is good for all of us.” 🌲





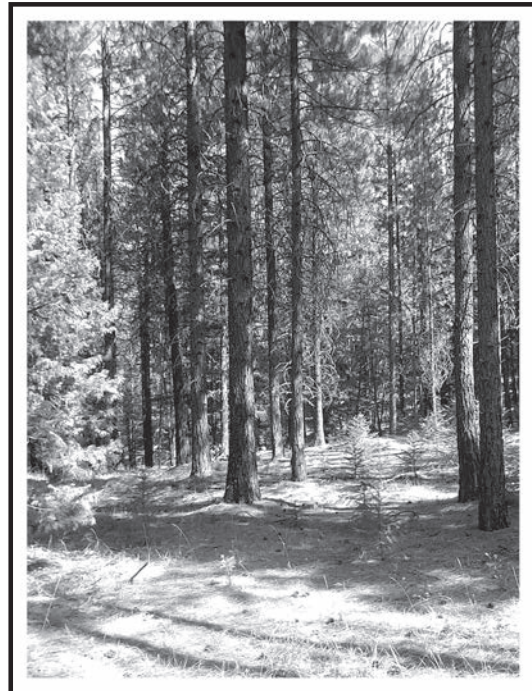
## Four Decades of Forest Thinning & Fuel Reduction



*Photos Courtesy Murry Taylor*



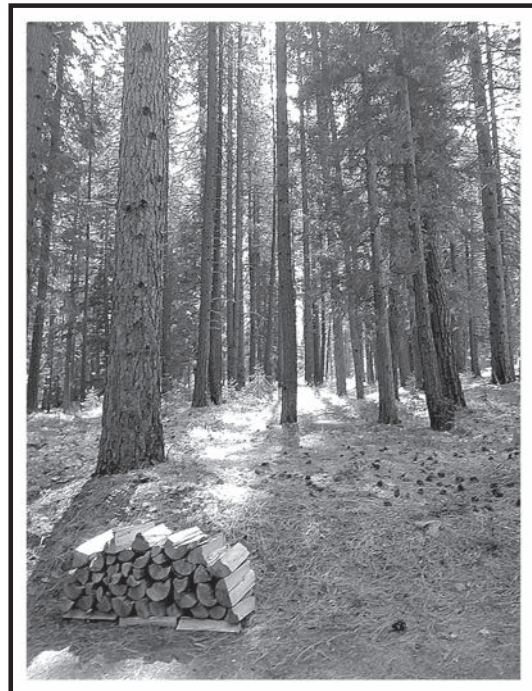
**Area Prior To Thinning**



**Thinned, Piled & Burned  
Note Natural Reproduction**



**Note Natural Ground Cover  
Reproduction**



**Thinned With Natural Reproduction**

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

# The Beauty Of Clearcutting

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

I enjoyed great success in clearcutting. This silvicultural system will optimize production, reduce conflicts with timber purchasers and prepare the site for ease in the burning of slash.

I first learned the art and science of timber management and clearcutting in North Idaho on the Kaniksu National Forest at Bonners Ferry. In response to a variety of forest conditions from insect and disease to fire and ice storms, we often secured approval to exceed the 40-acre size limitation.

Many of our clearcuts were more than 100 acres in size. I was never disappointed in the results.

The first grizzly bear I ever saw was in the middle of a recently harvested clearcut. The first hibernating black bear I ever saw was sleeping the winter away under a root rod next to an active skid trail. To log a clearcut was like ringing the dinner bell for the surrounding wildlife.

I ended my career on the Shoshone National Forest in Wyoming where we utilized large clearcuts to, in essence, save and regenerate old aspen stands that were dying due to conifer takeover. We achieved amazing results through clearcutting. I am proud to say that my last day in the Forest Service was spent laying out a clearcut.

## History

A district ranger north of us at Dubois, Wyo., told me years ago that an old forester came in to visit and see some of the 1,000-acre clearcuts they had planned and harvested in the 1960s.

The forester felt remorse at the size and scope of the cuttings. It bothered him throughout his career. Now he was back to see the effects.

Upon returning from the field, he told the ranger, "Forget about what I said. Those clearcuts are beautiful."

Right he was—not only for the openings and trees that had now been pre-commercially thinned, but the clearcuts had made for some of the best grizzly bear habitat in the United States.

So many grizzly bears, in fact, that I told one U.S. Fish and Wildlife employee that you wouldn't go in there without a .45-70 rifle and a case of bear spray.

After the ranger relayed the story I got to thinking about the clearcutting controversy and where it began. I called the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia. In short, some very influential politicians were upset that the Forest Service had clearcut their turkey hunting area.

In response, congress passed the National Forest Management Act, saddling the Forest Service with the proverbial "900-pound gorilla."

I made a statement to Monongahela. "I bet those clearcuts that started the entire controversy are unnoticeable today. I bet the clearcuts are totally recovered and are beautiful stands of timber today." Monongahela replied, "Well, yes, they are."

I replied, "So, why don't you publicize the cutting units with photographs and stories about the beauty of clearcutting?"

There was a pause. Monongahela replied, "Well, that would be too controversial." Okey dokey—how do you respond to that? Too controversial to end a controversy? The science of forestry loses—politicians win?

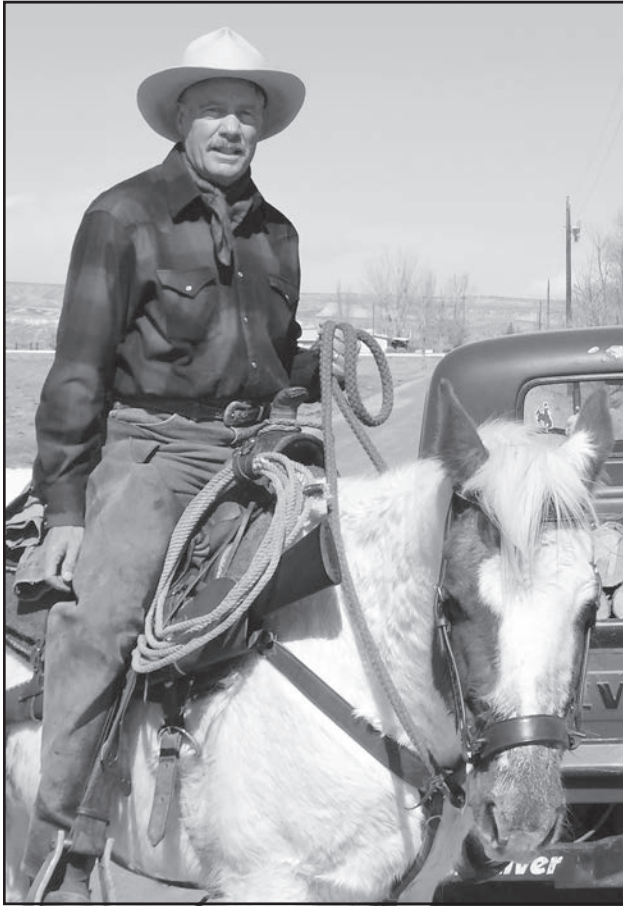
## Sale preparation

First and foremost you need to know how to get the logs out. A forester must know the transportation and logging systems to prescribe. Next comes unit layout and the proper stand prescription and follow up treatments. It takes years to learn this art and science.

For example, I had laid out a timber sale with dozer piling planned for a specific unit. I later changed the plan to broadcast burn the slash after observing soil compaction on adjacent units that were dozer piled.

When the fire management officer looked at the unit to burn, he came over to me and asked, "Browneyes, just what in the hell are





*"Straight from the horse's mouth" (Courtesy K. Brauneis)*

you thinking?"

I told him about the soil-compaction issue. He said okay—you are now the holding crew boss on the dogleg you put in for me to burn.

I ate a lot of smoke and humble pie that day. Unfortunately, my crew had to suffer along with me.

## Silvicultural Treatments

A forester can prescribe a variety of silvicultural treatments. To regenerate a stand, I have often used the Seed Tree (example—1 seed tree left every 75 feet), Shelterwood (example—1 seed tree left every 40 feet to both seed and shelter the site) and Clearcut systems. In both the seed tree and shelterwood systems, the reserve trees must be protected during logging and have a thick bark resistant to fire during the followup slash treatments. Good examples of leave trees are Western Larch, Douglas-fir and Ponderosa Pine.

The end product of both the seed tree and shelterwood systems are to regenerate the stand. Once the site is regenerated, the reserve trees are

removed at around year ten. At year 20, all three systems should look the same. If the clearcut will give you the same result as the seed tree or shelterwood, then I would prescribe the clearcut. It is much easier to manage a clearcut during harvest, site preparation and follow up treatments. One aspect of clearcut layout is to be aware of the distance of the seed wall to the center of unit. The idea is fully stock the unit with natural regeneration. Either system can also be supplemented with planted stock from the nursery. Key to know is that much time and thought is put into the planned harvest of cutting units. It is not a haphazard process.

There are opportunities for selection systems, but those opportunities are few in much of the mid and northwestern national forests. Most often, we went into stands that were selectively harvested and prescribed clearcuts to rehabilitate the sites.

In actuality, these stands were economically high-graded to remove the best trees years ago. Now, we were left with suppressed and damaged hemlock and cedar. Through clear cutting we could restore the site to a beautiful mixed conifer stand. We could also plant a variety of rust-resistant white pine from the tree nursery in Coeur d'Alene.

To watch western white pine grow in a north Idaho clearcut is truly a thing of beauty.

## Forest ecology

For convenience and length of article I will describe just one system: western lodgepole pine, from my last duty station on the Shoshone.

Lodgepole pine has a long fire-frequency interval (100 or more years) and a high fire-intensity level that results in a stand replacement fire. Trees grow to the age of about 100 and then send off signals: *We are mature and ready to die.*

Endemic pine beetle populations pick up the signals and transition to epidemic. They attack, girdle and kill the trees. Wind then blows down the dead trees and sets up the stand for a high-intensity stand replacement fire.

Serotinous cones (cones that are covered with a resin that must be melted for the cone to open and release seeds) open with the heat of fire and seed the area. Often, this results in a tightly

spaced or crowded regeneration, resulting in “dog hair stands” or “broomsticks” in 120 years. Often a second burn will take place in about 40 years when all of the snags have fallen to set up a reburn. This further sets back the stand back in time.

## Lodgepole Pine Management

Let's look at the steps of the conservation model in the management of lodgepole pine. At age 100, when the trees succumb to beetles, the stand is clearcut. Local jobs are provided in the forest and the local town. We estimated on the Kaniksu, that about nine people or jobs benefit directly and indirectly from each million board feet of timber harvested.

We use to carry millions and millions of dollars in funds generated from funds collected through timber sale receipts that pay for planting, thinning and sale area betterment. Brush Disposal crews made up a huge part of the firefighting force. They were paid out of money from timber sale receipts while on district work and then switched to a fire code while on fire.

At Bonners Ferry, Idaho, we could field two 20-man crews on any given day. You can see what happened to our ready-made firefighting force with the loss of the timber programs.

Next, the unit is broadcast burned to prepare the seedbed. Regeneration surveys follow and the stand will be pre-commercial thinned at around year 20 to achieve about an 8-foot-by-8-foot spacing. The dominant and co-dominant trees are left and the suppressed trees cut.

The next cut is a commercial harvest at year 60 for post and pole material. Small sawlogs can be cut at year 80. At all harvest points, diseased or damaged trees are removed. The stand is left healthy with large diameter trees growing. These trees can now continue to grow to age 120 before the cycle is repeated.

## Fire Suppression

Fire suppression becomes a key component in the protection of the managed stand. Fire suppression is a non-player in the view of many unless, of course, it affects the individual directly.

When homes and property burn, there is an outcry. But, the cry soon fades with the passing

fire season and the insurance adjustment payments.

I have witnessed homes destroyed by fire and rebuilt on exactly the same site. One home in Colorado was destroyed first by fire, then by flood and then by fire. It was rebuilt a third time on the same site.

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*This brief summary is written to get you thinking. How can we use our knowledge and stewardship of the land to benefit our fellow man? What role does fire play? Examine the conservation model of Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot.*

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## Forest Management

Forestry is both an art and a science that requires great skill to implement to achieve positive results. On the national forests it requires a professional Civil Service Corps that hires and promotes based solely on merit.

It requires a leadership that is knowledgeable and supportive of the field officers. It also requires a Congress that can actively evaluate and change or rescind the laws they pass. A Congress of absentee landlords is neither helpful nor beneficial to the management of our national forests.

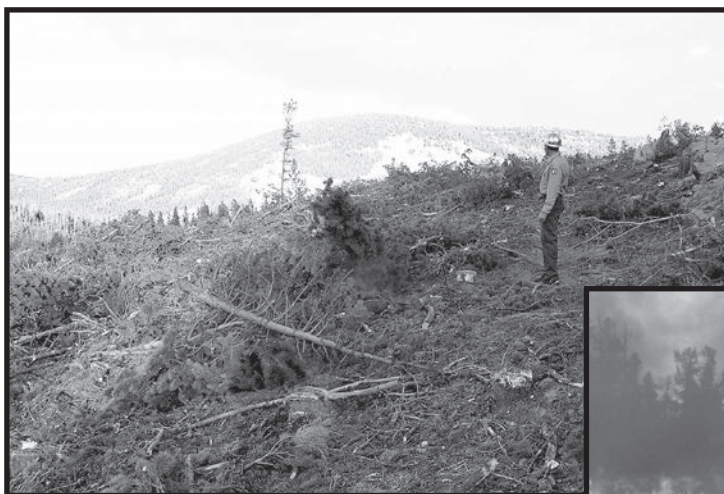
For further discussion, you can reach me at [brauneis@bresnan.net](mailto:brauneis@bresnan.net). 📧





# Lizard Head Clearcut Project Shoshone National Forest

*Photos Courtesy Karl Brauneis*



**Karl Brauneis at Lizard Head Clearcut**



**Burn Boss Brauneis at Clearcut**



**Lodgepole Pine Regeneration**



**Lizard Head Clearcut 18 Years Later**

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

# To Manage Or Not

by Jim Cherry (Missoula '57)

In mid-August my son and I took a trip to northeastern Minnesota to visit a camp I once directed. The sky was white (not blue) and the sunsets were red—all from the smoke of the massive fires burning over 1,500 miles to our west.

Along the way, we took a side trip to visit a former neighbor from where I had owned 120 acres of forestland and where I had built a log cabin. That land is where the Great Hinkley Fire of 1894 and the Cloquet/Duluth and Moose Lake Fires of 1918 came together. The Hinkley Fire consumed over 400 square miles and killed over 418 people. The Cloquet/Duluth and Moose Lake Fires burned over 1500 square miles and killed over 450 people. Both fires were the aftermath of a lack of forest and land management that allowed for the “cut and run” logging practice of that time. That virgin pine forest is now gone, and it has been replaced with hardwoods.

Back in 1982 I had sold 40 acres of that forestland to my neighbor and sold the other 80 acres to another buyer. When visiting my former

neighbor, it was gratifying to see that the property has been maintained and is being put to good use. I told him that there was a time when I would wake up at night with the thought that the land was maybe being divided into small parcels with junky hunting shacks and trailers being put on it. Thankfully, that's not the case, and it was good to also hear that he has been fighting against that kind of land abuse.

I was greatly impressed. I can truly say that I have never seen a better looking hardwood forest. His management is really working well. He has been doing selective harvesting and has used horses to skid logs to avoid damage to the standing trees and the soil. He has achieved a sustained yield with a healthy, vigorous forest.

I was amazed at how little brush there was. The forest was almost park-like, and a person would be able to move through it with little effort. Given the number of deer that we saw in the middle of the day, it is also apparent that the wildlife is thriving. He has been a good “steward” of the land. 🌲

## Sometimes It Takes a Thump Along The Side Of Your Head To Catch the Obvious –The 1976 Fire Season As Seen From My Eyes—Part I

by Dick Rath (Missoula '73)

My brother Tom (MSO-71) and I were born and raised outside a small rural town in eastern South Dakota. Our parents owned a multi-generational family farm and our dad worked as a trainman for the Mil-

waukee Railroad. Dad was a hard worker and did all he could to instill that characteristic in all of his children.

Tom and I, being the oldest sons, became dad's fulltime sidekicks. We worked on the never-

ending laundry list of projects that comes with owning a farm. Most of these projects were “pick and shovel” oriented, with our dad working alongside of us. Quite often, dad would use these work sessions to impart his hard-earned wisdom on us. One day, I remember he told a story of a co-worker, who was a brakeman. I remember him saying, “Emile Johnson was one of those folks that needed to be thumped along the side of the head just to get his attention.” So begins and ends this story.

## The 1976 Fire Season

In the spring of 1976, I was entering my fourth season as a smokejumper. During the winter, I was detailed to the Missoula Equipment Development Center (MEDC), where I had worked in their prefab shops at the USFS property at 14<sup>th</sup> and Catlin in the heart of Missoula. It was a great winter job. I worked for three machinists or, rather, I was their gopher. I learned a great deal about working with metal and working with folks, who by their trade, were very meticulous.

MEDC employed a number of mechanical engineers, whose job it was to design new forestry equipment that was related to all aspects of land management and the mission of the USFS.

The second part of the job was to use a cutting torch and get rid of some of the prototype equipment that did not meet expectations and were rusting in their boneyard. That part of the job occupied a large share of my time. During the winter of 1975-76, I went through a lot of acetylene.

## Johnson City, Tennessee

The '76 season started early for a small group of us who were assigned to a satellite smoke-jumper base in Johnson City, Tennessee. It was mid-April and we joined about a hundred other jumpers scattered out across the southern states. Being early spring, the green up had yet to occur. The country, the warm weather, and the warm-hearted people were very endearing. These residents always enjoyed hosting a group of smoke-jumpers and were very interested in all that went along with smokejumping.

This assignment was one of the most interesting of my jumper career, having never been to the

southeast before. The culture and landscape made this a truly wonderful experience.

**John Twiss** (RAC-67) ran the project and loft. John was a good guy who was not easy to hold down. I heard some great John Twiss stories long before I met him in person. John and some other of the Pacific Northwest Region (R-6) overhead had set up this program with Southern Region (R-9), and it certainly extended the fire season for a number of part-time smokejumpers.

Nearly twenty years later, John and I would cross paths again. John was the District Ranger on the Locksa Ranger District (R.D.) of the Clearwater, and I was working as an Assistant Fire Manager for the Fortine R. D. on the Kootenai N.F. We were both assigned to a wildland fire. Toward the end of the assignment, John picked me up in a FS truck and we drove into the District boneyard. John produced a six pack of beer. As I was opening my first beer, John said that in his job he had to be pretty darn careful about drinking on the job. I asked him what his job was? He said, “I am the District Ranger,” where upon I got a big smile on my face knowing that this renegade smoke-jumper had really done well for himself.

Now, back to our R-8 assignment. Each day we were prepositioned in a different location. Often in London, Kentucky, or Andrews/Murphy, North Carolina. This meant that we would be assigned to a DC-3 jump ship and fly to a remote airport. We spent our day on fire standby and returned to Johnson City each night.

I got one fire jump in North Carolina. Our jump spot was a tobacco field. The fires were carried by a dry leaf layer and catching them was far simpler than most of the western conifer fires.

Once the locals had heard that the Forest Service was using smokejumpers in initial attack, the number of man-caused fires increased. As I understood it, some fires were started just so they could see the men come and jump the fires. In those days, I thought that was a great idea. Eventually, the area did green up and the spring fire season came to an end. The base was dismantled and we all moved back home.

Upon return from Johnson City, **Larry Eisenman** (MSO-58) set up an early refresher. Those of us on the assignment went back through the training units and back on the jump list. Earlier





1976 Grand Junction—L-R: Dennis Friestad, Walt Smith, Bill Yount, Ted Putnam, Don Clarke, Dick Rath, Bill Hutcheson, Les Holsapple, Bill Duffey, Unknown, Rand Hertzberg, Ron Pierce. (Courtesy D. Rath)

in the year, MEDC was conducting a parachute test that I believe evaluated the parachutes with an anti-inversion net sewn below the skirt. A winter practice jump, along with two more while in the southeast region, was a real bonus.

In June, I was sent to Silver City, New Mexico, on a booster crew. Unfortunately, the season fizzled and within a week, we were on our way home.

## Grand Junction Assignment

Early July found a small group of us assigned to staff a BIFC (Boise Interagency Fire Center) Bell 214 Helicopter out of Grand Junction, Colorado, for the BLM. In the late 70s, the Fire Center in Boise had two contract helicopters that were each managed with a suppression specialist. In 1976 **Shep Johnson** (MYC-56) and **Floyd Bethke** (GAC-61) were two of the suppression specialists who managed these helicopters. Both Floyd and Shep had long careers in fire.

There were twelve of us on this assignment, which was lead by **Ron Pierce** (MSO-66). Ron was a new SJ Foreman, who had quite a bit of experience and respect from the GS-6's in the jumper organization.

We were pre-positioned on the west slope of Colorado due to a fuel condition that occurred. The Gambel's oak brush had leafed out completely when a late frost in June killed the leafy vegetation. The leaves became a very volatile fuel that, when ignited, produced extreme fire behavior.

The BLM had a small helitack operation at the Grand Junction airport, and we were assigned to help them as needed. They also had a contract B-26.

We quickly got well versed in the Bell 214, with its powerful twin engines, which gave it the ability to carry twelve firefighters and their gear. Once on site, a tank designed to deliver water or retardant could be attached to the bottom, similar to an air tanker. It became a real bonus in getting the edge on these fires in that extremely hot and dry country.

Early July brought plenty of dry lightning, and we found ourselves pretty busy. It did not take long to develop a pretty healthy respect for the fire behavior around the Gambel oak. We quickly altered our initial attack tactics to deal with these fires without putting anyone in harms way.

The fuel conditions in the Gambel oak in 1976 were quite similar to those during 1994 at Storm

King Mountain. I have often wondered what the outcome of that fire might have been if someone with knowledge of the 1976 Colorado fire season had been present. Or if the jumpers on that fire had watched the fire behavior change over several weeks of almost daily fire activity. I know that as the fire season progressed in 1976, the way we attacked the fires changed with the conditions.

We were on assignment for about two weeks when a fire near Battlement Creek started and quickly moved into a size class that required an Incident Management Team.

In 1976, the Incident Command System (ICS) had not been developed. The Large Fire Organization (LFO) was the standard for that time period.

The team assigned to the fire was headed by BLM employee Jack Haslem. Jack had a lot of experience with fire in this part of Colorado. When bringing his team into Grand Junction, he was short two operations positions. One was the "Line Boss" and the second was a "Sector Boss."

Jack came to our group and discussed the situation with Ron Pierce. Due to their fire experience, **Walt Smith** (BOI-71) and **Ted Putman** (MSO-66) filled those positions. The rest of us remained with the 214 and continued our initial attack work.

Not long after that, **Dennis Frestad** (MSO-65) and I were assigned to a small, two-person fire outside of Vail on the White River N.F. The fire was in a high-elevation conifer forest and was short lived. Dennis and I soon were enroute to Grand Junction.

On the way we came near the Battlement Creek Fire. At mid-afternoon on July 17, the fire had just begun making a large run up one of the many slopes within the perimeter.

Upon arriving in Grand Junction, we were told that the run we had witnessed trapped part of the Mormon Lake Hotshots from Flagstaff, Arizona. They were burned over and fatalities had occurred.

The Battlement Creek Fire started on July 11 and was contained on July 12. It was then monitored by the Grand Valley Volunteer FD. The fire escaped containment on the 15th and grew to 500 acres on the 16th when the B-26 air tanker crashed.

The Mormon Lake and Happy Jack Hotshots

were assigned to burnout operations on the 17th. Neither crew was aware of the exact location of the other crew. A squad from Mormon Lake was trapped on top of the ridge by the burnout operations. Four firefighters were badly burned. Three died on-scene and the fourth was flown by helicopter to the nearest medical facility. Firefighters were required to carry fire shelters following this fire.

The Battlement Mesa Fire Memorial to the four firefighters who lost their lives on this lightning fire lists Air Tanker pilot Donald Goodman and three members of the Mormon Lake Hotshot Crew—Anthony Czack, Stephen Furey, and Scott Nelson. Situated at a rest stop along Highway 70, the memorial consists of an interpretive display/map, plaque, burned pieces of cedar trees, a piece of the air tanker, and fire tools.

The Battlement Creek Fire resulted in some substantial changes in federal wildland fire management. This incident was the catalyst for the mandatory use of fire shelters and fire resistant clothing. It also demonstrated the need for closer interagency coordination between federal, state, and local wildland fire agencies.

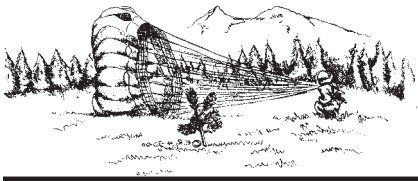
An investigation team was assigned to cover the fatalities. The lead in the investigation was R-1 Director of Fire and Aviation, Ed Heilman. Ed was a good leader and treated all of us at the Aerial Depot with respect.

When Walt and Ted rejoined us, it quickly became apparent that this was a significant event for both of them. Probably more so for Walt who was a quiet man and, as a Marine, saw significant action in Vietnam. I suspect those experiences were never far from his mind.

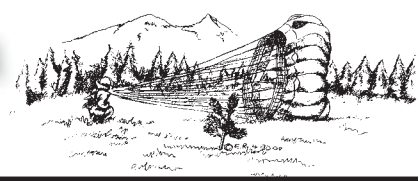
Two days after the incident, I was standing next to Floyd Bethke as the hearse containing the fallen firefighters came to a stop at the BLM's airport facility. I remember feeling a sense of loss for those three men. The reality of the work we were in came home to roost as I watched them transfer their coffins into a waiting aircraft.

Once the initial investigation was complete, our group was rotated home to Missoula. Ed Heilman flew back with us. All of us could see the serious nature that seemed to come with him. 🙏

*Part II to follow in the next issue. (Ed.)*



# Snapshots from the Past



by Jeff R. Davis  
(Missoula '57)

## Smokejumper And Ground Pounder – The Magnificent Red Card

I QUIT THE smokejumpers in 1966 because in those years a man was forced out at the age of 40. Regardless of a good EKG, etc., at 40, jumpers were cashiered out of the outfit and farmed out on a district as a fire management officer or some similar position.

I wanted to continue being as close to a smokejumper as I could, so I hired on with the Missoula Equipment Development Center (MEDC) as a smokejumper specialist. Each year I continued to make the week of smokejumper refresher training and the two refresher jumps, and I made many more Forest Service jumps in the next 18 years at my new position designing and testing parachutes and related jumper

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### *I made many more Forest Service jumps in the next 18 years ...*

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equipment.

But I no longer was called out for jumper fires, of course, so I became a ground pounder. It was the best I could do and it was the closest I could get to being a smokejumper, but I had to face the harsh truth that I was a damned ground pounder. That gave me an attitude.

The first summer after that, the Forest Service called me out on a large project fire, as a sector boss. Of course I was qualified for that position, and several others. Ten years of smokejumping qualified me for any number of Red Card positions.

A word about Red Cards:

It seems to be a really big deal among ground pounders. For jumpers it really didn't matter much. We knew how well we were qualified to fight any wildfire going, and we didn't need a damned Red Card to function.

The card is supposed to show your firefighting qualifications. I got mine, like all jumpers, by being on a lot of real fires and by direct, hands-on training.

Ground-based folks had

many other ways to "qualify" for their precious Red Cards, I found out. (Some of them carried their Red Cards around like it was a special citation from the pope.)

Here are some of the alternative methods: You could sleep your way through endless, half-assed training schools. If you showed up for the class, you got another qualification on your Red Card.

Fire-simulator classes were another sure way to rise up in the Red Card world. Firefighting-by-computer gave one the results of garbage-in-garbage-out, but you could score really high in the Red Card business.

To spare you the effort of these bulls\*\*t methods, the Forest Service ginned up another method to elevate you on your Red Card.

For several years after I became a ground pounder, I studied mine. I noticed on one side was printed your current qualifications. On the flip side, they printed your training needs. For three years, whether or not I was on any fires or attending any training classes at all, each New Year I automatically *became* what my training needs were for the previous year. Just by remaining alive. No fires, no training.

With that kind of system, I figure you can become God in about eight years. 🙏



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# ‘Pinnacle Paul’ Hazel And The Smokejumper Connection

by Greg Whipple (Missoula '59)

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In early June 1958, we were working trail and repairing phone lines on a trail that runs south down the west side of the Sun River in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. This is part of the Choteau District of the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

The district ranger at the time was Dave Terry, who was a fine man to work for.

We had started the day just south of Gates Park, cutting deadfalls and repairing the torn-down No. 9 wire that constituted the phone lines. This was 48 years after the giant fires of 1910, and we were still clearing huge blowdowns that had been killed in the great fires and had withstood the winter winds all those years.

Many of those ancient giants were four or five feet in diameter and a real challenge for two guys with a crosscut saw. It was almost as much effort to remove the cut sections off the trail, as it was to saw them free.

According to Murphy's Law, we seemed to be blessed with pushing, pulling, and prying the cutout sections out of a low spot in the trail, rather than off a rise and down a hillside. It was my first time on this trail, so all was new to me in the area. Paul Hazel was working with me and knew the area intimately.

Hazel, commonly known to us as “Pinnacle Paul,” was a living legend in the Bob Marshall. In his early 60s, about 5 feet 6 inches tall, and weighing maybe 150 pounds, Paul had lived and worked the wilderness for more than 40 years.

During the fire season he manned Bear Top Lookout, and in the off-season he was the caretaker of Klick's upper dude ranch, located a few miles south of where we were at the time. Paul wasn't a hermit, but he certainly qualified as an interesting recluse.

At this point we had been working trails together for more than a month, and the first two weeks were pretty much in silence. It was common knowledge the he didn't have much interest in conversation, so I kept my mouth shut.

At about the end of the second week of silence, we were resetting some poles for the phone line on a steep hillside and it was miserable digging. We encountered round river rocks on a hillside, from baseball- to basketball-sized, that were harder and harder to get out of the ground as the hole got deeper. I have always wondered how those river rocks got up on a hillside 400 feet above the river.

The sides of the hole kept sloughing in, and a 20-inch hole evolved into a four-foot-diameter conical depression. Talk about depression!

Paul heard me muttering expletives regarding the difficulty and for the first time in 12 or 14 days, he spoke up and said, “You know, Gregory, the Rocky Mountains are not known for their fine digging.”

I was stunned. He had actually stated a full sentence that deserved a response, if I could just come up with a logical reply. What I said in return I actually no longer recall, but what I do recall is that from that point the door opened and we began to communicate.

Turned out Paul was a prolific reader and was widely self-educated. He was a walking encyclopedia on many subjects and had a command of the local history better than anybody I have ever met. This brings me back to where I began, working trail with him along the Sun River.

As we went south, clearing the deadfalls, we approached an area over on the east side of the Sun River known as Biggs Creek Flats. The Sun River, flowing to the south, travels down a fairly flat-bottomed valley to eventually merge with the Missouri on the west side of Great Falls, Montana.

Over on the flats, across the river at about 150 or 200 yards from where we were working trail, I began to notice hundreds of stumps extending north and south along the river and receding up onto the hillsides to the east. The stumps ran from two to three and maybe four feet high, and they were all hand-cut, and cut a long time ago.

The walking, talking history book was right

there, and I asked Paul what had caused all the stumps.

According to Paul, back in the 1880s, a large group of men known as “Tie Hackers” had cut thousands of railroad ties during the winter, and when

the river opened up in the spring they floated the ties downriver. The ties were then pulled from the river, loaded on wagons and hauled to the railroad line being constructed westward across Montana to Great Falls.

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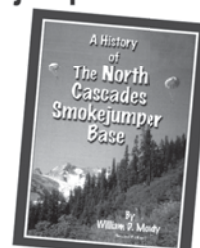
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Shortly after we had worked the trail, I took up permanent residence at the Forest Service quarters at Gates Park. Early one morning, I heard the rumble of big plane engines and was surprised to see a Doug come rolling to a stop on the airstrip just west of the cabin.

Four young guys with personal gear got down and the C-47 departed. Fires were slow, so they had been sent to Gates Park to work until the fire season picked up. They stayed for about 10 days. **Bill McLaughlin** (MSO-58), **Dave Poncin** (MSO-58), and two others, whose names have faded, were the jumpers.

Bill and Dave both became at least district rangers. One of the other two had been in training to become a monk in some religious sect and somehow ended up in the jumpers. He seemed to like the jumpers.

September 1958 was the end of my time with the Forest Service in Choteau. I never saw Paul Hazel again.

Curiously, Paul came back into my life 60 years after I last saw him. A short letter arrived from John Vollertsen, an old family friend I had not seen or heard of in more than 30 years.

Vollertsen, I learned, had researched and written about the "Tie Hackers." The surprise was mine as I thought nobody had any memory of those tough men who spent the winter swinging axes at frozen Lodge Pole pines.

I gave John his surprise when I told him what I had learned from Paul Hazel nearly 60 years prior. We began something of a dialogue on Hazel. Vollertsen had heard of him but never had met him.

I contacted another old family friend and former smokejumper, **Leonard Blixrud** (MSO-53), who owns and lives on the family ranch just west of Choteau. Leonard and I had talked a number of times about Hazel, and I knew that Leonard had worked with him just as I had, only about seven years prior.

I learned Paul Hazel had been born in Indiana, had come to Montana as a child, and lived briefly in Valier. The Hazel family then moved to a mountain meadow located between Muddy Creek and Blackleaf Creek about 30 miles west of Bynum, Montana, where I grew up.

As a teenager I hunted the very meadow in which the Hazel family lived. From the old, rusted

relics there, it appeared they had run a little gypo sawmill for quite some time in that meadow. Paul did join the Air Force during World War II and set records in sit-ups and push-ups that may still stand today. And *Life* magazine did a story on Paul in the late 1940s or 50s. I have not been able to locate that article.

Lillian Hazel was Paul's sister, and she brings us to the reason I have written this narrative. Lillian Lucile Hazel married Clarence "Roy" McVey and they had two sons, Robert and Philip. Lillian was born in 1900, her husband in 1893, and their son **Philip McVey** (MSO-48) was born March 31, 1927, in Choteau, Montana. Their father, Clarence, worked for a time as a border patrol inspector and then for the U.S. Forest Service becoming at least a district ranger.

It appears that his job with the Forest Service took the family from Montana to Washington state and eventually back to Montana. Clarence was a district ranger on the old Blackleaf District and later at Babb, Montana.

The son, Philip, went to high school in Browning, Mont. Philip enlisted in the Navy during World War II. After discharge, Philip was hired as a smokejumper in Missoula and was one of the unfortunate 13 men lost in the Mann Gulch disaster Aug. 5, 1949.

As you can see, the old recluse Paul Hazel was Philip McVey's uncle. All that summer of 1958 I worked with Paul, pulled a couple pack horses with food and supplies up to him on Beartop Lookout, and never had the slightest idea of his family history. It took me 60 years to learn the secret.

I am indebted to both John Vollertsen (prior airborne) and Leonard Blixrud for giving me much of this information. Without their contributions, this would have never come together.

Take a look at the winter issue 2017 of *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* and you will find John Vollertsen's remarkable article "Tie Hackers." It is a very good read.

The unusual and surprising fact that a smokejumper/rancher/accountant prepared tax returns for the parents of Philip McVey in the 1970s in Choteau, Montana, is beyond coincidence. Leonard Blixrud did that and his recollection of who his clients were and their deep connection to all of us, old and young smokejumpers, is a gift. 🙏



## Region 4 Reunion

*Photos Courtesy Jerry*



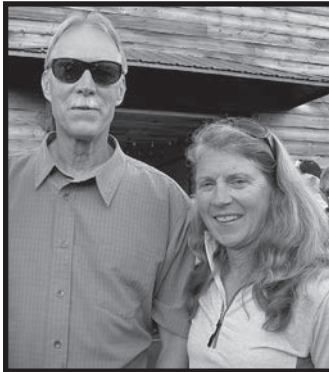
*Chris Niccoli (MYC-95), Jim Duzak (MYC-84)  
& Karen Morrow (GAC-89)*



*Bobby Montoya (IDC-62) &  
Derek Hoban (MYC-02)*



*Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67), Jim Lancaster  
Chuck Blanton (MYC-47), Rick Blanton*



*John Humphries (MYC-79)  
& Nikki Humphries*



*Jerry Hunter (RAC-75), Douglas Gochmour (BOI-74)  
& Don Ranstrom (MSO)-66)*



*John LeClair (MYC-77), Eric Brundige  
Michael Whitney (MYC-77), Vin  
Randy Webb (MYC-01)*



*Jeff Schricker (MYC-98)*



*Sheri Cowley &  
Gordon Harris (IDC-69)*



*Matt Galyardt (MYC-02), Brent Sawicki  
Hans Ohme (MYC-01)*

*Layout: Johnny K*



# Reunion 2018

by Ogawa (MYC-67)



ster (MYC-62), Eric Brundige (MYC-77),  
anton (MYC-74) & Dave Hade (MYC-77)



Fred Hatler (MYC-70) &  
Sharon Hudson



Stan McGrew (R-4 Pilot, Retired) &  
Charlotte Carr Larson (R-4 Pilot, Retired)



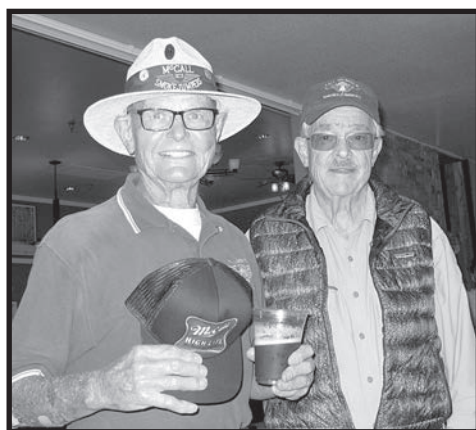
e (MYC-77), Scott Fahey (MYC-77), Jeff Bass (MYC-77),  
ncenzo Mazzier (MYC-77), David Hade (MYC-77),  
C-77) & Daniel Felt (MYC-77)



James Lindell (IDC-64), Guy Hurlbutt (IDC-62),  
William Rember (IDC-64) & Francis Mohr (IDC-63)



yer (MYC-98) &  
)



Wild Bill Yensen (MYC-53), &  
Dave Hemry (MYC-64)



Rich Nieto (MYC-87), Jan Stout,  
Mark Brondum (MYC-81) & Alison Stout (MYC-80)

irkley (CJ-64)



# Arrogance And Incompetence

by Robert Hirning

*(Editor's note: This is an opinion-editorial piece published in the Illinois Valley News of Cave Junction, Ore., Aug. 22, 2018. Bolding added by editor. Ed.)*

**A**t the end of last summer's fire season, Josephine County officially went on record in a letter to the U.S. Forest Service **expressing no confidence in their ability to control forest fires**. Chetco Bar, for example, was one of many lightning-caused blazes that spread into unstoppable conflagrations that went on for months until winter rains finally put them out.

Upper-level fire management had many excuses, such as fighting too many fires at once, not enough funding, dangerous steep terrain and remote location—all of which do not hold up under closer scrutiny.

There are basically two types of fires in Southern Oregon. One type includes rapidly moving, often human-caused blazes—sometimes wind-driven—that occur on the valley floor or at low elevations. On private and BLM lands, fire protection is the responsibility of Oregon Department of Forestry; Illinois Valley Rural Fire Protection District responds to structure fires.

Both are crackerjack outfits and do a tremendous job of immediate response. Consider the Smoking Duck Fire; an incredible ignition source that was kept from spreading by a rapidly deployed, dedicated force, made up largely of volunteers.

Also, the Four Corners Fire that broke out a couple of years ago in the worst possible fire conditions, but was stopped in its tracks with herculean efforts by state crews, along with volunteers, performing initial attack by air and on the ground. Both of these fires could have taken out many homes or the entire communities of Selma or Takilma.

The other type of fire is caused by what's known as a "lightning bust." That's when many active thunderstorms come through the mountains and ignite multiple small blazes. The em-

phasis here is on *small*, because there is a **window of opportunity when burning snags and ground blazes of less than an acre or two can be effectively contained by a relatively small number of experienced fire fighters who can get there within a few hours, equipped with only lightweight hand tools**.

There was a time between the early 1940s and 1980s when the Forest Service employed virtually all fire-suppression crews locally. In the fortunate case of the Illinois Valley, **smokejumpers – the Delta Force of lightning strikes – were based right down the highway**.

During this period the Siskiyou National Forest averaged about 800 acres burned per year. Now the average is 28,000 acres. **Put another way, smokejumpers and locally based suppression crews cut the acres burned by a whopping 95 percent!**

So, what happened? Basically, in the 1980s the Forest Service "privatized" firefighting, using contract companies who employed their own workers. We were told that this was less expensive for the government since it didn't have to supervise, transport, and insure the crews. But, no pun intended, this policy completely backfired.

With centralization and privatization, the emphasis shifted from immediate response to bigger and better fires, which cost more and more money. Fifty-eight percent of the Forest Service budget is now spent on firefighting with precious little left for anything else.

There were always plenty of lightning busts around here—we had one almost every summer—but the local teams knew the territory. Spotters in towers pinpointed location and small groups immediately took off down familiar roads and got to a strike within hours. I was on those crews and most of the time, we were home for dinner.

The smokejumpers specialized in really inaccessible spots, often felling and mopping up a single burning snag before the fire could spread. The lightning storms Southern Oregon experi-

enced July 15 this year were fairly typical of those in the past; **only now the Forest Service did nothing to suppress them for several days.**

**These small fires were allowed to spread out of control, swelling to thousands of acres and producing the worst air quality in the nation.**

None of this had to happen, and here is where the arrogance comes in. Fire managers in Washington, D.C. and the regional offices have decided that the public should come to expect this as the new norm. They told us that somehow fire is “good for the forest” and we should expect bigger and better fires. **This is complete baloney.**

Yes, there was a time when ancient, old growth forests dominated the land, when only a few people inhabited the backcountry. Fires burned slowly and on the ground, say back a hundred years ago.

Today the forests are largely evenly-aged, second-growth stands with a honeycomb of deteriorating logging roads, brush-covered clearcuts, and landings that burn explosively. The fires of this July 2018 have already taken out hundreds of acres of tomorrow’s timber crop; **much of it planted 40 years ago by local crews who well remember how much work went into the reforestation effort.**

During fire season, *no fires* should be “allowed to burn.” All fires need to be aggressively suppressed by local crews who know the territory and who can be available, fully equipped for immediate dispatch.

In the past, these crews did relevant work clearing brush and “stacking sticks” while standing by.

They also knew the road system and could assist the jumpers, if needed. On this district alone, many hundreds of miles of roads were constructed in the 1960s and ’70s, at taxpayer expense, and now are sorely in need of maintenance.

On one of our recent fires, a crew arriving in the first critical hours, but who were unfamiliar with the district, **simply went home because they got lost.** One would think in this day and age when home computers can pinpoint lightning strikes and GPS mapping systems provide directions, they could do better than that.

In conclusion, the public should demand a rapid response to lightning strikes from the Forest Service. **It can be done and has been done.** Allowing little fires to become huge conflagrations, burning tens of thousands of acres and threatening whole subdivisions, is a terrible danger to the environment, to property and to public health. It is a devastating blow to the tourism business in Southern Oregon and, finally, a huge waste of taxpayer dollars. 🌲

*Robert originally hailed from the East where his first job out of high school was for the USFS in the Al-legheny NF. Arriving in Takilma, OR, in the early 70s, he put together a 40-person suppression crew that endured for several years. During the winter months his crew morphed into a reforestation cooperative know as Green Side Up. He personally planted a half million trees on USFS districts from the Canadian border to Mendocino County. Now, he can only watch in sadness as tomorrow’s timber crop goes up in smoke.*

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## A Remarkable Acquaintance With Bob Nolan

by George B. Harpole (Missoula ’49)

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I noticed the clip on the back page of the January 2018 issue of the *Smokejumper* magazine about **Bob Nolan** (CJ-47). I met Bob at a National Parachute Jumping contest in 1951 held at the Wayne Field airport just outside of Detroit. As I look back, I think the consequences of my

meeting Bob Nolan saved my ass once, and then my life.

You wonder how?

To begin, it was the spring of 1951. I was 21 years old and knew I had an exciting year ahead of me. I was scheduled to go to Deming, N.M., as a

smokejumper for the early fire season on the Gila National Forest.

The fire season there ran from May through June. After the Deming assignment, I would return to Missoula where I planned to terminate my employment as a smokejumper to work in one of the Potlatch Forest (PFI) logging camps in Idaho's Clearwater National Forest. I could make much more money working in a PFI logging operation than I could as a smokejumper, and I needed money in order to go to school.

At the same time, I had arranged for a leave of one week from the woods work to go to Detroit to compete in a national parachute jumping contest – where the first place prize was a sizeable amount of money. I thought I could win.

Yes, everything was for the money back in those days.

For the jumping contest, I had a parachute design I thought could give me improved directional and forward speed controls that would enhance my chances of being able to land directly on the target and win the money prize.

The design was simple. It was much like the Forest Service's slotted and tailed parachute, except I wanted to have the slots moved down to and through the edge of the canopy.

To get a parachute rigged in this way, I had left a brand new 28-foot military flat canopy parachute in Missoula with a rigger at the Hale Field parachute loft to make the changes. For this reason, I had to stop by Missoula to pick the parachute up on my way back to Detroit.

Once in Missoula, the rigger who made the changes told me he didn't think the parachute would work. I insisted it would. So we tested the parachute with a 180-pound dummy we dropped from a low-flying Travel Air airplane. It deployed, opened, and worked just fine. No problem. I grabbed my "hot" parachute and headed off for Detroit.

But in Detroit, I discovered the Missoula rigger had shortchanged me by not completing the required changes – e.g., the military length risers had not been shortened and the control line to the open ends of the slots were out of reach. Thus, I would have to climb either a right or left hand riser in order to get hold of either a right or left side control line. The risers needed to be short-

ened, but there was no way to do it. Dang! Too, it was such a customary and simple change. How could he have overlooked it?

I jumped the parachute and managed the awkward control situation as best I could. It didn't work well. In spite of the control line problem, I came in fourth, but fourth place didn't pay any money.

The guy who came in first was jumping a slotted Forest Service smokejumper-type parachute. I met up with this guy who was from Cave Junction, Ore. His name was Bob Nolan.

He had handled his parachute quite well and landed much closer to the target than any of the rest of us jumpers. In our visiting, he told me about his endeavor to rig wings to his body to try and fly like a bird. He said it didn't work well and didn't think he was going to try it again. Looking back we can see he was way ahead of his time – i.e., where we are seeing the flying thing being done today.

In our conversations, Bob told me about the San Joaquin parachute loft in Tulare, Calif., where he had his rigging done. I had family to visit in Southern California, so I stopped by the parachute loft where I met Walter Preston, the owner and resident rigger of the loft.

I told him about my riser problem with the parachute I had, and he agreed to correct the shortcomings. This was then a great parachute. I thought it worked marginally better than the smokejumper slotted and tailed parachutes. Then, when I jumped it at a rodeo, Aug. 25, 1951, in Spokane, Wash., I think its added maneuverability saved my ass.

The wind was gusty – maybe to 20 mph – and in spite of a long, upwind lead on the rodeo arena, one of those gusts caught me and set me up to miss the arena. In the spur of the moment, I was able to maneuver toward a safe landing in the street next to the arena. Yes, cars were parked on both sides of the street.

I liked that parachute.

Then, too, my chance acquaintance with Walter Preston via Bob Nolan probably saved my life.

Walter was an innovative guy who came up with a safety seat belt design that could be easily installed in cars. This was way before seat belts were popular items to have in a car. I was, how-



ever, easily sold on the idea and had seat belts installed in my car.

A couple of years later, in 1953, my seat belt surely saved my life. After a long night of driving, I went to sleep while leaving an Oakland, California, freeway to go to Alameda Island. I hit a steel electrolier pole on the offramp at about 70 mph.

The car stopped some seven feet from impact and brought the sign down, with the supporting pole across the top of my car. The car looked

like an accordion with the engine pushed back into the passenger section of my 1950 two-door Chevrolet coupe. I had a couple of bruises, but walked away with only a sore knee that had met the dashboard. The car was scrapped.

I was glad I had met Bob Nolan back in Detroit in 1951, which led to my meeting Walter Preston in California, from whom I got a good rigging job done on my parachute and from whom I bought a seat belt for my car.

Thanks, Bob. 🙏

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## The Great NCSB Football Game

by **Gerry Jessup** (North Cascades '59)

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I would venture to say that most smokejumpers were high school athletes. And probably, many of them played football. So in August 1960, when the jumpers of North Cascades were asked to field a team for a real football game, we jumped (no pun intended) at the chance. It appeared that Twisp High School was sporting a brand new football field, and they wanted to dedicate it with a football game between the NCSB smokejumpers and the Methow Valley All-Stars.

Now, that may sound a little hokey, but believe me, those All-Stars were anything but hokey. They had a fellow named Morgan, who worked at the Twisp Ranger Station, was easily over 300 pounds, and had played some college ball. They had some men who had played football at schools, such as the University of Washington, plus they had some exceptional local talent. The All-Stars had also brought in a ringer, who was a current running back from Central Washington College – short, more than 200 pounds, and ran low to the ground. All you saw was helmet and knees.

We, on the other hand, had some handicaps going against us. We would be outweighed; some of our key guys were stationed permanently at La Grande, Ore.; and we had to form our team and practice at the base for two weeks without the base manager, **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40), finding out.

We also had a spotter/squad leader, **Tony Percival** (NCSB-54), who had to be neutralized. In order

to keep him from spilling the beans to Francis, we promised him that he could suit up, and yes, maybe even get into the game. Though he had never played football, he said he could kick the ball. Okay, whatever. When push came to shove, we could always run the ball for our PATs.

Our key players, who I can best remember, were **Buck Pino** (NCSB-56), my brother **Gene Jessup** (NCSB-57), **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57), **Jack McKay** (NCSB-57) and **Carl Dean Johnson** (NCSB-57). **Doug Bernhard** (NCSB-58), **Steve Daniels** (NCSB-58), **Terry McCabe** (NCSB-58), **Tom Monroe** (NCSB-58), **Abie Harris** (NCSB-60) and I helped complete the roster, and, of course, with our very own ringer, Dick Fagg. Dick was not a jumper, but had played junior college football with Gene and had just gotten out of the Army, where he played Army ball for three years.

Those of us who would become teachers and politicians got our first taste of cheating right here.

Our offense was very basic, but normal for the time: a split-T formation. You ran the ball, mostly, with the occasional pass – not like today's offenses.

Tom Monroe was the quarterback, and Moody and I were the ends. I was left end and he was right. Tom, an experienced quarterback, called a good game and threw the ball well. Most of his passes went to Moody, since Bill was the better receiver – or so we thought.

Though the Jumpers were the underdogs, we

played a good game, were aggressive, and hit the All-Stars hard. Years later, Jack Brantner, one of the All-Stars, told us that he could hardly get out of bed the next day because we had surprised them with our toughness. We made the jumper world proud that night.

So game night came and we suited up. The Twisp and Winthrop high schools were proud to put on the game, but not so proud that they gave us their game pants and jerseys. We had the Winthrop practice uniforms, and the All-Stars had the Twisp uniforms. But what the hey – we were playing in a football game, and it was the real thing.

We kicked off, the game was underway and evenly played in the first half with the All-Stars scoring first. But we came back with an attack of our own and moved down the field with a good ground game, with Steve Daniels running at fullback and Bernhard and McCabe at the halfbacks.

But, as the All-Star defense began to creep up to stop our running game, Monroe would hit Moody with a pass for a good gain, and in the second quarter, we scored a touchdown. But before we could get lined up to run for the conversion try, Tony Percival ran onto the field, demanding that we let him kick the ball.

Gene, realizing that Tony had his helmet on backward, spun him, and escorted him to the sidelines to turn his helmet around before the other team and fans noticed the faux pas. So Tony, with helmet facemask in the front, returned to the field and, to everyone's surprise, kicked the extra point. And it was halftime.

The second half was played evenly with both teams scoring touchdowns. They scored their PAT, but Tony missed ours. He complained that it was our fault since we made him wear the helmet with the facemask in the front. He said he couldn't see.

But, whatever; the score was 14-13 with the Jumpers on the short end.

Then came the deciding play of the game. With only a few minutes to go in the fourth quarter, we had the ball on the All-Stars 20-yard line. Tom called, "left end around pass." On this play, Tom faked the ball to Daniels running into the line, faked the ball again to Bernhard, and gave the ball to me, coming around from my left end position.

The defense was sucked in completely by the two fakes. Moody had gone straight down the field and

broke out to the right sideline. As I came around with the ball, the left outside linebacker stayed home. He had not gone for the fakes and was positioned between Moody and me.

So I threw the ball over his head into Bill's waiting arms – or so I thought. When Bill broke for the sidelines, he was all alone with no coverage.

A hush fell over the fans in the packed bleachers. Babies ceased to cry in mid-sob. The announcer stopped his play-by-play in mid-sentence and stared in stunned silence. Perfect blocks were made all down the line by the small but tough Smokejumper linemen.

The All-Star defenders groaned with disbelief as they saw there were no defensive backs between Moody and their own goal line. The All-Stars knew the game was over and they had lost.

But wait. A mighty groan heard in far-off Winthrop erupted from the fans. Newspaper reporters rushed for the phones. Moody had dropped the perfect pass. The ball bounced off Bill's hands once, twice, three times – finally coming to rest on the new turf out of bounds.

As everyone knows, Bill Moody has an unbelievable record and history in the smokejumper community. Mr. Jumper himself; base manager at NCSB for many years; a huge number of jumps; unbelievable war stories that have rookies mesmerized; in his late 70s, flying in the lead plane for the retardant bombers on project fires.

Wow. And yet, years later, in spite of all his accomplishments, there is still one moment that hangs motionless, frozen in time. In his dreams, he can still see the ball coming through the air. A perfect spiral, a perfect pass – "All I have to do is catch it." And once again, a scream is heard in the night. Bill's wife, Sandy, has heard this before and, without a doubt, will hear it again.

But, as in every human tragedy, there are some consequences to take away – a directive came down from Francis, stating that there would be no more football games; two NCSB jumpers were off of the jump list for the balance of the season; and Tony Percival was on probation for a year.

The outcome could have been different if we had our guys back from Oregon. But it changed the attitude by the locals toward smokejumpers – at least for the balance of 1960.

And now you know "the rest of the story." 🦋



# SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

MANAGING EDITOR

WE HAVE VERY few NSA members that are current jumpers. Organizations are dying due to age—just like trees in the forest, so we go. I don't expect that this column will be read by many of the current jumpers.

I caught some criticism for my article in which I questioned the Forest Service's move to square parachutes. It was just an opinion—my opinion. Somewhere in the mix, I think some people thought I was critical of the current smokejumpers. No way!

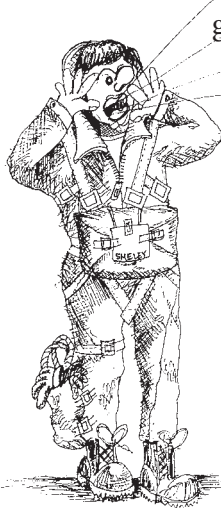
I've coached and taught young people for over 50 years. They keep getting bigger and stronger each decade. The athletes of years ago would not be on the same playing field as the young people of today. The jumpers of today are probably bigger and stronger than most of us were way back when.

Then, why aren't the firefighters of today allowed to do the job that we did years ago? We hear about global warming, increased fuel load, da-da-da. Why are we backing off on Initial Attack?

How about leadership? When I mention leadership, I do not mean leadership within the ranks of the smokejumpers. I feel that the current day smokejumper will go anywhere and do the job. Mentally, we haven't changed. The people who press the buttons have changed.

The key phrase is risk adverse. We hear that the country that has been jumped by smokejumpers for decades is now too rough for smokejumpers to be used. Refer to the Kalmiopsis Wilderness near Cave Junction as a prime example. Decisions on where to jump should be left in the hands of the jumpers and the spotter. They know what they can do—the when and where.

Somewhere along the line, the higher ups have to realize that fighting wildfire is a risky business. There will be casualties. I really like the phrase we had at Cave Junction when someone thought the job was



getting too tough—Well, this is what you signed up for. I always told my rookie firefighters that if the danger of the job scares them, hire on at Burger King.

If I were the Fire God, there would be 600 BLM and USFS smokejumpers. They would be airborne and on the way to any fire where they can be on the ground before other resources.

First and quickest initial attack—take it!

There is the constant excuse given by the USFS of lack of available resources when fires are not manned quickly. Common sense will tell you the smaller the fire, the less resources needed—the more resources available for another fire.

What is the key to this whole thing? Answer—leadership. Until the higher ups realize that quick initial attack will keep the fires smaller and present less risk, we're going to continue to drive down that dead-end road.

All of this is going to have to boil down to you. Keep quiet and take this line or speak up and demand some accountability. Contact your legislators and demand that these fires be put out quickly. There is a time to let fires burn, but not when the conditions are extreme.

When fires can be put out



while they are still in a burning snag but later grow into a monster of thousands of acres, we need someone to stand up and be accountable. We don't have that now.

Who in the world would believe that a fire in the wilderness in July would stay within the boundaries? Even the common citizen on the streets

will tell you to put it out. Still we have a management that is frozen in place. Readers—tell me you were not covered in smoke this summer if you live west of the Mississippi.

Go to the website that gives you the information on each fire that is being managed in the U.S. What is missing? The time that the fire was attacked

and how. Doesn't that tell you something? The most important facts of the incident are not there. Why—accountability. In the military officers are fired—in the USFS?

Time to stand up and demand a change. Be silent, be quiet, drink the Kool-Aid—be prepared for more destruction of our forests. 🌲

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## FEEDBACK IN RESPONSE TO OCT. 2018 WILDFIRE ISSUE

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**Pete Landis** (CJ-62): I just finished reading the October issue of *Smokejumper*. You did our country a favor by exposing unfortunate destruction of our National Forests. Ironically, the USFS is at the center of the problem. Their current fire management practices are damaging, for decades to come, the valuable timberland that belongs to the people of America. The ecological damage to wildlife and its habitat, water retention and drainage is an outrage. Most news responsibly covers the loss of homes and life. The Washington DC “swamp” is wider, longer, and deeper than the country knows.

Retired and current jumpers should send a copy of the October issue to their Senators and Congress Representatives. As a group, we have a responsibility to get the word out.

**Bob Service**: I am a retired fireman from the LA County Fire Dept. I started my career on a USFS Hotshot crew and went to County after five years where I ran hand crews for 17 years, the last seven years as a helitack foreman.

I have been preaching your points for the last 41 years. When I retired, County was just starting to change from fire control to fire management. LA County had the best Helitack program in the Country and great initial attack—we put them out.

All this is now gone. I watch the news and see the crews using a straight stream on grass fires—the training is not there any longer.

I have passed your article on to a lot of

friends.

**Roger Brandt** (Associate) retired National Park Service and resident of Cave Junction: Feedback relative to Chetco Bar Fire article, Oct. 2018 *Smokejumper*, where crews could not reach the fire because the ground was too steep and leaves too slick:

I do a lot of off-trail hiking in the Siskiyou and can confirm that the ground is steep. However, a savvy hiker can find many alternatives to navigate around thickets of brush and avoid slick leaves. Most slopes in this region have game trails you can follow, and animals have a good idea of the easiest way to navigate through this country. With today's technology, you can use a smart phone to look at satellite images of your location and use that to help navigate around brush thickets. Seems the crews who were in the initial attack had no idea how to navigate cross-country through a forest. Where did they get these guys?

In our local paper there was a picture of a jet, maybe a DC-10, dropping retardant on a fire near Grants Pass. It is an aircraft that is too big and heavy to land on the short runways of our local airports and the only place I can think of where a plane that size could land and reload with retardant would be the international airports in Portland, Oregon or San Francisco, California.

I don't know how this is a 'smarter' firefighting than a rapid response, initial attack capabil-

ity that puts out fires when they are small, easy, and inexpensive to control. Under the current firefighting strategy of jumbo jets and helicopters, our community has been choking in smoke for two months and are being told that the only hope of extinguishing these fires is the winter rain. Our economy is suffering. Our residents are facing the possibility of running for their lives. The high levels of smoke and particulates in the air are impacting the health of everyone from infants to grandparents. This new age firefighting strategy gets high marks for incompetence.

**Guy McMahan** (Concerned citizen, Brookings, Oregon): I am a complete “novice” to the inner workings of the USFS. After the Chetco Bar Fire (CBF), I have come to know more about fire AND the FS than I ever wanted to know. I have formed “my own version” of the issues facing citizens.

Here goes: First, climate and fuel load reductions are red herrings that the “New Forest Service” dangles, like bait, to distract others from focusing on the real issue—Put the fire out—All other issues then disappear. Simplistic?

The decision/authority to “let it burn” was under the wrong-headed MIST policy—the FS form of unstated fuel load reduction. For 32 days, this fire ran unchecked, building up a 5000-acre head, with six-mile perimeters on all sides. Over 90,000 acres were willing to be sacrificed before the first line was breached. Breached it was, and the rest is regrettable history. No regrets from the FS, however. Sheer arrogance to believe they could stop that “freight train.” They took no responsibility.

Now comes money. None of us will fix the New Forest Service’s ability to dangle and dole out multi-billions of dollars of funds to the private contracting world unless the money is taken away. All of it! The recent legislative “funding fixes” are irrelevant. They are already being accounted for around the nation’s boardrooms and small offices. We have followed our CBF money as far away as the Navajo Nation for contract services. The tags on our fire are over \$80,000,000, and still counting, because the “credit line” is still open. The FS is a multi-billion-dollar business, no longer focused on its

motto or mission statement. Pinchot would not recognize the once great institution.” Caring for the land and serving people.” Hardly!

I am a retired business owner, working with a group of “14 folks” that were burned out by what started as a quarter-acre fire. We are dedicated towards taking the New FS apart in our neck of the woods—piece by piece. All of us regret that we didn’t grab our equipment and put the fire out ourselves. Trust has been broken, and I see no repairs on the horizon. Civic-minded citizens need to step up but more importantly need to be educated that this is not the Smokey Bear we all grew up with.

Now we are dealing with the Klondike Fire—Same o’ same o’.

**Lee Gossett** (RDD-57): Great points make by Guy. Those responsible go in their “hunker mode” and wait for time to diminish the poor decisions they made. Guy is right, it’s big business and I saw this first hand at our own Miles Fire near our cabin. The Incident Command Center was headquartered at Lost Lake, and I visited it twice. There were 2,000 plus folks there and it was a small city. One lady I spoke to was from Florida, and we imported fire fighters from New Zealand and Australia. Just imagine the \$\$\$ that cost us and, most likely, they went through a week or so of “this is how we fight fire in the USA” prior to them even going on the fireline.

I also visited two heli-bases, one near the small airport in the northern end of the Rogue Valley, where I keep my airplanes, and the other at Prospect. I noticed several small, Bell Jet Ranger helicopters, used solely for personnel. If I were the contracting officer, these little pleasure helicopters would not be on contract. If a helicopter wasn’t capable of slinging a bucket, then it should not be on the fire. You can use the fire-bucket helicopters for personnel—this is called “dual purpose.” I am afraid we have a “fire cancer” growing, and the only way to deal with it is to dry up the funds.

I would like to see an audit done of when was the fire first reported and when did the first responders arrive on the fire. I would guess it was many hours, if not days. When was the last time you heard the word “initial attack”? Gone are the days when we would grab our jump gear

and run for the aircraft and be on the fires in a few hours.

**Larry Edwards** (MSO-02): Good Oct. issue, lots of food for thought. I have to believe that the FS policy (followed by other agencies) shift in 1974 away from the “10 am rule” to that of “fire management” has contributed to the fire problems we are seeing today.

As you remember, the “10 am rule” tasked initial attack to contain and/or control a new fire start by 10 am the following day. Failing that goal, control by 10 am the following day, and so on.

Having a “rule” established standards and with standards there could exist some evaluation and accountability of meeting said set standards. The 10 am rule also usually necessitated the use of “night shifts,” something almost unheard of today, except for “keeping eyes on it.”

While many units continued to field competent aggressive initial attack forces post 1974, many did not, with initial attack money now going to other aspects or fire management.

**Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77): Hi Chuck, got in from the woods and the Smokejumper was in the mailbox. I looked through and read a few articles—Awesome! You are the only one out there publishing the truth. Outstanding!

**Kurt Graves** (Associate): Your latest edition of *Smokejumper* was one of my absolute favorites. In light of all the bigger and hotter fires we are hearing about in the West, I have remained pretty incredulous that the impacts of climate change and fuel increases are the sole reasons for the situation. So it was good to see those easy-to-pullout reasons questioned and some new answers postulated. And though the data may exist, I have not seen data on fire histories over the last 50 years that exhaustively proves there is a marked, statistical increase going on.

**Tom Decker** (IDC-64): This is a winner! You did it! You and your cohort of writers connected a lot of dots that add tremendously to the plague of fires that has been upon this country. The articles all—one way or another—speak not only to fire prevention and firefighting, but also ties into saving lives and money, to say nothing of the God-given natural resources.

**John Manley** (CJ-62): I picked up the latest NSA

magazine in my mail this morning and read the whole edition. I have been thinking a lot about the wildfire situation the last couple of years, particularly the outrageous costs, questionable decision making, spectacular losses, and marginal performance of management and crews.

Granted that recent weather conditions are more fire friendly than in our day, but other assets, like equipment, communications, forecasting and tracking, etc, have greatly improved also.

The current NSA edition really highlights important topics that need attention and changes if we want to prevent the holocausts of the past couple of years from becoming annual events.

I’m thinking that the NSA organization’s biggest contribution can be as a platform for evaluation and identification of what issues need attention and suggestions for going forward. It is very apparent now that property owners, insurance companies, and other vested interests are wide awake and motivated to participate.

I can understand reluctance of current government employees to speak out readily without some confidence that they will not be punished for doing so. It’s more likely that former or retired firefighters would pitch in to support changes.

**Tommy Albert** (CJ-64): The Special Addition issue was well done and powerful. Though we are probably talking to ourselves, it makes me feel good that we expressed our thoughts on today’s wildland firefighting shortcomings. I have received several calls from members applauding the contents.

**LeRoy Cook** (CJ-62): Your Oct. issue is exceptional! Congratulations. It should be a part of the curriculum for everyone’s Advanced (fire) Training. The NSA should provide copies or information to people/organizations interested in correcting the current situation.

**Fred Rohrbach** (MSO-65): Read your articles in Oct. issue of the magazine. Good thought process but will take people with political will and power to change it. Solution is someplace in the middle.

Point is, when you have a dry fire year any new start close to urban interface should be initial attacked. Lolo Peak Fire is a good example



that could have been stopped. Instead, it cost millions of dollars.

Another key issue is smoke and the affects on health. The new norm is smoky valleys from end of July to the end of fire season. This not only creates health issues but also economic ones with loss of tourism dollars.

**Ron Hvizdak** (MYC-78): During my I.A. experience, we were protecting a valued resource—that resource was merchantable timber. In order to do that, we took chances and sometimes got our butts handed to us on a shovel, but many times we were successful. That success meant jobs for loggers, millworkers and the local economy. Today, the new firefighters don't look at the timber as we did, so backing off to a road a mile from the fire is acceptable.

**Kris Kristofors** (RDD-64): I found interesting your article about hiring problems. It brought back memories of hiring problems I experienced on

the Sequoia and Tahoe NFs. The Tahoe had a distinct jumper flavor in the mid-70s. The Forest FMO was **Dave Nelson** (MSO-57), **Jim Klump** (RDD-64) was the Truckee DFMO, and **Mike Madden** (RDD-73) worked on the forest.

Jim gave me free reign with the Hobart Hotshots. At the time the crew was mostly composed of Native Americans from the Stewart Indian School near Carson City, NV. My foreman, Rusty Whitwer, and I developed a recruitment strategy to use at Stewart that included pushups and credit for being on their boxing team. Our hiring strategy worked well; however, we had to spend considerable time wordsmithing their applications.

I agree with the need to separate smokejumper and Hotshot crew registers. The physical demands of these specialties exceed those needed for other positions. Credit needs to be given for high physical demand experience. 🍷

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## Concerned Citizen Meets Mr. Baer

by Youmus B. Chitenbee (Citizen)

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**F**irst, let's say what an honor it is to be able to publish this in *Smokejumper* magazine. It was a great task putting this together since my grade school teachers would never let me write anything in cursive. Fortunately, the computer came along, followed by cell phones. "Shazam." I was able to do this whole thing just using my two thumbs.

I'm from Washington D.C. and recently moved to the west. It has been an amazing experience—each day I get to look at a partial eclipse of the sun due to the layers of smoke that cover many states. It is really beautiful, but I'm having one heck of a time with the constant coughing. Must have caught one of those summer colds.

Anyway, back to a great and educational experience I was able to have one day at the local coffee shop. There I was stirring my triple Grande, half caf, hazelnut, non-fat, no whip mocha. In walks this big guy in a pickle-colored uniform with a hat that looks like it was stolen from an episode of Alaska State Troopers.

I looked at his name tag—Wilford E. Baer. What an impressive individual, even if he needed a shave. But, who shaves nowadays?

"Mr. Baer, could I talk to you for a couple minutes?" I was surprised when he answered in the affirmative. I introduced myself and started to address him as Mr. Baer, when he said: "Just call me Smoke. I feel that is better than Wilford or Mr. Baer." You bet. Wow, what a guy this Smoke E. Baer.

"Smoke, I'm new to the west and having a hard time understanding the number of wildfires and the constant layer of smoke that is blotting out the sun. Actually, it is good in that it reduces the temps from 110 to 100 each day, but there must be some negative aspects of breathing all that smoke. Didn't they prove somewhere down the line that cigarettes and smoke are harmful to a person's health? Nice hat by the way."

Smoke sat back and lifted the brim of his hat. "Appreciate the comment on the hat—thrift store, \$3.99. Listen, the Forest Service goes after all wild-

fires aggressively. We hate the smoke as much as you do. Actually more, although it is useful in those public meetings we have in communities that have been burned or smoked out—gives us a good chance to blow a lot of it at the public. I really want to eliminate all ex-smokejumpers from those meetings. They keep asking questions that we can't answer. Who do those guys think they are? They keep saying that quick initial attack and keeping fires small is beneficial. Those guys need to be squelched!"

"But, Mr. Baer, excuse me, Smoke, wouldn't we all benefit if fires were smaller and cost the taxpayers less money?"

"Listen, Mr. Chitenbee—can I call you Youmus? Where does a name like that come from anyway? Fighting—oops, managing wildfire is an extremely difficult task. We have so many rules and regulations that by the time we figure out how to deal with a fire, it has grown into something that requires a tremendous amount of resources."

"Wow, what a dilemma, Smoke. Please be patient with me as I am from Washington D.C. and know little about wildfire in the west. There has to be a lot of problems that can be solved by common sense, but that is one characteristic that seems to be absent."

"I have a question or two, Smoke. Hope you will bear, pun unintended, with me. I've done a bit of research. Please don't belittle me as I'm just a common man—I do pay taxes and have a fulltime job."

"The majority of climate scientists say we are dealing with a global warming situation. As I understand it, global warming/cooling cycles are natural and span a period of about 100,000 years. We are in the down cycle of the last global warming cycle that happened about 50,000 year ago. We should be on the cooling cycle. About 1750 the cooling cycle stopped, and we have been on a warming cycle since that time as opposed to the cooling cycle. I have a couple questions for someone of your status."

"If there is a global warming situation and the fire seasons have increased by months and the number of large fires has reached record numbers, why isn't the USFS aiming to stop fires before they become very large?"

"You just don't understand, young man. For years the actions of the Forest Service, smokejumpers included, have resulted in the saving of thousands of acres of National Forests and Wilderness Areas. That

has created forests that are clogged with overgrowth that would have naturally burned in the past. Just look at the work the Native Americans have done in burning the forests in the years before the white man got to this continent."

"Gee-wiz, Smoke, I didn't realize all of the foul-ups we did in the past by putting out forest fires. Here we were putting two smokejumpers on a fire and saving thousands of acres when we should have hired a couple hundred Native Americans to walk through the wilderness with fusees and start fires."

"A couple more questions for you, Smoke, if I may. With the increased temperatures, drought, and length of the fire season, why isn't it good policy to put out a fire as quickly as possible?"

"Holy Toledo, youngster—don't you have any common sense? We have rules, regulations and policies to follow. If we act too quickly on a fire, we might put people 'at risk.' Firefighting is dangerous enough without putting people at risk."

"Wow, Smoke, my brain is just not thinking as fast as yours. That's the reason you have the hat and the badge. I thought that keeping a fire smaller decreased the risk. You know, fewer people, less moving parts, etc., equals less risk. Something like a fire that could have been put out by 10 smokejumpers is less risky than a fire that develops into 50,000 acres. Sorry about the poor thought process. Guess bigger is always better—like they say at McDonalds, want a jumbo?"

"Hey, Smoke—another question please. I can understand the logic in reintroducing fire into wilderness areas—getting back to the natural swing of things 400 years ago. If we have a fire start in the wilderness in July and we know the fire season has extended through November, wouldn't we think there might be a problem with that fire burning beyond the wilderness? Wouldn't the intensity of the fire be greater than it was back in the days of yesteryear?"

"There you go again. You just don't understand the things the way we do. We look at wilderness fires and make a decision—let 'em burn or let 'em burn. Then, if they get out of control, we take action."

"But if we let them burn in July, don't we know that the conditions are not the same as they were when we had fire 100 years ago? I guess I'm just another dumb taxpayer trying to understand the system. It seems like, to me, burning conditions

are not the same as they were 100 years ago. From a common man's standpoint, I would like to let fire started in September and October burn and be stopped by Mother Nature. We can't revert to a natural situation of 100 years ago when it is 2018—do you have a cell phone or dial phone?"

"You're getting a bit testy, young man. I've been at this business for quite some time. People like you asking common sense question are becoming a pain in the ass. That guy, **Ben Smith** (MSO-64), completely destroyed one of our P.R. meetings by asking questions that actually had something to do with the Whetstone Fire.

"Fortunately, we were told ahead of time to divert those people to the end of the meeting as Ben's type is dangerous. He knows fire, being an ex-smokejumper. He is a retired USAF Colonel with missions in Vietnam. Ben actually had to be accountable for the actions of the air wing he commanded. We don't want people with that expertise to derail one of our public 'feel good' meetings. We took care of that guy. He questioned all of us up the line, but we fell back to the line of last defense—Freedom of Information Act. When you are backed against the wall, this is the escape door—just hit them with the FOIA. That will de-rail them for the next 50 years. Kind of a safety zone. So much for those guys who want accountability."

"Oh boy, Smoke, you are a wealth of insight. I had this notion that there was some sort of accountability in the wildland fire organization with the USFS. You have certainly opened my eyes. Back to the thought of putting people at risk. Isn't there a certain amount of risk that goes with any job? Certainly fighting fire is risky. I don't see Cal Fire and the BLM backing off their strategy of aggressively going after wildfire and putting it out. Why do these organizations have a different philosophy when it comes to putting out fires?"

"You still do not get it—different strokes for different folks. Let's leave it at that. Sooner or later we are going to fight fire their way or ours. At some point we will develop robots that can reduce the risk—but we don't want to loose too many robots."

"You are amazing, Smoke. I heard a Presidential Cabinet meeting the other day on the internet. The President was lamenting the waste of water in California and equating that to the wildfires in the state. I had a hard time making the two connect,

as there is very little water used in fighting wildfire. But, he lives in D.C. and they don't know much about the western part of the U.S. However, I kept thinking that if he wants to put coal miners back to work, why not the loggers who have been out of the business for 30 plus years?

"I heard that we used to have thriving communities of people who worked in the woods in the timber industry. They contributed to the local economy, and the amount of money that came into the schools was sufficient to provide a great education for a lot of our young people. Now those schools are closed, the jobs gone, and thousands of timber workers have vanished into oblivion.

"I always thought that young people are our most valuable resource in this country. The schools and towns that have closed have thrown people into poverty and created alternative ways of life—crime, unemployment, etc. Kids thrown into poverty with unemployed parents resulted in a good number of kids going into the penal system at \$140,000 a year. Could have sent them to Stanford for less money."

"Here we go again, youngster. Don't you see how many Spotted Owls we have saved?"

"Smoke, I actually have heard that the current situation has depleted the Spotted Owl population and another species of Owl has moved in."

"You have to make tough decisions when you are in my job. What is more important—Owls or people?"

"Boy, Smoke, you must have kept that hat from the days when you were a Drill Sergeant. I guess I'd rather see a kid succeed in life than an Owl exist in the Wilderness.

"Speaking of Wilderness Areas, I see that chain saws cannot be used without special permission in fighting wildfire. Seems like the aim would be to prevent the most damage to that Wilderness Area—wouldn't the ability to work faster and keep the damage to a smaller area meet those goals?"

"Maybe so, but rules are rules. Don't overthink the process."

"Hey, Smoke, I saw something on Ken Burn's Vietnam War Series where an officer said, 'In order to save this village, we need to destroy it.' Sounds early similar to the chain saw rule in the wilderness."

"OK, enough of this line. If you were in a public meeting, you would be asked to save your questions



until later. Actually, no one would be there later, but that is good enough to get us off the hook.”

“Well, Smoke, it was good talking to you. I learned from you at an early age that ‘only you can prevent forest fires.’ What I got from you today is

that we don’t have a chance in putting them out. Nice hat!”

“Yumas, there’s something strange about your name. Are you trying to tell me something?”

“Nice hat, Smoke!” 🍷

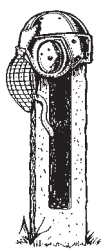
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### **Wilford L. “Ole” Olsen** (Cave Junction ’50)

Ole died January 21, 2018, in Spokane Valley, Washington, at the age of 88. He was a longtime resident of Townsend, Montana, and had recently moved to the Spokane area to be near family.

Ole graduated from Michigan State University in 1951 with a degree in Forestry and jumped at Cave Junction during the 1950 season. He was a Marine Corps veteran having served in the Korean War from 1951 until 1953. Ole worked in the private timber industry for nine years after his discharge. He finished his career with the USFS putting in the next 24 years in Washington and Montana.

Ole was an avid hunter and fisherman and longtime supporter of Ducks Unlimited. He carved thousands of working wooden duck decoys, many of which he contributed to DU events.

### **Jack H. Helle** (McCall ’54)

Jack died July 23, 2018, in Eagle, Idaho. He graduated from the University of Idaho with his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees and later from Oregon State where he earned his PhD. Jack jumped at McCall 1954-57 and 1960.

He began his career as a Fisheries Research Biologist in 1960 at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center Lab in Juneau, Alaska. Jack’s career there lasted 49 years. Jack’s published scientific works led to discoveries and collaborations with scientists from many countries. In 2001, Jack led the Bering Aleutian Salmon International Survey that developed into a collection of data that is widely hailed by scientists worldwide.

### **Danny F. Dibble** (North Cascades ’51)

Danny died August 6, 2018. After high school he joined the army and finished his enlistment on Okinawa as a staff sergeant. Danny used the GI

Bill and graduated from Washington State University with bachelor’s and master’s degrees. He lettered in wrestling at WSU.

Danny taught in Pullman (WA) schools for 25 years and jumped at NCSB 1951-56. He also taught in Zambia, Maine, Mexico, and the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. In retirement, Danny taught ESL in the Yemen Arab Republic. After living on Whidbey Island for many years, he settled in Yakima in 2003.

### **Jan L. Lindh** (Missoula ’66)

Jan died August 10, 2018. After graduation from high school, he moved to Missoula where he went to the University of Montana for three years before starting smokejumping in 1966. After a stint in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, he went back to smokejumping. Jan jumped at Missoula 1966, West Yellowstone 1968, Anchorage 1970 and ’72, and Fairbanks 1973 and ’75.

He spent his summers working on the pipeline and driving heavy equipment in Alaska—winters in the Sea of Cortez on his sailboat.

### **George G. Tranberg** (Grangeville ’52)

George died August 10, 2018, in Blaine, Washington. He spent three seasons as a smokejumper (52-55-56) and volunteered for the Army in 1953 where he spent two years. George returned to jumping in 1955 and was in New Mexico when he hung up in a burning snag. In August of that year, he was one of 103 jumpers to be dropped on a fire in the Salmon River area.

George joined the U.S. Border Patrol in 1956, being assigned to the Mexican Border. He was later assigned to the northern border and moved to Blaine in 1962 and retired in 1983 as the Deputy Chief for the Blaine section.

### **H. Reid Jackson** (McCall '49)

Reid, 91, died July 29, 2018. He grew up in Logan, Utah, and moved to Ogden in 1944. Just shy of his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he joined the Navy and trained as a tail gunner for the planned invasion of Japan.

When the war ended, Reid enrolled at Utah State University and graduated in 1950 with a degree in Forestry. He rookied at McCall in 1949 and worked there until 1956. He was promoted to Foreman at McCall in 1953. In 1956 he took a position as District Ranger on the Heise R.D. near Idaho Falls. In 1960 Reid moved to Boise and took the job as Fire Staff Officer on the Boise N.F.

In 1970 he moved to Nevada City, California, and became the Deputy Supervisor of the Tahoe N.F. In the summer of 1975, he transferred to the Bridger-Teton N.F. as Forest Supervisor. In 1983 he received the Distinguished Service Award from the USDA.

Reid retired to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 1985 after 42 years of service in the USFS.

### **Ronald L. Byrd** (North Cascades '64)

Ron, 75, died August 25, 2018, in East Wenatchee, Washington. He jumped at NCSB during the 1964 and '65 seasons. Ron then went to work for the Great Northern Railroad and retired in 2003 after 38 years. 🌲

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## Remembering David Oswalt

by **James Budenholzer** (Missoula '73)

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### **Klamath National Forest, June 12, 1977**

“Mac” – **Ron McMinimy** (RDD-65) – is supposedly the “best spotter in the Forest Service,” and he dropped “Oz” – **David Oswalt** (CJ-68) – so that he floated down exactly into a tiny green triangle that I could now make out, because Mac had spotted it perfectly and Oz had flown to it with such skill.

**Greg “Gonzo” Gonzales** (CJ-76) was next in the door. I watched carefully, trying to fathom the intricacies of his twists and turns. His chute settled against the gray boulders above the green triangle. **Ricky Dees** (CJ-75) was signaled to the door, which meant that the fire was a four-manner and that I would go on it, the fourth man.

After I landed, rain began flicking my face.

Oz met us halfway to the fire, which he said was another 50 yards down the ridge and to the left.

“It’s small,” he said, “a burning snag and 15 feet of burning duff.”

### **A reptilian appearance**

His face is chiseled out of hard rock, with a

grizzled shadow of whiskers that no razor can cut. He has white teeth behind lips that hang as if cigar-stretched and swollen open by a bullet-sized wad of snus in his lower lip, a thick mop of hair, deep-set eyes, a hawk beak of a nose.

The first time I saw him, I was reminded of an iguana – a wizened, ancient, grizzled reptile. Indeed, his movements are like an old iguana: slow, carefully considered, almost lulling.

He had just jumped his *two-hundredth jump*, which is usually considered a momentous occasion, a major career mark in a firefighter’s life. Oz – his nickname – never said a thing about his accomplishment the whole fire. This was an indicator of his tendency to conceal his intelligence or accomplishments behind his stupid gaze and his slow speech.

### **Precious cargo in your pocket**

“How many you got?” he asks me.

“How many what?”

“Of the most precious.”

“Precious what?” I ask.

“Gold.”

“What do you mean?”

“Cigarettes.”



"Uh," I mutter, "I've got an old pack in my fire shirt pocket. Let's see. Uh – three."

"Two for me," he says, "and one for you?"

"All right."

"Well, maybe we'll split one."

"OK."

He *was* the fire boss.

## No problem – just make a pile

The snag was no taller than 15 feet from the low end of the butt, which had anchored itself directly into a 45-degree slope, so from the topside it was only about 10 feet high. The carcass from above the butt had fallen in a crisscross of steam-roller logs alongside and above the base.

My guess is that the lightning had struck the snag, started a fire in its midsection, which burned out a hollow core until the shaft came spearing downward, where it shattered and buckled, leaving an oversized pyre around the tall, stubby stump with a volcano in the center. Ten yards down the slope, a good-sized creek bubbled merrily.

While Gonzales and I started lining the fire, Oz went right into mop-up mode; he stacked burnable material in a pile. "It's a trick I learned from an old jumper," he explained. "Just pile everything up and by the next morning, it's all gone."

Greg and I dug line down the upwind side; the smoke plumed below us as we worked. When we came to one of the logs that crossed the line, we broke out the two-man crosscut and misery-whipped through a log. Next, we dug line down the smoke-side, downwind.

Oz kept throwing green branches on his bonfire, which didn't help matters. The whole time my eyes and nose watered steadily.

Around 10 p.m. we knocked off work and climbed into the parachute tent Ricky made. We dug trenches on the side hill to sleep in. Since there were only two sleeping bags for the four of us, Greg and I forwent them in favor of Oz and Ricky.

I laid on my foam-padded Nomex jump gear with a cargo chute over me. My sleep was terrible because of the cold and the slope and the lack of a bag, although I did get in a few winks just before daylight. Then we all woke up together and went

out to mop up the fire.

Oz's plan had failed. There were bonfires burning right and left. We doused these with water, as well as the snag. Greg climbed into the roost on the stump and roasted in the coals, until he had been handed enough water, passed up in our hardhats, to douse the hotly burning wood.

When the fire was almost out, we stopped for breakfast – a package of powdered eggs for four of us. They tasted superb. That gave us energy to return to work.

I worked my way down to the bottom of the fire, then back up the downwind side, chucking burning materials in the creek. Oz was next to me; he worked from the creek with a gallon container with which he brought water up to the fire, where he dumped it on smoking or steaming spots.

Ricky and Greg were halfway up the fire, about seven or eight yards above Oz. They were working on a section of a log that had been crosscut the previous day.

Ricky says to Greg, "Let's send this burning log down the hill to the creek." Greg says nothing and Ricky dislodges it with a kick.

Scarcely believing my eyes, I watch it roll, not down the hill but towards me, gaining gyroscopic momentum as it wheeled. I deflected it slightly with my Pulaski and watched with dismay as it rocketed towards Oz.

"Look out!"

"David!"

"Log!"

Three shouts.

Dave sees it in plenty of time, but he freezes in his tracks. He's thinking it out. (*Just relax; go the way it doesn't.*) The log takes a bounce and catches him square in the chest and flips him clean over backward. His expression never changed. The water in his hand shot all over. We run down to his side.

"Oz, are you all right? Are you all right?"

He dusts himself off, somewhat shaken.

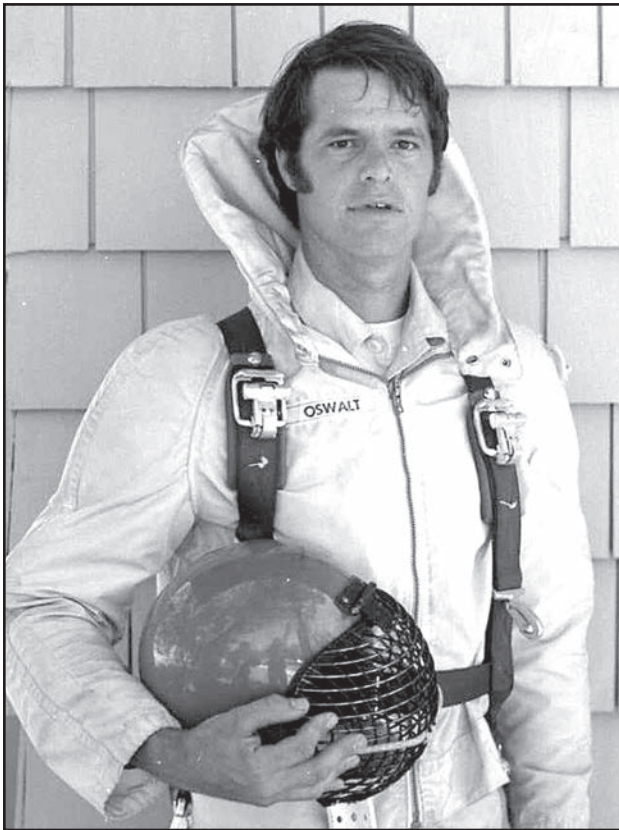
"Yeah, yeah. I'm fine."

He walks up the fireline to the top of the fire – a pathetic figure. I trail him, stand beside him where he is bent over, his hands on his knees.

"Do you have any internal wounds?" I ask.

"No."

Precious cargo goes up in smoke



*Dave Oswalt (Courtesy Doug Beck)*

He sits there, like a hurt rooster, for a period of time, then trudges down the fireline on the opposite side. Now I'm under the snag, working that area.

Oz reappears, kicks over the coffee water container that had been so brutally knocked out of his grasp.

"What have I done?" he asks.

"What do you mean?"

"To deserve this," he follows up.

"Sometimes," I say, "God acts in strange ways. Do you have some snus?"

He gives me a pinch of chewing tobacco. I place it in my lower lip.

"I still have 'Precious,' " I say.

"You do?"

"Yes." I take the last cigarette out of my fire shirt pocket; we had smoked the previous two the night before. "Here. God does act in strange ways. Here is a cigarette."

I gave him my last Camel.

He lit it and inhaled, and relaxing, exhaled, and a look of relief came over his face. He turned over the lit cigarette in a practiced manner, offer-

ing it to me. I took it, had a drag and gave it back to him.

"Back to work, Boss?" I asked, pointing at the still steaming ground with my Pulaski.

He didn't say anything, but nodded, the cigarette hanging off his lips. "Thank you," he nodded, and slowly, like a wizened iguana, moved off to continue the mop-up.

## **Break the rules and move on**

The dispatcher called at 9 a.m. the next day. Lookouts had spotted several other smokes wisping up elsewhere, and wanted to know if we could de-man and move on to other fires. We told them that we could be at a distant road by 7 p.m., and we asked permission to leave the snag standing, which is against U.S. Forest Service regulations. They allowed that. Around 2 in the afternoon, we declared the fire out.

## **Navigation by Oz**

Oz lays out a topographical map. I could instantly see that the challenge of packing out of this fire far exceeded any physical challenge I had been through in my life.

Oz, I could see, was in pain from the blow he had taken to his chest the previous day. He sat in front of his pack, staring off into space.

"I hope this doesn't kill me," he said.

"No, it won't," said Greg, who usually doesn't speak up.

"I can carry some of your load," I offered.

"No, thanks," Oz said, "I'm good for now. We're going to take it easy."

"Yep," I said. "Very easy."

Ricky nodded his head. He didn't have any problem with that.

After a few minutes Oz nodded and we tipped forward.

## **Long packout following a tough fire**

This was brutal. It took us three full days to put out the fire. We'd been short sleeping bags and food. The burning tree was so big we couldn't bring it down with a crosscut. It would have been a challenge with a chainsaw. We would have needed a 42-inch blade; even then, we might have

needed one of those 72-inch blades. The stump of that tree had a diameter of 10 feet.

It was a snag-buttress too large to topple. Now we faced a packout and the rock face, and the ridges, and the elevations. We jumped among trees that required 200-foot letdown lines and once we were on the ground, the only way out was on foot.

I began to understand why the jumpers in Cave Junction had self-selected themselves, over the years and decades, into a group of people who enjoyed this challenge.

Oz wasn't at all unhappy to be in the horrendous physical position we were in. I think, inside, he enjoyed thinking it through carefully. It was not easy. I didn't know how or where we were going – it was a mystery to me, one greater than I had experienced in my summers of firefighting.

After the zigzags to the spine of the ridge, it was straight up. Three hundred feet up, we took a break and stared back out into the sun over the drop zone where pilot **Garry Peters** (CJ-63) had dropped us three days previously. We couldn't see our jump spot or our fire.

"Yeah," said Oz, "when I jumped out three days ago, I saw that Pacific Crest Trail above us and that road down at the bottom of that trail, and I wondered if this was going to happen to me."

We nodded. When he was ready, we got up and headed straight up the spine of the ridge. At a couple of traverses, Greg left his pack and backtracked and showed Oz where exactly the easiest path was, but Oz carried his pack every inch of the way.

We left the timberline, so we must have been up around 10,000 feet. A few hundred feet higher, we were beyond the *tree* line; not even little scrubs could survive at this elevation. It was beautiful rock with meadow with flowers. At one break, I plucked one of the blossoms and tucked it into my journal.

Topping out, we followed Oz across the mesa plateau. As we crossed that plateau, we could look down the thousands of feet to the base of the drainage we had ascended. We hit the Pacific Crest Trail exactly where Oz had indicated it would be. The snows were bright white on the northern sides of the larger rocks and bluffs. Every

few steps, the trail ran across rivulets of melted snow water, delicious to drink.

Oz was excited to be on a trail and we headed east, the sun to our backs, at a good clip, maybe three miles an hour, and in 45 minutes we saw the trail that shot off from the Pacific Crest Trail and down the third ridge. We took a break there and after the last of our GORP and ice water, we went down the feeder trail. Our maps showed that this took us straight to the road. It was so much easier on a trail, going down that ridge, than bush-whacking through the wilderness coming up to the Pacific Crest Trail.

By 7 p.m. we were at the road. It was shadowy in the valley, and the sun hadn't set back to the west behind the three ridges that we had traversed.

A district man drove up in a pickup truck and with glee we tossed our elephant bags into the truck bed and hopped in.

"You guys the Siskiyou Smokejumpers?" he asked.

"Yes sir," said Ricky Dees.

"Where should I take you?"

We looked at Oz.

He was the fire boss.

"Take us to the Watering Hole in Murphy," said Oz.

"Yes, sir," said the district man.

## Enjoying some female companionship

He drove us to Murphy, which is a tiny hamlet about two dozen miles from Cave Junction and just outside of Grants Pass, Ore. We'd already had a few beers before we got there, and the district man joined us inside where we ordered supper.

We tried to clean ourselves up in the bathrooms, but it didn't do much for my appearance or Greg's or Ricky's. Oz, however, cleaned up nicely compared to us, maybe because he looks so grizzled and tough and coarse. Just a little water on his dark mop of hair, and, to our surprise, some ladies in the bar started hitting on him pretty hard.

He encouraged them and they joined us for supper. Up close, I could see they were closer to Oz's age than mine or Greg's or Ricky's.

One of them really took a shine to Oz, and



being kind of egged on by the second woman, she started rubbing Oz's shoulder and touching his whiskers and generally climbing all over him.

Ricky turned to the district man and asked him, "What kind of women are these?" The second woman pointed to the first woman, who was rubbing Oz's shoulder, and said, "She'll tell you what kind of women we are!" Without missing a beat, the first woman said, "Grandma likes to screw like a chicken and fly like an eagle." "Oh," said Ricky, "that kind of woman."

### **A little sleep, then up again**

Oz, being a good fire boss, got us out of there. We got to the base at midnight. Everything was pitch-black except for the loft, where the lights were blazing. It was still active. **Mick Swift** (CJ-56) was there, shaking out chutes that had come in.

"Break 'em down, hang 'em up, and go home and get some sleep. You'll be heading out again at dawn."

Oz said, "Mick, I just came off a five-and-a-half hour pack out, plus I had a bunch of grandmas hit on me at the Watering Hole."

"Poor little Oz," said Mick. "See you at dawn."

I got the message. We unzipped our elephant bags and took out our parachutes. We clipped a spring lock on the apex and hoisted them to the ceiling, where they joined a dozen other chutes that had come in from the field to have the debris shaken out on the spot and spend the night drying out before they'd be packed again and be jumped once more.

I left Mick and Oz there, Oz smoking a cigarette and telling Mick about the fire, and Mick shaking out each panel to see if any had been gored. 🐘

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## **Remembering Bill Payne**

**by John Parkes** (McCall '57)

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**I** remember **Bill Payne** (MYC-59) when we were in jump school in early 1954 at Fort Campbell, KY, when we jumped out of C-119 Flying Box Cars, and made night jumps and night maneuvers in the woods, ravines and brambles of Kentucky.

I remember Bill when we flew in giant Globe Master C-124s, two-tiered, pop-jobs, carrying 400 paratroopers each on Operation Gyroscope. It was the largest, most rapid transport of troops then in U.S. history in July 1954. The C-124s in tandem hopped at two-hour intervals – one plane after another, land, fuel, take off – from Kentucky to San Francisco, to Hawaii, to Wake Island, to Guam, and on to Beppu, Japan.

I remember Bill when we were on Japan's island of Kyushu on those winter jumps and maneuvers. For days in the mountain snows, we slogged in our cold, wet boots, slept in our cold, wet sleeping bags, ate our cold C-rations, and made those nighttime forced marches in the slush and snow.

And one bone-chilling night, we came up onto a makeshift soup kitchen and there filled our canteen cups. The soup was tasteless, but piping hot, and for that it warmed our insides and was a tremendous uplift.

During our tour of duty in Japan, we were constantly on alert. Across the water a hundred miles away was Korea. Although an armistice had been worked out, things there were still shaky. Bill and I were in an eight-man squad of which we were a two-man team. I was a B-A-R (Browning Automatic Rifleman) man, and he, an M1 rifleman.

I wore an ammo vest with pockets for eight clips of 20 rounds each, and Bill, in support, carried the same.

On three occasions we were put on alert – awakened early, a quick breakfast, a draw of full field equipment, live ammo, and at ready, then told to stand by. "Stand by" meant waiting for hours in anticipation but not knowing anything. Waiting, we did, until finally it was called off and we breathed easier.

In February 1956, our unit participated in a show of strength by the South East Asia Treaty Organization in Thailand. It was called Operation Firm Link, Joint SEATO Exercises. We made a massive parachute jump at Dong Mong Air Field near Bangkok.

The sky was filled with parachutes from jumpers, jumping from C-119s in formations, one after another. All went well – that is, unless you got yourself caught in an updraft of air, hanging there in the sky, and seeing coming directly at you the next formation of C-119s.

In the evening, Bill and I, and a couple of others, decided to check things out in Bangkok. Doing so, all was very interesting, except before long we had about 20 or so of the locals following at our heels. Sensing trouble, we grabbed hold of our steel pots – i.e., helmets – and stepped into a nearby doorway, ready for a fight. There was none.

The locals gathered around, only to stare at us with curious, blinking eyes. They had never seen white faces with blue eyes before.

Later that night, back at the airfield, Bill and I had a ringside seat to see Thai boxing. The matches went on all night. Dancing around barefoot in the ring, the boxers hit and punched each other only with their feet. No hands allowed.

In July 1956, we returned to the U.S. by the troop ship, the SS *Michel*. The ship was packed with bodies, all trying to find a place to sit. We were 12 days across the Pacific.

We ate beans for breakfast, slept in the ship's hold in hammocks four tiers high, one above the other, and took salt-water showers. We had guard duty, four hours on and four hours off. All the way across, the cut of the boat in the water sent flying fish scampering to the side over the water.

At night, down in the water, one could see flashes of phosphorus lights. About halfway across, another ship, going the opposite way, passed us close by. All on board went over to the side railing to watch the other ship go by. This caused the SS *Michel* to tip far that way, listing possibly more than 30 degrees. Then we returned to Ft. Campbell.

Soon afterward, Bill and I were together again as smokejumpers at McCall, jumping on fires in Idaho and other western states. A big challenge jumping in Oregon was to get to fit that 200-foot

drop rope into our jump pant's pouch for those high, giant yellow pines there.

During this time, we swapped jump stories and did the local nightlife together in McCall, in Boise, and nearby Garden City. In Boise, where Bill grew up, I met his mother. She was a great person and made fabulous lunches.

Between fire seasons, Bill and I attended the University of Idaho together in Moscow. We were roommates in a room with two single beds and two study tables. This was in a two-bedroom rented house shared with two others.

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*We ate beans for breakfast, slept  
in the ship's hold in hammocks  
four tiers high, one above the  
other, and took salt-water  
showers.*

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One of the others had shot an elk, so we ate elk burgers, steaks, and stew meat for six months. It was dark, lean, tough to chew, and the suet would cake in your teeth like wax – but it was free.

One time we made a vat of homemade beer, put it in quart jars, and stored it to age in a shed out back. On occasions, after studying late, Bill and I would get beer from the shed, a quart jar each, and not quite ripe, and at our desks would down the beers.

It was strong! One quart would put you on your a—. The next day was brutal, going to classes with a monster of a hangover.

On one spring vacation, Bill, I, and a couple of others drove in my '53 Mercury to southern Idaho to look for a lost gold mine. We never found it but had fun anyway. Eventually we graduated, he in Electrical Engineering and I in Geological Engineering.

Afterward we went our separate ways to pursue our careers, get married, have children, grandchildren ... and so it goes. We still kept in touch on occasions by long-distance phone chats, referring to each other as you "ole' Rangatang."

Bill, in the grace of God, fare-thee-well. My condolences to Shirley and family. 🙏

*Bill Payne died November 19, 2017. (Ed.)*



# ODDS AND ENDS



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to **Tom Pettigrew** (CJ-62) and **Rob Shaver** (MYC-67) who just became our latest Life Members.

*Associated Press* July 29, 2018, "Northern California wildfire raging into its fourth day—In Shasta County, **Matt Smith** (GAC-01), a Forest Service pilot with 13 years' experience as a smokejumper, says he used hoses to save his house in the well-kept neighborhood of Lake Redding Estates. Burned and twisted bicycle frames, refrigerators, and piles of rubble were still smoking Saturday around his property.

"Smith said he arrived home as evacuees were racing out. 'Save it for your family,' he says he reminded himself during two adrenalin-filled hours. As a former firefighter, he said he always kept an escape route in mind—possibly his neighbor's pool.

"On Saturday, he had a blistering burn on his hand from grabbing his propane tank and wrestling it away from the house and into the front yard. His nose and ear also had burns. 'The good news is that our house is here. The bad news is that our neighborhood is devastated,' he said."

*Matt is a pilot for the California Smokejumpers at the Redding, California base. (Ed.)*

From Robert Quist, a fellow track coach at Chico H.S., concerning the Carr Fire in Redding: "I thought you would be interested to know that a mandatory evacuation was ordered for the neighborhood where **Rick Russell** (FBX-77) lives. Naturally he stayed behind, daring the fire to come to him. For a time there was some concern because he has no cell phone, only a landline, and that was out because there was no power."

**Dick Linebarger** (RDD-74), who was also evacuated from another neighborhood, drove up and somehow got through the California Hwy Patrol (CHP) line blocking the road and



found Rick drinking coffee on his front porch, shooting the s— with a CHP officer. I was telling everyone that Rick was about the last guy I'd worry about in a fire. Russell's house is safe. Linebarger's house is safe. **Ralph Ryan** (RDD-77) lives on a ridge high above Shasta Lake, and he was pretty nervous for a while, but now he's safe.

**Karen Moen** concerning the ongoing process of trying to recover any remains of **Ed Weissenback** (CJ-64) and the two pilots of an Air America C-123 that was shot down near the Chinese border December 27, 1971:

"I wanted to let you know that during the month of July the Lao government unexpectedly offered the opportunity to excavate three sites in a Joint Field Activity, including Lao and American teams. The crash site for #293 was one of the sites selected.

"We've not received word yet about what has been found and what has been identified (or will be identified) from the two efforts, but good to know that items were recovered both times.

"Chuck: I've recently given out four copies of the book about smokejumpers and the CIA to agency personnel and DPAA personnel. They've been fascinated by the book and I know at least one is ordering another copy from the Association. My thanks to all of you who worked so hard to make the book a reality—it tells a little known story."

**Lise Tranberg:** "George was pleased as punch when he got the July issue of *Smokejumper* and read the article he had written about landing in a burning snag. It was unexpected and really made his day." (*George died a month later on August 10, 2018-Ed.*)

*I was looking at the Smokejumper Status report on the NSA website and saw that BLM has 10 jumpers at Lander, WY. In the NSA Board meeting last year*



in Boise, we heard that BLM is still aggressive in their Initial Attack on fires. I asked **Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77), who lives in Lander, to stop in and visit with this group.

I was pleased to see that **Ivan Smith** (MSO-95) was in charge of that group. Ivan was one of the “kids” that started his career in firefighting on one of my Type II Crews from Chico back in the early 90s. Karl met with the group and got back to me. (Ed.)

**Karl:** “Hi Chuck, you are a great coach. Ivan told me how you worked with him to get him in shape. Outstanding.

“Makes total sense about the BLM. They are gung ho on initial attack. It demonstrates the difference between BLM and Forest Service

policy. I know the BLM Station Foreman here and my son (Forest Service) has also been on fires with them. Like you said—they don’t mess around. It is like the old days in the Forest Service—night shift to catch the fire and mop it up in the day.

“The BLM can not afford to loose good range in the summer. They can not allow cheat grass and other invasives to spread.”

From Sept. 20, 2018, *Idaho Press*: “A group of four WWII vets have been meeting each September in Nampa, Idaho. **Ray Mansisidor** (MYC-46) and **Glen “Ace” Nielsen** (MYC-46) became smokejumpers after the war. Ray trained as a flight engineer and Nielsen was a Navy TBM pilot.” 🦋

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## MISS MONTANA AIRPLANE HEADED TO NORMANDY

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THE MUSEUM OF Mountain Flying, based in Missoula, Mont., is the caretaker for the historical C-47/DC-3 N24320. This aircraft was part of the Johnson Flying Service fleet and flew the smokejumpers who fought the tragic Mann Gulch Fire near Helena, Mont., in 1949.

Twelve smokejumpers and one firefighter/ex-smokejumper perished in that fire.

This aircraft has been dubbed *Miss Montana*, and has been selected to participate in the Daks Over Normandy campaign in June 2019 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day invasion by Allied forces June 6, 1944.

Eight people are currently registered to jump out of *Miss Montana* on June 5: Kim Maynard (MSO-82), Keith Wolferman (MSO-91), Jon Fuentes (RDD-16) and five former military jumpers.

The *Miss Montana* to Normandy committee, and many volunteers, are working to restore N24320 to flying condition. Given a successful refurbishment, *Miss Montana* will fly to Europe with the American contingent of C-47s and DC-3s in spring of 2019. The museum is seeking donations to cover the cost of restoration and logistics support.

Contributions can be made on the website at [missmontanatonormandy.com](http://missmontanatonormandy.com) or by mailing a donation to the Museum of Mountain Flying, 5225 U.S. Hwy. 10 W, Suite 29, Missoula MT 59808. 🦋



# Mid-Air Collision Ninemile

by Don Stevenson (Missoula '55)

It was during our 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> training jump, and we were jumping three-man sticks out of the Doug. I was second out the door.

We had all been instructed that the first thing you did after leaving the plane was to look up and check your chute, and next, look around to see where the others in the stick were.

As I looked, I could see the third jumper coming right at me. He was heavier than me, so was falling faster, but I could see we were on a collision course. We had been instructed that if this ever

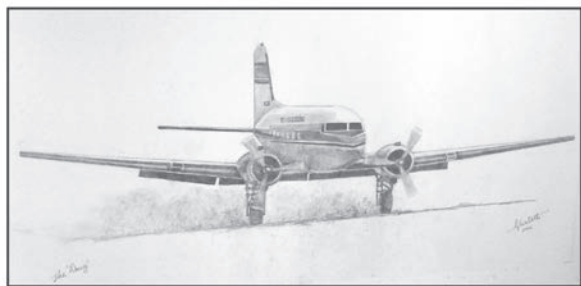
happened, both turn right. I hollered, "Turn, turn," but it was too late or else one of us turned the wrong way.

The next thing I knew his chute was collapsing all around me. I remember thinking should I grab his chute so we both could go down on my chute, but it was too late. Since he was heavier, he fell faster and his chute opened again right below me. That robbed the air from my chute, and I remember looking up and seeing my chute looking like a limp pear.

I then fell faster and when I looked up again, he was above

me and his chute was beginning to collapse, but then we got separated and both came in for normal landings.

When I went to stand up, my knees were shaking so much I couldn't walk. One of the overhead, who had been watching from below, came over and said, "That was a close one," and that I should sit on a log until my knees quit shaking. In a few minutes, I was up packing my chute into my stuff sack. To this day I don't know who the other jumper was, and no one ever said anything more to me about this mid-air collision. 🙏



If this amazing **Smokejumper DC-3** that appeared in the January 2017 issue of *Smokejumper* magazine brought back pleasant memories of your jumper years, you can get a full-sized (18" X 24"), high-quality, signed, numbered print that is suitable for framing for only \$25. A portion of the proceeds will go to the *Smokejumper History Preservation Fund*.

To order, send name,  
mailing address, and check to:  
G.M. Watts  
PO Box 1107, Julian, CA 92036.

## 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.

NSA Director Fred Cooper (NCSB-62) says: "I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing. I think I mentioned in an earlier message that I'm having other magazines/newsletters delivered electronically.

To request email delivery contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) [cnkgsheley@earthlink.net](mailto:cnkgsheley@earthlink.net). 🙏