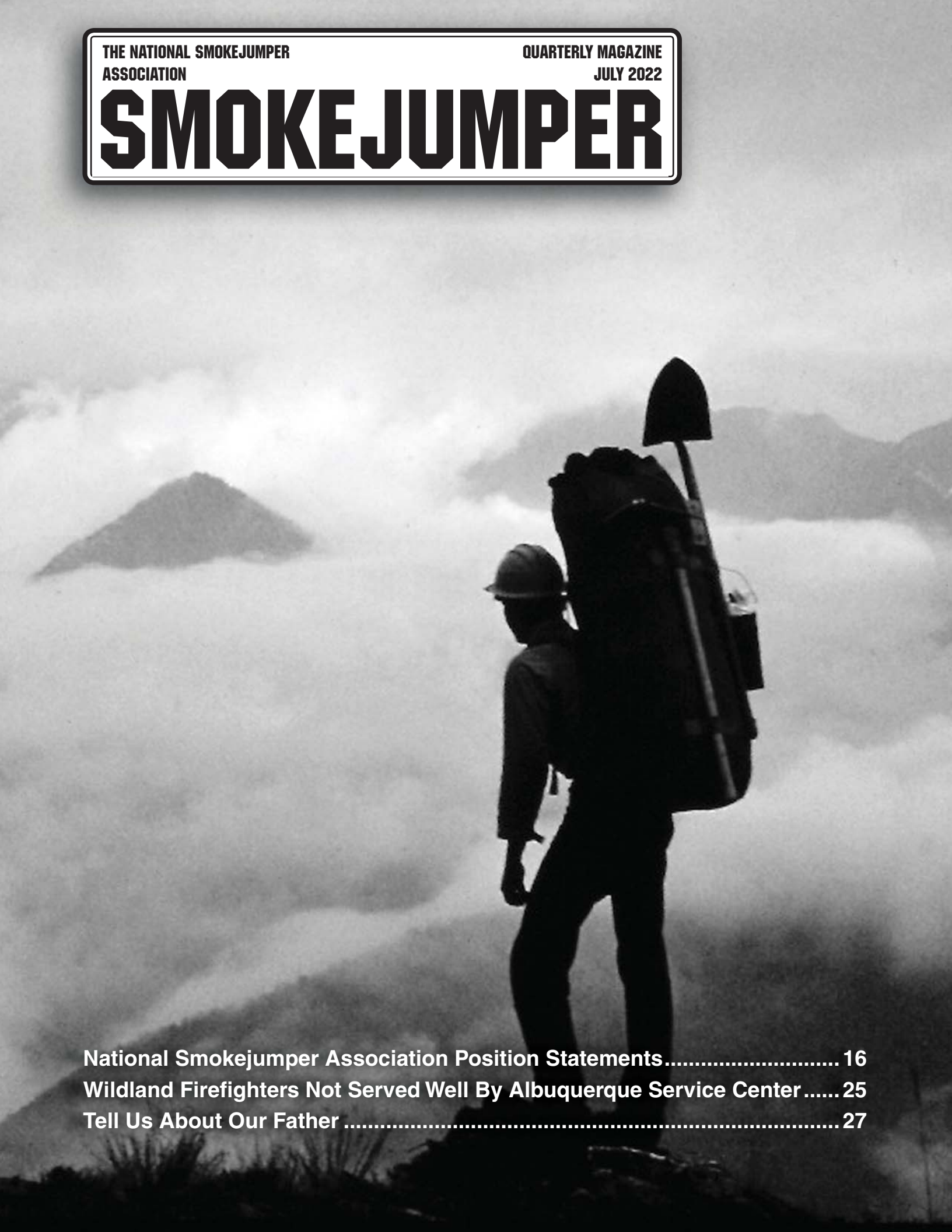


THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
JULY 2022

# SMOKEJUMPER



National Smokejumper Association Position Statements.....	16
Wildland Firefighters Not Served Well By Albuquerque Service Center .....	25
Tell Us About Our Father .....	27

# CONTENTS

Message from the President.....	2
Militant Environmental Activism.....	4
My Year in South Vietnam .....	6
"The Mouse that Soared" Book Review.....	12
Odds and Ends .....	14
National Smokejumper Association Position	
Statements .....	16
Recording Smokejumper History: 1945 Rookies—	
The End of the Civilian Public Service Years...18	
Dixie Fire Destruction Didn't Have To Happen.....	23
Sounding Off from the Editor.....	25
Wildland Firefighters Not Served Well by	
Albuquerque Service Center.....	25
"Tell Us About Our Father" .....	27
Old Smokejumper Memories of High Mountain	
Two Jumper Fire.....	30
More Smokejumper's Stories (1954-56) .....	31
Good Sam Funds at Work .....	33
NSA Restoring Our Nation's Forests &	
Rangelands .....	34
COVID Was the Leading Cause of Deaths on	
Wildfires in 2021 .....	35
The Jump List, Men of the '50s .....	37
White's on the Breaks .....	43
Notes from the Ranks .....	47
Off the List .....	48
Idaho City Smokejumper Unit Sign Finds	
New Home .....	51



SMOKEJUMPER, ISSUE No. 118, July 2022  
ISSN 1532-6160

Smokejumper is published quarterly by:  
THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER ASSOCIATION  
C/O 10 JUDY LANE  
CHICO, CA 95926

The opinions of the writers are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the NSA. Permission to reproduce *Smokejumper* in any manner must first be obtained in writing.

NSA Website: <http://www.smokejumpers.com>

Managing Editor: *Chuck Sheley*

Associate Editor: *Ed Booth*

Editing: *K. G. Sheley*

Photo Editor: *Johnny Kirkley*

Illustrator: *Dan Veenendaal*

Layout/Printing: *Larry S. Jackson*, Heidelberg Graphics, [www.HeidelbergGraphics.com](http://www.HeidelbergGraphics.com)

Front cover: *Spur Creek Fire Okanogan N.F. 1979 (Courtesy Ted Taylor/Jeff Seals)*



## Message from the President



by Bob McKean  
(Missoula '67)

As I WRITE this in mid-April 2022, the upcoming wildfire season is shaping up to be severe once again. The ongoing drought in the West shows no sign of abating, <https://www.noaa.gov/stories/warm-dry-march-worsened-record-drought-conditions-in-west>. Moreover, recent reports indicate an early melt to the snowpack which will exacerbate the problem. At the same time, it is increasingly difficult to populate the ranks of wildland firefighting crews, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/07/14/lack-of-federal-firefighters-hurts-california-wildfire-response>; <https://wildfiretoday.com/2020/09/16/fire-leadership-is-concerned-about-the-decreasing-number-of-fire-fighters-in-the-fall-months/>.

These conditions, along with the increasing length of the fire season due to climate change, demonstrate once again a dis-

turbing trend line. It begs numerous questions: What can be done about the proliferation of mega fires? What can be done to alter the conditions that perpetuate them? What can be done to improve means and tactics to fight them? What can be done to live with the increasing susceptibility of the west to destruction caused by these fires? How do we make the forests more resilient against the backdrop of climate change? How do we make sure we have an adequate workforce necessary to fight these fires and engage in actions to prevent them to the extent possible?

Finally, there is another question: What, if any, positions should the NSA take regarding these questions?

The first set of questions and more are being hotly debated by entities across the country both inside and outside the wildland firefighting community.

The NSA is comprised of members who reflect expertise and political views across the spectrum. The NSA Board in its make up reflects that diversity of expertise and views, as it should. Consequently, finding agreement on positions to questions such as those posed above is difficult. Moreover, the Board has been reluctant to take formal positions per se. Part of the thinking along these lines is that since the NSA is a private non-profit, tax exempt (501c3)

*Continued on page 4*

## Amazon Purchases Can Help NSA

Every one of your Amazon purchases can generate a donation to the National Smokejumper Association.

1. Sign in to your Amazon account via <https://smile.amazon.com/>
2. Go to: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9ytjfw> and press the SELECT button
3. If you are shopping via your laptop, always use <https://smile.amazon.com/>
4. If using your smart phone and the Amazon app, make sure the **Smile** option is turned on.
5. Remember, only purchases at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com/) or through **AmazonSmile** activated in the **Amazon Shopping** app will support your selected charity.
6. Ask every one of your friends to designate the National Smokejumpers Association as their **Amazon Smiles Charity** and then to make all of their purchases at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com/) or through **AmazonSmile** activated in the Amazon Shopping app.

## Having Your Correct Email Addresses Is Very Important

In order to save the NSA time and money, Chuck Sheley is sending renewals and the merchandise flyer via email. The National Reunion has been **postponed until August 12–14, 2022**, in Boise. We will be sending information on that event via email whenever possible. Sending via email is a good cost-efficient move.

To see if we have your correct email address, go to the NSA website at [www.smokejumpers.com](http://www.smokejumpers.com). Click on “News and Events” at the top of the page. Click on “Jump List” on the pulldown, type in your *last* name.

Please contact Chuck if we need to update your email. His contact information is on this page.

**Opinions by *Smokejumper* authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the NSA.**

### NSA Members—Save This Information

Please contact the following directly if you have business or questions:

***Smokejumper* magazine**  
**Articles, obits, membership,**  
**change of address**

Chuck Sheley  
530-893-0436  
[chucksheley@gmail.com](mailto:chucksheley@gmail.com)  
10 Judy Ln  
Chico CA 95926

**All else**

NSA President  
Bob McKean  
971-404-5659  
[mckeanbob@gmail.com](mailto:mckeanbob@gmail.com)  
5465 Aspen Meadow Ln  
Mountain Green UT 84050

#### *Smokejumper* base abbreviations:

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

### 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.

To request email delivery, contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) [chucksheley@gmail.com](mailto:chucksheley@gmail.com). 📧



organization, it cannot lobby anyway.

Of course, the NSA has provided a forum for discussion of these issues in *Smokejumper*. And, the Board recognizes we have entered a new, more compelling era of wildland fires and firefighting. It further recognizes an obligation to weigh in when there is appropriate consensus among Board members to do so. Despite its 501c3 status, nothing prevents the NSA from taking positions on issues.

Consequently, at its March meeting after significant discussion and multiple drafts, the NSA Board agreed to take a number of official, NSA positions. The primary intent of these positions is to support increased wages and improved working conditions for smokejumpers and, more generally, wildland firefighters. The idea is simply that wildland firefighting has become more professional out of necessity. Consequently, to attract and retain the best, wages and benefits need to reflect that. Additionally, one of

the positions is specific to the use of smokejumpers in initial attack. Another is oriented to improve the hiring for positions that are difficult to fill. You will find the official NSA positions and more information about them in an article in this issue of *Smokejumper: National Smokejumper Association Position Statements*.

### Other Stuff

Don't forget to sign up for the Reunion. It will be in Boise in August 12-14. I hope to see you there. 🍷

---

## Militant Environmental Activism

by F. Carl Pence (USFS Ret.)

---

Many of us who served with land management agencies during the 1980s through 90s had exposure to some form of militant environmentalism. My exposure started when I was Forest Planner on the Bridger-Teton N.F. in the 1980s.

In 1974, the Arabs limited the amount of gas imports creating a gasoline shortage that maximized their prices and control. It was described as "The Arab Oil Embargo." Gas prices soared as did interest in potential domestic supplies for this valuable product.

Most of northwestern Wyoming included oil and natural gas formations, and energy companies leased large land areas to explore the potential for explorative drilling. The Bridger-Teton N.F. was being explored during my time on the Forest. Drilling and road access to drill sites in the Bridger-Teton was opposed by environmentalists. An environmentalist group called Earth First! was the most active opponent.

Oil companies started drilling an explorative well just west of Jackson, Wyoming. It was fall

and a group of opponents gathered in the forest headquarter's parking lot to stage opposition to the well. A female led the group in chanting slogans against the drilling. About four o'clock, she and the male leader chained themselves to the front door of the office blocking the office entrance.

The Forest Supervisor called a staff meeting. My feeling was we had back door access for ourselves and the public, so they didn't totally close us down. I was interested in seeing how long they would stay chained. It was late fall, and it would soon get cold. I was overruled by our law enforcement staff, who pointed out they were breaking the law, and we needed to arrest them. When officers cut the chains, the two went limp and had to be carried off to jail. Papers made a big deal of it with front page photos, that fit well with their plan to get their cause in in the news.

My next two jobs, Ranger of the Sawtooth NRA and Deputy Supervisor of the Gila N.F., also included exposure to environmental activism associated with timber harvesting and livestock

grazing, but none of that came to serious legal confrontation.

As Sawtooth Area Ranger, my Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) convinced me to attend a Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) training called "Law Enforcement for Managers." That was the most interesting and disturbing training I ever had. It included videos of motorcycle gang activities including the abuse of women during their occupation of forest campgrounds, enforcement action regarding drug gardens in national forests, and tactics used by ecoterrorists to stop timber harvesting and other activities. We also experienced some of the training regular enforcement officers went through. That training served me well when I became Forest Supervisor on the Malheur N.F.

It was only four months after I became Forest Supervisor when my two LEOs informed me Environmentalists had blocked access to a timber salvage sale. The activists had towed an old Chevy Luv Pickup to the entry road of the sale and blocked the access road. In addition, they cut several lodgepole pines and used them to form a tepee to which they fastened a pulley system. When any of our people approached the road block, the leader's female companion fastened her neck to the undercarriage of the pickup and the 9-year-old son of the leader would pull himself up to the top of the tepee structure. If we attempted to move either structure, we would endanger the woman and the boy.

The officers believed there were 24 people involved and saw they had their own videographer who was there to film any action in response to their occupation. It was obvious the demonstrators were prepared for a confrontation with us. I couldn't help but think, "What in the world have I gotten myself into?"

I asked the LEOs what happened when they approached the site? They told me the leader would approach them and the rest of the people would filter back into the forest. These tactics fit well with the situations I had seen during my FLETC training. At the same time, the Willamette Forest was going through a very similar blockage on one of their timber sales and was having a terrible time dealing with it.

The LEOs recommendation was to arrest the

leader and perhaps others. I was concerned that was just what they wanted. I had seen video of officers being sprayed with body fluids and a host of other disruptive actions to frustrate arrest. A failed confrontation would encourage others to join the "party" and make things worse. I envisioned that the ones who faded into the woods would circle back and flatten officer's tires and fasten themselves to their vehicles.

While we were formulating action, I received a call from a local environmental sympathizer. He said he would form a deal to avoid confrontation with the demonstrators if we modified the timber sale contract. He explained the reason for the demonstration was that the timber sale contract included trees that were alive, and we were using fire salvage to include them in the harvest contract.

The sale did include trees damaged by the fire that still had some green needles. This is common when ponderosa pines are involved in wildfire. If fire singes over half of the crown's needles and is hot enough to damage the roots, the trees are weakened and subject to bark beetle infestation. Beetles girdle the weakened trees, and they die within two years. The beetle infestation then spreads to neighboring undamaged trees, thus expanding tree mortality in the affected area. Knowing that, I was not willing to modify the sale contract.

Our first action was to form an Incident Command Team. The demonstration had serious potential to escalate. We needed that team to develop alternatives, tactics, and action. Since it was March, the weather was on our side, and there was no urgency to act until we were fully prepared. Personally, I wondered how long it would take for them to get tired of sleeping in the snow. The timber operators wanted to resume their harvest, but they didn't want the incident to expand.

One of the first things we did was establish our own roadblock to keep other demonstrators from joining the group. I directed the Incident Command that if arrest action was to occur, we needed our own videographer and an interagency team of officers from all the federal, state and county officers. I didn't want only Forest Service officers dealing with the problem.

A big complication was how we could house 24 demonstrators if we took them all into custody.

The local Canyon County Jail was limited to 12 prisoners. Because of that limitation, we would have to transport them to other facilities. In the process, we knew they would be looking for ways to claim police abuse and misconduct. I must confess, being a strong Christian, I did a lot of praying.

It took six days to get an arrest team together. The strategy was to hit the camp at 0500, when they would be least prepared. As we gathered in my office conference room at 0400, officials at our roadblock called and said the whole group just whizzed by in their vehicles and left. I uttered, "Thank you, God."

That day information filtered down that gave light to their action. The previous day, their videographer got tired of waiting around in the cold and left. The excuse they gave was that I had incited the locals to go up and attack them. They said they could see flashlights that morning moving through the woods toward them. The end of the story is that our LEOs did arrest the leader, Asanti River Wind. He lived in Condon, Oregon, and ran an environmental activist training center.

A month later we all appeared at the Federal Office Building in Portland for his trial before the Federal Judge. While my law enforcement support and I waited for the proceedings to begin, Asanti and several friends walked in and sat in front of us.

When the judge got seated, Asanti jumped up and yelled, "Your honor, I am not the one you should be judging. This man (he pointed at me) should be because he is falsely harvesting live trees in the guise of a fire salvage sale." The Judge hit his desk with his gavel and exclaimed, "Young man, you need to sit down and not say a word unless asked, or I'll find you in contempt of court." Asanti followed his order.

I was disappointed with the Judge's ruling, but Asanti was fined a couple thousand dollars and went on probation with the judge's warning that if he ever participated in future demonstrations like this, he would go to jail for a couple years.

We had done our job to minimize a situation which had grave, long-term potential and he was convicted of illegal action. One of the charges on our notice of violations was child endangerment. It was dropped in the final proceedings. Oh well. 🙏

---

## My Year In South Vietnam

by **Ronald Rockwell** (Missoula '59)

---

**M**y smokejumping days terminated in Fairbanks in 1964. I had served two seasons there and two in Missoula. Before my departure, I sent in an application to kick cargo with Air America. During our 1963 season, we had lost **Gid Newton** (CJ-55), killed, and **Eugene DeBruin** (MSO-59), shot down. Several other jumper buddies were either there or soon headed that way. Among them were **Lee Gossett**, **Karl Seethaler**, **Barry Reed**, **Louie Banta**, and **Tom Butler**. In autumn 1965, I began work on a master's degree program in German at the University of Mainz. While there I received a job offer from Air America but decided to pass on it until I finished my degree, then hopefully get aboard.

Autumn 1966, I arrived back in the USA stopping off in Washington, DC, to see the Air

America rep. He had no kicker slots available but suggested I check with the Agency for International Development since they were hiring Provincial Representatives for Vietnam. The idea appealed to me. I was a believer in the war, was twenty-nine years old, and had already completed my military obligation with the US Army Reserve. The idea of serving in South Vietnam as a civilian, I thought, offered a career path to more peaceful assignments where I could take my future wife. USAID took me on, and by January 1967, I was in a six-month training program at Pearl Harbor. It was mostly Vietnamese language with history, culture, US government policy, etc. I had met a fine lady in Germany. Gabriele came to Hawaii and we married in March.

During early 1967, the military advisory effort





*L-R: Vietnamese Cadre Team, Ron Rockwell, Lt. Carter (Courtesy R. Rockwell)*

in Vietnam (MACV) was tasked with supporting the vaunted Pacification Program. It was merged with USAID Vietnam into CORDS (Coordinated Operations for Revolutionary Development Support). Thus, I would be slated to be a Deputy District Senior Adviser working under a US Army major (District Senior Adviser). His team would consist of me, a captain, a lieutenant, and several sergeants and corporals. Duties would entail military and civilian support of our District Chief, Captain Vang. Naturally, responsibility for civilian support would fall primarily to me, augmented by army personnel. In reality, we all worked in tandem. When it came down to a purely military operation, such as a military sweep, I was not involved. In actuality, members of our team were not involved in more than six or seven sweeps during the ten months I served in the district, thus there were few occasions in which my activity was clearly segregated.

Near the completion of my training in June, word arrived that a civilian USAID rep had been

captured by the VC and executed on the spot. I arrived in Vietnam around July 1st and reported to John Vann, Senior Advisor, Region III. I arrived in Vann's office with a fellow trainee, an ex-Special Forces officer. Vann was together with his deputy, Rudy Kaiser. Neither of them would survive the war. Vann immediately asked, "Which one of you is the smokejumper?" He decided to assign me to Bien Hoa Province, now named Dong Nai Province. I would learn that I was slated to be the district deputy in Nhon Trach District where the USAID rep had been executed.

Nhon Trach was located on the southern end of the province and populated by 50,000 residents. Viewed on the map it was shaped like an west to east oval about 25 miles by 20 miles in size. The western half was considered "contested" 24/7 while the eastern half was classified "VC controlled" unless you were moving through with firepower, such as a US infantry platoon. In reality, most of the district was controlled by the VC at night. Although only about a one to two hour

drive from Saigon, Nhon Trach was definitely out in the weeds and a dangerous environment. We drove the roads almost daily in the western half visiting US and later Thai battalions, village chiefs, RD Cadre teams, and a US Civic Action unit. I would estimate I drove at least fifteen miles, sometimes twenty miles daily on our primitive dirt and gravel roads, and therein lay the primary danger of being killed. The unimproved roads usually led thru forested areas interspersed by small clearings.

The enemy usually consisted of small groups of local guerrillas, perhaps squad sized. They specialized in harassing our compound at night and setting off mines and ambushes on our road from time to time. During my ten months in the district, they set off mines and attempted to ambush members of our team on two occasions. Larger NVA(North Vietnamese Army) units sometimes passed through the district which was, aside from Parrots Beak to the west of Saigon and others, one of the infiltration routes into the Saigon area. They conducted a two-battalion sized attack on a Thai battalion stationed in our district in December 1967. Obviously, the Thais were threatening their infiltration and the commies wanted them out of the way by attacking them one night. They lost well over 100 killed while the Thais lost four. The Thais stayed put.

I arrived in the district around July 6th and met with my US Army superior, Major Tomkins, and members of the team. Our District Chief drove me and my interpreter, Mr. Noi, around the district introducing me to about six village chiefs. I had learned a lot of Vietnamese but was not fluent. Since I had had language training, my interpreter never really knew whether I could understand more than I let on. That was useful. I was introduced to the RD Cadre teams. Our district had three approximately forty-man teams. They were paid by the CIA and monitored by a CIA rep and me. Their mission was to move into designated hamlets, root out VC sympathizers and develop government loyalty by promoting the standard of living of the hamlet via various construction projects, such as schools, wells, etc. They were all armed with M-1 carbines and were to provide security against VC infiltrations or interference. The plan was to remain in the hamlets

for at least one year then move on to newly designated hamlets. In accordance with the CORDS pacification plan, these teams were backed up by one 500-man ARVN battalion, also stationed adjacent to their location, which was in the area of a village called Dat Moi. The ARVN were to deal with any heavy VC or NVA units attempting to move in.

Our District Chief commanded about 100 Popular Force troops (PFs). About sixty were located in our compound with the other forty scattered among small outposts along the road. The PFs were third-rate troops, bested by the Regional Forces (RF). The first-rate troops were the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam). In fact, the ARVN left much to be desired.

Our captain, Al Schooler, introduced me to Lieutenant Colonel Baldwin, commanding a US infantry battalion about six miles down the road. They would be later replaced by the Thais. I also met Lieutenant Carter, commanding a US Army Civic Action unit also located a few miles down the road. LTC Baldwin's battalion conducted sweeps in the eastern part of the district where he was wounded while flying a chopper over a fire fight thus adding another Purple Heart to his collection. He had come up from the enlisted ranks and had won a Silver Star and his first Purple Heart in the Korean War. He was the quintessential American fighting man.

I was provided a US Army M-151 jeep with a mounted PRC-25 radio and was always accompanied by my interpreter and a sergeant from our team, usually SGT Buckout. The radio could reach our district compound from anywhere on the roads we drove. Our compound radio reached our provincial team in Bien Hoa, as well as LBJ and Bear Cat army bases all to our northwest, as well as a US Navy river base at Nha Be off to our southwest. Nha Be was our closest base for support by Huey gunships armed with rockets and mini-guns. We could call them and they would be overhead in fifteen to twenty minutes. Likewise, if someone was wounded, we could call for a "dustoff" and expect it just as fast. I always carried an M-2 carbine, semi or fully automatic, with at least thirty rounds (two fifteen round clips taped together). SGT Buckout carried a M-79 grenade launcher with a loaded pellet round and a couple



HE rounds in his pockets. We also kept two hand grenades in the glove box. I had no illusions about battlefield immunity as a civilian!

One encounter with LTC Baldwin while returning with SGT Buckout from a trip to Bien Hoa underscored our daily appraisal of road security. He was coming back from a visit to our compound with his jeep and driver. He advised that they had just been shot at up the road. We then parted company while the SGT and I drove somewhat faster than usual, although we always traveled fast on our roads. We were not shot at. It could have been a signal shot all too frequently employed by our Vietnamese allies. One thing, knowledge of the colonel's combat awards certainly added credence to his warning!

Two weeks after my arrival, Major Tomkins rotated out and was replaced by another fine officer, Major John Burford. We hit it off well. One day after he had been there about three weeks, we received word that a PF had been wounded by a VC hand grenade a short distance down the road. He was being brought into the infirmary. The major and I were in the compound and walked over to our infirmary about 100 yards outside the gate. We had a USAID doctor from Venezuela temporarily stationed there. We arrived just as the doctor informed the PF's brother, also a PF, that he was dead. At that moment the PF's frantic mother arrived. The PF looked at his mother and cried out, "Ma, Chet roi! (Mom, he is dead!)" Both began crying loudly over the deceased PF. The major looked at me and said, "It gives one food for thought, doesn't it, Ron?" I nodded.

Not one week later I found myself staring at the major's body, killed by a grenade booby trap. It was very depressing for all of us. The major left behind a wife and small children. Within ten days he was replaced by Major Frances Vossen, also a good officer. We got along well. Two weeks later Captain Schooler rotated out. Fortunately, he was replaced after three months by Captain Wilson, a fine officer.

One morning I spotted the PF carrying two stretchers with dead guys into the compound. The interpreter told me they were dead VC. By afternoon the story came out. Two ambush squads had been sent out to take up position for the night.

One squad decided early they had had enough, pulled up and started back, walking right into the other group. They opened up killing two. Another twist. Upon hearing the first version the major reported to the provincial team that two VC had been killed. This was dutifully forwarded to Westmoreland in Saigon, then on to CINCPAC in Hawaii and on to the pentagon.

During my training I had attended one daily CINCPAC briefing. A spit-shined officer with a fancy pointer stood before a large map of Vietnam, pointed at a specific location and confidently stated, "Three hours ago at this location one of our infantry platoons engaged a VC unit killing three with one US wounded." Very impressive. When the real story came out, I asked the major if the figures could be corrected, however there was no provision for that, thus LBJ got bum info. Did it matter in the larger picture? Probably not.

Every morning the PFs in the outposts cleared the road we would drive down. I should emphasize that this was no guarantee that the road would be safe an hour later. They would often fire short bursts into the brush and trees along the road to flush out ambushers. We listened to this almost daily as we ate our breakfast. One morning the short bursts suddenly became a crescendo of automatic weapons fire. They had been ambushed by VC. The District Chief and the major loaded up troops and went down the road to engage the VC. This was a purely military operation and I did not go along. Did that shield me from additional danger? Not quite.

I was scheduled to fly up to Bien Hoa that morning for a meeting. A US Army Huey picked me up from our pad. Just then the major contacted the pilot. They had encountered a road block of trees pulled across the road about 100 yards from a 50-foot high embankment and forest. A perfect spot to hide ambushers. The major requested the chopper make a couple of low passes to see if we drew enemy fire. We took off, proceeded down the road and made two rapid passes about a 100 feet high over the road block while I sat in the open chopper staring out at the slope and the trees less than 100 yards away. We drew no fire. Charlie had departed. Another day in Nhon Trach.

We had a sergeant on our team who believed,

as did some others, that the Vietnam War was the best damned training program he had ever participated in. SGT Davis was another quintessential war fighter. One day in December, a bird dog aircraft flying overhead spotted about thirty armed men walking across a small clearing in the middle of the district. He radioed us to determine if we had troops in the area. Receiving a negative reply, he made a lower pass over them and was greeted with AK-47 fire. We ordered in some gunships and they chewed the area up with miniguns and rockets. SGT Davis was chomping at the bit to take some men down to the location. The major granted permission and off they went under cover of a gunship. The NVA had departed but they did find one dead NVA soldier, seized a flag and a B-40 RPG with two rounds of ammo. In retrospect, these NVAs were no doubt just a part of a larger unit heading for the Saigon area in preparation for Tet.

The Tet Offensive would occur on January 30, 1968. Commencing in December, activity picked up in the district. Our PF outposts along the road began receiving harassing fire at night and one was overrun. I have already mentioned the attack on the Thais. On the first day of the offensive, little happened in Nhon Trach, but our wartime goal was definitely impacted.

Since May our three RD Cadre teams had been working in the Dat Moi area and it appeared progress was being made. Unfortunately, our South Vietnamese leadership was spooked with enemy units popping up in Saigon. They ordered our ARVN battalion to Saigon to aid in its defense. This left our RD Cadre teams naked and the VC moved into the special hamlets with the RD Cadre yielding. The VC commenced executing all pro government civilians. Every night for a couple weeks someone was shot and dragged out onto the road for public viewing. After two weeks the ARVN returned. The next day they moved to clear the hamlets but stopped when they received some small arms fire. They then broke for lunch in spite of the urging of US advisers. They slowly resumed their advance the next day. After about one week, they had recaptured the hamlets. One 500-man ARVN battalion versus perhaps fifty VC! The damage was done.

After that, not a single Vietnamese civilian in

the area believed that the government would protect them. They had also observed the poor performance of the ARVN. Similar results were felt in other RD Cadre locations throughout Vietnam. Ironically, ARVN had been charged with support for the pacification effort, easier duty while US grunts in our battalions and brigades tramped through the weeds engaging larger VC and NVA units. I began to believe our effort would come to a bad ending.

After Tet, the VC began, on occasion, harassing us at night by firing AK-47 bursts into our compound. When this happened, we would take cover in the bunker, call Nha Be and request a gunship overhead. They would arrive, snarl around above us, and Charlie would withdraw.

Since our compound was surrounded by villagers on three sides, hosing the area with miniguns was only an option if we faced a ground assault. But the presence of a gunship definitely deterred them from assaulting us.

One night we went through the usual drill, then the chopper retired. Charlie decided to wake us up again. It appeared they were firing on us from about 300 yards to the northeast from a forested area where there were no civilian huts. The major decided to order a battery of six 105 mm rounds from the Royal Thai regiment. The first problem was it was almost a straight line from our open bunker door over the VC to the Thai 105s. Additionally, the Thai artillery was notorious for inaccurate shooting. A 300 yard overshoot could put the six 105 rounds right in our bunker doorway. The pucker factor was high. The major ordered the shoot. Whamm! The rounds came in on target. Seconds later an excited PF came running up yelling, "Theiu Ta, Too close!" He was holding a smoldering piece of 105 shrapnel in his hand. The next morning, we found pieces all

## National Smokejumper Reunion

August 12–14, 2022

Boise, Idaho

over the compound but nobody was hurt. The VC decided that was enough for one night. We found no blood trails.

On March 8th the VC crept up near the Police Station and fired a B-40 RPG into the wall striking the Police Chief in the back. He was on a cot next to the wall laying on his side. The round punched a small hole in the block wall, entered his back and exited his chest splattering his insides all over the office walls then punched a small hole in the opposite wall. The charge did surprisingly little damage to the building itself. We were 200 yards away and awoke to the explosions and machine gun fire—the VC withdrew.

One night while we were receiving harassing fire into the compound, I was standing next to the major at our radio near the door to our quonset hut. The VC fired a burst of AK-47 fire from near the infirmary at a point where the compound wall was only five feet high. The rounds snapped past the doorway nearly hitting SGT Nelson who was standing at the door. I could see one of them zip by in the darkness. It was not a tracer but must have had some unburnt powder on the back of the round. The major and I were shielded from VC sight by the metal of the quonset wall, not AK-47 proof. That was the closest any enemy round ever came to me in Vietnam.

Another close shave occurred in April. I was ready to drive down to the Dat Moi area and asked where SGT Buckout was. I was informed he was across the compound at the District Chief's office and would be back soon. The major and the lieutenant were in Bien Hoa. Captain Wilson had been down the road visiting the ARVN advisory team at Dat Moi. I had waited about ten minutes when the radio came alive with an urgent call from Captain Wilson. I responded and he stated, "We just ran an ambush and I am hit. We are a couple miles away coming in." I responded and ascertained that they needed no assistance beating off the VC and returning. I dropped off the channel and called for a dustoff to our location, then returned to the captain's channel. In another couple minutes, they sped into the compound and our two corporals, damned good men, helped the captain limp inside where SGT Nelson, our medic, checked him for additional wounds. There were none. The

dustoff arrived high over our compound, and I talked him down to our pad while one of the sergeants fired off a flare. We loaded Captain Wilson onto the dustoff for a quick trip to LBJ hospital and a Purple Heart.

The captain had been returning with one corporal driving and one sitting in the rear of the jeep. The VC had the usual setup. Two or three 105 mm warheads buried in the road with a detonator and wire leading out into the brush to a trigger. They set the charge off too soon, busting the jeep headlights and cracking the windshield. The corporal at the wheel reacted per standard Nhon Trach procedure. He hit the throttle and got out of the area as the VC opened up with AK-47 fire. One round must have glanced up out of the dirt. It hit the captain in the calf of his right leg. The other corporal quickly fired back at the VC with his M-16. As food for thought, if SGT Buckout had been available when I wanted to depart, we would have hit the ambush first. Of course, they may have been set up for someone coming from the other direction and let us pass. Who knows? We did not have after action discussions with our VC friends.

Later the VC made another attempt to ambush members of our little team. The same routine but this time the gunfire was lighter in volume. Once again, the charge was set off too soon. Examination of the crater clearly showed that three 105 rounds had been planted in the road some months before when it had been graded. The camouflaged detonator wire lead out into the brush ready for retrieval and use while we drove back and forth over it.

In May I was promoted to a desk job in Bien Hoa. I no longer drove the Nhon Trach roads daily. I took advantage of the easy access from my location in Bien Hoa to visit Karl Seethaler in nearby Saigon on a couple of occasions. He was stationed there at the time with Air America. I soon determined that my notions of getting a USAID position in a safe environment where I could take my wife would not come to fruition. I therefore decided to resign and return to Montana and my wife, Gabriele. We both planned to teach. I arrived home in July 1968. After five years of teaching, I was hired on as a DEA Special Agent for a twenty-year career. 🧠



The story of Allen Owen, aka Mouse – a 4' 11" combat marine and legendary smokejumper, would be enough to make Paul Fattig's *The Mouse that Soared* a stirring read. Owen lived an inspired and inspiring life, overcoming seemingly impossible obstacles almost to the end. But the book is chock full of startling characters and high adventure that together make this a welcome addition to the literature by and about those who leap from the sky to take on wildland fire.

—John N. Maclean, author of  
*Fire on the Mountain and Home Waters*

From the Introduction to *The Mouse That Soared*:

“**T**he jumper I decided to weave throughout the book was neither the biggest nor the baddest. Yet, like the base, he was small but lived large. He was also feisty and outspoken, a gung-ho fellow who charged challenges head on. With his big heart and sense of humor, he stood tall among his brethren. His name was Allen Dale “Mouse” Owen, a Marine Corps combat veteran who was 4-foot-10. Although the shortest smokejumper in the nation’s history, he stood out among the airborne firefighters. He was also a jumper I knew, albeit only at the journalistic level.

To reiterate, this book is not centered on Mouse but on the base and many of the jumpers who lived and worked at the base. As you would expect, smokejumping attracts folks who live life with a certain élan. Again, many other books could be written about the Siskiyou smokejumpers. This book is simply one take on this impressive group.”

With a keen eye for deeply human stories Paul has produced a work that embodies the best of what we hope for in our fellow man.

—Murry A. Taylor, Veteran Smokejumper and  
Author of *Jumping Fire: A Smokejumper's Memoir of Fighting Wildfire*



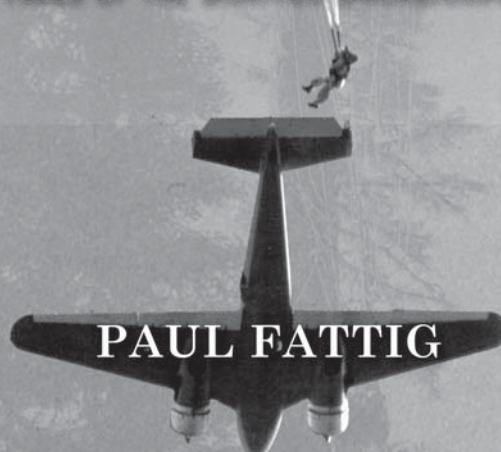
The Mouse That Soared

PAUL FATTIG



# The MOUSE That Soared

TALES OF THE SISKIYOU SMOKEJUMPERS



## “THE MOUSE THAT SOARED” BOOK REVIEW

**Murry A. Taylor** (Redding '65)  
Author of *Jumping Fire: A  
Smokejumper's Memoir of  
Fighting Wildfire*.

As a BOY growing up in the Illinois Valley of Southern Oregon, Paul Fattig often looked up into a deep blue sky as it filled with International Orange and white parachutes. These were the Siskiyou Smokejumpers. Paul and his young cohorts admired these parachuting firefighters for their courage and noble qualities. Sometimes they went to the jump spots and watched as the jumpers laughed and

gathered gear. I doubt that anyone there thought that someday that little boy would write a book detailing the big heart and spirit of the Siskiyou Smokejumper base and some of its' most memorable characters. But “The Mouse that Soared” is exactly that.

Being an avid reader, I occasionally read a little-known book about an obscure subject. Many of those books turn out to be literary jewels. Each time I'm left with a sense of gratitude for the writer who saw a subject, recognized its importance, then did the work to make it a book. “The Mouse that Soared”

is exactly that. Profiling various individuals who served as Siskiyou Smokejumpers, Paul Fattig has rendered a book of great stories that is not just for smokejumpers. It is for anyone who believes that trying your best and giving your all is fundamental to not only living a meaningful life but maintaining a healthy society as well. While I hesitate to call the people profiled in the book heroes, beyond doubt they are the kind of people that make for a richer and better world.

Here's a handful of the characters featured in the book:

Jack G. Heintzelman—Jack

was the first Siskiyou Base Foreman. Back in 1943 when asked if he'd take the job, he told them he needed a little time to think it over. That day he went to the Medford Airport and had a pilot take him up for his first plane ride. Having survived the trip, Jack decided to take the job. Then came the hard work of hiring a crew, finding them housing, and acquiring an aircraft.

Mick Swift—Mick was a giant among jumpers both at "Cave" and in the jumper world at large. As much as any single person, Mick's love of people and smokejumping helped shape the character of the Siskiyou base in its best years. Whenever we would boost C.J. from Redding, as soon as the plane shut down its engines, Mick was at the open door waving and smiling. On the ground Mick shook hands with every single jumper just like we were royalty. As a spotter, Mick's manner in the door while putting jumpers out over a tough fire was legendary. "It's not so bad," he would yell. "You'll do fine. Just remember your training." Then, just before slapping them on the back for exit, he would sometimes kiss them on the side of the helmet. Mick drove the development of the Gobi Green, an improved round parachute.

Dee Dutton—Dee and Mick were the perfect combination for strong, firm, and fair leadership at the base for years. Dee went on to the Regional Office late in his career.

Gary Buck—While many came together to help restore

the abandoned base, Gary led the charge and is still there carrying the flame. An amazing accomplishment, indeed.

Tom "Trooper Tom" Emonds—This is the guy that Mick Swift claimed was a "management nightmare." After *Jumping Fire* came out, some of the Siskiyou jumpers asked me, "How much did Troop pay you to say all those good things about him?" Joking aside, Trooper Tom was a smokejumpers' smokejumper. Tough and strong, good-hearted and fun, he went on to form Dragon Slayers, a company that manufactures fire tools.

Mike Wheelock—Mike jumped out of the Siskiyou base then went on (with the help of other Gobites) to form Grayback, a fire contracting company. Grayback supplies engines, hand crews, and water tenders to agencies during high fire demands. They also contract to complete dozens of fuel reduction projects employing hundreds of people.

Chuck Sheley—What can I possibly say about this guy. Words can hardly capture what he did as a jumper, as a lifetime (award winning) coach, and all he's still doing for smokejumping. Chuck has fond memories of the Siskiyou base and his years there. He has remained a strong voice and steadfast supporter of smokejumpers through his work with the National Smokejumper Association. For over twenty-five years Chuck has edited *Smokejumper* magazine. Along with help from his wife, K. G., this National Smokejumper Association

magazine is what it is today due to Chuck Sheley.

Allen "Mouse" Owen—The overarching theme in this book is the story of "Mouse." This amazing young man petitioned the Marines to allow him in when he was barely five-foot tall and weighed 125 pounds. They turned him down, so he wrote a Congressman and, after some hassles, was allowed to become a Marine. As the "Littlest Marine," Al Owen was featured in *Life* magazine: full story, and photo of him in line with his platoon. Mouse earned medals in Vietnam and was loved by the locals who referred to him as "Little Big Mouse."

Others you'll read about in "*The Mouse that Soared*" include Cliff Marshall, Jim Allen, Gary Mills, Wes Brown, Mike Cramer, Wes Nichols, Charlie Moseley, Willy Unsoeld, Stewart Roosa, Walt Congleton, LeRoy Cook, Gary Thornhill, and many others.

Paul Fattig is one of those writers with a keen sense of a good story. After a hitch in the Marine Corps, he majored in journalism at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Over the next 40 years, he worked for a dozen newspapers from the Bay area to Anchorage. With a keen eye for deeply human stories, Paul has produced a work that embodies the best of what we hope for in our fellow man. *The Mouse that Soared* is Paul's third published book. German philosopher and playwright Goethe, wrote that, "Boldness has genius, power and magic in it." This fine piece of writing is a living testament to just how true that is. 🐭



# ODDS AND ENDS



**Chuck Sheley** (Cave Junction '59) Congratulations and thanks to **Simon Friedman** (NCSB-00), **Jim Rush** (MYC-65), **Bruce Ford** (MSO-75), and **Carlene Anders** (NCSB-86) who just became our latest Life Members.

**Mike Nielson** (MYC-73): **Everett L. (Sam) Houston** (MYC-71)—“‘Doc’ went by Sam, never Everett. Those that didn’t know about ‘Doc’ were OK with Sam. Sam was a McCall jumper. The ‘Doc’ came from being a Green Beret medic in Vietnam and he also had been an Air America cargo kicker out of Vientiane, Laos. Like me, Sam had left Southeast Asia behind or so we thought until a few shared pitchers allowed the Vietnam experience to resurface between the two of us. It was a sheltered experience we didn’t share. Sam was a giant among the Laotians. His stature had no less esteem with me who valued his friendship and the new experience of getting out of an airplane.

“The legacies you have admirably documented about smokejumpers and their military experience has made me realize how much our biographies, while illustrious, don’t tell the whole story of the person and we are left with conjecture about the essence and character of guys like Sam for those who never knew the ‘Doc.’ We knew the Sam who had the commonality of US as smokejumpers sharing what we do but never knowing what we did. To me, Sam was ‘Doc’ because of what I knew of his experiences as a Green Beret medic. Beneath the rugged veneer of our shared dangers, Sam had the gentle, soft essence of a caregiver; an almost opposing quality to his manliness and stature that made exiting a Volpar as the second man somewhat of a contortionist, just-dive adventure for Sam. A Doug was more suited to Sam’s physique.

“I bring this to your attention as I’m quite sure you might not have a bio on Sam as he



passed away a few years past in Chico from multiple myeloma attributed to his Vietnam exposures. Last I heard, he was providing healthcare as a nurse at a facility in Chico when he succumbed.”

**Kevin Brown** (MSO-66): “Chuck, I just wanted to compliment you on such a fine article (‘The Safety Card’ Jan. 2022 issue). You are so spot on in what you say. I have been saying for years that we are shafting ourselves out of business. I am still wondering why we use to fight fire at night, jump fires on the west side of the Bitterroots, work on steep slopes, work in amongst snags and jump in the timber. We did it and survived with few injuries. We were taught how to manage our safety. Again, great article. Enjoy all your articles, keep it up!”

**Lillian Wenger** (Associate): “Hello Chuck—I so enjoyed the January issue of the *Smokejumper* magazine. How nice that you had the article wishing Luke Birky a “Happy Birthday” for turning 100 years old. I did call him last week and had a nice chat with him. He is doing well, said ‘just slowing down.’

“Naturally, since I am most familiar with the CPS men, I thoroughly enjoyed the thumb-nail bios of some of the men. Reading them brought back memories of the men, many of whom I knew and had met. In the fall I did donate a couple of boxes to the National Museum of Forest Service History of Roy’s files. Thanks, for all the years you have put in writing the magazine and for your being so fair to the CPS men in the articles you have included over the years.”

**Chuck Sheley:** After I stopped jumping, I worked 18 years for the Mendocino N.F. as Organized Crew (OC) Coordinator. I recruited and trained almost 4,000 young people from U.C. Davis, Chico State, and the local high schools during that time. We were fielding 13 crews with a roster of 300 available firefighters a year. They were all young people and



for many, this was one of their first jobs. Twenty-three of these young men and women went on to become smokejumpers. Very unusual for people from a Type II Crew to be hired as a smokejumper as Hotshot (Type I Crew) experience was the normal requirement. Many more went into other jobs with the USFS and BLM. I am saddened that the USFS has dropped this program as it provided the needed firefighters and, also gave young people a chance to have a job resume. I recently got an email from “Kipp” Morrill who went into a long career with the BLM.

This is an example of why I feel teaching young people is one of the most rewarding careers. Whether it was teaching Physical Education, being a Track Coach or teaching wildland firefighting, every student was important.

A recent email from Kipp: “Hello Mr. Sheley! Just checking in to say hello and hope all is well. I’ve been retired since October of last year and have been enjoying traveling. I was able to connect with another one of your mentees, Mike Lopez. Mike and I both started our fire careers on OC-24 back in 1988. Mike retired from CAL FIRE and is currently the treasurer for the California Professional Firefighters. We both had a nice evening around the fire in Quartzsite, AZ, and reminisced about our time together back on the crew. Soon your name was brought up and we both reflected on how our time on that crew set the stage for what turned out to be amazing careers. We were both thankful to have had such incredible opportunities that started with the high standards you instilled in us through that stellar program. We both learned so much and here we are. I know many of us have said it before but thank you again for all you did for so many in that program. I’ve attached a picture of two old fire dogs who eventually grew up to people we hope have made you proud. We will hope to get together with you when we are all back in Chico at the same time.”

The Start of the NSA—**Cole MacPherson** (MSO-55): “I had the privilege of knowing **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) for 40 plus years. He organized an evening meeting with Ed Courtney, Laird Robinson, Jack Demmons and me with his dream of the NSA.” *The rest is history. (Ed.)*

1952 Washington D.C. news release: “The forest

service is turning the airplane into a workhorse for fire detection and control. C.A. Gustafson, forest service fire control chief, ‘When a fire is spotted in a remote area, the forest service’s smokejumpers are rushed to the scene to put out the blaze or slow its progress until help arrives.’”

Got a note from **Davis Perkins** (NCSB-72). He is off to the Ukraine tomorrow (3/23) to join a medical team helping those in need. Davis continually volunteers on medical teams to respond to needs all over the world.

Smoke Jumper Hot Springs Yellowstone N.P.: “In 1956, Assistant Chief Ranger William S. Chapman named Smoke Jumper Hot Springs, located about one mile west of Summit Lake and about 6 miles southwest of Old Faithful. Chapman named it because ‘smoke jumpers who jump on forest fires use the thermal area as a guiding landmark in making their jumps in and coming out from fires’ (USBGN folder file).”

**Mike Nielson** (MYC-73): “Chuck, I always knew my writings affected the people that read them, but I never considered myself a ‘writer.’ Over time, I wondered whether just writing constituted qualification to be a writer. It seemed so but my readers weren’t necessarily qualified to declare me so. Until I wrote a piece declining an opportunity to crew on a racing yacht competing on San Francisco Bay in the Big Boat Races. I was overly eloquent in my declination, and it resulted in a response I didn’t expect. The reader said I was a writer. He was qualified in that assessment as he and his parents were all published authors. He accepted my declining to sail with him by saying I was a better writer than a sailor and that I should ‘just write.’ I did and I do.

“I’ve been tempered in my writings to write what I know and to know my intended audience. When asked what moves me to write, I often respond with, ‘I don’t know what I mean until I read what I write.’

“This lengthy lead-in (forgive my violation of your advice ‘to keep it short’) brings me to comment on your most recent ‘Sounding Off’ column in the April *Smokejumper* issue. I would have benefited by your response to critics that if they didn’t like what they read had I embraced ‘Just Turn the Page.’ On the opposite page of your column is validation to your Editor

role - New Life Members. 'Just Turn the Page' is inspiration that opens writing to more expanded subjects I've held back on due to that tempering caution and sensitivity to critics."

**John Blackwell** (MYC-64): "Chuck-Thank you for an honest, straight forward, sensitive article (1944—The Civilian Public Service Years). I recall as a child my father being told by a friend that 'conscientious objectors are cowards.' My father idolized his older brother Hubert (**Hubert Blackwell**-MSO-44), as did I. Hearing those words caused me a lifetime of introspection. I took a challenging fork to become a smoke-

jumper because of those words."

**Jim Miller** (CJ-68): "Chuck-I really appreciate the way you handled a disgruntled member regarding military service smokejumpers. I found the documentation of their military service, their firefighting, and their post-firefighting life worthy of reading and recording. To the disgruntled member, I for one am very happy with 'the cook and the food.' A long overdue thank you."

**Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59): The NSA Reunion registration was mailed in April. The dates are August 12-14, in Boise. If you did not get this, please contact me. 📧

# National Smokejumper Association Position Statements

By **Bob McKean** (Missoula '67)

**T**he proliferation of mega-fires has been a topic of conversation among NSA board members for the nine years I have served on the board. Board members are deeply concerned about these fires: the millions of acres burned, the smoke-filled skies, the precious resources and beautiful places lost, the businesses destroyed, the towns leveled, and, especially, the loss of life. They are also deeply concerned about what can be done to address this increasingly dire situation since fire seasons are longer, temperatures hotter, and droughts more severe.

The NSA is a private non-profit 501c3. This means it cannot lobby, but nothing prevents the NSA from taking positions on some of these issues so that others will know where the NSA stands. However, consensus among board members has been elusive. The diversity of opinion among board members, likely reflective of our membership at large, is a primary reason.

During the past few months, wildfire fighter pay and benefits emerged as an area where consensus could be achieved; subsequently, a committee was formed to draft language. During committee deliberations, it became aware of the Infrastructure Act which included some of the same concepts the

committee was considering. More significantly, the committee learned from Michelle Hart that she was working with others on a bill that contained many of the same ideas to improve pay and benefits for wildland firefighters. The committee, working with Michelle, drafted language in support of what was subsequently named the Tim Hart Bill. That language was approved by the NSA Board and sent in a letter of support for that bill:

*The National Smokejumper Association strongly supports the direction of the Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act.*

*Pay and benefits for Federal wildland firefighters must be drastically improved to be commensurate with their difficult, dangerous work. Improved pay and benefits are required for the Federal Government to attract and retain the highly skilled, professional workforce necessary in today's wildfire environment. Moreover, increasing the pay and benefits of Federal wildland firefighters is simply the right thing to do!*

The committee continued its work in drafting more specific position statements. After a number of drafts, and in consultation with a variety of sources,

the National Smokejumper Association Position Statements were passed by the NSA Board at its meeting on March 23, 2022.

First, the NSA believes that the effective use of smokejumpers in initial attack is worthy of new emphasis. It is a time-tested, effective strategy that must be foremost in the minds of those making decisions about initial attack.

The primary idea at play in most of the remaining positions statements is that pay and benefits for federal wildland firefighters must be increased to attract and retain qualified individuals. That is particularly important given the length of the fire season and nature of fires which requires an increasingly professional work force to fight them. It is also important in retaining quality firefighters in part because the salary and benefits are considerably better at other agencies.

Finally, there is concern that there needs to be more latitude in hiring hard-to-fill positions.

A number of the positions taken by the NSA are reflected one way or another in either the Infrastructure Act or the Tim Hart Bill. Nevertheless, the NSA Board decided to include those positions since the Tim Hart Bill is yet to pass Congress and some aspects of the Infrastructure Act are not permanent.

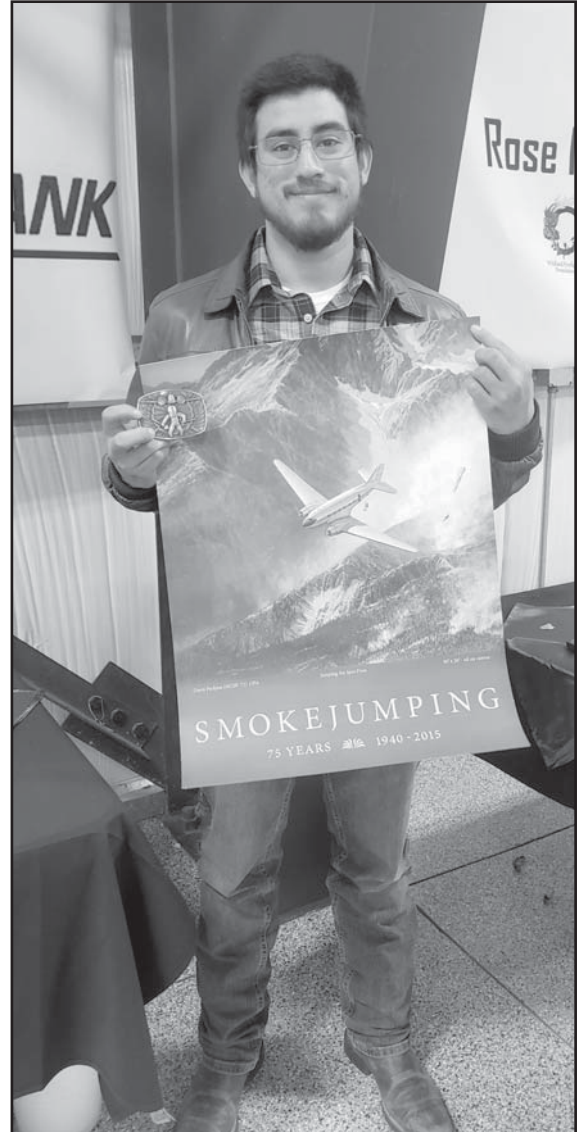
NSA positions may be altered as more information becomes available or circumstances otherwise change.

NSA Position Statements March 3, 2022

1. Use smokejumpers timely and effectively in initial attack on wildfire.
2. Develop distinct wildland firefighters' classification series.
3. Allow long-term seasonal (temporary) wildland firefighters to transition and/or apply for permanent positions.
4. Transition all smokejumpers to career seasonal or permanent positions.
5. Provide 12-month health insurance for all long-term seasonal wildland firefighters and qualifying family members.
6. Provide comprehensive mental health programs for wildland firefighters and qualifying family members.
7. Provide federal wildland firefighters locality pay commensurate with state and local wildland fire pay.
8. Eliminate, or exempt, wildland firefighters

from pay caps.

9. Create research programs to evaluate, track, and treat the effects of chronic exposure to smoke, combustible particulate matter, and firefighting chemicals.
10. Provide career training and education benefits to wildland firefighters who are required to transition out of the profession.
11. Allow local hiring for hard-to-fill positions. 🧠



*The NSA recently donated a Jumper belt buckle and a print of 'Jumping the Spot Fires' to the Kalispell Chapter of the Wildlands Firefighter Foundation (WFF) for their annual fundraising banquet.*

*Alexander Zarynow, a Kalispell stationed Firefighter and aspiring smokejumper, was the winner of the NSA sponsored raffle. Thanks to sponsors like the NSA, the Kalispell WFF group raised over \$35,000 for the WFF. These funds go to support injured Wildlands Firefighters from all branches, and assist families of Firefighters killed in the line of duty. (Courtesy Eric Shelton)*





# RECORDING SMOKEJUMPER HISTORY



## 1945 Rookies—The End of the Civilian Public Service Years

NSA History Preservation Project

*The Civilian Public Service (CPS-103) (Conscientious Objectors) era comes to an end after the 1945 season. There were 118 rookies trained that season. Seventy-six were stationed at Missoula, 21 at McCall, 14 at Cave Junction, and seven at Winthrop.*

*From Mark Mathews book Jumping On The Western Fire Line: "Throughout its history, American society has grudgingly protected, to various degrees, the privilege to conscientiously object. ...former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harlan F. Stone pointed out the importance of protecting such rights when he wrote, '...Every ethical and practical consideration which should lead the state to endeavor to avoid the violation of the conscience of its citizens should therefore lead a wise and humane government to seek some practical solution of this difficult problem.' The Peace Churches were caught off guard during WWI. From Jumping On The Western Fire Line: "War Department records show that of the 504 courts-martial, 17 conscientious objectors were condemned to death and 142 were sentenced to life imprisonment. Although no objector was officially executed, the roll of the Mennonite 'Martyrs Mirror' did expand during the war years. Not until 1933 did the government grant the last of the court-martialed objectors a full and free pardon."*

*By the time WWII started, the Peace Churches had helped provide a program that offered religious objectors an alternative service. Language described the work to be of "national importance." Many of the men I talked to referred to the program as being of "national impotence." They did not hesitate to volunteer for the smokejumper program when given the chance. They wanted to make a difference.*

*If I remember correctly in talking to these men, they were paid \$5.00 a month by the Peace Churches. This was double the rate paid the other CPS men, and the smokejumpers were encouraged to use the "extra" to purchase health insurance since the Forest Service re-*

*fused to cover them. Clothing was almost falling apart when approval was finally made for the government to buy the men a pair of boots, two pair of pants, three shirts, socks, and gloves.*

*In my opinion the work done by the CPS-103 men established the permanency of the smokejumper program. The 1943 group jumped 47 fires saving taxpayers an estimated \$75,000. In 1944 the number of smokejumpers doubled and the USFS no longer considered the program experimental, and funds were budgeted. The 1945 season "sealed the deal," in my estimation, as smokejumpers from Nine Mile, McCall, Cave Junction and Winthrop made 1,236 jumps on 296 fires and saved an estimated \$346,000. Here are the men of 1945. All from MSO/Nine Mile, unless otherwise noted. (Ed.)*

**Ivan Amstutz (MYC)**—Mennonite, career dairy farmer, Ohio.

**Edward "Ned" Arnett**—Quaker, Ph.D., Professor Duke Univ.

**David "Skinny" Beals (MYC)**—Mennonite, career smokejumper, retired as Loft Foreman Redmond after 29 years with USFS.

**Ralph Belzer**—Jehovah Witnesses, career carpenter/painter in MT.

**Luke Birky**—Mennonite, hospital administrator. "Smokejumping—I'd do it all again. Living with people of conviction but from varied backgrounds and perspectives became a time of evaluation and maturing. It was a time to increase vision of what it meant to be a follower of the Prince of Peace and become more socially responsible."

**Bill Bristol (NCSB)**—Ph.D., professor, Princeton, Latin-American expert.

**Jim Bruff (MYC)**—Born Korea of missionary parents, M.D., Chairman Dept. of Family Medicine Presbyterian Hospital, CA.

**Jim Brunk**—Mennonite, M.D. Internal Medicine Harrisonburg, VA.

**Edmund Christopherson**—Quaker, free-lance writer primarily about Montana and the Northwest, articles in major magazine, writer of at least six books.

**Joe Coffin**—Quaker, Whittier College, bit part actor Hollywood 1938, career Auto Mechanics teacher, Southern Calif.

**Wardell Davis**—First African American smoke-jumper, First Gospel Church, from Philadelphia, PA.

**Clarence Dirks**—Mennonite, career heavy construction, US Corps of Engineers for 24 years.

**Conrad Downing**—Quaker, Univ. education, worked for ITT on development of Night Vision Program.

**Warren Downs**—Methodist, Univ. education, grant writer for Univ. of Wisconsin, noted cellist for Madison Symphony Orchestra.

**Elon Eash** (CJ)—Mennonite, relief work Europe, career farmer.

**Junior Eberly** (MYC)—Brethren, Univ. education, schoolteacher.

**Neil Eller**—Brethren, mechanic, and heavy equipment sales.

**Dale Fickle** (MYC)—Coach Boise Jr. College, jumped five years, discharged paratrooper, squad-leader MYC, career USFS. Not CPS.

**Chuck Frantz**—Ph.D., a noted researcher/professor of anthropology and taught at State University of New York-Buffalo, Portland State University, the University of Toronto, Howard University, and Amherst University.

Chuck had strong feelings about the military draft and refused to register for the peacetime draft in 1948. In July 1949 he was sentenced to 90 days imprisonment.

**Dick Frazer**—Enlisted in the Marines at age 17 during WWII and was on a troop transport that was torpedoed at sea, jumped 1945-46 seasons. Not CPS.

**Ray Funk**—Mennonite, Bethel College graduate, four years football, missionary work Paraguay, hosted Mennonite tours of historical significance.

**John Garber** (MYC)—Farming, construction, contractor, Christian missions and relief trips to foreign countries through Mennonite Disaster Services.

**Bob Goering** (NCSB)—Mennonite, M.D., Pathologist St. Joseph Hospital, Kansas City, KS.

**Albert Gray** (CJ)—Ph.D. professor of economics at Baldwin-Wallace Univ., taught at American University in Cairo, Egypt, and in Nigeria, active throughout his life in civil rights, nonviolence, and poverty problems in the U.S. and Third World.

**Bill Green** (CJ)—“He was a pioneer in air operations in Region 5, and I was told that he was the first person carried on a stretcher on the outside of helicopter during a test. During WWII he spotted members of the Triple Nickles on several fires.” From Al Boucher notes. Not CPS.

**Willard Handrich**—An ordained minister, pastored the Grand Marais, Michigan, Mennonite Church for 31 years.

**John Harnish** (CJ)—Mennonite Board of Missions and Bethel Publishing as a graphic artist, retired from Bethel Publishing as a department supervisor of graphic artists.

**Jonas Hershberger**—Mennonite, self-employed as a heavy equipment operator, in an unusual turn of events he was drafted again in 1950 and entered the Army to serve in the Korean conflict.

**Ivan Holdeman**—Remembers that the Mennonite kids were not readily accepted at his grade school, and he and his brother had to fight their way home at times. In 1964 he received his master's from the Univ. of Colorado and went to Turkey for a teaching assignment. Ivan finished his teaching career in Denver at Arvada West H.S. and retired in 1983.

“It is my hope that I have been a link in the chain which has contributed to a world of less violence and a world that treats our planet with more respect.”

**Donald Hostetler** (CJ)—Joined smokejumpers with twin brother, Dwight, career farmer in Ohio.

**Dwight Hostetler**—Twin brother of Donald, career in fabricating metal.

**Art Hoylman** (CJ)—Mennonite, dairy farmer, insurance business.

**Charles Huppe**—Columbia Univ., first assistant to Montana Attorney General Arnold Olsen and was actively connected with the newspaper *People's Voice*.

**Al Inglis**—Yale Divinity School, flying pastor N.D., worked for the Federal War on Poverty. “He

celebrated his **90th birthday** by jumping from a plane (tandem with a professional). He admitted to not particularly caring for the long 'free fall' but was once again thrilled by the parachute, despite a growing wind from an approaching storm."

**Jim Johnson**—Mennonite, logger, saw shop owner, Corvallis, OR. **Richard Kathe** (MYC)—Radio announcer at WGAR in Cleveland, President of the U.S. Feed Grains Council, Executive Vice President of the United Dairy Association, and President of the American Egg Board where he developed the very successful "Incredible Edible Egg" advertising campaign.

**David "Doc" Kauffman**—Sawmill worker, USFS packer, Medical Dr. Whitefish, MT. where he practiced family medicine for over 40 years.

**Norman Kauffman**—Univ. education, teacher, school administrator, and pastor in the Mennonite Church, service with Gospel Echoes Prison Ministries.

**Archie Keith**—Jehovah's Witness, severely injured on fire jump, chute was collapsed by a snag, and he fell about 80 feet to the ground. His right leg was fractured near the hip and his left leg near the ankle. The falling snag landed only a few feet away, barely missing Archie. Then began the effort to carry him over 16 miles through deadfall and brush in the dark of night.

The crew only made two miles in the first 12 hours. By noon they had made seven miles and were reinforced by eight new jumpers who parachuted in. Dr. Amos Little, a military doctor trained in 1943, was among the group. Archie spent two and a half months in a cast before being released when the camp closed in October. Archie's occupation in later life is listed as Locomotive Engineer for the Burlington Northern Railroad.

**Howard King** (NCSB)—Howard jumped at North Cascades in 1945 and was a member of the 12-man crew that started up jumper operations at Winthrop after the base was closed at the end of the 1940 season.

**Willard Krabill** (CJ)—Graduated from Goshen College in 1949 and received his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in 1953. Dr. Krabill was a leading figure in health care in the Goshen area. During his career he delivered more than 2,700 babies to residents, instituted courses in human sexuality at Goshen College, and served

on numerous boards and ethics committees. In the 50s Dr. Krabill served a three-year Mennonite Committee term working with leprosy patients in Vietnam. He started in family practice after returning from Vietnam and later became the physician for Goshen College until his retirement in 1991.

**Dale Landis**—Advanced Univ. education, Dept. of Public Works in Virginia, Child Guidance Clinic in Ohio, Racine Mental Health Clinic in Wisconsin, and as a therapist at the Norris Adolescent Center in Mukwonago, Wisconsin.

**Dexter MacBride**—Dexter had graduated from Cumberland University in Tennessee in 1938. CPS notes show him as being City Attorney for Norfolk, VA, at the time he entered CPS.

**Al Malthaner**—Univ. education, taught at Horace Mann School for Boys in New York City, N.Y.

**Bob Marshall**—Quaker, Univ. education, Executive Director of Self-Help Enterprises.

**Wes Matson**—Quaker, advanced Univ. education, therapist, Episcopal Clergyman, and college lecturer.

**Jim Mattocks**—Duke Univ. Law School graduate, helped establish the North Carolina American Civil Liberties Union, and the High Point Human Relations Commission named Jim and his wife, Edith, as High Point Citizens of the Year in 1985.

**Dennis Miller** (MYC)—Mennonite, heavy equipment and mining, 33 years in cattle business. "Remembering the four years in CPS, I think it made me a better person. I learned to respect the feelings and thinking of other people with different backgrounds. All the projects had their importance, but smokejumping was the most enjoyable."

**Ralph Miller** (MYC)—Mennonite, career logger, pastored churches in North Pole, Sitka, and Anchorage from 1959-84. Ralph served as an elected official in the denomination's Alaska District Office from 1984 until retirement in 1996. "My short tenure in smokejumping was one of the highlights of my life. This experience did much to mold my entire life."

**Virgil Miller**—Mennonite, owned and operated Millers Greenhouse and Cider Mill. Later owned and operated Springbrook Park and Farm.

**Bill Mummery** (MYC)—Methodist, Professor of Psychology at Univ. of Oklahoma.

**Carl Naugle**—Marine Corps paratrooper, student at University Montana.



**David Palmer**—Quaker, airport mechanic.  
**“Nick” Pauls (CJ)**—Graduate Pacific Bible Institute, career carpenter.

**Roy Piepenburg**—Quaker, Univ. Wisconsin grad. In 1961 he emigrated to Canada and took teaching position in the Northwest Territories and, after three years, was promoted to school Superintendent, Indian Affairs, St Paul, Alberta. Roy was a lifetime peace advocate and after retirement continued with his involvement in Project Ploughshares and the Canadian Peace Alliance. “I planned to dedicate my life to social reform along avenues that would aid the poor and oppressed. That is how I got involved in Indian education and aboriginal rights.”

**Bob Rehfeld**—Rookied just out of high school, graduated from the Univ. of Montana, where he played tackle on the Grizzly football team, with a degree in Forestry in 1950. He served in the Army during the Korean War and returned to a career with the USFS, retired as Forest Supervisor for the Superior N.F. in 1982. Not CPS.

**Fred Rungee**—Was immensely proud of his service to his country as a conscientious objector with the fledgling smokejumpers of the CPS program during WWII, a true Alaskan, more often he could be found in the woods on foot with his double bit axe, his model 70 Winchester hunting rifle and a 60-pound pack, worked for the Bureau of Land Management as the Fire Management Officer of the Glennallen District.

Of his more than 70 years in Alaska, he resided primarily in the town of Glennallen. Upon retirement in 1978, he moved to the Slana area to a cabin that he himself built two and a half miles from the nearest road. Packed all the materials and even a massive wood stove he needed for the cabin on foot. He did concede using a buckboard to move his piano.

**Abe Schlabbach**—Attended Palmer Chiropractic College, took over a practice owed by his wife’s father. Abe continued to teach Sunday School in the Amish/Mennonite tradition.

**Bob Searles**—Methodist, accomplished musician, active in radio and TV in Los Angeles, played at Coconut Grove.

**Maynard Shetler**—Headed the Herald Press book division of Mennonite Publishing House, advanced university degrees, helped develop Bible school cur-

ricula used by many denominations across North America.

“The two years in smokejumpers were a time of significant spiritual growth. The early camps consisted mostly of Mennonites with little conflict on doctrine. **The smokejumpers contained a broad spectrum of beliefs** from radical Pentecostals to modernists. In discussions, **you either proved your point or you weren’t heard.**”

**David Smith**—Methodist, BA in English from the College of Idaho, and Master’s in Divinity from Garrett Theological Seminary. David ministered at many churches in the Pacific Northwest.

**Tom Summers (MYC)**—Univ. Redlands, UC Calif., Univ. Nevada, taught at Truckee Meadows College and Univ. of Nevada, well-known Reno area artist.

**Hubert Taylor**—Quaker, 4<sup>th</sup> generation prominent Philadelphia family, Law Degree from Temple University.

**Phil Thomforde**—Quaker, Univ. education, Phil served in China for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency 1946-48, worked for UNESCO in Iran 1956 as an agricultural advisor, moving to Italy in 1959 while working for the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, a post he held for 22 years while visiting more than 70 countries. Phil retired in 1982 to Pleasant Hill where he served a four-year term as mayor. He and his wife went back to China 1985-86 as volunteer teachers at the Nanjing Agricultural University.

**Clarence Tieszen**—Mennonite. “When I was born, we lived in a building that served both as a barn and home with a single wall separating the areas.” BLM in Anchorage, Alaska, as an equipment maintenance mechanic for the Anchorage District Fire Control. He also notes two tours to Nigeria as an equipment specialist for Aid for International Development. He called it “the experience I cherished more than anything else in my life.”

**Levi Tschetter**—Hutterite, advanced university education, taught English and German for 32 years, finished at the Poinsett-Hutterite Colony near Estelline, SD. The Hutterites are the oldest Christian communal society in the world (450 years) and there are more than 350 colonies in the US and Canada.

**Don Unruh**—Mennonite, served in the Merchant Marines for two years in the late 1940s and later

became a teacher at Findlay High School where he taught automotive, math, and theory until his retirement in 1986.

**Norman Watkins**—Army 1943-44, probable Airborne. Not CPS.

**Bill Weber**—Quaker, volunteering American Friends Service Europe four years helping with food distribution, photography business, ran for state representative (WI), returned to Koblenz, Germany, in 1987 for reunion with children to whom they had distributed food and clothing 40 years earlier.

**Gene Yoder**—Mennonite, like many CPS draftee's, he was verbally abused by locals and accused of cowardice for his religion-based opposition to military service. His daughter Beth stated in an August 2020 interview that Gene told her he volunteered for the smokejumper CPS camp at Missoula to prove his bravery. Gene was extremely proud of his time as a smokejumper. In 2010, a Ford Trimotor was touring Kansas and daughter Beth bought him a ride in it. Gene said afterwards through a broad smile, that he had never landed in a Ford until that day, only taken off. 🦋

*Turn Your Pins and Patches Into*

## **Helping Other Smokejumpers**

*and Their Families*

Send us your Smokejumper or other pins, Trail Crew pins, and/or patches that are hiding in your sock drawer. We'll sell them to collectors on eBay with all money going into the NSA Good Samaritan Fund and acknowledge you in a later issue.

*Send to: Chuck Sheley—10 Judy Ln—Chico  
CA 95926*

## **Still Looking for Your Biography**

The response has been good for the bio request. I've got close to 1,500 done. If you have not taken the time to send me one, please sit down and do so. Information in this order:

**Born:** Month, day, year, city, state. **Grew Up:** City, state, graduated from H.S. including location. **Further Education:** Location, degree(s).

**Career:** Chronological order Military service/Honors/Awards?

**Your Life:** Have been getting good extra information—go for it!

If you can send in an email or Word document, it saves me a lot of typing.

Please do not send in pdf. Otherwise, I'll take it written longhand. (Ed.)

EWU Digital Commons



[Home](#) [About](#) [FAQ](#) [My Account](#) [Contact](#)

[Home](#) > [College, Department, or Program](#) > [Archives](#) > [SMOKEJUMPERS](#)

## **SMOKEJUMPER DIGITAL ARCHIVES**

<https://dc.ewu.edu/smokejumpers>

Visit this NSA and EWU website to view these collections:

- National Smokejumper Association Meeting Minutes
- Publications on Smokejumping
- Smokejumper & Static Line Magazines
- Smokejumper Base Crew Pictures
  - Redmond •Cave Junction •NCSB •LaGrande •Silver City
- Tom Carlsen Film on Smokejumping (1939)
- Triple Nickle Photographs from the National Archives

# Dixie Fire Destruction Didn't Have To Happen

by Bill Smith (USFS/Ret)

**W**hen I see the incredible destruction caused by the 960,000-acre Northern California Dixie Fire, I'm flabbergasted because it didn't have to happen! The unprecedented destruction is the result of politicization of our National Forests and the dismemberment of the United States Forest Service as a tree management Agency.

As a Professional Forester and retired 33-year veteran of the USFS—Plumas National Forest where the Dixie Fire ignited, I have a lot of skin in the game. We can do better, a lot better.

Unbelievably the spark that ignited the Dixie Fire goes all the way back to 1981. Ms. Gene Bermardi, a sociologist and USFS employee, was unhappy with her GS-11 position and filed a discrimination complaint based on gender. It took ten years, but the complaint morphed into what became known as the "Consent Decree." As a result, many foresters and seasoned fire fighters became "personas non grata" and, over time, were harassed and pushed out. We took with us the corporate knowledge and experience that is lacking in the management of our National Forests today.

The exodus happened to coincide with the 1993 "Spotted Owl Moratorium" that favored the management of "Old Growth Species" over managing the forest for its ever-present fire risk. The Moratorium was nothing more than a thinly veiled program to stop tree harvesting on the National Forests.

Because of the Moratorium, the vacuum created by the departing foresters and firefighters was quickly filled by bulking up on "ologists" i.e., Wildlife Biologists, Anthropologists, Archaeologists, Fishery Biologists, Botanists, Ichthyologists, and others, all mostly cut from the "Environmental" cloth. This was the point where the USFS changed from a "Can Do" organization to a "Do Less and Hope for the Best" organization that per-

sists today. The new "ologists" thought they could protect and enhance old growth wildlife species while ignoring the management of the forest itself. What they ignored was the annual growth of .06% that has plugged our forests with biomass that should have been harvested to keep the fire risk down but wasn't. This sealed the fate of the Old Growth species that the "ologists" wanted to save as they have been wholly consumed in the exploding firestorms we have today.

Two Federal laws made it possible to "ignore the forest for the owls." They were "The National Environmental Policy Act" (NEPA, 1970) and "The Endangered Species Act" (ESA, 1973). NEPA gives any "appellant" the right to "appeal" the decision to implement USFS harvest projects under the Moratorium all the way to court. ESA requires the USFS to consider the impact of the project on all life forms which is nigh on impossible. These laws were and still are used by energized Environmental Organizations to appeal every USFS project that proposed to harvest a tree or a cubic yard of biomass. Empowered by judges, Environmental Organizations stopped hundreds of USFS harvest projects for the past 30 years but could not stop the ongoing growth of the forest itself. It's this unharvested growth that is being consumed by wildfire today. It's not the suppression of lightning-caused fires over the past 60 years that is wiping out our forests as the "ologists" like to say, it is the lack of harvest that is fueling these catastrophic fires.

To right the ship of management on our Western National Forests, the USFS would have to be reimaged. Foresters and experienced firefighters would have to be hired and the operating direction for each forest (i.e., the "Forest Plans") would have to be rewritten. It happened in the 1990s with the Spotted Owl Moratorium and with Congressional action, it could happen again today.

I'd like to suggest a better way to manage our



National Forests than watching them burn. This strategy centers on establishing shaded fuel breaks and locking up the carbon that grows in the forest. This new strategy would:

- Establish shaded fuel breaks that would stop fire starts.
- Starve fires of fuel by harvesting the fuel.
- Clean the air by putting carbon that is stored as wood beyond fire's reach.
- Prevent thousands of premature deaths each year from exposure to smoke and airborne particulates.
- Protect and enhance the streams, soils, and wildlife in our forests.
- Create jobs in a self-sustaining system, no tax dollars needed.
- Stimulate the development of new products derived from wood that will replace oil.
- End the billion-dollar expense of fighting wildfires.

With California's Mediterranean climate, droughts, and dry lightning, there will always be the potential for large consuming wildfires. Fires as large as Dixie burned in California before the Native Americans entered the picture and will always be a possibility until we change how we manage our beloved National Forests.

Trees do a marvelous thing. They absorb carbon dioxide and using photosynthesis they split the carbon dioxide molecule into oxygen and carbon. Trees then release the oxygen and store the carbon as wood. This is known as the carbon cycle. The result is clean air to breathe.

The benefit of the carbon cycle is lost if the trees are burned by wildfire, the carbon is converted back to carbon dioxide, dirtying the air.

In the new strategy, trees would be harvested, and their stored carbon would be locked up beyond fire's reach. More importantly, the openings created by the harvest would be replanted and maintained as shaded fuel breaks.

Harvesting trees would starve the fires of fuel. Carbon stored as wood would be locked up by building homes with it. Locking up carbon reduces the amount of carbon available for the next wildfire. Less carbon-dioxide in the air means

climate change has been reversed.

A shaded fuel break is a fuel break with trees as opposed to one without trees. Fuel breaks interrupt the continuity of the forest fuels and stop fires from spreading. The shaded fuel breaks would be grown into and maintained as open "park-like" areas, much like those maintained by the Native Americans. When these park-like forests reach the age when they are losing more carbon to decay than they are storing, they too would be harvested and replanted. Each harvested area would be re-harvested every 80-100 years or so, locking up more carbon each time, thus reversing climate change.

The sale of the harvested carbon, stored as wood, would pay for the whole program, including harvest, replanting, and administration. No taxpayer monies needed.

The biggest obstacles to a new strategy for National Forest management are of our own making. First, Congress would have to fund a new mission to "harvest carbon" for the USFS. Second, Congress would have to change NEPA and ESA that have been exploited to block harvest programs in the past. Both very doable.

Let's leave green and clean National Forests to the future generations.

The time to come together is now! 🌲

*Bill is a Retired Plumas National Forest Silviculturist. He graduated from Michigan Technological University in 1977 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Forest Management. Bill fought fire throughout his career initially as crewman in 1975 on the Lee Summit Tanker 684, Quincy RD, Plumas NF, and as a "Spare Shot" on the Plumas Hotshots. He served 20 years as a Reforestation Culturist on Plumas NF before joining Ron O'Hanlon's "Vegetation Management Solutions" Enterprise Team in 2000, where he served as a Contracting Officer's Representative for eight years. He promoted to Plumas National Forest Vegetation Management Officer (Silviculturist) in 2009 and retired in 2011. Since retirement he has been exercising his State of California Professional Forester's License around the Camp Fire clearing lots of dead trees. He resides in Chico, Ca., and is and is an amateur historian and active in a hiking group*



# SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



## Wildland Firefighters Not Served Well By Albuquerque Service Center

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

**A**t our NSA Board meeting in Boise March 2018, we heard that the USFS smoke-jumper program was 43 positions short of their goal of 320 jumpers for the 2017 season. There seemed to be a breakdown in the hiring process at the Albuquerque Human Resources Management (HMR), where the applications are screened and forwarded to the hiring unit.

I listed some of the problems the smokejumper base managers were having and forwarded them to the appropriate people. The questions were kicked up the line. The answers I got back from Human Resources Management (HRM) were confusing, and I could not match them to the questions I submitted. I forward them to some of our Ph.D.'s and smokejumper lawyers for interpretation.

Former NSA legal counsel **Guy Hurlbutt** (IDC-62) responded with an answer like several others: "Overall, the responses from the Forest Service are unintelligible and come chillingly close to the bureaucratic 'Doublespeak' we were warned about by George Orwell in his classic book *1984*. I have rarely seen better crafted non-responses to straightforward questions."

**John Culbertson** (FBX-69) responded: "Chuck's questions are direct, reasonable, and relate to a considerable problem in wildfire administration; an understandable hiring process that connects supervisors with workers. Answers from the Forest Service Albuquerque Service Center (ASC) appear generated by an automaton and are unfocused on all but government processes internal to that office. **The ability to clearly communicate is key to effective administration. That is a missing element here.**

"I have fifty years' experience in public and

private fire suppression, prevention, public information, research, and administration. ASC seems uniquely problematic. I hope the Forest Service will consider returning hiring to the Forests and Administrative Units. The human element in personnel management is essential, and one is closer to that with the home unit."

After this 2018 article, I followed it up with a July 2019 article as hiring did not improve. The USFS smokejumper program was short 32 jumpers in 2018, down 31 in 2019, and down 36 in 2020. Similar stats for 2021/22. Smokejumper Base Managers get lists of people who do not want or are not qualified to be smokejumpers—the person just checked that they were interested in "all vacant fire positions."

### Feedback From The Field

I am fortunate to be able to hear from wildland firefighters, jumpers, and hotshots. In 2019 I had the opportunity to sit down with a Fire Management Officer from a forest north of here. I was impressed with his attitude and desire for quick initial attack. He was a throwback to 30 years ago. We talked about the lack of ability to make **local hires. He said that is one of his problems.** The local people live in the area, have community ties, and know the country.

The current system gives him out-of-state hires while the local applicants go to another state. For instance, the hires coming from New Mexico to Oregon pass the hires going to New Mexico from Oregon. This would not make sense to anyone except those in the USFS Human Resources Department.

Now in 2022 we see that one of the main concerns of wildland firefighters is their lack of ability

to pay for housing in areas where they are offered jobs. Wouldn't local hiring make sense where the young entry-level firefighter could live at home?

**John Culbertson** (FBX-69): "Local agencies lead the way. The FIREScope agencies, with the exception of the federal folks, already have local hire. When formed, Federal agencies were vital to the running of a country and played a bigger role out of practicality. But I do think our country has become so big that it would be better to break up many Federal lands and put them under the authority of the states."

**Smokejumper Base Manager (2021): "ASC/HRM needs to revisit their mission statement which roughly states, 'a model employer that provides exceptional customer service to recruit and retain a workforce of dedicated public servants.' How can they value their own mission statement when our 'boots-on-the-ground' public servants are engaged in fire suppression and all-risk incidents during the time when applications are due to be considered for a permanent/seasonal position?"**

From a column I wrote for the July 2019 issue of *Smokejumper*: "Today, after a two-week delay, I did my annual Smokejumper History presentation to the RDD 2019 rookie class. Due to the many hiring problems from HR, they were two weeks late in starting their rookie training. There were supposed to be 12 rookies. Finally, today, there were 10 approved rookies, plus one still waiting approval, sitting in front of me. The last rookie still is undergoing background checks. They are delaying the start of rookie training with hope that #12 will get approval soon."

More recently (March 2022) I heard back from **Dave Provencio** (MSO-77) who was at the U.S. Hotshot Association conference in Santa Clarita, CA. I asked Dave for some feedback on the hiring system and got responses, via Dave, from current Wildfire Management Supervisors and Regional Wildfire Management personnel. Some responses: (1) Give up and get rid of ASC. We've been working with something that has never worked. (2) A Hotshot Superintendent or any supervisor has no control over who they need to hire. (3) Hotshot supervisors can't hire who they need to maintain IHC standards for recertification.

Dave forwarded me an article by Rachel

Granberg—Senior Forestry Tech., Okanogan-Wenatchee N.F. —who did a study to find barriers to recruiting and retaining Wildland Firefighters (WFFs). Over 70% of the 736 who responded to the survey were current federal WFFs. The hiring process presented many roadblocks to the recruitment of federal WFFs.

Some of these are: (1) Regions and agencies do not coordinate externally, and applicants sometimes must apply as much as eight or nine months before their start date. (2) When Fire Hire positions are announced in August when many are on the fireline, over 76% do not have access to a computer. (3) Only about half felt that job announcements were open long enough to apply. (4) Over 53% of respondents had issues "with navigation paths, sessions timing out, or other accessibility issues." (5) Only about 30% understand how resumes are evaluated and must have key words as the resumes are initially evaluated by a computer system.

The final paragraph of this report gives an excellent summary, and I want to quote it. "All survey respondents were current or former federal WFFs, meaning they made it through the application process at least once—yet they still reported issues with the hiring process. Because Fire Hire is held once annually, a missed opportunity or mistake can delay an individual's career by a year or more. Lack of job advertising, poor announcement timing, and brief application windows complicated the application process. Lack of access to supplemental documentation and problems with human resources all contribute to recruiting issues in the federal fire service. These results suggest that reforms to recruitment, application and hiring practices could be another leverage point for addressing WFF retention issues."

All of this points to a broken system that continues to operate and not make any changes. This is what we get with the government and the USFS. "Leaving the broken system the way it is, that's not a solution"—Barack Obama. "If I had one hour to save the world, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only five minutes finding the solution"—Albert Einstein. "If you define the problem correctly, you almost have the solution"—Steve Jobs.

At a recent NSA board meeting it was af-



firmed that the centralized system will **continue to expand** regardless of how it does **not** serve our wildland firefighters. Let's get back to local hire where local youth can start a job. I don't say this as an uninformed individual. I've done it with close to 4,000 young men and women and it works.

We will continue to hear the USFS rail about the lack of wildland firefighters and the numbers of positions not being filled. It is like a person running into a wall and wondering why they come to a quick stop. My wish is that all the people who sit on those chairs with four wheels could be put into the field for a season. Most would die the first day.

I am coming from the standpoint of a wildland firefighter and a teacher. There is no way that I, and other teachers could survive by ignoring the wishes of our clientele. Children are the top priority of most families. If I as a teacher, was failing my clientele, a quick change would be made. That is the result of **local control**. That is what is missing with the centralization of the hiring system.

Don't look for any changes. Common sense is not part of the equation. We will continue to

lack wildland firefighters; they will continue to get screwed by the system and we will continue into chaos.

The major news outlets will continue to write about the shortage of wildland firefighters and have little knowledge of the basic problems with the current, failed hiring system.

I do not make this claim without any knowledge or background. I have shown you statistics, input from smokejumper base managers, and hotshots. This is input from the people in the field. Apparently that input does not reach the higher ups.

I'm glad that I'm a teacher. We are responsible to our clientele. We respond to local needs. Our goal is to meet the needs of our students.

The chances that the Albuquerque hiring system will change are zero and next to none. There is no chance that this failed hiring system will change.

You as taxpayers and citizens of the U.S. are being duped by the government. Isn't it time to demand a change? Where are our Senators and Representatives in the Western States? They are asleep at the switch! 🗣️

---

## “Tell Us About Our Father”

by **Bill Moody** (North Cascades '57)

---

**A**t approximately 1815 on June 23, 1958, Forest Service Twin Beech N164Z, piloted by **Bob Cavanaugh**, departed NCSB with a load of cargo for the 8 Mile Ridge Fire, Winthrop R.D., Okanogan N.F., located 19 miles north of NCSB. Aboard were Senior Squadleader **Keith (Gus) Henderson** (NC-57), a Forester along to assess the multiple fires on the Winthrop District and to observe cargo drop operations.

At 1845, while circling for a second drop, N164Z crashed about .75 miles from the fire—all four aboard perished. Over the next few days, regional newspapers carried the story and funerals were held. Unfortunately, however, the news sources and the Okanogan N.F. had very little information about pilot Robert Cavanaugh.

Sixty-three years after their father's death, Bob's

son, Dennis, reached out to me for information about his father's short time at NCSB. Information that might help bring closure for Dennis and his siblings Denise and Kevin.

The following story is a response to that request. The story includes recollections of the “1958 crew” who knew Bob, and also information and excerpts from articles previously written by **Jack McKay** (NC-57), **Doug Baird** (NC-58), **Bill Eastman** (NC-55), and **Gene Jessup's** (NC-57) book “Friends I Have Found Along The Way.”

Bob was born on October 21, 1922, in Alameda, California, and graduated from St. Elizabeth H.S. in 1940. Shortly after graduation, he received an AA Degree in Criminology. In October 1942, Bob enlisted in the Navy flight program and entered active duty in February 1943. In June

1944 he became a commissioned naval aviator and in 1945 was assigned to an anti-submarine warfare unit on an escort aircraft carrier in the North Atlantic. After WW II Bob served in a reserve air anti-submarine unit stationed in Oakland. Later, while in inactive status, Bob furthered his education.

Bob was called back to active duty during the Korean conflict and was assigned to the carrier USS Bataan. Bob would later be sent to Pensacola to become a flight instructor for French and English military pilots. He married the love of his life, Dorothy, in 1952. In 1955 Bob's Naval career ended. He later flew for Mercy Flights out of Medford, Oregon, and had logged considerable Twin Beech flight time. In 1957 Bob returned to Southern Oregon College of Education where he earned an Elementary Education degree in 1958, just two weeks before his death.

In the spring of 1958, Bob was hired for a USFS smokejumper pilot position at NCSB. Bob reported for duty in May 1958, and by May 30, he was dropping jumpers on their annual refresher jumps.

## Bob Becomes Part of The Crew

The 1958 season marked a couple of significant changes at the jump base—a new pilot and an aircraft upgrade to a USFS Twin Beech that replaced the old single-engine Noorduyn Norseman.

The new pilot, as is the jumper's nature, had to be "assessed"—his personality, piloting ability, attention to safety, cargo drop accuracy, and pilot technique to facilitate a smooth exit with minimum opening shock (before the days of the D-bag). In all areas Bob received very high reviews.

This guy is going to fit in just fine!

Bob's "down to earth friendly personality" resonated with the crew. **Gene Jessup** (NCSB-57) recalls—"In the past there was not much interaction by pilots and the smokejumpers who rode in their aircraft, but Bob seemed to be just one of the jumpers. Most pilots were rather aloof, but Bob was more like a big brother. He was well liked by everyone who had the privilege to spend time in his company."

On June 22, the day before the fatal crash, several of us, including Bob, a WWII carrier pilot,

gathered in the bunkhouse to watch our favorite Sunday TV show, *Victory At Sea*, a documentary about WWII naval warfare in the Pacific and Atlantic Theaters. The show featured carrier activities in the North Atlantic, Bob's old post. As the show progressed, Bob added his first-hand account to the TV narration. He immersed as a real-life WWII hero, and further cemented his relationship with the crew.

Before "the D-bag days," jumpers were always bitching about poor position and a hard opening which often resulted in bloodied clavicles, riser neck abrasions and, occasionally, a helmet ripped off. Some attributed it to the pilot flying too fast, pulling too much power, inability to glide through the exit for an "optimum exit." Being sensitive to "our bitches," Bob fine-tuned the power settings, exit speed, and technique to allow the jumper to attain good position resulting in minimal opening shock. It helped! Jumper **Doug Baird** (NC-58) said of Cavanaugh, "Cavanaugh was greatly admired as a top-notch pilot. He was the best; someone we had learned to admire and trust."

## The Fire Season Begins

The 1958 fire season was shaping up to be busy fire season. The spring was unusually hot and dry with occasional thunderstorms. In early May the Snoqualmie N.F. had a 2,000-acre fire west of Snoqualmie Pass. From Bob's arrival though mid-June, the returning jumpers made their two refresher jumps. The first fire of the season, a lightning sleeper, occurred on June 18, on the Twisp Ranger District. This was Bob's first jumper fire, and it went well—he was going to be a great jumper pilot!

Over the next few days, temperatures climbed and T-storms were predicted to hit the area. On Monday, June 23 the temperature would soar to 105 degrees. This was the sixth day of rookie training. After a few false alarms, around noon, jumpers **Ron Roberts** (NCSB-57) and **Gene Jessup** (NCSB-57) jumped the Rock Creek Fire on the east side of the Okanogan N.F. About 1400 jumpers, **Bill Eastman** (NCSB-55) and **Leroy Gray** (NCSB-57) staffed the 8 Mile Ridge Fire, Winthrop R.D., 19 miles north of the jump base. The atmospheric conditions were very unstable

with downdraft conditions. The fire, in steep heavily timbered terrain, began to spread. At about 1530 jumpers **Jack McKay** (NCSB-57) and **Carl Dean Johnson** (NCSB-57) reinforced the fire. About the time the reinforcements arrived, the fire became very intense and was spreading quickly. The 20 rookie jumpers in training were dispatched via vehicles to support the four jumpers on the fire. When they arrived about 1800, the fire was estimated to be three acres.

Late afternoon two more fires were jumped on the Winthrop R.D. just north of the 8 Mile Ridge Fire. Jumpers **Chet Putnam** (NCSB-52) and **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57) jumped the Andrews Creek Fire. They witnessed bad downdrafts. The two other jumpers in the load, **Jim Wescott** (NCSB-57) and **Roy Percival** (NCSB-57) jumped the Disaster Creek Fire, the last fire Bob Cavanaugh would drop jumpers on.

## Tragedy Strikes

Returning to base, N164 Z was refueled, and full load of cargo was loaded for the 8 Mile Ridge and Andrews Creek Fires. **Keith (Gus) Hendrickson** (NCSB-47) and **Gerald Helmer** (NCSB-53) would be the cargo kickers. **Bob Carlman** (NCSB-57), in the co-pilot seat, would observe. The cargo consisted of hot meals, a Merry Digger (a several hundred-pound mechanical fireline trencher), chainsaws, fuel, and miscellaneous other equipment. At about 1745 N164Z departed on what would be its last mission.

Arriving at the 8 Mile Ridge Fire at about 1800, N164 Z circled to size up the drop flight pattern, then commenced with the first drop. Rookie **Doug Baird** (NCSB-58) wrote later, “a perfect drop, placing it in a clearing near the fire base camp.” The plane continued to the southwest, then turned northeast to set up for the second drop. Out of direct view from the jumpers, they heard a “distant thud.” Shortly after came the report from Sweetgrass Lookout that the plane had crashed. **Elmer Neufeld** (CJ-44), Training Foreman, quickly organized a 10-person crew and hiked .75 miles to the crash site where they confirmed that all four aboard the ill-fated plane were dead. They took action to contain the fire ignited by the crash. The specific cause of the crash was never determined, but a t-storm in the area with



*Bob Cavanaugh (Courtesy B. Moody)*

severe downdrafts was probably a significant factor. The plane needed about 150-200 feet to clear the ridge.

As if to mourn the deaths, after midnight the lightning storms subsided. It rained for the next two days, and the clouds hung low on the mountains. The Okanogan Aerial Project was in deep mourning. We had lost four brothers.

During the next few days, the overhead and crew discussed the tragic event and the risks inherent in smokejumper operations. What would the 20 rookies do, now only six days into their training? Surprisingly, no one resigned. A few of the experienced jumpers never fully recovered emotionally. The crash, in some way, had a permanent impact on all our lives—none more than the young family of Bob Cavanaugh: wife Dorothy, sons Dennis, Joey, Kevin and daughter Denise. There were many questions left unanswered. Hopefully, this story, “**Tell Us About Our Father**,” will help in some small way to bring a degree of closure. 🕯



## Remembering Our Lost Brothers

In 2002 Tom Leuschen, Asst. Fire Management Officer, Twisp R.D., Okanogan N.F., initiated a program to identify all the firefighters who lost their lives while fighting fire on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. A bronze plaque would be placed at the site of their death. In 2003 Leuschen, **John Button** (NCSB-75), and myself located the crash site. On September 26, 2003, NCSB jumpers placed a memorial bronze plaque

and American flag on the site of the crash.

Although Bob's smokejumper pilot career was short-lived, he made a deep and lasting impression on the '58 crew. Six plus decades later, our memories of him are still vivid—his friendly nature, "hero image," and desire to be a part of the team and "just a real nice guy"—destined to be in the jumper pilot "Hall of Fame."

In August 2021 the 70,000-acre Cub Creek 2 Fire on the Methow Valley R.D. burned over the 8 Mile drainage and ridge, and most likely the 1958 fire and the crash site. 🌲

# Old Smokejumper Memories of High Mountain Two Jumper Fire

By **Jimmie Dollard** (Cave Junction '52)

**B**reakfast, top of jump list, loft duty, making fire packs, boring. Fire call, sprint, suit up, hook on chutes, load on plane. Nordin warming up, fire packs loaded, four jumpers aboard, spotter in, rolling in 12 minutes, takeoff, noise, wind, fumes.

Airborne, sit on floor or fire packs, no door, wind, fumes, hard to talk. Spotter briefs: "Shasta N.F. lightning, morning smoke." Hour flight, seems longer, great scenery, cramped quarters, noise. Find lookout, see smoke, circle, big snag burning, two jumpers going, two disappointed.

All trees, no meadow, no clearing, timber jump smaller trees, in the door, rookie behind, push off, good position, check rookie, ok.

Plane gone, silent, time stops, slow turn, mesmerized by vistas, turn into wind, trees coming, drop through limbs, chute secure, make letdown. Meet rookie, lay out double L for jumpers OK. Cargo next, fire packs break through trees, climbers free fall, water cans next, one breaks, the other ok. Plane leaves, hike to fire, find big burning snag and small ground fire.

Dig fireline, must fall snag, clear impact area, wind increases, start back cut, snag brittle, dry, hollow and breaks. Fire scattered, heavy fuel, wind increases, fire spreads, dig new line, flank fire,

smoke, attack hot spots, dig faster, fire gaining, loosing fire, wind slows, fire slows, we're gaining. Fatigue, keep going dig faster, pinch it off, fire controlled! Exhausted, break for food and water, back to fire, cool hot spots, chop snag open, improve line.

Fire controlled by 2100, "Rookie, we did good." Need rest, paper sleeping bag useless, rookie has WWII down bag, lucky guy, jump suit and cargo chutes for blankets, sleep in fireline, alternate sleep/watch, cold night, little sleep.

Cold C-rats for breakfast. Get climbers, climb tree, clear lines, retrieve chute, fantastic view, lifetime image. Have humans been here before? Climb down, bag chute and repeat for rookie's chute. Back to fire, cold trail fire, check with bare hands, watch for smoke, eat C-rats, cold night.

Up early, C-rats, no smokes, no hot ashes, declare fire out, prepare for packout. Study map, easy packout, one-mile down ridge, five miles downhill to trailhead (Wrong). Start down ridge with 105 lb. packs, hike 30 minutes, wrong direction, confused. Fire marked wrong on the map; correct ridge is west across a deep drainage. Back up the ridge, 5-mile detour or cross the drainage?

Choose to cross the drainage, very steep, avoid drop-offs, heavy brush, water gone, thirsty, keep

going, find creek. Fill canteens and start climbing, steep, brush, exhausting, ridge at last, follow ridge, tough going, find trail after a mile, trail unworked, deadfalls, logs, washouts. Rookie falls, slow going, trailhead five miles, downhill, fatigue, legs wobbly, body numb, near trance, one foot and then the other, keep going. Reach trailhead, totally exhausted, USFS truck with keys, note and map to Ranger Station.

Arrive Ranger Station, tired and hungry, great meal, hot shower, bunk bed, sleep soundly. Backcountry airport, charter flight home, great pilot, extraordinary flight home.

Land at the Gobi, bros admire the plane, big smiles, rookie did great, gets high fives (he ended his career with over 5 fire jumps), file report, back on the jump list. Shower, shave, clean clothes. Tonight, Oregon Caves Lodge, beer, girls, life is good!

Looking back now, I feel blessed and proud to have been a smokejumper, one of the few who ever had the privilege. Smokejumping gave me the confidence that **“whatever is down there, I can handle it.”** I remember the many wonderful wilderness experiences with smokejumper bros. I hope you enjoyed sharing the memories with me. 🙏

*Jimmie earned his bachelor's in engineering from Oklahoma State and taught engineering at Purdue. He joined the Boeing Space program in Huntsville, Alabama, and had the privilege of working with Dr. Braun. In 1981 he founded Sunbelt, a solar company which became the second largest in the country. Jimmie worked on the Saturn V program which launched his college roommate and fellow Cave Junction Smokejumper, Stuart Roosa, to the moon. Roosa was the moon module pilot on the Apollo 14 Moon Mission.*

## More Smokejumper's Stories (1954-56)

by Don Maypole (Idaho City '54)

Jumping out of airplanes led to some interesting moments but we also were continuously challenged by non-airborne activities. In 1954, **Elmer Huston** (IDC-52) and I were dropped on a 2-manner on a high ridge in the central Rockies. There was no clear spot within walking distance to the fire, so we made a “timber jump.” Under the tall pines, the decayed “duff” on the forest floor was a foot thick. Our chutes came down between the pines and the thick “duff” gave me the softest landing I ever made.

While we slept that first night, an elk left tracks just a few feet from our camp. We expected to stay 24 hours after the last smoke. However, that time came and went. A helicopter flew over us and we thought it was going to pick us up, but it left. We were later told that it was diverted to an injured jumper from the Missoula base.

On the third day, our Idaho City packer, Fern Caves, arrived at our camp just as we finished our last food and water. Fern took our 90-pound fire packs, but it was necessary for us to hike the three

miles to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and then another 3-4 miles to the unpaved, short aircraft runway.

Elmer was a farmer who jumped in the summer and worked his farm the other time. A little older than the rest of us, I think he could outwork and outwalk most of us college boys. He left me in his dust. Fern was a mile or so behind me. As I arrived at the river, I stepped on a round rock and sprained an ankle.

As I walked along the river, I came to an acre of farmstead. There was a small, decayed log cabin and some farm equipment, but also of interest was a dugout cave. The front of the 8' X 10' structure was made of boards with about 10 or so feet dug back into the rock and soil. I walked another mile or so and came upon another dugout. This structure had a rock front. A soot stain showed where the fire had been in one corner. A full-length flat rock (bed?) was near the back wall. I believe that this dugout could have been made by a “mountain man” trapper of the 1840s.

Shortly thereafter, Fern caught up with me and noticed that I was limping. He gave me his horse and I continued the three miles. The airfield was interesting. The runway was across a horseshoe-shaped bend in the river. There was a 50-foot high cliff on the east side of the river. Wrecked airplanes were at each end of the dirt/gravel runway. When our pilot took off, he had to follow the contour of the river until he gained enough speed to pull up. I don't know about Elmer, but I may have had my fingers crossed!

One morning in 1955, our foreman, **James B. "Smokey" Stover** (MYC-46), yelled, "Fire on the Mountain," and we ran to the loft to suit up. Four of us were dropped on a fire. We controlled the fire by the late afternoon and were relieved by a ground crew. A Forest Service employee came during the beginning of a thunderstorm. The fellow had only a short piece of rope on his horse and no mules. He gave us his horse and decided to stay with the ground crew. We were able somehow to fasten some of our gear onto the horse, but we each still had to carry something. I carried a parachute bag.

As night fell, we started down the trail to the river and the thunderstorm really erupted. Although we had flashlights on our helmets or caps, they were not necessary because the lightning was continuous. Miles away, the foreman of our Idaho City ground crew experienced a lightning strike a few feet away. His crew rescued him, and he was taken down the mountain and ultimately to the VA hospital in Boise. It was a couple of weeks before he returned to work.

When we arrived at the river, it was apparent that it was wide and swift. There were no nearby bridges or good places to ford, so we strode out into the shallow current. I was successful in tip-toeing across the river bottom until I sank out of sight. As I hit the bottom, the water was over my head. I was carrying a parachute bag. The trapped air caught in the bag made it quite buoyant.

I shoved off the bottom and immediately popped up to the surface. Swimming and dragging the chute bag took me the few feet to shallower water and I waded to the shore. A Forest Service employee met us with a truck and took us to the nearby ranger station where we slept on the hay in the barn. I was ready for it.

In summer 1956, several of us were given a truck and assigned the task of loading some long logs. With four jumpers per log, we were able to use timber hooks to take them to the truck. However, we were faced with the task of getting the logs up onto the truck without a crane.

We had several pieces of rope, so we decided to lay them perpendicular across the truck bed and to load each log separately by pulling from the opposite side of the bed. Two of us pushed the logs up on one side and two pulled from the other side. We were doing OK until the logs shifted, and some rolled down toward the two of us at the bottom. We both immediately ducked under the bed of the truck, and the logs rolled a foot over our heads. A guaranteed way to clear one's mind!

My last fire occurred the first week in September in 1956. Smokey yelled, "Fire on the Mountain," and informed us that we would not be jumping. Four jumpers had already taken off in our Twin Beech for another fire, so we were given a pickup to ride to a small fire along the road north of Boise.

When we arrived, it was apparent that the fire was only a half-acre, but the fire conditions were the driest I had ever seen.

We started our fireline, but the fire was so hot we could not get close to it. I noticed that a spark had transferred the fire to the other side of the road, but my attempt to stop it was not successful. Then the fire started to crown. It became apparent that there were too few of us to stop the advance of the fire at that location.

We loaded up into the pickup and retreated up the road. We were a quarter mile from the highway when a fellow on a D7 Caterpillar appeared to fight the fire. We stopped him and informed him that the fire was crowning and not far behind us. He turned the Cat around and followed us. Driven by the wind, the fire continued to advance rapidly in our direction.

We were a few miles from the highway when we saw an elderly couple standing near their log cabin and looking toward the smoke. We turned in and stopped near the cabin. They had no car. We told them the fire was approaching and that we would take them to safety, but they could bring only their most prized possessions. We dropped them off at their friends' house and con-



tinued to our ranger station at Idaho City.

We arrived at Idaho City and were told to grab a few hours of sleep and to return to the fire before sunup. When we did, we found that the Fire Center in Boise had constructed a fire camp, including 15-20 volunteers. I was assigned a crew of eight Hispanics, only one of whom spoke English. When I determined that my two years of Spanish at Boise Jr. College had not prepared me for the vernacular of Spanish spoken by my crew, a higher per hour salary was provided to the one fellow to help me. We hiked to our assigned portion of the fireline, directly above the fire.

We were making good progress until some trees below us started to crown. I had spotted a meadow not far above us and decided it was time to go into it. I yelled, "Arriba! Arriba la Montana!" I was met with blank faces. My interpreter saw what was happening and gave them the commands in words they understood. They quickly followed me into the meadow and the fire passed us. We went back to the fire camp to report the

fire's status and get further orders.

We were now on the fireline with the fire above us. When we sat down to eat our bag lunches, one of the men jumped up and yelled "La cascabel, la cascabel!" My Spanish was good enough for that. He had yelled "rattlesnake, rattlesnake!" To escape the fire, a large snake had crawled down between two of the men who were sitting close together. They quickly killed it.

Late that afternoon the fire was sufficiently contained that we (four jumpers) were released to return to our ranger station. A couple of days later, I left for Idaho State College at Pocatello, Idaho. My smokejumper career had ended. 🦋

*Don jumped at Idaho City 1954-56 and is a retired Lt. Col., having served as a fighter pilot in the Air National Guard. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota and in 1986 he became the head of the new graduate social work department at the Univ. of Minnesota Duluth.*

---

## Good Sam Funds At Work

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

---

**I**n January I received word that Wyatt Pettis (FBX-17) was having some medical issues and the family might need some help. Wyatt's wife, Kate, responded with more details: "Guillain Barre Syndrome is an autoimmune reaction to a virus or bacterial infection (could be as mellow as the common cold) that sparks the immune system to attack the myelin sheath of the peripheral nerves. No one knows exactly why this happens, but it does to about 1 in 100K people! Wyatt noticed that his hands and feet were feeling a bit numb and that he was weaker than usual when he was practicing Jiu Jitsu. The numbness and weakness progressed in the next few days, and he eventually went to the ER where they diagnosed him and started treatment. He has been through the hospital wringer doing a few stays in ICU when the numbness started working its way up to his breathing muscles. He was released and then hospitalized again when his symptoms came back. He is currently at rehab so he can start healing

his body and learning how to do his daily routine without help. Guillain Barre in most people is curable and with rehab and patience Wyatt is expected to be back to normal sometime in the six-month to two-year range. Thanks to his jumper training he is focused and goal oriented, so we are hoping it will be closer to 6 months."

Days Later: Hey Mr. Sheley—Checking in to let you know we got the check. My wife and I appreciate it. It's a big deal to have people show up when things are not going smooth. I'm preparing to leave the rehab facility tomorrow. Walking and basic tasks are getting easier, I'm typing this now which is a big difference from a week ago. I look forward to being able to tell this story in the past tense and having the stamina to tell the whole story. Thanks, Wyatt. 🦋

*GS Funds were sent to Wyatt and Kate. I will also monitor the progress and see if further NSA help is needed. (Ed.)*



*Jack Sterling's project clear Yellowstone River debris 2021. L-R: Dan Debar, Bruce Morey, Chuck Hull, Don Wirth, Mike Penfold, Auzie Blevins, Joe Sterling, Jack Sterling, Roger Williams, Bob Dayton. (Courtesy Fred Cooper)*

## NSA Restoring Our Nation's Forests & Rangelands

by Bob Smee (Missoula '68)

In keeping with one of the three NSA's mottos, the NSA contributed over \$100,000 in labor value and 4,000 hours of volunteer time on 14 service projects in 2021. For the 23<sup>rd</sup> year, it was the usual mix of new construction and maintenance of trails, buildings, bridges, lookouts, fences, and historic sites. NSA members and associates have been volunteering in wilderness areas, forests, and parks in Montana, Idaho, California, Oregon, Utah, Colorado, New

Mexico, Wyoming, Minnesota, New York and West Virginia.

The volunteer labor has been accomplished on mountain tops (12,800 ft.), on islands, semi-deserts to grassy plains, and along rivers and lakes accessible by car, boat, canoe, horse or on foot. All an adventure! Accommodations have ranged from tents to historic residences and to modern lodges. Food—the Best! Sometimes transported by mule train.

All this has been the experience of a group of volunteer smokejumpers, Associates, and friends dubbed TRAMPS (Trail Restoration & Maintenance Project Specialists). We spend a week together from May to October every year with old friends or new ones, rekindling the jumper experience.

Treat yourself, your spouse, and/or your children or friends to an adventure into Smoke-jumper lore. Visit [nsatrails.com](http://nsatrails.com) to read the stories and learn how to join in on the fun. 🧡

# COVID was the leading cause of deaths on wildfires in 2021

by Bill Gabbert (Wildfire Today)

*(This article was first published on Wildfire Today)*

The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center (LLC) has released their annual review of incidents from last year, 2021. The *10-page report* discusses lessons learned from seven categories of injuries: dozer swamper, entrapment during initial attack, tree strike, entrapment during a burnout operation, crew vehicle rollover, hazard tree removal, and water tender rollover. It also mentioned other injuries—medical, feller-buncher, ATV rollover, drip torch, falling trees, rolling rocks, and dozer.

## COVID was the leading cause of deaths on wildland fires in 2021.

The LLC report states there were 23 fatalities, Line of Duty Deaths (LODD), connected to wildland fires in 2021. Six of those, 26 percent, were caused by COVID. That word appears twice very briefly in the report—in a chart showing COVID was the leading cause of Line of Duty Deaths on fires, and, in a word cloud showing that “COVID” was the single word mentioned more than any others in LLC incident reports in 2021. Other than that, it is missing in the *2021 Incident Review Summary* in spite of the six fatalities from the disease. It is not perfectly clear if the four fatalities described as “medical” had any relationship to COVID.

This annual report would have been an excellent opportunity for the LLC to summarize the most important lessons learned from COVID among firefighters over the last year. It could have identified innovative and successful methods for preventing fatalities and life-altering long-COVID, as well as policies that were not effective. It could have included important facts such as how many worker-days were spent in COVID isolation or quarantine on fires, how many firefighters tested positive during their fire and non-fire duties, and how many tested positive and were hospitalized.

If you go to the LLC website, if the database for

reports is working and if you can master the search system, a person might find four reports from the summer of 2021 about “clusters” of COVID among Hotshot crews, fuels modules, and engine crews. A total of 52 in these four clusters had to be quarantined and 14 tested positive. We *summarized them* in an August 21, 2021, article. There is no indication that these were the only COVID “clusters” in 2021.

On the Cameron Peak Fire in 2020 west of Fort Collins, Colorado, 76 workers at the fire tested positive for the virus and a total of 273 *had to be quarantined* at various times over the course of the fire. Two were hospitalized. And this is just at one fire.

I searched the LLC for COVID LODDs but was disappointed to find there were only very brief boiler-plate firefighter fatality notifications from the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA). There were no identified lessons learned. I found out last year that in some cases the USFA was not afraid to identify the actual cause if it was COVID, when the *federal agencies* will sometimes, if they mention a cause at all, will just list it as an “*unspecified illness*.”

The USFA released the information that *Allen Johnson* was exposed to COVID-19 on the French Fire in California last year and tested positive along with others. His positive test was on August 24, and he was then placed in isolation at the incident. He was transported to the hospital on Aug. 31, 2021, where he passed away that day. That is not a typo. He died same day he was admitted to the hospital.

## Fatality rates for COVID and influenza in the United States

We have all heard people say that COVID is just like the flu, people die from both. According to data from the *New York Times* retrieved February 9, 2022, 907,500 people in the U.S. have died from COVID, which is about 0.3 percent of the population. With 76,961,143 reported cases, that works out to a fatality rate for the disease of 1.2 percent.

During the 2019-2020 influenza season, the



estimated number of deaths in the United States from influenza was approximately 20,000, or 0.06 percent of the population. The estimated number of people in the United States symptomatic of influenza was approximately 20,000,000, which would be a fatality rate for the disease of 0.1 percent. (*These influenza statistics are from Wikipedia.*) The United States does a terrible job of accurately tracking COVID testing and fatalities, so these stats should be taken with a grain of salt.

### **Delays releasing lessons learned reports**

It is taking longer and longer for the US Forest Service to release reports about fatalities and near fatalities.

- Burnover of 15 firefighters at a fire station on the *Dolan Fire*: 17 months.
- *Helicopter crash*, 1 fatality and 2 serious injuries on a prescribed fire almost three years.

### **How is COVID affecting federal firefighters?**

I asked the US Forest Service several questions by email about their firefighting forces, including, what percentage of firefighters are vaccinated, how many have been terminated because they are not vaccinated, how many have been hospitalized with COVID, and how many people assigned to fires managed by the FS have tested positive while assigned to the fire and then died from COVID?

The response came from the Forest Service National Press Office. The person who wrote it was not identified. The office refused to disclose any of the numbers requested. "Reporting deaths if an employee dies outside of the workplace is voluntary," they wrote. "The FS does not track how many employees have been hospitalized."

Due to a court order, enforcement and disciplinary actions associated with non-compliance with the vaccine mandate for federal employees have been placed on pause. The Department of Justice appealed the preliminary injunction to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, but it remains in place at this time. The Forest Service said employees who received a proposed suspension were officially notified of the pause. The injunction also pauses the requirement for new employees to provide COVID vaccination documentation prior to onboarding as a condition of employment.

### **Our take**

The Forest Service appears to not be committed enough about workplace safety to even keep track of all their personnel who are killed due to exposure to COVID while working for the agency. Or if they do keep track, they are lying when they report they don't have the data. A motive for not caring or for hiding the fatality information is difficult to imagine.

A rational person would think that it is astonishing that Allen Johnson remained in isolation at the incident for eight days after testing positive, and then died the day he was admitted to a hospital. Hopefully an investigation is underway. Lives are at stake. What treatment, if any, did he receive at the fire or in isolation? Was he seen there by a doctor? Has the Medical Unit Leader been interviewed? Where was he isolated—in a tent at the fire, or a motel? What was his condition when he was admitted to the hospital? There were others at the fire who tested positive according to the U.S. Fire Administration. What are their stories? I fought fires with Allen, so I would like to know more and how to prevent this from happening to other firefighters. Surely there are many lessons to be learned from this and other COVID-related tragedies.

The Forest Service needs to develop the courage to do the right thing for their people. When a firefighter is entrapped on a fire and injured or killed, a team of at least a half dozen subject matter experts will sometimes, but not always, try to honestly figure out what led to the incident and may develop suggestions for preventing others from suffering the same fate. Why are they scared to do the same for the fire personnel that died from COVID last year? Why are they refusing to be transparent about workplace hazards and their people being hospitalized and killed? What is the upside to the secrecy? What are they afraid of?

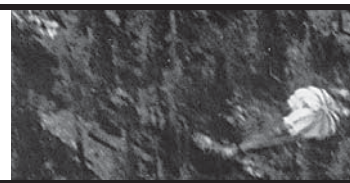
Already having severe problems recruiting and retaining employees, this type of uncaring management can only make it worse.

If the Forest Service refuses to conduct and release an honest investigation into the line of duty death of Allen Johnson, the chain of command from the Region 5 Director up through the Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry and the Chief of the Forest Service should be fired. 🗿



# THE JUMP LIST

## MEN OF THE '50s



*This column is part of the NSA History Preservation Project. All information will be kept in the Smokejumper Archives at Eastern Washington University. (Ed.)*

### **HENRY H. "HANK" BRODERSEN**

(Missoula '54)

Hank was born May 29, 1935, in Mount Vernon, N.Y., 14 months after his parents emigrated from Germany. He grew up in New Jersey and graduated from Hackensack H.S. in 1952.

"I attended the University of Maine in Orono, ME and graduated in 1956 with a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Conservation. While in college, I spent the summer of 1953 at the Trout Creek Ranger Station and rookied in Missoula in 1954. I jumped 1954 and 55 making a total of nine training jumps and three fire jumps.

"After briefly working for the USFS as a timber management assistant on the Clearwater NF, I joined the U. S. Navy in 1957 and received my wings as a navy pilot in 1958. Most of my career was spent in Anti-submarine Warfare (ASW) flying the P2V Neptune and P-3 Orion patrol planes. I also served as a flight instructor, assistant Carrier Air Traffic Control Center (CATCC) Officer aboard the USS Hornet, Operations Officer on a Patrol

Wing staff in Japan and as a pilot flying research missions worldwide for the Naval Oceanographic Office.

"I am a Vietnam veteran, having spent the summer of 1967 aboard USS Hornet supporting operations in the Gulf of Tonkin, and then in 1968 flying Operation Market Time missions out of U-Tapao, Thailand, for which I was awarded the Air Medal. For my service in Japan, 1970 to 1972, I was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal. I retired from the Navy in 1978 after 21 years active duty with the rank of Lieutenant Commander and 7,200 hours pilot time.

"After 1978 I flew for 5 years as a corporate pilot for McDonald Aircraft Company at The Naval Air Warfare Center at Patuxent River, MD, where I accumulated 2,000 more hours pilot time and then as a Flight Scheduler for another defense contractor until I retired in 1998.

"My wife and I have stayed in southern Maryland since retirement and for the past 29 years have lived in Leonardtown. For 11 years I participated in the NSA Trail Maintenance Program in Montana, Idaho, West Virginia, and Maine. I have been delivering Meals on Wheels for 18 years and still play the tuba with a 45-piece concert band and a

small church group for services every week at a nearby Veterans Home."

### **RAY E. CARTER** (Grangeville '54)

Ray was born June 17, 1934, in Texarkana, Arkansas, where he grew up and graduated from Texarkana, Arkansas High School in 1952. He graduated from University of Arkansas in 1956 and went on to a 20-year military service with the Navy where he was a fighter pilot. Ray was Commanding Officer of VFC-13 "Fighting Saints" flying F8 Crusaders.

Ray jumped the 1954 season at Grangeville where he made seven practice jumps and two fire jumps. In Missoula in 1955, he made two practice jumps and three fire jumps.

Ray has participated in several NSA Trail Projects. He is retired and living in Denver, CO.

### **AUSTIN L. YOUNG** (McCall '54)

Austin was born May 2, 1934, in Shoshone, Idaho. In 1939 the family moved from Shoshone and lived in various parts of the United States. The family returned to Shoshone when Austin was entering the sixth grade. By this time, he had attended eleven different grade schools. He completed elementary and high school

and graduated from Shoshone H.S. in 1953. Austin was active in high school football and basketball.

After high school, Austin attended college for two years at Idaho State University and three years at the University of Idaho. He graduated with a bachelor's in Geology in 1958. During this period Austin worked summers as a smoke-jumper at McCall, Idaho, and jumped in Silver City, New Mexico in 1959. He jumped at McCall 1954-57 and 1959.

His work career varied over the years. He worked as an underground uranium mine geologist near Grants, New Mexico, mined underground storage caverns for the storage of LP Gas in the Midwest, and constructed petrochemical plants in various areas of the United States. He worked for Morrison-Knudsen's (MK) Building Group for twenty years as a Project Manager and then as Division Manager. After leaving Morrison-Knudsen, Austin worked as an independent construction consult for six years. All this required extensive moving and traveling. He retired four times. The last was in 2006. "What was the best job I ever had... smokejumper."

Austin lives in Boise, Idaho, enjoying life traveling, his wife Mary of 60 years, grandchildren, great grandchildren, old smokejumper gatherings and riding his four-wheeler in the Owyhee's Mountains in Idaho. "Some may know me as "Barney Bear."

## **CHARLES THEODORE "TED" NYQUEST**

(Missoula '54)

Ted was born July 9, 1934, in Boulder, Montana, where he grew up and graduated from high school in 1953. He went to the University of Montana on a track scholarship, started in the School of Forestry, but switch to Psychiatry and graduates with a master's degree. Ted served in the Marine Corps for two years active and eight years in the reserves. He entered the CIA in 1959 and helped develop the Sky Hook Program at Marana Air Base in Arizona and worked in Guatemala and Honduras during the Bay of Pigs.

As a young man Ted worked at ranches around Boulder and was hired during the summers as a "Gandy Dancer" by the Great Northern Railroad at age 16. He worked at a Lookout for the USFS for two summers before his rookie season at Missoula in 1954. Ted jumped at Missoula 1954, 61-62, 67-68, Grangeville 1957-58, 60, 63-64, and at West Yellowstone 1965-66, and 1974. He worked as a Dry Kiln operator at Champion Lumber for nine years. As a retiree, he has been delivering Meals on Wheels for 20+ years.

## **MAHLON "LONNIE" PARK**

(McCall '54)

Lonnie was born July 2, 1936, in Blackfoot, Idaho, and grew up in Boise where he graduated from Boise H.S.

in 1954. He then received his bachelor's in Marketing from the University of Idaho in 1958. Lonnie spent two years in the Army Infantry as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in Korea and Fort Ord, California. He completed Airborne Jump School at Fort Benning, GA.

Work Career: Commercial Banking Group, First Security Corp 36+ years. Based in Boise, Idaho Member of First Security Bank Board of Directors.

Retirement: "I set up my own mortgage business. Had a good run and turned it over to my kids. I live in Boise, Idaho, and have a cabin in McCall, where I spend my summers, and play as much golf as possible. I winter in Palm Desert, CA." Lonnie jumped at McCall 1954-58.

## **DOUGLAS P. STINSON** (Cave Junction '54)

Doug was born in Chicago Heights, Illinois, on April 13, 1933, and at age fifteen, moved to Mountain View, Missouri, where Doug graduated from high school. He then moved to Columbia, Missouri, where he studied Forestry at the University of Missouri. After graduation, Doug became a captain in the Marine Corps and was stationed in Okinawa, the Philippines, and Japan. In 1958 Doug moved to Alaska with the aim of homesteading, but soon discovered farming would be difficult there. He joined the U.S Forest Service and worked as a forester from 1959-1964. During this time,



he met Fae Marie Beck, a schoolteacher. They married and had two children in Alaska, Steven Douglas Stinson in 1961 and Ann Marie Stinson in 1963. In 1964 the young family moved to Roseburg, Oregon, and another daughter, Julie Dawn Stinson, was born in 1965.

From 1964-1979 Doug worked for Champion International in Roseburg, Seattle, and Morton, Washington. In 1979, he joined Conifer Pacific and worked there as a forester and mill manager. In 1990, Doug left industry to manage his own tree farm, Cowlitz Ridge Tree Farm. He continues this work today.

Over the years Doug and his family have won many awards for outstanding stewardship of their timberland. In 1993 he was named Washington State Tree Farmer of the Year and in 1994 earned the title of Western Region Tree Farmer of the Year. Doug has served on the Washington State Forest Practice Board and on committees for the American Tree Farm System and the American Forest Foundation.

He and Fae Marie have traveled widely, often to visit forests. They've traveled to Sweden, Japan, New Zealand, Tasmania, Chile, Switzerland, Austria, Brazil, Hungary, and Spain. His most recent overseas adventure was to Japan with daughter, Ann.

In addition to international travels, Doug has used his retirement to paddle many rivers including the Nahani, the Owyhee, and the Grand

Ronde. His son, Steve, and his daughter Julie accompanied him on many of these trips. Doug jumped at Cave Junction 1954-55.

**WILLIAM D. "BILL"  
BREYFOGLE**  
(Missoula '55)

Bill was born August 9, 1933, in Three Rivers, Michigan, where he grew up and graduated from high school in 1951. He then earned his bachelor's in Science and Education from Western Michigan University in 1955 and spent two years as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. in the Army. He had read about smokejumping in "Boys Life" magazine as a Boy Scout and decided he wanted to become a smokejumper.

Bill worked two years in blister rust control in Idaho before becoming a jumper in 1955. He jumped the 1955, 57-58 seasons. In 1959 he went back to the Boy Scouts to work as a director of ecology/conservation and has stayed with it for over 50 years. Bill also taught Junior H.S. Science for 36 years. As an adult Scouter, Bill was a scoutmaster for 19 years, and taught an ecology/conservation section at the Scout National Camping School for 35 years.

After retirement, he worked 15 years as a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity building homes. He now spends time at his local church and tutors math at a local school. He did smokejumper trail work in the "Bob" from 2002-08. Bill considers smokejumping one of his life experiences

that has made him who he is today.

**ROLAND M. "SAM"  
GROTTE**  
(Missoula '55)

Sam was born March 22, 1933, in Northwood, North Dakota, where he grew up before moving to Hamilton, Montana, where he graduated from Hamilton H.S. in 1951. He graduated from the University of Montana in 1955 and started his USAF 20-year career as a pilot, leaving as a Major. Sam then flew for American Airlines for 25 years before retiring in White Salmon, Washington, where he is still living (2021) at age 88. Sam jumped at Missoula in 1955.

**RAYMOND E. "RAY"  
HONEY**  
(North Cascades '55)

Ray was born June 27, 1936, in Riverside, Washington. "We moved to Winthrop when I was six weeks old as my dad, George Honey (NCSB-40), was packing ore out of the tungsten mine to Winthrop. I grew up in Winthrop and went all 12 years of school, graduating from Winthrop high school in 1955. I attended College of Puget Sound and Wenatchee Valley College.

"I had a very early interest in smokejumping because my mother reminded me that in 1939, she walked me down a small hill where men were experimenting jumping out of planes as a way to get to forest fires faster as my uncle Allen Honey was one of these

men. At this site they were experimenting jumping into trees and getting to the ground safely. The next year 1940, my Dad, George Honey, was in the first group trained as smokejumpers. That was the beginning of his career with the Forest Service. He retired from the forest service after a long career.

"After I graduated from High School in 1955, my first job was smokejumping at Winthrop. There were three from my class that jumped that year, Virgil Imes, Melvin Northcott, and myself. My jump partner was Virgil and Melvin jumped with Mike Bowman. The next summer, 1956, I jumped again. After fire season I married and moved to Santa Monica, California, where I worked for Southern Counties Gas company and Douglas aircraft before joining the Los Angeles City Fire Dept. in 1958. I retired from the fire dept as a Captain in 1978 and moved back to Washington.

"I managed to keep busy after retirement, built 7 Bays Marina on Lake Roosevelt, managed a golf course in Bridgeport, Washington, and owned a gift store in Winthrop. In 2013 my wife and I moved to Rathdrum, Idaho. We've been married for 65 years."

### **HAROLD "HAL" H. HOWELL**

(Missoula '55)

Hal was born June 13, 1934, in Samson, Alabama. He grew up in and around

south and north Alabama, graduating from Decatur Alabama H.S. in 1952. He then attended Auburn University in 1952-53 before transferring to University of Montana in 1954 where he graduated with a degree in Forestry in 1957.

Hal served as a US Air Force pilot from 1957-63 reaching the rank of Captain. He continued with the Washington Army National Guard from 1964-82 as fixed wing and rotary wing pilot. Hal worked as a United Airline pilot/flight manager from 1966-94 with bases in Seattle, Denver, and London. He retired in 1994 and is living in Tapps Island, Washington.

Hal jumped from Missoula during the summers of 1955-56. He served on the NSA trails crews from 1998-2013.

### **WILLIAM ELLIS "BILL" LONG**

(Cave Junction '55)

Bill was born August 18, 1930, in Minot, North Dakota, and grew up in Oregon and California where he graduated from Richmond H.S., CA, in 1947. He furthered his education with a bachelor's in Geology from the University of Nevada in 1957, a master's in Geology from Ohio State in 1961 and his Ph.D. in Geology from Ohio State in 1964. Bill served in the USAF as a Survival Instructor at the USAF Advanced Survival School.

Work Career:

- Explorer, Geologist, 1954-64, Antarctica
- Geologist, Exploration

Geologist, 1964-65, Texas

- Professor, Geology, 1965-76, Alaska Methodist University
- Hydrologist, State Hydrologist, 1977-97, State of Alaska
- Consultant, Hydrologist, 1997-2001, Alaska

Bill jumped at Cave Junction during the 1955 season.

### **HAROLD JAMES "JIM" MAXWELL**

(Cave Junction '55)

Jim was born May 23, 1937, in Fresno, CA. He grew up in Kernville, California, and graduated from high school there in 1954. Jim then graduated from San Jose State University with a degree in Business Management. He jumped at Cave Junction 1955-56 before entering the Marine Corps where he flew jets until 1960.

Jim went back to smoke-jumping at Fairbanks the 1961-62 seasons before re-entering the Marine Corps and being sent to Vietnam in 1965. He then returned to the states and Meridian, Mississippi, where he was an instructor for student pilots. After leaving the Marine Corps (Major), Jim was with Colgate Palmolive Corporation for 20 years finishing as Chief Manager. He is currently living (2021) in Vero Beach, Florida.

### **JAMES A. "JIM" MEIER**

(Missoula '55)

Jim was born May 6, 1936, in New Salem, N.D., where he grew up and graduated from high school in 1954.

He worked for the USFS on the Clearwater N.F. on a brush crew before he trained as a smokejumper in 1955. Jim jumped 1955-56 and 1958. He earned a bachelor's in Mathematics from North Dakota in 1959 and went into the USAF as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Jim studied Meteorology at UCLA and spent two years active duty at Dow AFB, Maine. He was discharged in 1962 but remained in the Active Reserve and the Michigan Air National Guard for 20 years retiring as a Lt. Colonel.

Jim taught high school in Garrison, N.D., 1962-65 before returning to NDSU to earn his Ph.D. in Chemistry in 1971. He then took a job with Inmont Corporation, an Automotive Coatings Supplier located in Detroit, as a resin development chemist where he worked for 10 years before moving to PPG Industries in 1981. In 1987 Jim was named President, General Director of PPG France, the largest and oldest PPG coatings subsidiary of PPG outside the US. "In 1992 I returned to the Cleveland facility as Director of Technology for Auto OEM and retired from that job in 1997." In 1999, he moved to Brighton, Michigan. Jim is an NSA Life Member.

### **JESSE J. "JESS" NELSON** (Missoula '55)

Jess was born October 4, 1934, in Chester, Oklahoma, and grew up in Clinton, Oklahoma, where he graduated from high school in 1953. He received his bachelor's from

Southwestern State University in Weatherford, in 1958 and his master's from Oklahoma State University in 1965. Jess spent six years in the Army reserve and was discharged in 1963. He worked two summers for the USFS in Idaho before starting smokejumping in 1955. Jess jumped at Missoula 1955, 60-61, 68-73, and at Grangeville 1956-57, 59.

Jess started his career in education teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade in Buffalo, Oklahoma, 1958-59. He moved into administration in 1960-70 as an Elementary School Principal in Shattuck, OK, and 1970-94 as a Principal/Elementary Coordinator in Guymon, OK. He retired in 1994. Jess has been a Scoutmaster for the Boy Scouts of America for 20 years. He also has been heavily involved in community affairs being on the Guymon City Council for 28 years and Mayor for 14 years. Oklahoma Representative Gus Blackwell describes Jess' service as "yeoman work in representing and furthering rural issues for small cities."

### **DONALD G. STEVENSON** (Missoula '55)

Don was born November 26, 1935, in Kalispell, Montana. "My folks, who were caretakers at Many Glacier Hotel in Glacier National Park, had planned I would be born in Cardston, Alberta, Canada, but the road was closed. Instead, they went to Kalispell. While they were gone the road into the Many Hotel snowed closed so Dad pulled Mom and me 13 miles

on a toboggan. I grew up in East Glacier where my father was Chief Engineer for the Glacier Park Hotel Company for 54 years.

There was no high school in East Glacier, so I went to boarding school at Gonzaga High in Spokane, Washington, graduating in 1953. I then took electrical engineering for one year at Gonzaga University. In 1955 I transferred to Forestry at Montana University in Missoula and received a degree in Forest Management in 1958.

"I was married to the love of life June 9, 1956. Vicki and I celebrated our 65<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this past June. One of our boys, Jeff Stevenson (MSO-89), jumped for nine seasons in the early 1990s.

"I started working as a groundskeeper for the Glacier Park Hotel Company the summers of 1949-51, then worked trail for the Park Service in the summers of 1952-54. I jumped at MSO in 1955 and had 7 training and 6 fire jumps. I had the most overtime of the new men that season. I then flew as air observer for the Lolo N.F. for 1956-57 seasons.

"Upon graduation from Forestry School, I received a PFT appointment with USFS starting at Bonita Ranger Station. After two years we transferred to Sitka, Alaska. In July 1962 we transferred to the Chugach NF in Anchorage as a Forest Staff overseeing timber, wildlife, watershed, and multiple use planning on the Chugach Forest. In June of



1965 we transferred to the Bitterroot N.F. as District Ranger. We prepared and administered timber sales cutting about 12 million bf per year, administered 8 grazing permits, one ski area, 5 campgrounds, one 20-person Hotshot crew, part of the Anaconda-Pintlar Wilderness Area, two fire lookouts, maintained numerous miles of trails, and suppressed an average of 12 forest fires per year. We had a main cookhouse and bunkhouse at the station, another at the East Fork Guard station for the Hotshot crew, and a spike cook tent and sleeping tents up high in the 230,000 acre Sleeping Child Burn where we were spray thinning heavy Lodge pole pine reproduction. In the fall we burnt many acres of logging slash. We had one bad injury where fire overran a crew member and burnt his ears badly. There were several search & rescues each year, usually for lost hunters. We helped establish water quality/gaging stations. We worked with the Montana Fish & Game preparing for a mountain sheep transplant into the East Fork of the Bitterroot. We conducted or attended numerous public meetings explaining what we were doing and made some of the first multiple use plans.

"In June of 1969 we transferred to the District Ranger job in Missoula on the Lolo N.F. A major task was blending the personnel from the 3 Districts into one strong working unit. We had about 20 permanent and permanent part

time employees. In addition, we had a 30-person YCCC camp with a cook house and sleeping quarters. We were amazed at how much tree thinning, fence building, trail building, slash piling, building construction and maintenance the YCC crew could get done. In addition, we prepared and cut about 12 MMBF of timber each year, administered 8 grazing permits, two ski areas, and 6 campgrounds. We had two fire lookouts and responded to about eight fires each season and caught up with a backlog of logging slash burns. Our crews and contractors planted seedling trees on about 1000 acres each spring.

"This was the beginning of the environmental 70s and we received intense public involvement over our multiple use plans for the Rock Cr. drainage, a Nationally known Blue Ribbon trout stream, the Rattlesnake watershed that supplied Missoula drinking water, a Blue Mt. area where we took over management of a 6500-acre Military training ground. All required numerous public meetings.

"In June of 1975, I transferred into the Forest Service Regional Office in Missoula where I put on Management training on all the Forests in R1 and did efficiency studies of various practices and size of District studies. Several Districts were combined as a result of these studies. I also had two details to the Washington DC office trying to get rid of the requirement to keep log books in all Forest Service

vehicles. The information from these log books was not being used for budget, vehicle replacement, or anything.

## **DWIGHT WILLIAM ZWICK**

(Missoula '55)

Dwight was born March 9, 1935, in Fargo, North Dakota, and lived in Texas and California before returning to Valley City, N.D., where he graduated from high school in 1953. He earned a bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering from the University of North Dakota in 1957 and an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1964. Dwight served in the USAF at Vandenberg AFB and was discharged in 1960 as a Captain.

"After my discharge from the Air Force, six friends and I rode from Naples, Italy, to Northern Europe and purchased a sailboat with intent to go to California. We found ourselves short of funds, so we ran cigarettes and Cognac between Northern European countries for six months until we put the boat on the rocks off an island in Northwest Germany. I decided that fun and games were over, so I applied to the Harvard Business School.

"After graduating from Harvard, I interviewed but could not get myself to take an office job, so I bought an 11,000-acre ranch in Northern Minnesota on credit. Did my best for four years but the lack of working capital forced me to sell right before they foreclosed.

"From the ranch I went to Denver and found a 40-unit apartment that I could acquire for no cash. From there I engaged in about fifty ventures of one kind or another. Occasionally one of them made a profit.

"I married a lady from Cheyenne, Wyoming, and we had two children. They grew

up well and never got into any of the trouble that I experienced. My wife died in 2012. I am now living with my college sweetheart, the widow of actor Jack Elam. We live quietly and are very happy.

"I have had a wonderful life. It could not have been programed better. There have

been many bumps in the road, but overall, near perfect. I loved being a smokejumper and believe that it was part of the reason that I could not take an office job. Each day I am thankful that I never was a loyal employee for forty years." Dwight jumped at Missoula 1955-56. 🌲

---

## White's On The Breaks

by Mike Nielson (McCall '73)

---

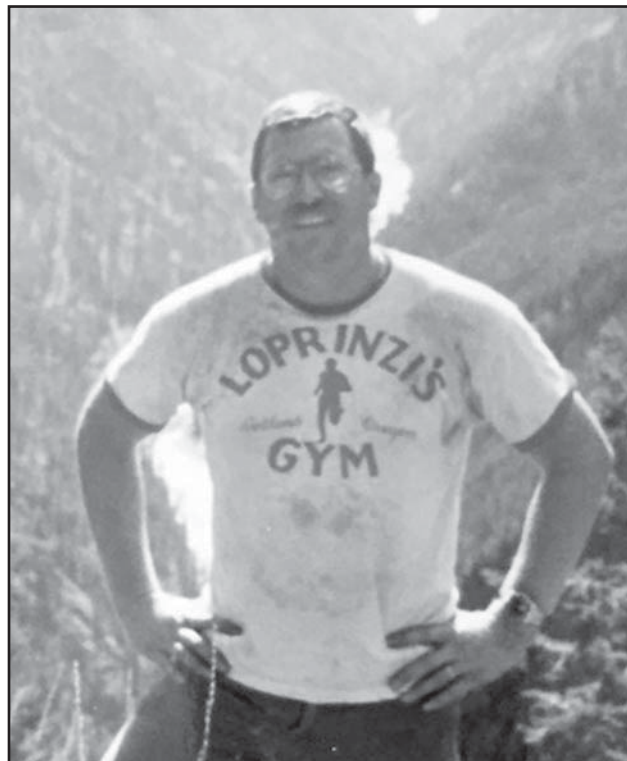
**A** mostly true Region 4 smokejumper story. "Once upon a time...." No, that's not how a smokejumper story begins! Right! "Now, this is no....." Close.

"There I was..." Nah.

Now, this is all about two things that distinguish smokejumpers—boots and terrain. In fact, these two things may be the only commonality amongst an elite cadre known for their bold individualism, freedom of expression, and colorful character. OK, maybe a third thing—an altitude of attitude.

They brought it with them. After mastering initial attack fire suppression on hotshot crews, helitack or ground pounders, the characters had already uniformed-up to the task and now aspired to do low-level parachute jumps into inaccessible mountain terrain to suppress wildfire. The aerial aspect of getting to a fire was not a natural progression for most and only appealed to those who had the maverick quality in those character traits already mentioned.

A woman in sizing up a man looks at his hands. And here I thought all along they were sizing up another feature I had at that same level. My hands tell me nothing, but to a woman, they say everything I'd rather they not. Firefighters look at boots, their own and others. Mine came from White's on Ferry Street in downtown Spokane. White's look at feet. In my case, I had to pull off a pair of Tony Lamas so White's could measure both



Mike Nielson (Courtesy N. Nielson)

feet, never assuming that one matches the other.

White's knows feet better than a podiatrist. They have been making handmade footwear since 1903. The place smells like what I'd expect leather heaven to smell like. Nothing else emanates from the stacks of boot boxes where you can buy stock off the shelf or go wallet-deep with a custom build order from in-store measurements. Going deep, I commissioned White's for two pair of 10"

Packers with Vibram soles, one pair in elk-tan, one pair in black oil intending to switch between the two as dry/wet conditions dictated. Packers because of a year I'd spent in the saddle as a back country patrolman on the Los Padres N.F. and packing mules for big fire support. Whites are further distinguished by the brush tongue under the laces. My feet packed the Packers with a white cotton athletic sock under a grey wool outer sock. You speed lace White's from the ankle up through brass eye hooks and tie off the leather laces top-side. The fit is like a leather layer of skin immune from the long hours you are going to spend in them through all the conditions firefighting is going to torture them with. Off work doesn't mean off White's. They are excellent at drinking beer and dancing. They still don't get a woman's gaze like the hands do, but they do cause them to look up. With White's, bare foot is overrated. Shame that some women make you take them off first, though.

With White's you're on file. They keep your measurements, ready to build anew. Alternating both pairs, I usually only needed to have them re-build a pair at the end of a season when that wallet had been replenished. Before the beer tab, re-build the White's. They always came back with whatever leather needed to be replaced, a new brush tongue, new laces and new soles retaining what was still in good shape from the old contrasting well with the new refurbishment. New boot, same old fit. An investment in an essential tool that looks really good staring at and through them to a landing spot on a descent from a jump. Especially on a descent from a jump on the Breaks where more often than not there is a lot of airy space between those size 11's to a spot that is precariously steep, rocky, on a ridgeline, windswept, or an assortment of all the above. A miscalculation on the steering toggles or an updraft will end you up on another ridge in another drainage or worse, across the river in Region 1 trafficking on the domain of the Grangeville jumpers.

The Breaks. Or more expansively, the Salmon River Breaks. All the smokejumper bases have a terrain feature they identify with. The McCall base has fondly adopted the Salmon River Breaks as terrain they would like to jump or rather NOT. The Region 5 base at Redding has the Middle

Fork of the Feather River Canyon as a NOT.

The Region 1 base at Missoula has a bad history with Moose Creek but loves "The Bob," as in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. McCall has a couple of sweethearts in The Frank Church Wilderness and the Chamberlain Basin. Sweethearts are typically those jumps that are going to either earn you OT's (overtime) or cost you OT's as in any jump you'd likely make on a sweetheart in Lardo's Saloon.

The Breaks. The Idaho backcountry. Big and green. Inaccessible. Mountainous. Stands of lodgepole. Where the Salmon River cuts through it, there is a thousand-foot elevation difference between the surrounding plateau and the river. That difference in terrain is what is referred to as the Breaks, where the predominant ground breaks off down to the river and all the rivers/creeks that drain into it—the Middle Fork, the South Fork, Big Creek. You jump the Breaks; you jump everything that feeds it. The Breaks are a magnet for lightning. Updrafts out of the deep heated drainages mingle with cold fronts moving across the plateau. Lightning lights up everything under the blackness of the rain front and the dryness of the cheatgrass and ponderosa pines on the precipices of the Breaks. If the Breaks attract the lightning, the P-pines receive it, and everything that burns upslope is going to roll down to the river making for fire with a thousand-foot elevation profile and likely calling for a full planeload of jumpers. A single ponderosa burning up top of the Breaks not quite established is a four-man jump needing a chainsaw to drop it.

The Breaks. Under attack from lightning strikes, seasonal variations in weather, and the River of No Return rafters. Under protection by the Region 4 McCall Smokejumper Base where fires jumped early and always aggressively stay manageable and rarely grow to gobblers. Aggressive initial attack - saves watershed, saves habitat, preserves the natural order that makes wilderness and primitive areas savings in the bank. It allows resource management of the national forests a calculated withdrawal of timber from federal lands for the benefit of local, state, and national economies. It works when you disallow the mass destruction of resources from wildfire. Dropping initial attack smokejumpers aggressively is interest on the federal forest land savings account. Deduct



beer from the smokejumpers' bank account and their earned protection money deposits are compounded exponentially.

The Breaks. Every call to the Breaks from McCall has enough flying time to think about what you're about to encounter, no matter the first stick or the last two in the plane load. All eyes are inside. Your field of vision is near - self, next to self, spotter, cockpit. Your head is within itself. Close compression of senses droned on by the plane's engines, and the wind turbulence from the open door encapsulate you in your gear and your thoughts. Perception starts to expand when you hear the throttle back from cruising speed and notice the spotter is up on the door looking out at what we are here for. He's talking to the pilot through his headset as they begin to size up what is burning and the wind direction from the ascending smoke. The pilot maintains approach elevation and commences a shallow left turn for both his and the spotter's view of the circumstances. The pilot is assessing a flight pattern for the drop. The spotter is assessing the terrain for a drop zone for the jumpers, looking at the fire smoke for wind direction and making a determination on how many jumpers he is going to deploy. The two jumpers in the first stick are looking at what the pilot and spotter are looking at and making their own assessments and calculations of what they will confront when they exit the plane with contingency considerations if anything goes awry - twists delaying steering control, wind shift, any ground deviation from what was evident 1200' in the air creating an alternative approach to landing and mercy, a possible parachute malfunction. The mutual review of factors between spotter and pilot establish a drop spot, a flight pattern, and an altitude. The pilot sets up his approach and the spotter prepares to drop a set of streamers to determine wind speed and direction. The streamers indicate wind direction/velocity and the likely position to deploy the jumpers assuming the jumpers are more maneuverable than crepe paper streamers and can steer their way to the jump spot. You know you're off to a bad start if the spotter forgets to discard the rubber band holding the streamers together.

The Breaks—never routine. Nothing normal. Heated updrafts. Squirrely winds. Lone snags.

Two-manners to two plane loads. Mid slope, full slope, top of the Breaks to river bottom. The only fires starting at the Salmon River bottom were those by rafters whose campfire got away. Most Breaks fires were upslope where burning material took a steep roll to the bottom forecasting the fate of any jumper who didn't arrest his landing and secure his gear.

The Breaks. They took it easy on me the first time. It was the last fire jump of the season on September 6, 1973, a two-manner on the Payette at Hida Point. I was first in the door of the Doug with **Duke Norfleet** (MYC-70) behind me. The weather was deteriorating with rain and sleet and the ceiling was dropping. Whitey Hochmeister was the pilot who had flown C-47s over the Hump from Burma to China during the war. Whenever flying conditions got dicey, Whitey would start to sing. Whitey was singing. The spotter and Whitey were about to abort the effort to drop the two of us assuming the onslaught of seasonal weather would put the smoldering fire out. Assumptions don't apply to an aggressive initial attack smokejumper mentality, so we opted to just go ahead and jump it. Duke and I would be the streamers, no time to do the routine as the wind was already howling. As we came around on final to the jump spot, which was a long-ago intended airstrip that was never completed, I was waiting for the spotter's slap to go. Never felt it, but the next thing I know is I'm out of the Doug, in silence from the engines and wind turbulence and under a FS-5A canopy descending, planing into the wind, scoping out between those White's just where I wanted to land when I spotted Duke below me heading for my spot. First out, first to the ground wasn't in play here. Duke was in a hurry to get to our fire before the rain put it out, kicked me out the door and planed his chute to descend faster than me. We had enough fire left for some hot chow and fed it to keep warm and dry for the two days we spent socked in with weather before a Bell 47G was called in to come in and de-mob us. We spent another two days watching the aspen leaves change and chasing moose off the salt lick in the corral before a fixed wing could ferry us back to base. The old sage in Duke said not every Breaks jump would be a Hida Point jump and he was right.

The Breaks. Raven Creek. Payette N.F. August 10, 1974. Top of a ridge. A full Twin Otter load of eight: **Lynn Flock** (MYC-68), **Barry Koncinsky** (MYC- 74), Duke Norfleet, **Steve Mello** (MYC-70), **Brent Johnson** (MYC -74), **Mike Cook** (MYC-68), **Don Ranstrom** (MYC-67) and me. The setup was a south to north pattern perpendicular to the ridgetop that had enough width declaring itself as the jump spot. Any overcorrection and you ended up in another drainage. Duke and I were the second stick. I would exit the Twin Otter second man. The second man must scramble from upright to first man exit position making for a separation between the jumpers. To get out quickly, I placed both hands on the top handrail of the open door and “kips” out. You are out quick, good body position and no twists. Raven Creek Fire, here I come. Noise was gone. You fall. You’re arrested. You glance up

---

*To get out quickly, I placed both hands on the top handrail of the open door and “kips” out.*

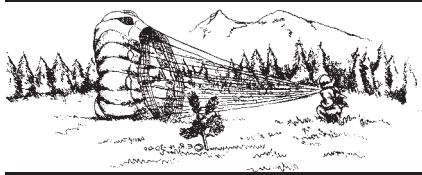
---

at that fully deployed FS-10 canopy (“Oh! You sweet thing”), reach for those steering toggles with kangaroo-skin jump gloves, look around (“WOW! That’s a lot of air” - a panorama of vastness)) and then look down between those Whites (“Forget the vastness, the ridge is immediate!”) and start making assessments and adjustments to make the clearing on the broad ridge jump spot. Come up short and you’re slamming into the down slope, it being nearly vertical with steepness. Go long and you’re over the top in another canyon. I landed on the crest. You get out of your gear and gather up your chute careful to secure your PG bag from rolling off to the river 1000’ feet below. More jumpers coming in. Johnson apexed a Ponderosa pine and was doing a letdown. Cook was on the ground but downslope about 100’. Flock was on the ground, Koncinsky treed-up but was in a tree near the jump spot hung up about 5’ above the ground. Flock had the ground-to-air radio and was doing a head count. With Johnson out of the tree and everyone else on the ground, Flock called for our cargo drop and for a chainsaw needed to drop a burning snag. The Raven Creek Fire was

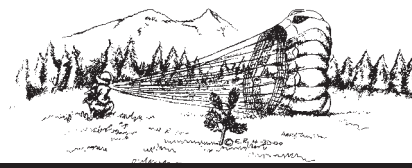
contained, controlled, mopped-up and declared out after two burn cycles.

The Breaks. One way in. Two ways out. The sweet way in was under a rip-stop, FS-10 canopy to a semi-controlled arrival on the ground or in a tree. Your way out is determined by broader, multiple fire urgencies that get you back on base with Dispatch helicoptering you out. This way out would likely consist of multiple ferrying to a close fixed-wing airstrip like Chamberlain Basin that would get you all back to McCall. A less urgent way out was to pack-up to pack out which meant down to the river. Leaving nothing behind, packs weighed about 110# per jumper delegating the additional weight of the chainsaw to whoever would pack it. Pack outs made you appreciate those Whites as they helped the knees and encapsulated the ankles from what steep 1000’ descents could wreak. Arrival at the Salmon River off the Breaks presented two retrieval options. Again, by helicopter from a sandbar or jet boat down to an airstrip on the river, like Mackay Bar that was frequently serviced by backcountry pilot extraordinaire Bob Fogg of McCall Flying Service. The resort at Mackay Bar was legendary in its hospitality for smokejumpers. The Raven Creek Fire would have us de-mobed by helicopter to Chamberlain Basin.

The Breaks. Defined primarily by the Salmon River and the tributaries that flow into it and the national forests that host them. It’s all home for the McCall smokejumpers, whereas fire jumps elsewhere always seemed like you were a visitor. Even a jump on the Wallowa-Whitman N.F. in the Eagle Cap Wilderness seemed like another place in another state, which it was. Nice place to visit, but... We planted those White’s on the Breaks. We suppressed with aggressive initial attack the fire danger that threatened the pristine nature of it and left only those White’s prints on the ground. You could easily say we owned the Breaks but Nah, it kept calling us back, forlorn as if it missed us and so demanding that it owned us. We may have left the imprint of our White’s on the Breaks, but the Breaks left an indelible imprint on every one of us privileged to have experienced the grandeur, the primacy, the challenges, and the endearing memories of having put White’s on the Breaks. 🌲



# Notes from the Ranks



Pat McGunagle  
(West Yellowstone '19)

WE JUMPED OUR second and third practice jumps of the year this morning just south of Boise: high winds out in the desert. We didn't quite have the 1000 yards of drift that ram-air canopies are truly fun to fly in, but still good enough to knock the rust off. Good to hear that slider flapping madly in the wind above and then go quiet as you flare the canopy out, touch earth soft as can be (well, usually). It's good to hear that internal robot voice count out the jump sequence in the fall under drogue, wait for it to tell you to pull that brilliant green handle. Your hat and gloves in your fire pack smell like last summer's fires, and I guess you did, too, because you didn't notice them, then. They tell you: This summer's gonna be a blast!

This winter has been full of chatter. What kind of season will this one be? Will the Bill ever get through Congress? Is it worth it to stay another season

or two, just in case?

It's a lot of chatter among fire brethren on crews and engines, wondering what our programs are worth. Looking back with crystal clear hindsight at some large fires of the last season, we wonder when it's worth it to jump a fire, knowing the consequences of not having jumped it. Qualitative, quantitative metrics designed by someone, somewhere, just like those particular folds in our jump gear were at one point designed by some bro, somewhere, perhaps in meaningful engineering method, perhaps simply on a whim and a prayer.

Tim's Act would have wildland firefighters compensated in aggregate to a pay scale approximate to going rates for our skills in contracted and state workforces. These are explicitly interpolated data points. Intrinsic value is something harder to tether to economical points. Intrinsic value is beyond dollars and sense (sic).

While many of us wonder what government mire the bill is stuck in, I wonder if the jargon of legislative debate over occupational workforce hazards and job requirements may zap away some of the proud, intrinsic privilege that comes with our pedigree as wildland firefighters, not to mention the heritage of the title "smokejumper." Beyond cross referencing federal pay scales, how do we best

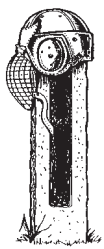
explicate the value of the job to us, ourselves? What is the intrinsic value that people who aren't smokejumpers have no idea about?

Maybe what we need is a relational ecology study per se: The ecology of wildland fire-fighting. In ecological studies, there's a concept of reciprocity, that you're getting what you're due in kind for your existence, or at least time. Something akin to a chemical reaction. This is a bland, sterile approach, yes, but even chemical reactions have value systems. And when was the last time government jargon wasn't bland?

Someone on one of the jumps today, mentioned "You aren't a real smokejumper until you've quit it for a year or more and then come back." Looking around the base, I'm surprised to say that's more a rule than an exception. I think that "coming back" is a nod to that intrinsic value, and something we can all reflect on before the roar of this season really kicks off.

If you have questions or concerns for the current cohort of smokejumpers, please contact me at [patmcgunz@gmail.com](mailto:patmcgunz@gmail.com). My board position is "Liaison to Active Jumpers," and as I flesh out the potential for this position, I also need to understand the questions from the family of smokejumpers that came before me. Technical, philosophical, even just banter—contact me! 📧





# Off The List

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

Chuck Sheley  
10 Judy Lane  
Chico, CA 95926

## **Kent J. During** (Missoula '68)

Colonel (Ret.) Kent James During (US Army, CA National Guard) died April 6, 2022, due to complications from pneumonia. He most recently lived in Prescott, AZ and prior to that, Lodi, CA. Kent was born in Yosemite Valley Hospital in 1946 to Harry and Mary During. Harry was a Park Ranger in Yosemite, and they lived there through Kent's first grade. The family then moved to several national parks including Carlsbad Caverns, where Kent graduated from high school. Always an adventurer, he then spent summers as a smokejumper in Montana's Bitterroot Valley. When Kent went to Utah State, his childhood love of skiing overrode his studies, so Uncle Sam said, "Off to Vietnam you go." He thought military service would be better from the air than the ground; he pursued helicopter school and served as a pilot until the end of the war. *I want to thank Gene Hamner (MSO-67) for this information. I had lost contact with Kent in 2014. This shows the importance of getting an obit forwarded to me. We need to keep a historical record of all smokejumpers. All of you are important. (Ed.)*

## **David K. "Dave" Nelson** (Missoula '57)

Dave, 86, died March 12, 2022, in Grass Valley, California. He was born in Aurelia, Iowa, in 1935. Dave jumped at Missoula 1957-58, and at Redding where he was Base Manager 1959, 65-67. He received his bachelor's in Forestry from Iowa State University. Dave and his family ultimately settled in Nevada City, California, and he led one of the nation's Type 1 Fire Teams while working on the Tahoe N.F. When he retired, he continued for 20 years shaping emergency response policy for FEMA.

*For any of you that worked with Dave, you knew that he had a tremendous insight in fire management, was a no-nonsense person, and expected the best of his associates. Back in the days of immediate initial attack,*

*Dave would load the DC-3 at Redding, fly the forest after a lightning storm, jump fires as he found them (2-manners), and prevent them from becoming project fires. He was one of a kind and I don't think will ever be duplicated. (Ed.)*

## **James Scott "Jim" Sleight** (McCall '77)

Jim died March 26, 2022. He was born June 4, 1952, in Southern California. He grew up and attended junior college, then continued his education at U of Idaho. He had many adventures in his life including hitchhiking across the country with friends to music festivals, hopping boxcars, shipbuilding in Mississippi, diving for lobsters in Guatemala, and backpacking in New Zealand, just to mention a few.

In the mid '70s, Jim joined some classmates in McCall. He had so many endeavors ranging from dressing as a penguin while selling balloons, working on the sewer system around the lake, tree topping, painting buildings in town, to starting a log furniture business. He was not afraid of hard work and his imprint on McCall remains to this day. Jim worked in the Chamberlain Basin for a couple years, then joined the McCall firefighters in '76 and became a smokejumper in 1977. He was the prized player on the smokejumper volleyball team.

Jim started in real estate in the late '80s and was a top realtor in Boise for 25 years until his recent retirement. He enjoyed collecting records, going to hot springs, traveling with his wife to Canada and Mexico and everywhere in between, spending summers in McCall with his grandkids. His final adventure was building a dream home with his wife on the Payette River using things they had collected across the country.

Jim jumped at McCall 1977-80.

## **Albert Theodore "Al" Stillman** (McCall '59)

Al, 82, died February 23, 2022. He was born December 23, 1939, in Medford, Wisconsin, and

moved with his family to Riggins, Idaho, in 1941 where he graduated from high school in 1957. Al started his Forest Service career on the Boulder Ranger District in New Meadows in 1958 and, at age 19 in 1959, he became a smokejumper at McCall where he jumped 1959-63, 66, and 1967. He was drafted into the Army in 1964 and served as a supply sergeant at Fort Lewis.

Beginning in 1967 Al worked as a Fire Control Officer for the USFS on the McCall and New Meadows Districts on the Payette N.F. and on the Dale, Ukiah, and Pomeroy ranger districts on the Umatilla N.F., retiring in December 1995. After retirement from his Forest Service career, Al supported his wife JoAnne in her own Forest Service career, also worked as a contractor for the Forest Service during fire season for several years. In McCall in recent years, he became known for his letters to the editor of the local paper and his advocacy for wilderness areas.

### **Julio Bernardo Bilbao** (Idaho City '64)

Julio, 78, died January 26, 2022, from complications related to Parkinson's Disease. He was born December 26, 1943, in Emmett, Idaho, and grew up in Cascade, Idaho. After earning a bachelor's in History from Carroll College, a master's in School Counseling from Idaho State University, and a PhD in Education Administration from the University of Idaho, he dedicated his career to nurturing educational excellence in the Boise Public Schools. Julio was named Idaho Middle School Principal of the Year in 1998. In addition to teaching, he was also a coach and sports official.

At Carroll College he was a tremendous athlete being named Outstanding Running Back and Most Valuable Player and received honors as Outstanding Boxer. Julio jumped at Idaho City 1964-69, and at Boise 1971, 73-78.

### **Harris Anthony Wiltzen** (Missoula '48)

Harris, 99, died February 13, 2022. He was born August 8, 1922, on Minot, N.D. Harris grew up in Deering, N.D., and started school at the Dakota College of Forestry before he enlisted in the Army Reserve Corps in 1942 and was called to duty in 1943. Harris became a high-speed radio operator. He served in New Guinea, Southern Philippines, and Luzon in WW2. After four years of service,

he was honorably discharged in January 1946, and moved to Missoula where he finished his degree in Forestry in 1951.

Harris then started his career with the Soil Conservation Service where he worked until retirement in 1980. In 1984, Harris received the Montana Tree Farmer of the Year award. From 1992 to 2002, he was an advisory member of the Sanders County Board of Supervisors and was awarded the Life Achievement Award by the Montana Tree Farmer Association in 2004. Soon after his retirement, Harris took up running in local races and kept up this activity well into his '70s, typically placing very high in his age group in most races. He jumped at Missoula during the 1948 season.

### **Christopher Richard "Chris" Palmer** (Redding '75)

Chris died December 28, 2021. He was born January 15, 1953, in Glendale, California, grew up in Southern California, and graduated from Bishop H.S. where he was a football standout. Chris worked as a Hotshot on the San Bernadino N.F. before starting his 25-year career as a smokejumper with over 300 fire jumps. He jumped at Redding 1975, 77, 92-95, McCall 76, 78-79, 90, Fairbanks 1980-85, and NIFC 1986-87, 95-98. Chris was a Life Member of the National Smokejumper Association.

### **Phillip George Schmid** (Missoula '55)

Phil died December 14, 2021, at his home in Iowa City, Iowa. He was born January 30, 1935, in Alliance, Nebraska. He grew up in Hot Springs, South Dakota, where he ran Track and graduated from high school in 1955.

He earned a bachelor's in Chemistry from Carleton College in Minnesota and his medical degree from the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine. Phil moved to Iowa City in 1962 where he completed his Internal Medicine and Cardiology residency at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. During the Vietnam War he served in the USAF as a Captain at Wright-Patterson AFB. Phil returned to Iowa City where he served as a Professor of Cardiology at the University of Iowa until his retirement.

Phil's professional interests included cardiovascular research and he authored hundreds of research publications and received numerous awards in that

field. He was an avid fly-fisherman, private pilot, and skier.

Phil jumped at Missoula 1955, 57, and at Grangeville 1956.

### **Roger W. “Wade” Erwin** (Missoula ’59)

Wade died September 4, 2021, in Snellville, Georgia. He was born in Ohio but lived most of his life in Montana and called it home. Upon graduating from high school in 1957, he continued his education at Northern Montana College and the University of Montana where he received his degree in Forestry.

Wade jumped at Missoula 1959-61, 63-64, and was a survivor of the Higgins Ridge Fire. He attended the gathering of fire survivors hosted in Missoula in 2019 and referred to it as one of his most memorable times.

He served as a medic in the Army 1961-63 and

returned to work with the USFS in fire control in Oregon, Idaho, and Butte, Montana. Wade was promoted to Regional Fire Coordinator for the 13 southern states and was based in Atlanta, GA, where he retired. After retiring he worked for the Mental Health Services for ten years.

Wade was an avid Montana hunter, fisherman, and snowmobiler.

### **Melvin E. “Ernie” Walker** (Redding ’01)

Ernie, 58, died November 6, 2021, at the Eastern Idaho Regional Medical after a yearlong battle with cancer. He was born February 20, 1963, in Albany, Georgia, and grew up in San Diego where he graduated from Hilltop H.S. Ernie then received his bachelor’s in Natural Resources from Humboldt State University. He made his home in Teton Valley, Idaho. Ernie rookied at Redding in 2001 and jumped at West Yellowstone 2002-11, 13-17. 🐾

## NSA Good Samaritan/Scholarship Fund Contributions

<u>Donor</u>	<u>In Memory of/or Honor of</u>
Frank Just (MYC-54) .....	Good Sam Fund
Gary Jensen (Associate) .....	Good Sam Fund
Scott Parish .....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
S. Cotton Walker.....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Holly Butler .....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Butch Shipley.....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Mark Eichholtz .....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Matt Duckett/Donna Jordan.....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Katy Doman/Lisa Hennon.....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Cornell/Farrow/Healea.....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Juan Garcia .....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Mark/Lisa Hoerschgan.....	Mike Hodge (CJ-54)
Doc Lammers (MSO-71).....	George Gowan, Dennis Parker, Doug Maryott, John Harper, D. Boyd, B. Tanner, Buttercup, Bill Allred
Scott Fairchild (RAC-74) .....	Mark Corbet/Doug Houston
Ben Musquez (MSO-56) .....	Joe Gutkoski (MSO-50)

<u>Donor</u>	<u>In Memory of/or Honor of</u>
Roger Steerman (MSO-75) .....	Roger Siemens (MSO-59)
Dick Lynch (MYC-64) .....	Julio Bilbao (IDC-64)
Eddie Yosick (MYC-81).....	Gordon Woodhead (RDD-83)
Cole MacPherson (MSO-55) .....	Tom Milligan Jim Manion, Hans Trankle
Reb/Pat Dahlstrom .....	Ed Kurowski (MSO-61)
Dale Gardner (CJ-67) .....	Doug Houston (RAC-73)
Frankie Shoemaker (BOI-70) ..	Julio Bilbao (IDC-64)
Ken Chase (ANC-67) ....	Ernest Holmberg (ANC-66)
Friends of Wade Erwin .....	Wade Erwin (MSO-59)
Rich Krenkel (MSO-71).....	MSO ’71 Class
Jon Klingel (CJ-65) .....	Good Sam Fund
Jim Frakes (RDD-65).....	Dave Nelson/Al Stillman
Peter Landis (CJ-62) .....	Al Boucher (CJ-49)
Helena SJ Coffee Group.....	Michael MacKinnon, John MacKinnon, Travis Atkins
Joel Beaudin (ANC-63).....	Good Sam Fund

Contributions since the previous publication of donors April 2022  
Total funds disbursed to Smokejumpers and families since 2004—\$277,200  
Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:  
Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico CA 95926



# Idaho City Smokejumper Unit Sign Finds New Home

Francis Mohr (Idaho City '63)

The sign that once identified the Idaho City Smokejumper Loft and proudly served as a centerpiece for several jumpers' memorable fire seasons has found a new home. It will be displayed in front of the Strauss House in Idaho City. Originally built in late 1860s, the historic building was restored by **Kenn Smith** (IDC-55), Smokejumper Unit Assistant Forman in the 1970s. The interior recreated a prominent home of the famous gold rush era and Kenn filled it with the large collection of old bottles found by him and other jumpers during diggings around town or at old mining/cabin sites found in the nearby forest. The Strauss House and surrounding gardens were willed to the Idaho City Historical Foundation upon his death in 1997. The Foundation is creating the Kenn Smith Wildfire Museum to commemorate him and the firefighter's role in the community. The museum will be open to the public this summer in time for this year's Smokejumper Reunion. One room in the house is completely full of crew photos, photos of jumpers on work projects or fires, and Jumper Unit socials, such as the well-remembered "Christmas in July" Party with



*Fire Season 1963: L-R: Idaho City Smokejumper Unit Squad Leaders, Dick Graham and Clarence "Ty" Tiechert, Assistant Unit Foreman, Kenn Smith and Unit Foreman, James B. "Smokey" Stover.*

lights, etc. It's a room full of memories.

Idaho City was the site for one of the earlier USFS Smokejumper Bases. It was established in 1948 and located in rock tailings left by the gold dredging that occurred between the early 1900s till shortly before WW II. For many jumpers based at Idaho City, its residents became family. Many friendships and memories were formed on both sides. In 1969, a management decision was made to move the unit to Boise. Even letters from Senator Frank

Church, the County Judge, and others couldn't unearth a realistic rationale for the move. It was a done deal before the official announcement was ever made. At the end of the 1969 fire season, Idaho City residents sponsored an all-out "Farewell Dinner Party."

That fall, a handful of jumpers remained to move smokejumper parachutes, jumpsuits, sewing machines, office equipment, historic records, and an assortment of miscellaneous smokejumper-related and work-related project tools to the Boise Inter-

agency Fire Center. Before the Jumper Loft was put on the Government Auction Block, the large sign in front of the loft along with a couple other directional road signs were saved. It didn't take a lengthy planning meeting and decision to know that these signs would have no place at the Boise Interagency Fire Center. The signs stayed in Idaho City.

Several times the large sign served as a tabletop for visiting past jumpers and pilots as they enjoyed a glass of refreshing liquid and reminisced about their fire season days in Idaho City. Several visitors left their autographs on the sign. Soon after the sign was entrusted to the Idaho City Historical Foundation, they contacted a specialist at the Idaho Historical Society about ways to protect the signatures and preserve the sign so it could be displayed as it once was at the jumper base. Tentative location for the sign is to the left of the Strauss House. Dedication of the Foundation's "Wildfire

Museum" (the Strauss House) and smokejumper sign is planned for this year's NSA Smokejumper Reunion.

An architect with the Idaho Heritage Trust provided methods to preserve and provide long-term weather protection for the sign and signatures. The architect sent the following comment: *"It is really a special piece of smokejumper his-*

plexiglass with UV filtering capabilities is being considered. Although the sign will be partially sheltered from light and snow by a large spruce tree, a roof structure adequate to cover the sign is also planned. The treated post for mounting the sign will be secured in a steel holder and concrete foundation to help deter moisture deterioration.

---

*"It is really a special piece of smokejumper history and deserves some delicate treatment. Some of the uniqueness of the signatures comes from the different ways smokejumpers applied them to the sign."*

---

*tory and deserves some delicate treatment. Some of the uniqueness of the signatures comes from the different ways smokejumpers applied them to the sign."*

Protection process involves a case-like enclosure with adequate ventilation and ability to drain any moisture that may collect. A special

Like all special projects sponsored by the Historical Foundation, special fundraising is necessary. A special dedicated account has been established to cover expenses to preserve the signatures, installation, and long-term preservation of the sign. A goal of \$2000 is best estimate. It is already starting to be nipped away. Any amount over what is necessary to accomplish the sign project will be transferred to the Strauss House Dedicated Account which is dedicated for annual support and maintaining the adjoining flower/lawn area that Kenn so proudly established.

Contributions can be sent to: **Idaho City Historical Foundation, P.O. Box 358, Idaho City, ID 83631.** Please indicate your contribution is for the I.C. Smokejumper Dedicated Fund. 🙏

## **National Smokejumper Reunion Boise Aug. 12–14, 2022**

Reunion director Lynn Sprague says that the early registration is very good.

Don't put off sending in your registration. If you need the registration form and information, go to the NSA website [smokejumpers.com](http://smokejumpers.com), look under "Events" and download the form. You can also contact me at [chucksheley@gmail.com](mailto:chucksheley@gmail.com) and I will email or mail the form to you. We need to see you there!