

SMOKEJUMPER



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NSA Web site: <http://www.smokejumpers.com>

Managing Editor: *Chuck Sheley*

Associate Editor: *Ed Booth*

Editing: *K. G. Sheley*

Photo Editor: *Johnny Kirkley*

Illustrators: *Dan Veenendaal*, and *Eric Rajala*

Printing: *Larry S. Jackson*, Heidelberg Graphics,
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Message from the President



by **John Twiss**
(Redmond '67)
PRESIDENT

AS I ROTATE out of the President's position and turn the job over to outstanding board member **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57), I would like to leave you with some thoughts for the future.

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are facing budget cuts and will look closely at the smokejumper program and its cost effectiveness. I support this review, however, the smokejumper program does not currently enjoy high-level support in the Forest Service. There are fewer smokejumpers attaining high-level positions within the agencies and thus fewer who can explain the skills and capabilities of smokejumpers.

There are roughly 400 smokejumpers in the United States. A steady yet reduced number from earlier years. Many backcountry and wilderness fires previously attacked by smokejumpers are allowed to burn for ecosystem improvement and cost reasons. Smokejumpers, while still attacking backcountry fires, are assuming different roles in

fire management.

Smokejumper aircraft are aging and in short supply. The Forest Service is looking at eliminating the DC-3 in Missoula and McCall because of the cost of operation. The Forest Service owns eight smokejumper aircraft. Scrapping two large, airworthy aircraft without finding suitable replacements seriously degrades the effectiveness of smokejumpers and thus the agencies firefighting capabilities. Smokejumpers are still one of the quickest initial attack resources in the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service, and 400 is the bare minimum needed today.

Drought and insect infestations have left our western forests in poor condition. The fuel loading is very heavy. Many future fires will be large and catastrophic. It will be even more important to attack fires quickly with a high level of skill. Smokejumpers will likely attack more fires in the urban interface and, because of the shortage of skilled fire personnel, will serve on lead fire teams and fire monitoring assignments.

Firefighting costs are high and will be scrutinized closely. Fire camps, equipment and logistical support on large fires have grown tremendously and there is still little incentive to cut costs. There is a shortage of skilled firefighters who can go out on a large fire today and safely put the fire out, thus fires linger on and costs continue to rise. Smokejumpers and Hotshot crews will be in even greater demand on these fires.

The Forest Service and BLM will need to look seriously at how and why fires escape initial attack and thus become costly mega-fires. There is no national review process. There has been a reluctance to do this because of the decentralized nature of deciding when and how a fire is initially attacked. Fires are often attacked on the cheap or with local resources. Inexperienced employees with little national guidance often make multi-million dollar dispatch decisions. The closest forces concept and ordering the right firefighting resource are often out of consideration. Dispatching cannot be timid, nor slow, and inter-agency/local turf battles must be discovered

NSA Members—Save This Information

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

Smokejumper magazine

Articles, obits, change of address

Chuck Sheley 530-893-0436
cnkgsheley@earthlink.net
10 Judy Ln.
Chico, CA 95926

Membership

John McDaniel 785-668-2093
jumpercj57@hotmail.com
P.O. Box 105
Falun, KS 67442-0105

Historical items

Photos, letters, documents

Larry Longley 360-654-1720
ldlongley@gmail.com
16430 Marine Dr.
Stanwood, WA 98292

All else

NSA President
Jim Cherry 641-927-4428
jimcherry@wctatel.net
2335 300th St.
Ventura, IA 50482-8502

Smokejumper base abbreviations:

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

and eliminated. Proper preplanning is a must.

Forest Service and BLM leaders today do not have the fire management background of their predecessors. They came up in a system where fire was very specialized and not a part of most employees' background. These leaders will face many difficult staffing and fire decisions. Fires will threaten life and property and decisions will have great impact. They will need training and help.

It is important that you and I stay updated and lend guidance to the agencies. We need to be ready to get involved and lend our skills and input on the level of skills and readiness we want on our forests and grasslands and how we expect the agencies to perform. That is part of our National Smokejumper Association Mission. Smokejumpers are multi-functional and provide tremendous value for the cost. Their skills will be needed more than ever.

It has been an honor serving as your president. Becoming a smokejumper was, and still is, the proudest accomplishment of my life. I was trained and supported by the best, my role models have been smokejumpers, and I am happy that the bonds between smokejumpers are lifelong and irreversible! My best to you. 🙏

MEMBERSHIP CORNER

John McDaniel (CJ-57)
NSA Membership Chairman

When you order smokejumper items *ON THE WEB*, you are asked to set up an account. The account is your email address and the **PASSWORD IS THE ONE YOU USE ALL OF THE TIME.**

Better to pay by check.

Frequently, we are asked to verify membership data. The best way to acknowledge this is via email. Unfortunately, a large percentage of members' email addresses on file are incorrect. If you want to receive needed info, send the correct address to J. McDaniel at jumpercj57@hotmail.com OR update your info on the website. Click on "Update Jumplist Form" on the right side of the Home Page.

1949 – Gates Of The Mountain Or Mann Gulch?

by George B. Harpole (Missoula '49)

The spring of 1949 was a good spring for the grassy meadows in the Idaho and Montana forests. The meadows and slopes produced thick covers of grasses and wildflowers from the abundance of rain – until the summer heat and dryness of July dried the forest openings into feathered meadows of flash fuels.

Then, in the afternoon and evening of Aug. 3, 1949, lightning storms rolled across the Idaho and Montana mountains, repeatedly and thunderously smashing the ground and trees with bolts of lightning. This was the beginning of a horrendous fire year for the U.S. Forest Service's Region 1 smokejumpers and other firefighters.

On Aug. 4, **Al Bowman** (MSO-49) and I were the only GS-6 smokejumpers in the barracks located at the Hale Field Airport in Missoula. Base supervisor **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40), a couple of squadleaders and foremen, parachute loft personnel and Johnson's Flying Service pilot personnel were hanging out around the smokejumpers' dispatch office – waiting for action.

Al Bowman and I were sleeping in the resident smokejumper barracks, next to Hale Field, ready to make our first-ever fire jump. It was somewhat after 6 in the morning when we were roused and told to suit up for a fire jump.

Then there was a debate as to whether to send us to a ridge top smoke (smoldering, but not flaming) outside of Helena, close to the Gates of the Mountain, or to a smoke on Squaw Peak Mountain above the Ninemile Ranger Station just outside of Missoula.

We were standing outside the Hale Field smokejumper dispatch office when **Skip Stratton** (MSO-47) came out to tell us we were going to Squaw Peak because the Gates of the Mountain smoke was on a ridge top, where it could wait until they got some jumpers back from Yellowstone – such as **Bill Hellman** (MSO-46) and others.

The Squaw Peak smoke was on a 40- to 60-percent slope covered with lodgepole pine that could quickly flame up and become a major forest fire, as opposed to the Gates of the Mountain smoke on a sparsely covered ridge top without much of any place to go.

We left Hale Field in a Travelair single-engine aircraft at about 7 a.m. in clear and cloudless weather to jump

on Squaw Peak Mountain. Skip Stratton was our spotter.

Arriving at the jump site, we could see a wisp of smoke rising vertically. Great! This meant no wind, and our forward movement, when coming in for a landing, would only be from the air jettisoning from the two slots in the back of our canopies.

I jumped first. Some fun. Lots of lodgepole. I came down into a small clearing between trees that caught the outstretched skirt of my canopy. I swung forward and up, like on a schoolyard swing. When the trees let loose on the “up” side of the swing, I came down flat on my back and made impact on the ground like I had hit a thick gymnasium mat – thanks to the protection provided by the parachute packing board, helmet and jump suit. Then the parachute canopy, small limbs and twigs crashed down on top of me.

I was fine. It was my first fire jump and the landing was more fun than a carnival ride. I got out of my helmet and protective gear and into the middle of the small clearing to wave an “okay” to Skip as they did a flyby to see if my jump had gone okay.

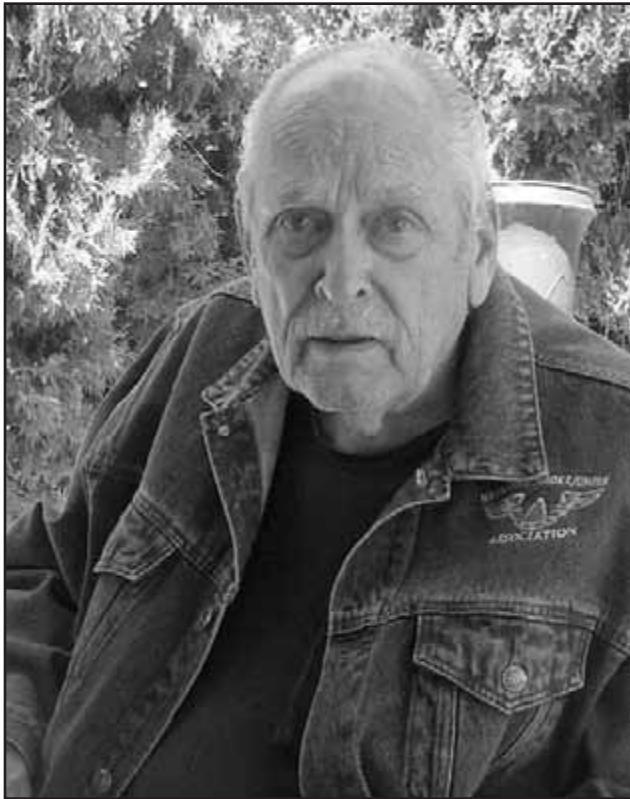
Next run, Bowman jumped. I couldn't believe what I saw. His parachute packing board came fluttering down like a bird trying to find a tree to land in. Bowman had jumped with his static line under the strap that secured the parachute pack to him.

Bowman landed okay. We found the pack board and discovered the buckle had busted – like it was supposed to do in such circumstances. We also thought about what could have happened if that belt buckle had not been designed to break like those on our jump harnesses. This was our first fire jump. We were both thinking our parachutes and jump gear were designed to be foolproof, and we just put it through a couple of those tests.

Yes! Smokejumpers! Good outfit to belong to!

The smoke was officially recorded as the McCormick Creek Fire that was reported at 4:22 a.m., Aug. 4, 1949. According to the record, we attacked the fire at 7:05 a.m. and officially had the fire dead out at 9 a.m.

Bowman and I then assembled our parachute gear to be packed out by a Forest Service mule and headed down the mountain to the Ninemile District Ranger Station – with our fire tools. We expected to get an immediate



George Harpole (Courtesy G. Harpole)

ride back to Missoula, but didn't. It was late afternoon, so we stayed the night at the ranger station.

The next day, Aug. 5, the ranger asked us to chop firewood until he could arrange for transportation to get us back to Missoula – approximately nine miles away. We thought the resident ranger should have taken us back to Hale Field immediately because the fire season was upon us, and we were “smokejumpers,” not “wood choppers.” But, we knew the ranger districts contributed budget funds to the smokejumper project, so we think they did their best to get their money's worth whenever they got their hands on a couple of smokejumpers.

So, dang! We chopped wood all day Aug. 5, 1949, piling up enough firewood to keep a fire burning for the ranger to stay warm for at least one long, hard winter.

We stayed a second night at the Ninemile Ranger Station and then got our ride back to Hale Field Aug. 6, arriving at the dispatch office at about noon. We were immediately told about the fate of our comrades at the Gates of the Mountain Fire, now called the Mann Gulch Fire. We were told the ridge top fire they were sent to suppress had blown up, jumped down into the gulch and overran them.

Most of the jumpers had been fatally burned – including my two good friends **Leonard Piper** (MSO-49) and **Bob Bennett** (MSO-49).

I became physically sick and stunned into a kind of stupidity of nothingness. Others I knew had died, and

Bill Hellman and **Stan Reba** (MSO-48) died in a Helena Hospital as a consequence of their burns. These were the guys who came back to Missoula from Yellowstone in the afternoon of Aug. 4, plus the resident fireguard **Jim Harrison** (MSO-47).

Thus, I wondered if the Gates of the Mountain fire/smoke we knew about on Aug. 4 exploded into becoming the Mann Gulch Fire of Aug. 5. I've never found out what happened to our Aug. 4 Gates of the Mountain smoke, but found the ridge top fire calling for smokejumpers who chose to land in the Mann Gulch meadow was officially reported to the Hale Field dispatch center at 1:55 p.m. Aug. 5 while Bowman and I were chopping wood at the Ninemile Ranger Station.

I still wonder if those were one and the same ridge top fire, or two different fires.

Whatever, a lethal fire blossomed forth from the shores of the Missouri River on Aug. 5, shortly after Earl Cooley dropped 15 of his 16 smokejumpers into the Mann Gulch basin from an aging Johnson's Flying Service DC-3. One of his jumpers had become sick and had to return to base.

Wag Dodge (MSO-41) jumped as the fire boss and **Bill Hellman** as the straw boss. Fire guard **Harrison** – a former smokejumper – had hiked in and joined in with them. There were 16 firefighters on the ground when the Mann Gulch fire from the river overran them.

Two survived by way of pure luck – **Robert Sallee** (MSO-49) and **Walter Rumsey** (MSO-49) – and the fire boss **Wag Dodge** survived by way of retreating into a backfire he started. He tried to get his crew to get into the burned-out area of his backfire, but they stampeded in attempts to outrun the fire. Thirteen of them died.

The official conclusions of the Forest Service's Board of Review are still said by some to have covered up some Forest Service shortcomings. The biggest question is how the ridge top fire got from the ridge top down into the grasses at the mouth of the gulch.

Some suggest someone – not knowing that the smokejumper fire crew was in the basin – started the fire to improve the grazing quality of the gulch with a fire that could be passed off as coincidental to the ridge top lightning-caused fire. See the first chapter of **Norman McLean's *Young Men & Fire*** and you may find the reason **McLean** did not publish the book while he was still alive. He left the manuscript behind for his son **John** to publish. He could not.

I still remain sad about what I believe to have been an unnecessary loss of life at Mann Gulch Aug. 5 – remembering how, little more than two weeks before in our last training session, I asked: “What about the use of backfires?”

In short, when I asked the “backfire” question, I asked

it with the “save your life” aspect in my mind; I got a dismissive answer with “They just use them on big fires” and was pissed off to be treated dismissively. I tried to make my point with Leonard Piper and Bob Bennett immediately after the session, and they died only a couple of weeks later.

But, it looks like they might have already been too far away from Wag to see his call as a better chance than the ridge top. I don't know what I would have done if I had been there. Probably would have depended upon where I was standing when Wag started his backfire.

Now I find an array of equivocation about what kind of a fire Wag Dodge created. For example, Wag invented the “Escape Fire” at the moment the Mann Gulch Fire challenged him and his crew, and “it was not a backfire.”

Not a backfire? Why not? Would it be shameful to not have an instructor who could talk about what a “backfire” was and what it might be used for?

I can't help but think there's been some smoke-and-mirror nonsense intended to defuse the training room faux pas. I had been taught what a backfire was during the World War II summers working on my uncle's Nevada cattle ranch. It was a fire set deliberately to eliminate fuels in the path of an oncoming fire to deprive the primary fire of fuel when it reaches the site of the backfire.

Uncle Charlie didn't describe it that way – just by way of scary stories about how you might have to save your life in the Texas cattle country where he grew up. That's why I asked that question at our last training session. And that's what Wag Dodge did at Mann Gulch. And that's what our smokejumper instructor couldn't discuss.

And, yes, the burned-out area created by the backfire was used by Wag as a refuge from the fire. So, it's an “escape fire.” Duh!

I think our training instructor didn't know how to answer my “backfire” question or anything related to it. I still wonder how Wag Dodge – now deceased – would have answered the question.

Over the years since the Mann Gulch Fire, I've been told many times by others that they believe Forest Service officials did successfully avoid any liabilities for the Forest Service for any shortcomings there might have been in smokejumper and fire-management training. If that's the case, in doing so, these Forest Service officials apparently denied the families of the Mann Gulch Fire victims any retribution for their losses.

Without any retribution, the families of the Mann Gulch victims received approximately \$400 (1949 dollars) from Social Security and the State of Montana for each victim as opposed to approximately \$127,000 (1994 dollars) from a 1976 Federal Public Safety Officer's Death Benefit program for each of the Storm King

Mountain Fire victims – another wildfire tragedy that killed 14 firefighters near Glenwood Springs, Colo., in July 1994.

I continue to wonder if THE Mann Gulch Fire was a fire that someone started as a secretly prescribed fire, or was it the explosive results for neglecting a ridge top lightning strike we might have known about for at least 36 hours before smokejumpers were dropped into the gulch. So, should we call it the Gates of the Mountain Fire, spotted the morning of Aug. 4, or the Mann Gulch Fire, dispatched to on Aug. 5, 1949?

I lost two of my best friends as well as some newly made friends, in the Mann Gulch Fire. That was 62 years ago with almost all of those associated and involved now deceased.

I can only wish that all those now deceased might rest in peace, as well as those of us who remain to remember. I think we need to look at our current records that demonstrate our firefighting fatalities are now relatively rare, and that we need to pay high tribute and honor to all of those men and women responsible for managing today's firefighting and fire-safety programs.

For everyone, we need to be mindful that our forest can be a dangerous place to be during times of high fire danger, and that approximately 16 percent of all wildfire deaths are the result of entrapments that are sometimes called burnovers.

All life is so precious.

Please be safe.

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Historical Wildland Firefighter Fatalities: 1910-1996, by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. 1997, second edition, NFES No. 1849. National Interagency Fire Center, Great Basin Cache Supply Office. 3833 S. Development Ave., Boise, ID 83705.

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'46 Jumpers Spotlight Beck – Sort Of – In Magazine Prank

by Jim Allen (North Cascades '46)

This is a story about some of the 14 smoke-jumpers on the 1946 rookie crew at North Cascades Smokejumper Base at Winthrop, Wash. – and it is especially about “**Jumping Jim**” Beck (NCSB-46).

Jim and his old friend **Johnny Tauscher** (NCSB-46) grew up together in the small, western Washington logging town of Elma, in Grays Harbor County. Their folks were involved in logging in the days of “Big Timber” when logging was king in that part of the state. No finer timber could be found anywhere in the nation in those days.

Both Jim and Johnny spent time in the woods prior to enlisting in the Army in World War II. They both went airborne. Johnny was in Company B, 307th, Engineer Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division in Europe. Jim served with the 457th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, 11th Airborne Division, in the South Pacific.

After the war, they returned to Elma and joined the NCSB crew at Winthrop in May 1946. Since there were no training facilities at that time in Winthrop, they traveled to Missoula, Mont., and trained under the supervision of **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40). They then returned to Winthrop to take up not only fire-fighting duties but also a great deal of construction.

The facilities built during this season included the bunkhouse, cook shack, parachute loft, etc., from some of Civilian Conservation Corps buildings that the crew moved from Early Winters.

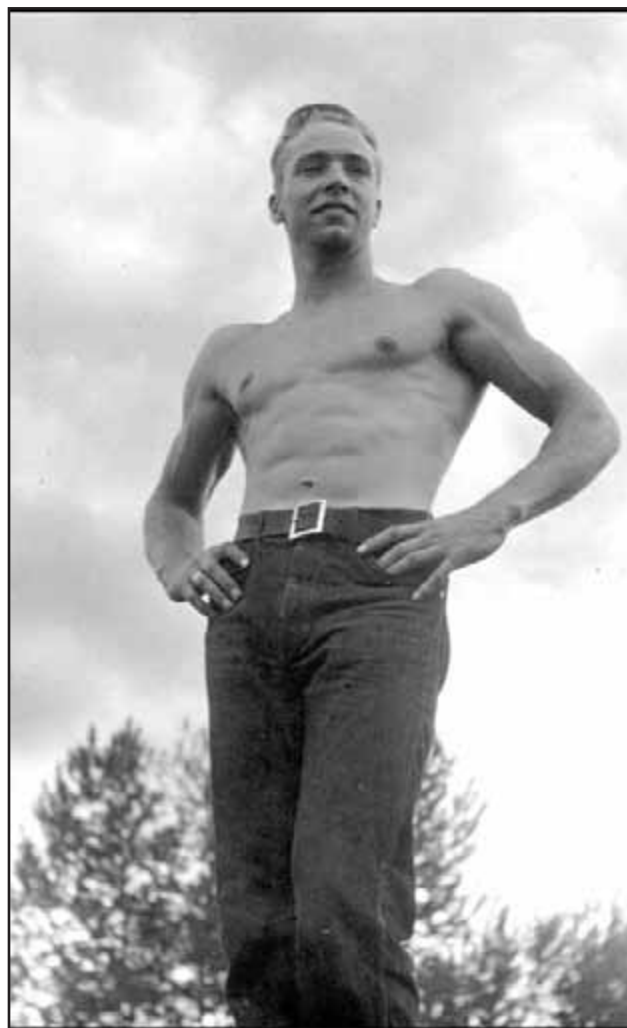
Of the 14 members of the 1946 crew, **Art “The Body” Higbee** had a near-perfect physique that every American boy envisions and any bodybuilder would envy. Although Art has a primary role in the story that follows, it is important to note that Jim Beck had a girlfriend in Elma. He said he was planning to marry her that fall, but no one believed him.

During the summer someone in the camp found a copy of “Rangeland Romances” that had a section of “Lonely Hearts.” Several crewmembers composed a letter to the magazine’s “Lonely Hearts” section, supposedly written by Jim Beck, as a joke.

Never in their wildest dreams did they think they would publish it, but they did. They took a photograph of Art Higbee, shirtless, in a pose that showed

his physical attributes to his best advantage. They described Jim with Art’s physique and embellished him with a 30-inch waist, 44-inch chest, height of 6 feet, 1 inch, with “battleship gray” eyes.

They said “Jumping Jim Beck” was a fire jumper at Winthrop, isolated, and spending a lot of time in lonely areas where there were no girls. Other than work, he had nothing to do but exercise, lift weights, ride horses, and run for miles in the mountains. He had no girlfriends to write to and, being lonely, asked for someone to write him.



Art Higbee in photo that was sent to Rangeland Romances magazine. (Courtesy Jim Allen)



L-R: Jim Allen, Roy Goss, Art Higbee at NCSB 2008 Reunion. (Courtesy Johnny Kirkley)

They sent the letter away with Art's photograph and thought nothing would come of it. WRONG AGAIN!

The 1946 crew finished the summer and, sure enough, Jim went back to Elma and married his sweetheart. Sometime that fall the letter and photo were published and the mail started arriving. Some were

*It was a joke played on Jim. ...
Throughout that fall and winter,
at least a thousand letters came
and were put in a duffel bag.*

forwarded to Jim's Elma address, but the volume was so great that the Winthrop postmaster asked Francis Lufkin what he should do. Francis explained that it was a joke played on Jim and not to forward any more, since Jim was now a married man. Throughout that fall and winter, at least a thousand letters came and were put in a duffel bag.

When the crew assembled in 1947, the bunkhouse was a lively place with all of the reading material that had come in from nearly every state in the union. Some of the fellows answered the letters – especially those that had included photos. Two or three of the fellows actually had girls come out to visit.

Jim Beck took this in stride and must have had a wonderful bride who didn't divorce him – as well as a good sense of humor since he didn't sue anyone for the joke. Still, no one volunteered authorship.

Fast-forward to the future

Jim Beck didn't return to jumping after 1946. Since he was married, he had a full-time job. Between 1946 and 1950 Jim and his wife had two lovely children.

Unfortunately, Jim fell victim to polio in 1948 and spent a long time in an iron lung. He finally passed away on Dec. 18, 1950.

Thus ends the story of Jim Beck. Art Higbee, whose photo was used in the article, lived on. We received word in February 2011 that Art had passed away in Arvada, Colo. Now there are only three left of the 1946 crew – Jim Allen, Roy Goss and Wilfred "Jack" Larson. 🇺🇸

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Airborne Eradication Effort Kills Johnson Flying Service Pilot When Engine Fails

by Kim Briggeman

(This article appeared in the June 18, 2011, edition of the Montana History Almanac serial. Copyright 2011, The Missoulian of Missoula, Mont. Reprinted with permission.)

A FIERY CRASH in the Elkhorn Mountains ended the life of legendary mountain pilot W. Penn Stohr and his copilot June 19, 1957.

Stohr, 54, and 31-year-old Robert Vallance of Hamilton were spraying to eradicate sagebrush from a Ford Trimotor out of Townsend for the U.S. Forest Service.



They'd started on their second pass at the head of Crow Creek, 14 miles to the west of town, when an engine "seemed to miss," a witness said. The plane hit the ground in a gulch and skidded more than 100 yards, shaving off a large fir tree. The diesel tank was thrown free and both gas tanks ignited. Only the wings and motor survived destruction.

It was the third fatal wreck of a crop spraying plane in Montana in less than three weeks. Crashes near Gildford and Geraldine killed one pilot each.

Stohr, who learned to fly in Plains, was the most experienced pilot for Missoula-based Johnson Flying Service. He was an artist at flying ski-equipped airplanes into the mountains of Idaho, and received national recognition in 1943 for a daring, subzero rescue of an Air Corps bomber crew that crashed near McCall, Idaho.

Stohr was a member of the Museum of Mountain Flying's Aviation Hall of Fame and of the Idaho Aviation Hall of Fame. In 2006, the Plains airport was named in his honor. 📌

Abandoned

by Gordon Dickinson (McCall '63)

In my experience as a smokejumper, a rapidly moving roster with everyone out on a fire was about the strongest incentive to work hard. And nothing was so discouraging as to be stuck in some god-forsaken spot after your fire was extinguished.

I jumped in the mid-1960s. In the "early days" (when men were men ...), the way back to the base was arduous: first the hike of several miles with 80 pounds of gear to the nearest trail, then a horseback ride with the district packer to the nearest road, and then a long pickup ride over roads of variable quality. These times were largely gone by the mid-1960s when the way home – if you were lucky – meant a short hike to nearest ridge top or open meadow, followed by a ride in a Bell chopper.

One morning in early September 1966, an electric

storm had swept through the Payette National Forest, lighting up fires from one end to the other. We jumped the roster, and anyone getting back to camp stood to go right to the top, if not to be sent out immediately. I had flown in the second DC-3 load that morning, but we were unable to drop everyone, so returned to camp.

After a quick lunch, **Jon Griffin** (MYC-66) and I were spotted on a fire on a rocky ridge near Suicide Rock, just downstream from the old mining town of Roosevelt. When we flew over the fire, I could not believe our luck – a curl of smoke from a stump in the middle of rock scree was the extent of our fire. And just up the ridge was a natural helipad that would require little man-made improvement.

Wayne R. Webb (MYC-46) was our spotter, and I

was not sure if he would drop us. This fire was likely to die a natural death without attention from us. But he said this was a jump.

As we watched the streamers float down, I begged him to call for the helicopter as soon as he had dropped us. At least, get it out before dark. He said he would and Jon and I were on our way.

The side of a rocky ridge is not the most appealing of jump zones. Even so, the rocks were mostly little and we both made uneventful landings, stripped off our gear, bagged the chutes and suits, and legged it to our equipment drop and on to the stump. The fire was no more complicated up close than when seen from the air, and after an hour or two of shovel-and-ax work, we pronounced it out.

The hike to what would be our heliport was less than a quarter of a mile, although half of that distance was straight up. The place needed some leveling and one tree cut down, which we did as rapidly as possible – always looking over our shoulders in the direction of the expected helicopter.

We finished our work several hours before dark, sat down to eat and wait. At sunset it was clear that no helicopter would come that night. This was disappointing as we could envision the other guys getting back to McCall from their fires ahead of us.

We were up at the crack of dawn to pack our sleeping bags and gear after a quick breakfast. I found a comfortable spot to sit and read my current book. If I had learned anything useful during my smokejumping days, it was to always have a good book along. On that rocky ridge top, it was Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. So I read for a while and then challenged Jon to a rock-rolling contest.

As a Ned, several seasons earlier, I had not always successfully resisted the urge to roll boulders down the mountainside to see how far they would go. It was definitely not an accepted, safe procedure, but it was fun for the inner kid. Those boulders would go pretty far at times.

But Jon resisted my foolishness and suggested a rock-throwing contest to see who could knock limbs off a snag down the hill from us. So we spent our energy winging rocks at the snag. After an hour of pitching rocks, it was lunchtime, so we opened up our ration bag and dug into a lunch of beans and weenies topped off with a pecan nut roll – or it could have been lima beans and ham topped off with fruit cake.

I finished *The Grapes of Wrath* that afternoon and still no chopper. I have been reminded that we'd had a philosophical discussion about the merits of consuming or conserving water. Jon was a conserver. I – the older, wiser member of the team – was of the opinion that if you had it, you drank it. This philosophy undoubtedly had been

picked up in the bars of McCall from still older, wiser jumpers. Jon had reluctantly given in to my wisdom, so by the afternoon his canteens were as dry as mine.

From our ridge top we could look up the Monumental Creek canyon to the small lake that had flooded Roosevelt, Idaho. Roosevelt was founded in 1902 to support the miners working the gold strike on nearby Thunder Mountain. It boomed for a few years but was flooded when a mudslide just below Roosevelt created a dam on Monumental Creek and submerged the town.

I subsequently learned that this was not an acute disaster causing death to the townspeople, but it certainly was death for the town. Since then, a road had been built that came in from Stibinite, and we could see the end of the road on the flat just above the lake.

We were curious to explore the town site, and more importantly, we were just about out of water. So as the sun set, we took our canteens and flashlights and headed down the mountainside. We found water and the trail along Monumental Creek to Roosevelt. It was about a two-mile hike to the old town site.

We found no sign of human life around. The road had no fresh tracks and our hopes of finding a fisherman, prospector or any other explorer were dashed. As we headed back down the trail for the climb to our heliport, our flashlights were reflected from what proved to be gravestones in the town cemetery just below the mudslide. It was not large, but we found tombstones of men who had died in 1902 to 1908, including one who had died on about the same day of the month we were there; a rather eerie sight, especially at 9 o'clock at night.

As we settled in for the second night, we were discouraged. Webb had abandoned us. Besides losing the chance to be at the top of the roster, we were low on rations. Moreover, I was forced to admit that conservation might just be the better than consumption in the management of a limited water supply. And there were storm clouds to the north. These storms usually did not cause significant delays for the chopper, but our luck was not good, and we did not need this additional threat to getting home.

The following morning, there was still no chopper. We discussed what to do, and decided if the worst came to be, we could walk the 30 miles up the road from Roosevelt to Stibinite. Any passerby would certainly give us a ride. By noon, we loaded up and headed down the mountainside for the trail. Since we had eaten most of our food, our packs were not the 80-some pounds of the days of canvas jumpsuits, but they were still heavy.

Once we made it on to the trail, it was an easy walk to the road head. We stacked our gear to the side of the road with a sign stating to whom it belonged and asking if the traveler would assist in bringing it back to McCall. This was backwoods Idaho in the 1960s. In Miami, to-

day, one leaves nothing by the street side if you hope to ever see it again. If not stolen, the waste disposal crews would take it.

We were only a 100 yards up the road when we heard from behind us “whop, whop, whop” – that delightful sound of a chopper. We had left a crepe-paper arrow on our helispot indicating where we had gone, and I think the pilot quickly spotted our gear stacked up at the road head.

Once our gear was stowed and we were aboard, I could not contain my irritation, asking him what had taken him so long to come for us. He grinned, said nothing, but pointed to the north. As we gained elevation,

the massive thunderheads to the north could be seen to be sitting atop a huge smoke cloud.

The day that we jumped was the day the Flossy Lake Fire in dense lodge pole pine had broken out and gone from several acres to 10,000 acres! No one had forgotten about us, but we had gone to the bottom of the priority list for pickup. Not only were we at the bottom of the roster, but also a number of jumpers had made several jumps as we sat on Suicide Rock. 🐻

Gordon is Professor of Medicine and Chief, Division of Infectious Diseases at the University of Miami. He can be reached at: GDickins@med.miami.edu.



THE JUMP LIST



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

GEORGE TRANBERG (Missoula '52)

Now living in: Blaine, Wash.

Jumped: MSO 52, 55-56

Since jumping: While working for Forest Service in 1951, served in one of the last “horse stations” – Martinsdale, Mont., Lewis and Clark National Forest; hung up in burning tree in 1955 in Gila National Forest in New Mexico; served in Army (1953-55); joined Border Patrol (1956), serving on Mexican border (1956-62); transferred to Blaine, Wash. (1962) and became agent in charge of Lynden, Wash. (1980); became deputy chief for Western Washington and Oregon; retired in 1983 with 30 years of government service.

George says: “Being a jumper was the best job I’ve ever had. The Border Patrol was good to me and had its moments, but being young and a jumper was outstanding.”

JIM HICKMAN (Missoula '52)

Now living in: Trussville, Ala.

Jumped: MSO 52, 56

Since jumping: Before getting a fire call in 1952, received Navy orders; went to Navy OCS, was commissioned in December, reported to Beach Jumper Unit One in San Diego; went through underwater demolition training (UDT) in spring 1953 and became UDT officer for BJU-1 (a pre-invasion, clandestine unit), spending a lot of time swimming and blowing

things up; released to inactive duty, December 1955; started forestry school at Utah State University in January 1956; called **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41) and reported for jumper refresher training in June; made last two refresher jumps in one day, flew to Redding the same day and jumped the next day with **T.J. Thompson** (MSO-55) on Mt. Shasta; had a great summer before going back to Utah State; was dispatcher in summer 1958 and flew fire patrol for Lolo National Forest with Don Stevens; graduated with a degree in Forestry in May 1958 and got a permanent assignment with Lolo on the Plains Ranger District; got private pilot’s license on GI Bill while at Utah State; was forester in Plains R.D. (1958-59); assistant director, Lolo R.D. (1960-62); district ranger, Magruder R.D., Bitterroot N.F. (1962-64), Fisher River R.D., Kootenai N.F. (1964-67) and Petersburg R.D., North Tongass N.F. (1968-70); fire staff, equipment development, S.J., W.O. (1970-73); forest FMO, Sequoia N.F. (1973-77); program manager, Chaparral Fire Prog., Riverside Fire Lab, PSW (1977-80); director, Fire and Aviation, R-3, Albuquerque (1980-83), retiring January 1993; also served as incident commander, plans chief, for teams in California; aircraft coordinator for Southern Zone, R-5; worked some in Spain and France while program manager; worked several times in Mexico while in R-3, including two weeks reviewing and evaluating fire program in Mexico City, and worked on four trips to Brazil, Central Highlands, including teaching workshop in fire management at the University of Brazil.

Jim says: “I’ll be 80 on Sept. 25, 2011. I presently travel, enjoy grandkids, write stories and one book.”

FRANK FOWLER (Missoula '52)

Now living in: Dillon, Mont.

Jumped: MSO 52-54

Since jumping: Had a career in administration of the Forest Service.

Frank says: "I wrote a book about smokejumping called *High-Mountain Two-Manner*."

WILLIAM ENNINGTON FRAME (Missoula '53)

Now living on: A farm near Pine Island, Minn.

Jumped: MSO 53-55, 57

Since jumping: Went to college in Minnesota; did some graduate work at San Diego State, then finished master's work at University of Montana; was a high school math teacher for 33 years, mostly in Rochester, Minn.; was a farmer during that time, raising cash crops and beef cattle; been married to Sandy 53 years; three children; 10 grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

William says: "I wish I could have continued smokejumping after 1957 but the summer breaks from teaching were too short. I just received my second new hip from the Mayo Clinic. Now I just need two new knees and I'll be ready to jump again."

STAN TATE (McCall '53)

Now living in: Meridian, Idaho

Jumped: MYC 53, 55, 58-59, 61, 63

Since jumping: Elected Juvenile Court judge in Idaho, Fourth District Court – awarded Outstanding Young Idahoan by Idaho JayCees for this; appointed by governor of Idaho as chairman of the Idaho Commission on Juvenile Justice – recognized nationally for this and Boise Youth Alternatives Substance Abuse Program; wrote smokejumping book "Jumping Skyward," receiving first-place award by Northwest Christian Writers and honored by Princeton Seminary; earned doctorate in Biomedical Ethics, teaching classes on same at Washington State University schools of Medicine and Veterinary Science as well as Boise State University and University of Idaho; guest lecturer recently at Princeton University; chaplain in many areas – joined 124th Fighter Interceptor Group ANG, captain (chaplain) at beginning of Vietnam War, but division was never called into combat; Episcopal chaplain at Oregon State University; seven students there went into ministry, including The Most Rev. Katharine Schori, presiding bishop of the entire Episcopal Church, and the Right Rev. Brian Thom, bishop of my Idaho diocese; honored nationally by the Idaho State Historical Society at their annual national meeting in St. Louis as an "Idaho Legend, Smokejumper-Priest"; honored as distinguished alumnus at Princeton

and at 2003 ceremony at the University of Idaho for outstanding service to the State of Idaho; honored by McCall Smokejumpers, especially by **Leo Cromwell** (IDC-66), with a plaque and standing ovation for serving 50 years as their chaplain – compared to only 49 jumps; greatest achievement has been marriage to Lynn for almost 60 years and having five great-grandchildren; busy writing a new book about my "jump partner, Jesus" and working together all these years; the Rev. Dr. Stan Tate since 1953.

Stan says: "How beautifully our special friendships experienced as smokejumpers complement our sacred friendship with nature."

DONAL W. HALLORAN (Missoula '53)

Now living in: Marshfield, Wis.

Jumped: MSO 53

Since jumping: Served as Navy medic (1956-57); Biology graduate school (1958-59); Biology professor, University of Wisconsin (1965-97); National Park Service ranger (summers of 1966-67 and 1979-88); biologist in Canadian Wildlife Service (1968-70); served in Peace Corps in Africa (1973-75); worked on TRAMPS projects (2010-11); private pilot since 1977.

Donal says: "During the summer of 1955, five of us from Missoula built a three-mile road in the Selway National Forest and moved two log cabins to Shearer Airstrip. The three remaining jumpers will join others to perform maintenance on the cabins this June (2011). After the project I'd be willing to write up the events."

H. AMES HARRISON (Missoula '54)

Now living in: Springfield, Va.

Jumped: MSO 54

Since jumping: Graduated from University of Massachusetts in 1955; worked 30 years for Forest Service after two years in military; retired in 1985 from Division of Fire Management in Washington D.C.; presently own a landscaping-home improvement company in Springfield, Va. area; married with four kids, 14 grandkids, eight great-grandkids.

Ames says: "I'd like to hear from our old rookie crew from Missoula '54."

CHARLES "TED" NYQUEST (Missoula '54)

Now living in: Missoula, Mont.

Jumped: MSO 54, 57-68, 74

Since jumping: Worked as dry kiln operator for Champion International; owner-operator of rental apartments and houses for 42 years; presently retired.

Ted says: "I enjoy living in Missoula where many opportunities for activities with jumpers and associates exist." 🍷

The “Country Club” That Never Was, And The Bliss Of Springtime In The Wilderness

by Jim Rabideau (North Cascades '49)

In the summers of 1953 and 1954, I was a member of the North Cascades team of **Francis B. Lufkin** (NCSB-40). I had rookied in 1949 but missed the interim, due to the U.S. Navy needing me to provide vigorous and inspiring leadership during the Korean War commencing for me July 20, 1950. I was a Naval Reserve recalled for some unannounced purpose.

I returned in June 1953 after finishing the first year of law school at the University of Washington. I brought along a new man to be my jump partner, one **Stanley Tsunoda** (NCSB-53), a Korean War Army combat jumper with 83 total jumps. Stan had never worked in the woods before, he being a San Diego youngster and an Architecture student at Washington. Needing summer money, he came with me for another parachute adventure – all 5 feet, 3 inches and 135 pounds of him; size, in his case, was not challenging.

In early June it was customary to accommodate the whims of the Winthrop District, U.S. Forest Service. Insuring the Pasayten Airport was clear of impediments to aircraft landing thereon, NCSB was tasked with dispatching diligent, hardworking, intelligent, experienced and all-around sound woodsman types for the job.

Francis, in his usual pragmatic manner, selected Stanley, two others and me, who shall remain nameless as I have forgotten whom. We were told the night before and instructed we could each take 40 pounds of clothing, etc., on the Noorduyn. Well now, we were to be gone a week, maybe two. Taking law books or architectural texts didn't seem worthwhile to Stan and me.

However, the very week before we'd driven up to Osoyoos in British Columbia and returned, belabored with some cartons containing 12 bottles each of a substance identified by local experts as beer. So, not taking books, it came to pass that those small cases of beer were airlifted to the Pasayten for later use in negotiating important matters with Ken Thompson, the packer/fireguard at the Pasayten airfield.

The Noorduyn lifted off NCSB with **Wally Tower** as pilot, unknowing the precious cargo stashed behind him. Some may wonder how this happened.

Well now, those of us with Navy “experience” would

have expected a “sea bag inspection” prior to such transportation to avoid any contamination of the aircrew. Well, at NCSB there never was a question that such would occur as the crew were hardly ever known to imbibe; well, there were rumors, of course. So off we went.

Arriving at Pasayten in late morning to the salutations of Ken Thompson, and perhaps the pack mules, we unloaded and helped Wally Tower rearrange the Noorduyn for his roughly half-hour flight back to NCSB. Then came the challenge: how to cool the beer for the long haul?

Francis was along and gave us specific instructions



L-R: Jim and Phil Rabideau June 1949 for first rookie jump at NCSB. (Courtesy J. Rabideau)

to use the “swede fiddles” to get our arms in shape on the trail clearing and other miscellaneous chores to be supervised by Ken. Off went Wally and Francis for the half-hour trip back to NCSB.

Ken then showed us to our area of the guard shack for our sleeping quarters. Then, discreet inquiry was made on where there was located – within reasonable distance – a cool spring. Ken, a World War I Army man, asked no questions, merely pointing out the appropriate nearly ice-cold water spring about 100 feet from the building. Shortly we deposited our 24 bottles of beer in the spring, waiting supertime for the first exposure.

Now came the test: Did Ken like to cook? Did he have a chain saw? And so on. In short order we agreed to relieve him of cooking, pot walloping, and other household chores if we could use his chain saw. And, if he truly behaved himself, a bottle of Canadian beer was his reward each evening after the horseshoe tournament. Yes, yes – a horseshoe tournament.

Scattered around the premises were packhorse and mules shoes. Furthermore, local rules required that right-handers throw left and left-handers throw right, and no cheating. Except the cook could not participate. The duties changed on daily rotation. After supper Ken was given his bottle of cold beer and, from then on, we had access to the chain saw.

I expect you should know the challenging further duties at the airport runway itself. Well, with all this pent-up engineering-type education amongst the four of us, there was no telling what we might accomplish.

However, our dreams were shattered the next morning when we were furnished two wheelbarrows and four shovels and instructed to clear the runway of horse turds, from the previous fall’s hunting parties’ horses, and various sizeable rocks that surfaced when the freeze thawed. Strange – none of these seemed to bother us landing in the Noorduyn.

We, team like, wandered across the field, back and forth, in more or less organized fashion for several days, stopping only on occasion to observe calls of nature and drinking water.

As it turned out, at the end of the week we saw the Noorduyn landing and learned we were to go back to NCSB for the weekend, as it was payday and the Gods of the Forest Service had decreed we should not be deprived. So back we went.

On the way, one of our more imaginative members thought we should have a sign made for the Pasayten Airport to greet the intermittent arrivals. We located the late David Ellis “Skinny” Beals (MYC-45) and persuaded him – of the artistic nature – to paint a sign for us: “Pasayten Valley Golf and Country Club, Ken Thompson, Prop.”

This was on plywood about 3 feet by 4 feet. It was smuggled on the Noorduyn on the weekend and in it went on Monday. We fastened it at the head of the steps leading from the airport surface up about eight feet to the level of the guard shack, after the Noorduyn left.

We were pleased with this nice touch, as was Ken Thompson. He had learned to enjoy our somewhat-adolescent behavior, the beer, and the fact he could frequently beat us in after-supper pinochle. Well, all good things end, sometimes in unplanned ways.

Somehow the brass in Okanogan decided, I guess, that Pasayten needed an eyeballing from the safety officer and the supervisor. Not, of course, after we left, but midweek. We were beautifying the valley on their arrival, so did not see or hear the ruckus when the sign was discovered.

Those Okanogan folks kept somewhat aloof, away from us, and sent Francis B. Lufkin, also along, to instruct us in proper Forest Service style to remove the sign, destroy it, and never again deface U.S. Government property with such. How it occurred to them that we would have considered erection of such a sign was beyond us at that point.

In order to lessen the continuing cacophony, we agreed to remove it, offering to put it in the Noorduyn to be flown back to NCSB for historical purposes. Somehow that offer was spurned and the sign was removed; where it went after that I know not, as on Friday we were flown back to NCSB, not to return until the next summer. No one ever suggested we have any fun at Pasayten, such as parachuting in the next June ... and so it goes in smokejumping.

Now 1954, Pasayten efforts demanded more forest-like engineering skills. When the four of us had been there at Ken Thompson’s for a few days, we learned our seasoned pilot, Wally Tower, had noted in the glide path into the field that a sizeable pine snag was a possible hindrance to him and other aviators.

He made a request, and we were notified to properly remove this hazard to aerial navigation. We were not allowed the chain saw. Seems Ken was off somewhere with his horses for a few days, clearing trail to some tower or whatever.

The setting for this extravaganza is important. At the north end of the runway, a trail restarts down the river. It must negotiate a steep trail, about 45 degrees and 350 years downhill into Soda Creek Canyon. Adjacent to the trail, on the right a few feet away, was the then 10-gauge phone line that ran from the Early Winters Guard Station to Monument 83 and Bunker Hill Lookouts.

The snag was on the other side of the trail on a slight slope and appeared to us a “piece of cake.” The four of us conferenced on the challenge and agreed on how it

was going to fall, perhaps parallel to the trail for easy cutting for Ken's firewood.

Blissfully sawing and chopping away, it came to pass that it was time to tip this beauty over. All of a sudden this inanimate object, on its own, spun around and fell over the phone line, thereby severing it. I don't know if you have ever witnessed or heard such a zinging noise through such insulators. A somewhat-startling sound – such finality in the end.

With the expectation of climbing down and pulling the wire up through the insulators and splicing it on was suggested; that is until we climbed down and saw this enormous birds nest of highly tangled wire.

It is said that confession is good for the soul. Well, we trudged back the 1.5 miles to the guard shack and somehow announced our quandary to officialdom.

Unhappiness abounded. Later the Noorduyn flew in a replacement coil with some “know-it-alls” – allegedly phone

line experts – to fix it. Guess who had to do the hauling.

The only salvation is that, as far as I know, that pile of tangled wire still lies along the banks of the peaceful Soda Creek these ensuing 47 years.

After looking at the photos of the airstrip, from 1932 and later, I have mixed feelings of its closure in 1968. Somehow it seems unfair that later generations of NCSB smokejumpers are denied the early summer grandeur of the Pasayten. Spring in the mountains is a genuine toxin.

I know technology has passed by the challenges of string phone lines, but I'm sure there are others today just as daunting.

And, I must say, that working for Francis B. Lufkin was really one of the high spots of my life. How he managed sanity in putting up with the likes of “some of us” remains unexplained. The mold was broken with him. Without him, I'd never have been able to enjoy that special piece of geography in the Okanogan National Forest. 📍

Midair—A Bad Place for Lines to Tangle

by Ken Wilder (McCall '57)

I believe it was the summer of 1958. Things were quiet at the McCall base. California was having more fires than the Redding base could handle. There were eight jumpers – could have been more – detailed to Redding; I was one of those jumpers.

We arrived in Redding in the evening. Naturally, we had to check out the nightlife. After a night on the town we hit the sack.

The next morning we got a fire call. There were eight jumpers in the double-tail Lockheed Electra headed to the fire. It didn't take long to locate the fire. The spotter did his usual thing, drifting streamers and locating a spot. Hook up and get in the door.

I can't remember who the jumpers were. I think maybe I was first or second out. My chute didn't feel right when it deployed. I looked up and saw tangled shroud lines, definitely not normal.

My next thought was: Now what should I do? The main still had some air in it. I was thinking, if I pull the reserve, it might tangle with the main and cause a complete streamer. Well, I had to take that chance, so I pulled the reserve.

You don't realize how much silk was packed in that little package. Before I could grab the silk and throw it out, it went down, came up through my legs and opened behind me. It flipped me upside-down; my head was now pointing at the ground.

Two shroud lines had half-hitched around my heel. The main completely collapsed, just waving in the breeze. NOW IT'S TIME TO PANIC, I thought. I bet the spotter wondered: “What has that dummy done to be hanging upside-down in a reserve?”

I knew I couldn't land headfirst, as I was looking at maybe a broken neck or back or worse. You can really do a pull-up in midair.

I got up close enough to grab the shroud lines, pulled them down, and they released from the heel. Reserve now normal. It wasn't long afterward that I made contact with the mountain – no injuries, but a heck of an experience.

Wayne Webb (MYC-46), our loft foreman, said that if I'd brought back the reserve handle, he'd have bought me a “case.” Damn – that Pepsi would've tasted good. I do remember one jumper on that fire, a guy named John “Tex” Louis (MYC-53). He was later killed in an Air America crash in Southeast Asia.

My last jump was on a fire in 1962. When I left the plane I looked up and went over backward. The risers came up and caught under the back of my helmet and ripped it off. I watched it go south. I deviated from the jump spot and looked for a spot without any trees. I saw an opening on the side of a ridge, with no trees. I made the opening.

What a great time we had as jumpers – one of the happiest times of our lives. 📍

Evolution Of The Smokejumper Parachutes And Related Gear

by Jeff R. Davis (Missoula '57)

In talking with some of the smokejumpers detailed to the Gila in the summer of 2011, the thought occurred that very likely much of the history of the old jumper equipment is not recorded anywhere and might become lost. I wrote down what I could remember, in case that's true.

I was a smokejumper based at Missoula from 1957 through 1967. During that time, I spent seven fire seasons jumping in Region 3 on the Gila National Forest. I became a foreman in 1962 and was Missoula's loft foreman for the next six years. In that position I earned a master parachute rigger's license.

I also was founder and past president of the Montana State Parachute Club, later named the Silvertip Skydivers. I held a Parachute Club of America Class B license signed by Lewis Sanborn, one of the founders of skydiving in the United States. We believe the Silvertips were the first skydiving club recognized on campus in America.

I was employed for the next 18 years by the Missoula Equipment Development Center as sole technical representative for all smokejumper parachutes and related equipment. My career ended in 1978 when I became injured on a jump. I worked at MEDC for two more years before my injury forced my retirement.

During those 18 years I remained jump-qualified, because I believed no one should design smokejumper equipment if he or she weren't a qualified jumper.

With the exception of the Eagle chute, I developed the following list of parachutes and gear from first-hand experience. I either jumped them, designed them or otherwise was involved in their development.

The first parachute used by the smokejumpers was the Eagle, manufactured by the Eagle Parachute Company. That firm supplied parachutes to the early-day barnstormers who became the first smokejumpers. **Frank** (MSO-40), **Chet** (MSO-40) and **Virgil Derry** (MSO-40) were among those members.

The Eagle was a flat-circular, 28-foot-diameter parachute. "Flat-circular" means the canopy itself, minus the loadlines, could be spread out flat to form a complete circle. This is unlike the parabolic, extended-skirt T-10 canopy, for example, whose largest diameter of 35 feet was about two feet above the skirt.

The main feature of the Eagle was the 360-degree extended skirt, held in position by a complicated series of extra suspension lines that gave it an extremely rapid opening, known to knock out many jumpers.

Other parachutes included:

- **FS-1** – A 28-foot, flat-circular main equipped with six-foot "Derry slots," named after Frank Derry, their inventor. It turned a 360 in 10 seconds or worse. It had no measurable forward speed. I jumped several; it was a dog. I had six of them constructed by Missoula's loft foreman **Jack Nash** (MSO-42) for my parachute club. The FS-1 was rapidly replaced by the FS-2. I'm not sure what reserve was used with the FS-1; we used an FS-3.

- **FS-2** – Identical to the FS-1, except it contained "tails" in several of the rear gores. These were skirt extensions that reportedly gave the FS-2 some forward speed, but you couldn't prove it by me. I jumped them the first several seasons. The FS-2 used a 24-foot reserve, flat-circular, 1.6-ounce twill, ripcord deployed. We carried a knife mounted on top, under the pack-opening bands, to use when incurring the fictitious "line-over" malfunctions, which were actually semi-inversions.

- **FS-2A** – A low-porosity FS-2. "Candy-striped" (red and white) like the FS-2. The hot rate of descent was becoming a concern, but the FS-2A oscillated badly during turns, typical of low-porosity parachutes. It was soon discarded.

- **FS-3, FS-3A** – These were 24-foot reserves. I believe the FS-3 was made of 1.6-ounce twill and the FS-3A was constructed with 1.1-ounce ripstop nylon. These reserves employed a right-hand-pull ripcord mounted on the right side, as seen by the jumper looking down.

- **FS-4** – A flexible emergency backpack, ripcord deployed, used by spotters and cargo kickers. It was a flat-circular 28-footer. It wasn't in the system more than a year or two and was not used by all the bases. There was a great deal of latitude in the use of emergency spotter packs among the bases – they all used different models through the years.

There was an important modification of the main parachutes that evolved between the FS-2 and the FS-5 and FS-5A. Up until this time, the rigs were canopy-first deployed, without the use of a deployment bag. The lines were stowed in a row of rubber bands on a plywood

trayboard; the naked canopy was flaked and S-folded on top of that.

The entire assembly was covered by a concave “bungee cover,” which fit over the tray, and was held in place with an elastic band around the perimeter. The static line pulled the canopy from the pack in a sudden burst, and the lines flew out rather randomly during the process.

The openings were often hard enough to blow out whole panels and knock guys out – it was common to descend “in a snowstorm” of white haze and dots before your eyes, caused by the terrific opening shock. We called this system a “flat-wrap” deploy. It was replaced, starting with the FS-5, by lines-first deployment, using a deployment bag for the first time.

This allowed the lines to be deployed first, followed by the canopy, in a more sequential manner, eliminating many malfunctions such as full inversions, twists and streamers (yes, we had a few). The lines-first concept used a deployment bag, first developed by the military and later adopted by the Forest Service.

We used some D-bags and the FS-5A, but it came fully into use with the FS-10. A secondary effect of the lines-first deployment was a lessened opening shock and a slower opening altogether. The first time I jumped a D-bag, I thought I had a streamer – it was that much slower and softer opening.

We had steering lines on all our early rigs, but the toggled control lines didn’t evolve until the FS-10. The previous steering lines were standard 550-pound test loadlines, but they were colored olive drab instead of natural, and they had built-in slack so you could easily spot them and grab ’em for the slow-ass turns those rigs were capable of making.

On the FS-10, the lines, suspension and control were 375-pound test, and the control lines were toggled for the first time.

• **FS-5 and FS-5A** – A 32-foot main, flat-circular. The FS-5 had six-foot Derry slots like the FS-2. The FS-5A Derry slots were increased to eight feet, and both used the standard tails in the rear gores. The FS-5A became the standard for about seven years – the average time jumper mains remained in the system. By this time we’d gone from the 1.6-ounce twill to the 1.1-ounce ripstop nylon in all canopies.

• **FS-6** – A 26-foot canopy, used by spotters and kickers. It wasn’t flat and had the advantage of having a lesser rate of descent. The FS-6 was actually just a Navy NB-6, renamed.

• **FS-7** – This was a total abortion; a flexible backpack designed by committee. It came out of some national smokejumper workshop before I became involved in parachute R&D. Apparently they tried to incorporate

all the suggestions from all the bases in a single canopy, and it was a fiasco. It was used rarely and never became a standard by any means.

• **FS-8** – This was a Navy 28-footer NB-8 spotter’s pack just adopted by some bases and renamed, like the NB-6.

• **FS-9** – Another in a continuing series of flexible backpacks used by the Forest Service as spotter packs. I don’t remember a thing about it, but I assume it was also a 28-footer.

• **FS-10** – The Army’s T-10 system, back and chest. It was unchanged from the military’s version except in color, complete with a 24-foot reserve. The steering modifications were the same as the Army’s: a seven-panel “TU” cut in the rear panels. This was the first departure for smokejumpers from the flat-circular canopy. It was a 35-foot, nominal diameter, parabolic canopy with the largest diameter occurring about two feet up from the skirt. This gave it a bell-shaped profile and was designed that way to prevent canopy collapse during midair collisions happening with mass-exit jumps. The chief advantage of the FS-10 was a slower rate of descent, plus the ability to recover from a midair collision.

• **FS-11** – A complete fiasco. It began with a need expressed by the bases to replace the FS-10 as they still were not too happy with it. They wanted to design their own canopy; I felt the MEDC could more properly handle the job with our connection to the Army Natick Labs, where all the military parachute R&D was done. I was given the job by the Washington office, and I flew to Natick, Mass. and negotiated a contract with them to design a suitable replacement for the FS-10 according to the specs set forth by the bases. Natick became bogged down in red tape and bureaucracy, and we were nearly at the end of the specified contract and hadn’t come up with the canopy yet. To save face, they quickly provided us the same damned canopy, only constructed with low-porosity material – a lo-po FS-10. In the meantime, I’d arranged a full Forest Service reliability test at the Army’s Yuma Proving Grounds, using their sophisticated equipment, which included cine-theodolites, articulated instrumented dummies, high-speed motion photography, etc. I called for each base to send down its most experienced jumper and arranged for a DC-3 to be flown down and used on Army soil – a first since World War II. For the next week we tested the new canopy after the initial dummy-drop tests. I dropped the guys from 5,000 feet with instructions to wring that canopy loose any way they desired. I remember the men probably made at least 20 jumps apiece; we then met in my motel room to discuss results and vote the canopy in or out. All the jumpers, except **Jim Cyr** (MSO-63) from the AFD, voted to get rid of the FS-11 because they felt it had an

unsatisfactory degree of oscillation when cranking tight turns. We dropped the FS-11 on the spot and set about reaching agreement on the specs for its replacement, which was to become the FS-12.

- **FS-12** – This canopy was developed by a combined effort of jumpers from the AFD – **Frank Sanders** (MSO-63), **Steve Clairmont** (MSO-62) and I believe Jim Cyr – and a German national named Dr. Heinrich, who'd come over with Van Braun and six other notable experts following World War II. Heinrich was to parachutes what Van Braun was to rockets – an expert. Together they developed a multi-porosity canopy that was essentially a flat-circular 32-footer. They came to me at MEDC to evaluate it during live drops at the AFD. I was very impressed with its performance and prepared a formal field test evaluation for all bases, prior to adopting it service-wide. A few days after that I broke my back on a jump and had to complete the MEDC signoff of approval from my hospital bed. It was later approved and became the standard until the advent of the FS-14, which was after my time – I had since retired. I really don't know anything about the FS-14 except for watching it jumped by the Region 3 crew in the summer of 2011. [Note: there never was an FS-13, which I suppose was because jumpers were a bit suspicious about hanging a "13" on one of their canopies.]

- **Ram-air flexible gliders** – the "squares." They were coming into practice with the BLM jumpers prior to 1989, but I never had any dealings with them and know little about their development or performance. I do know they cannot be deployed by a pure static line, as is the case with any uneven-skirt canopy, including the Para-Commander. The risk of severe spinning malfunctions is too great; they must be dropped on a "California static line," which is simply a static line-deployed pilot chute which deploys the main. The performance of the ram-airs is obvious, and I can't add any pertinent comments with which modern jumpers aren't already familiar. You guys know more about them than I do.

A word now about the harnesses, which were always manufactured by the individual bases, like the jumpsuits, since the beginning.

- The first one with which I'm familiar is the **H-1**. It was a cotton-webbing harness with a four-point connection: two leg straps and two chest straps. They came together into a single-point connector box used by the military. It was a quick-release mechanism that locked over the four straps with a quarter-twist, and for safety used a cotter pin, similar to the pin used in the static-line anchor snaps. The problem was that sometimes the guys would accidentally twist the box open instead of closed when suiting up, and then the only thing preventing

the box from releasing all four straps in midair was the cotter pin. I remember once twisting my box "open" when I landed and discovering I'd just locked the son of a bitch. Ooops. The H-1 was the first harness fitted with a canopy-release device. The jumpers designed it for timber landings. The military hadn't come up with one yet. Ours was simply a snap-hook and V-ring – the standard 2,500-pound cadmium-steel parachute hardware used today. The military quickly saw the advantages of it and developed its own version, sometime around 1959. It contracted with Capewell Manufacturing Company in Connecticut or around there; the device became known as the Capewell fitting. The 1950s version was soon replaced by the "60-series" Capewell, which had a larger housing over the connect point and later used a wire-cable, lanyard-pull release known as the "shock and a half."

- **H-2** – This was introduced about 1958. It was also a cotton-webbing harness, but used the standard three-point connection of today – two leg straps and a single chest strap.

- **H-3** – Very similar to the H-2, except that it was made of nylon instead of cotton webbing. It remained the standard until the advent of the FS-10, when **Ray Beasley** (MSO-52) and I designed the H-4, compatible with the FS-10 system.

- **H-4** – Very similar to the H-3, except it used a flexible series of thinner webbing straps to form the main lift webs. We used the 60-series Capewells and essentially the same hardware as the H-3. The saddle was constructed somewhat differently; it also incorporated several other minor changes.

The jumpsuit went through several changes from the one I used in 1957. That one was made of 17-ounce cotton duck, padded with a quarter-inch layer of felt, in either natural (white) or tan. The helmet I used was the leather football helmet of the day, like Knute Rockne's teams wore, fitted with the same wire-mesh mask used today.

About 1959 or maybe later, we changed to the 7-ounce nylon duck suit, padded with Ensolite. That was always my favorite jumpsuit and the one in which I jumped most. By then we'd gone to the plastic football helmets, whatever was the standard of the day – Riddell and others. I was the one who introduced the Bell helmet around the early 1970s while working at MEDC. That and the anti-inversion net (AIN) were my babies.

I got the AIN from Natick Labs, which invented it to prevent semi-inversions or what we used to mistakenly call "line-overs." Then, the nylon jumpsuit was replaced by the Nomex version, and today the Kevlar model.

That's pretty much all I can recall of the old para-

chutes, harnesses and jumpsuits as I experienced them from 1957 through 1978.

I may have made some mistakes in some of the details

here – I’m relying solely on my memory, which is as old as I am. But it beats a complete vacuum in our special history, huh? 📌

After Almost 400 Fire Jumps, Wasser Hangs Up His Parachute

by Patrick Orr

(Copyright 2011, The Idaho Statesman, Boise, Idaho.)

For someone who spent almost four decades working every summer in the wilderness of the western United States, **Walt “Wally” Wasser** (MYC-79) hasn’t seen much of the forest.

“One of the things when you fight fires in summertime is that you don’t have a summer life,” Wasser said.

Wasser will finally have the chance, retiring September 2011 after 39 years as a wildland firefighter, including 33 years as a smokejumper.

While some wildland firefighters opt to stay on as temporary workers during bad fire seasons after they retire, Wasser says he is done. No more firefighting. He doesn’t want to jump into the forest. He wants to walk in at his leisure.

“I’m looking forward to retirement,” he said. “I really just want to travel through the West, going camping and backpacking and stuff like that.”

He’s going to do stuff like play golf, hike California’s John Muir Trail and train for his next Ironman race.

Bureau of Land Management spokesman Don Smurthwaite says Wasser’s 395 fire jumps are the most ever.

“Wally – the living legend,” said **Jerry Drazinski** (NIFC-91), who has been smokejumping with Wasser for 20 years. “He’s a natural athlete. Some guys look like Hercules, and they seem to be the ones who get hurt. It’s the tall, lanky guys like Wally that keep going.”

Drazinski also lauded Wasser’s toughness.

“He broke a femur one year (in the 1990s), and he came back and kept going,” Drazinski said.

“A lot of the young (jumpers) look up to him. Wally is proof that if you are young at heart, and keep working out and take care of yourself, you can keep doing it.”

So why is Wasser quitting?

Mandatory retirement for smokejumpers and all active federally employed full-time wildland firefighters is 57. Wally turned 57 in September. That being said, he is ready to stop.

“It’s good they have an age limit ... fighting fire is a tough job,” Wasser said. “I don’t do it like the guys who are 30 and 35 years old. They can hike up a hill a lot faster than I can.”

While he won’t necessarily miss the work, he will miss his fellow smokejumpers – people who think it’s fun to jump out of planes and into forest fires – and then do backbreaking physical labor in incredibly dangerous conditions.

“That’s what I’ll miss. The people you work with are top-notch. You can trust a smokejumper with anything,” Wasser said. “It doesn’t matter who they are or who they trained with.”

Wasser began fighting fires in 1973 in California, moving on to join engine and hot shot crews in the Sierra National Forest before joining the McCall smokejumpers in 1979. He moved to the Boise NIFC crew in 1987 and worked there until September of this year.

Wasser decided to become a wildland firefighter after watching a Walt Disney special on the subject when he was a child in the 1960s. And once he started, he never left.

“Every time I was tempted to move on, I would ask the question, ‘Would I be happier doing something else?’ The answer was always ‘no,’ “ Wasser said.

Smokejumpers parachute into remote areas to be able to provide a quick response to freshly started fires, trying to stop them before they can grow. It’s a dangerous, difficult job that requires excellent physical fitness and an ability to think clearly in dangerous situations. Firefighting tools, food and water are dropped by parachute to jumpers after they land near the fire, making them self-sufficient for the first 48 hours.

Wasser said his favorite jump was at Grand Gulch in eastern Utah, where the fire site was near ancient cliff dwellings and petroglyphs. His worst jump was in Oregon’s Mount Jefferson Wilderness area. That’s where he broke his leg.

His most interesting assignment was when he spent seven weeks in Russia in 1997 as part of an exchange program, jumping and rappelling into blazes in Siberia. 📌



SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

The Demise of the NSA

THE BOARD OF Directors, under John Twiss' (RAC-67) leadership, has been developing a list of long-term and short-term goals over the past two years. This has been a valuable and much-needed task for the NSA. To me, the goals are predicated on the continual growth of our organization.

In the last year, I've had a change in thought. I think we need to re-evaluate the future of the NSA based on our declining numbers and what is actually happening in our day-to-day operations. We are like a rocket shot into the sky that has reached its peak and we're currently on the downward part of the journey.

Our membership peaked in April 2004 at 1798, but that included 271 Associates. Realistically, we need to deal with smokejumper/pilot membership that peaked at 1627 in January

2007. Since that time I've written 217 obituaries for this magazine. The deceased were not all NSA members but, at the same time, it considerably narrowed our field of potential members.

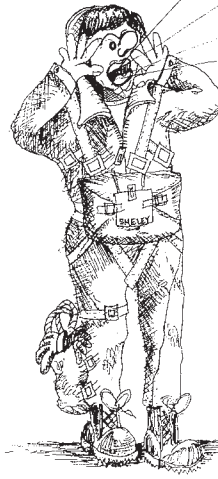
The number of smokejumpers in the history of the U.S. total around 5600. Of that number, 77% rookied before 1980. Eighty-eight percent of the NSA membership rookied before 1980. We have more NSA members who jumped in the 40s than members who jumped from 2000-2009.

When the great majority of us jumped, the job was a way to get through college and on to the next life. It was something that we did for two or three seasons. Being a teacher, I was lucky to put in 13 seasons.

All one has to do is read the "Off The List" column to see how these jumpers moved into society and made their mark. In the January issue of *Smokejumper*, we had a lawyer, professor, contractor and a Major General.

With the change in the 80s to more career smokejumpers, the potential for membership has declined with the decrease in total number of rookies each year. John Twiss, in his column this issue, reflects on the potential future of smokejumping itself.

In the 80s and 90s when I took my fire crews on R-5 dispatches, I was amazed with the number of Redding Smokejumpers who were in manage-



ment positions. They were everywhere in fire. The Regional Forester was a McCall Smokejumper. Smokejumpers jumped and then moved on up the ladder to where they made the decisions and policy. It was not uncommon to find smokejumpers as District Rangers, Fire Control Officers, Regional Foresters and in the D.C. offices. When decisions were made about the

future of smokejumping, smokejumpers were at the table where these decisions were made. The career smokejumper might have "the best job ever" but, at the same time, the lack of jumpers advancing into upper level management might result in the demise of the program.

The NSA has done a tremendous job, in my estimation, of keeping our numbers up. Since our high in 2007, we are down about 200 in memberships. Not bad. But, in order to plan for the future, we need to look at our market the same way as a good businessman would look at his/her market. With 88% of our membership being older than 60 years, I don't see us being very big in twenty years.

We have made major accomplishments as an organization in recording smokejumper history and pulling together all of us from different parts of the United States and around the world. The Trail Program continues to be a success, but drive-to projects are becoming a necessary part of that program. The reunions,

even with declining numbers, are well attended and enjoyed by our membership. From the feedback that I get, *Smokejumper* magazine is appreciated and provides a connection between the brotherhood.

We have had little success in reaching the “younger generation” of jumpers. Scholarship programs and help for those in need (Good Sam Fund) have been valuable to the recipients but have not increased our membership with the 1990s rookies through the current generation. We have been and are a strong lobby for keeping the current smokejumper program. We are now in a situation where we are trying to save the jobs of those who do not support the NSA. The joke is that NSA stands for “Not Smokejumpers Anymore.”

I’m about worn out trying to adjust the magazine and see what we can do to get the current

smokejumpers interested in the NSA. At the last board meeting, it was stated that the current jumpers consider the magazine as a collection of “old stories.” For years I have pleaded for the current jumpers to write about their experiences. I have enough work to do without doing interviews.

In the October 2009 issue of *Smokejumper*, **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) wrote an article titled “Who Writes 21st-Century Jump Stories?” Mark threw out a challenge to the current crop of jumpers: “Start putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard....” Got zero results. Mark jumped for 31 seasons, 305 fire jumps, 697 total jumps, and no jump injuries. Pretty amazing in my book. Mark was a big supporter of the NSA during his jumping days and now in retirement.

As to the 88%, we are currently in dire need of workers and board members. Appeals for

website help, Treasurer’s job have gone unanswered. Associates are saving our bacon by doing a large portion of our work. Webmaster **Jon Robinson** and columnist **Chris Sorensen** have been faithfully working for over a decade. **K.G. Sheley** (editing) and **Ed Booth** (editing/merchandise) put in hours on almost a daily basis. Each day our needs increase, and we don’t have the manpower to do those jobs. We don’t need any more “Good Ideas” of projects for us to do; we need people who have good ideas and can do the project.

In 20 years about 60% of our membership will be “Off The List.” I had heard that this organization was started by six people around a table and a pitcher of beer. By 2032 we will probably only have six people sitting around a table and a pitcher of beer left. We need to set our goals with this in mind. 🍷

Operation Bolo: Smokejumper Shoots Down MiG-21

by Fred Donner (Missoula '59)

On Jan. 3, 1967, I was the Air America airline station traffic manager at Danang, South Vietnam, for just over a year. In 1964 I spent the last of my five years as an Air Force lieutenant as commander of Detachment 5 of the 8th Aerial Port Squadron at Bien Hoa Air Base, South Vietnam, doing essentially the same kind of work. (Between Bien Hoa and Danang, I flew as aerial observer on the St. Joe NF in 1965.)

In the Air Force before and during Vietnam and in Air America during Vietnam, I occasionally ran into smokejumpers: **Jack Cahill** (MSO-58), **Don Hansen** (MSO-57), **Harold Hoem** (MSO-57), **Carl Gidlund** (MSO-58), **Karl Seethaler** (MSO-55), **Ralph Myers** (MSO-55), **Bob Ingram** (MSO-59), **Wade Irwin**

(MSO-59), **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58), and **Max Allen** (MSO-48) among them. I have probably forgotten some.

Collectively, they told me many smokejumper stories concerning Laos, Tibet, Thailand, Arctic ice islands, Bay of Pigs, Indonesia, and more that I thought were mostly male bovine feces, the “lingua franca” of smokejumpers, but that I learned in later years were basically true. However, the biggest smokejumper story out of Vietnam was yet to happen.

On the stated Jan. 3, I picked up my *Stars and Stripes Pacific* newspaper and read that “Air Force Captain John Stone of Coffeerville, Mississippi,” had downed a MiG over North Vietnam the previous day. I am sure there are many “John Stones” in the world,



Matt Britt (RAC-08)



Dave Ortlund (RAC-10)



Jonah Gladney (WYS-06)



Redmond Ju
Photo's Courtesy Josh



Tony Johnson (RAC-97)



Erin Springer (RAC-08)



Dirk Stevens (RAC-91)



Peter Hammett (MSO-06)



Armando Lara (RAC-10)



Mark Hentze (RAC-00)

Layout Design: John



Aaron Alpe (RAC-10)



Dustin Underhill (RAC-10)



Jeff Robinson (RDD-86)

umpers 2011
h Voshall (RDD-03)



Dave Keller (RAC-04)



Craig Hingley (RAC-04)



Chris Hinnenkamp (RAC-08)



Jacob Welsh (RAC-08)



Jason Barber (RAC-05)



Jeff Coburn (NCSB-08)

my Kirkley (CJ-64)

but when I read from “Coffeerville, Mississippi,” there was no doubt it was the **John Stone** (MSO-56) that I knew in Missoula.

Little did I know, until recent years, that his downing of a MiG was the culmination of a much larger story. Basically, John had just changed the course of the air war over North Vietnam. John or “JB,” whom I see now at reunions and on volunteer trail crews, is too modest to call attention to himself. JB’s only drawback was best told by his close friend **Roland Pera** (MSO-56) describing their trips together mountain climbing in Colorado (“Smokejumper” January 2010) and to the Grand Canyon (“Smokejumper” April 2011), when Roland essentially said that in 1956 he could not understand John’s Mississippi accent, and this had only improved somewhat over the years.

Like most jumpers, JB is a person of many talents. He was a college geology graduate before flying F-102’s

and F-4’s for ten years in the regular Air Force. After the Air Force JB flew F-100’s and A-7’s in the Colorado Air National Guard for 17 years, during which time he went to law school. He practiced law for 14 years before joining Continental Airlines at age 54, but he didn’t have enough seniority to make captain before age 60 and mandatory retirement. Today, JB and his wife, Tommi, divide their time between homes in Breckenridge, CO, and San Antonio, TX, while JB does some real estate work. He can be reached at jbstone1956@aol.com.

Fortunately, the background of JB’s MiG downing is told in a book. The Bolo story is also available on DVD # 76932 from the History Channel. However, the History Channel erroneously calls JB a “brigadier general,” for which JB has taken no end of grief from his alleged friends. JB is an Air National Guard-retired colonel.



Col. Robin Olds (L) and Capt. John Stone (MSO-56) in Saigon, South Vietnam, January 3, 1967, the day after Operation Bolo. “J.B. By whose efforts Bolo was possible. Good luck and all best wishes.” Robin Olds, Colonel Saigon, 3 Jan. 1967 (Courtesy John Stone)

Herewith the Bolo story from "FAST MOVERS: Jet Pilots and the Vietnam Experience" by John Darrell Sherwood. Copyright © 2000 by John Darrell Sherwood. Reprinted by permission of Free Press, a Division of Simon and Schuster, Inc., NY.

Ubon, Thailand, October 1966

For the men of the Eighth Tactical Fighter Wing at Ubon, the summer of 1966 was a season of bitterness. Mired in the fruitless bombing campaign known as Rolling Thunder, the Eighth Wing pined to strike the North Vietnamese airfields, factories, and command-and-control facilities in Hanoi, but neither the political leadership in Washington nor the local Air Force commanders in Saigon and Ubon would hear of it.

To President Lyndon Johnson and his key advisors, the bombing of North Vietnam was primarily a political tool, its purpose being to convince the North Vietnamese to give up their support of the insurgency in the South. One accomplished this aim, reasoned Johnson, by attacking the North's supply routes to the South, not by waging total war against its urban and industrial areas. But for the U.S. military pilots this strategy proved exasperating. Rolling Thunder's limited portfolio of targets meant that the North Vietnamese military could easily predict where U.S. planes would attack and could concentrate their defenses accordingly, leaving other areas undefended.

If that were not enough, the Eighth Wing's lackluster commander, Colonel Joe Wilson, compelled his pilots to fly standard routes and times, and to carry standard bombloads. Anxious to please his superiors in Saigon and Washington, Wilson believed that such standardization would result in a higher sortie rate for the Eighth Wing. Higher sortie rates, in turn, would allow Air Force Secretary Harold Brown to petition Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara for more money for the Air Force. This program to increase sortie rates, called Rapid Roger, ran from August 1966 through February 1967, and greatly undermined morale at the Eighth Wing.

"It was shitty, it wasn't the way to efficiently win a war," recalled "slick-wing" Captain John Stone about Rapid Roger. (Junior pilots in the Air Force call themselves "slick wings" because their wing insignias didn't have a star above them like those of senior and command pilots.) The predictability of the missions annoyed Stone the most: "There were no tactics, everyone went the same route, the same time of day, the enemy knew we were coming." Another junior captain, Ralph Wetterhahn, complained that to achieve a rate of 1.25 sorties per aircraft per day Rapid Roger compelled the men of the Eighth to fly night missions—

dangerous missions usually flown by specialized night squadrons. Moreover daytime sleeping, in un-air-conditioned quarters with no blackout curtains, meant that in the hot, humid, mosquito-ridden conditions of Thailand pilots simply could not get enough sleep.

Bolo

The opportunity to "beat the shit" out of North Vietnam came in late 1966. From September through December of that year, five Thailand-based USAF fighters were lost to MiGs. Robin Olds, upset by these losses, approached John Stone, the wing tactics officer, and asked him to help come up with a plan for defeating the MiG threat. This plan would be known as Bolo.

Captain John Stone possessed neither the rank nor the background to become the lead planner for the largest, most complex fighter operation in the Vietnam War to date. A country boy from Coffeerville, Mississippi, Stone graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1959 and nearly joined the Forest Service in Montana. He loved the excitement of fighting fires, but figured that flying fighters with the Air Force was probably even more exciting. After an assignment flying the F-102 at Soesterberg RANAFB in Holland, "eating lots of Indonesian food and drinking Indonesian beer," Stone came back to the United States with four other 102 drivers to train in the F-4 and head to Southeast Asia. Of this original group only Stone would escape being shot down or killed.

One should not conclude, however, that John Stone could be characterized as cautious. Before he headed to Thailand, Stone's base commander at George AFB in California asked him and another pilot to ferry some F-4s to Nellis AFB. Stone ended up flying an unauthorized low-level flight to Nellis that knocked down a power cable and destroyed a radome on route. Needless to say, his base commander wrote him up for a formal reprimand known as an Article 15. When Stone returned to base, he walked into the commander's office and refused to sign off on the Article 15. Like Olds, this jock hated the "chickenshit" of the peacetime Air Force and refused to play by the rules. The Air Force, desperate for pilots in Southeast Asia, simply threw up its hands and sent the young Turk to Ubon to join the Eighth Wing.

At Ubon, John Stone thrived. Olds allowed his men to raise hell to their hearts' content as long as they fought the war professionally. For aggressive warriors like Stone, such unorthodox leadership was just what they required to succeed; in the end, Stone would end up spending more time in the Wing Operations area than in the bar. It was here that Stone and Olds

began to hit it off. As he began to conceptualize the Bolo plan, Stone confronted several major challenges. First, the American rules of engagement during this period did not allow for airfield attacks. All MiG kills would have to be made in the air—a distinct problem since MiGs rarely came up to challenge flights of F-4s. Instead, they preferred to attack the less maneuverable Air Force F-105 Thunderchief, or “Thud.” Heavily laden with bombs, and flying in tight formations with large blind spots in their rear quadrants, the Thuds made perfect bait for the fast, highly maneuverable MiG-17. During December of 1966, 20 percent of all Thud strikes against the Hanoi area had to jettison their bombs before reaching their targets due to MiG attacks.

MiGs could differentiate F-105s from Phantoms from the electronic signature emitted by their QRC-160 jamming pod. The jamming pod, though, was a necessary evil for the 105s because it jammed the Fansong range-finding radar of the SA-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) battery. According to Stone, the QRC-160 transformed a blip on a SAM operator’s radar to a solid line. When a flight of four or more aircraft flew with their pods turned on in a tight formation, these solid lines blurred together and rendered the Fansong technology useless.

Stone believed that if the Eighth Wing installed the QRC-160s on a flight of 28 F-4s, the MiGs could be tricked into thinking that those planes were the more vulnerable F-105s and attack. Along with Major J. D. Covington, Lieutenant Joe Hicks, and Captain Ralph Wetterhahn, Captain John Stone set up shop in a tiny storage room in the rear of the operations shed and worked on the plan for two weeks. He pulled several all-nighters just planning the routes and the timing.

When a coherent plan finally emerged, Olds flew to a commanders’ conference in the Philippine mountain resort town of Baguio. The Pacific Air Forces Commander, General Hunter Harris, was conducting a farewell tour of his fiefdom and all Southeast Asia (SEA) commanders were required to appear at Baguio for a series of “stupid briefings by a bunch of staff officers from Hickam AFB, Hawaii.” It was just the type of event that under ordinary circumstances Olds would have had little patience for.

During the conference, Olds nervously approached General Momyer, the Seventh Air Force Commander, with his plan, but was in essence told to “get lost.” A fighter pilot who had fought in World War II and Korea, Momyer possessed a keen intellect, but had a reputation for being a “terrible people person.” Furthermore, his chief of staff, Frank Nichols, despised Robin Olds. “That little bastard bad-mouthed

everything we did in the Eighth,” Olds complained. Nevertheless, shortly thereafter a call came into Eighth Wing headquarters. “General Momyer wants to talk to you, get your ass down here.”

Olds flew down to Saigon with Stone that day and briefed Seventh Air Force on the plan. Major General Donovan F. Smith, Momyer’s director of operations, loved it and sold it to the rest of the higher headquarters. “Boy, the whole Air Force jumped through its rear end getting us ready for that,” Olds recalled. “It was marvelous. The whole supply system and the whole Air Force turned out to support this Bolo mission.”

Bolo, named after a Filipino traditional knife, called for three separate strike forces to attack North Vietnam. An “Iron Hand” force of F-105s from Takhli would go in first and attack the SAM sites near Kep, Cat Bi, and Phuc Yen airfields in North Vietnam. An East Force of F-4s from Da Nang would cover the Kep and Cat Bi airfields east of Hanoi and block any MiGs that attempted to retreat to China. The heart of the ruse, though, would be the pod-equipped F-4Cs of the Eighth Wing. These aircraft, known as the West Force, were to attack MiGs coming from the Phuc Yen and Gia Lam air bases just west of Hanoi. The West Force emulated an F-105 Thud strike in every way imaginable. It followed similar approach routes, flew at F-105 airspeeds, and used F-105 tankers to refuel. Overall the Bolo task force consisted of 56 F-4Cs, 24 F-105s, 16 F-104s, plus numerous supporting aircraft: EB-66s for jamming, KC-135s for refueling, helicopters for rescue.

Like the conductor of a symphony orchestra, Stone was mainly concerned about timing. Each instrument in his elaborate symphony needed to play its part at just the right moment. To prevent the MiGs from landing, Stone wanted a flight of F-4Cs flying over each airfield every five minutes for the entire duration of the operation. The MiGs would either be shot down or run out of fuel; escape was out of the question. For three days prior to the mission, aircrews received special briefings for Bolo, originally scheduled for 1 January 1967.

Airman Clinton and the maintenance crews worked nearly 27 hours straight before the mission. “They made us clean every aircraft, take everything off, every rack, bomb, missile, everything!” Olds and Stone told the crews nothing about the mission, and expected the crews to load the ECM pods on the aircraft with little prior training. “In that period of time,” according to Clinton, “the only time you flew ECM on an F-4 was if you were flying with nuclear weapons.” Because the pods ran on the F-4s’ nuclear circuitry, Olds ordered the crew to do a “GWM-4” test of those circuits—a

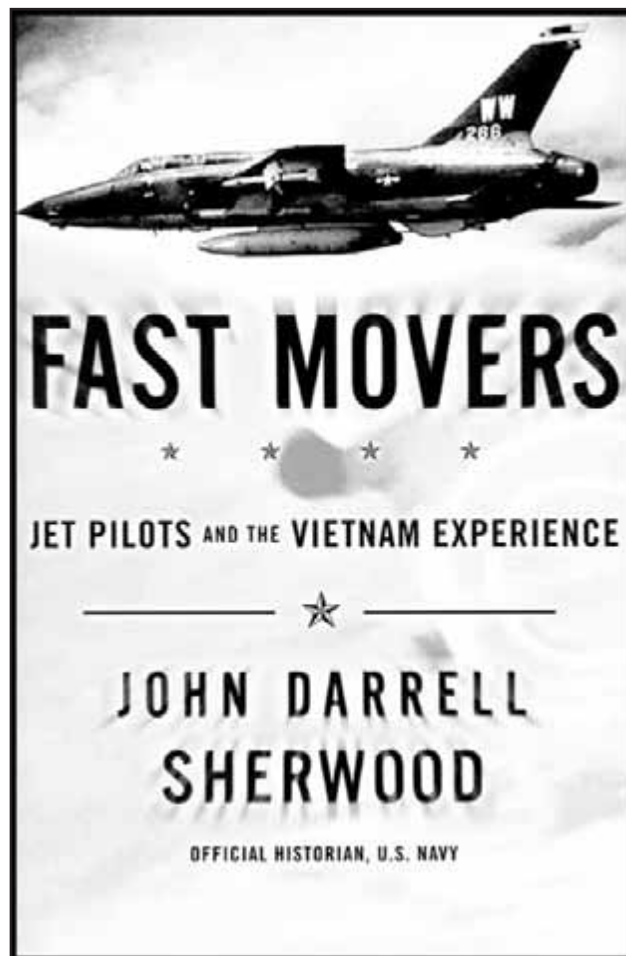
test run only in the event of nuclear war. “What the hell’s going on?” thought Clinton. “Rumors kind of rolled around.”

On 1 January, Robin Olds delayed the mission for 24 hours due to poor weather over Hanoi. Annoyed at having stayed sober for New Year’s Eve, many of the Eighth’s pilots (including Olds, briefly) went directly to the bar and began to party. At “Oh dark thirty” on the night of the first, Stone and Olds decided that the mission was a go. Usually the coolest hand in the outfit, John Stone disgorged his dinner of liver and onions outside the briefing room that evening. With no sleep that night and no food in his stomach, Stone would go up the next day and shoot down a MiG.

The Eighth Wing’s flights that day were all named after automobiles such as Ford, Plymouth, Tempest, and Rambler. Robin Olds, naturally flying in “Olds Flight,” led the entire stream of fighters that day. The weather remained “shitty,” with heavy cloud cover over Hanoi. Olds, knowing he might only get one shot at executing this plan, pressed on. He led the flight to a point twenty miles from Hanoi, and called “Green Up!”—F-105 jargon for “Arm bombs.” Much to Olds’ surprise, no MiGs showed up to meet the decoy flight. Olds 3 then picked up a fast radar return about seventeen miles from his 12 o’clock. The MiG was closing at a very high rate, indicating a head-on situation. The MiG zoomed under the flight and ducked into a cloud layer. Olds, continuing to lead the flight toward Thud Ridge, spotted several MiG-21s coming up through the cloud layer. He immediately initiated a hard left turn to gain a firing position. The fight was on. For Olds, this would be his first engagement with an enemy jet; in his excitement he almost “went Winchester” (shot all his missiles) trying to get his first MiG.

First, he salvoed two radar-homing AIM-7Es at minimum range. The missiles failed to guide. Next, he launched two heat-seeking AIM-9 Sidewinders at the MiG-21, now a mile and a half away, but these missiles guided on the clouds instead of the MiG. Meanwhile, another MiG-21 started closing on the flight from the rear quarter and started firing its cannon at Olds 3. Wetterhahn, flying as Olds’ wingman in Olds 2, remembered that moment distinctly. “I’m watching this MiG about to kill us,” Wetterhahn recalled, “and my backseater’s [First Lieutenant Jerry Sharp] getting a little bananas.” But he stuck with his leaders.

After Olds’ Sidewinders failed to guide, Wetterhahn immediately salvoed two AIM-7Es at the MiG in front. The first missile simply fell off the rail, but the second missile did guide and exploded just behind the MiG. “I saw this fireball behind his tail,” Wetterhahn explained, “and I thought, ‘God damn, I missed him!’”



The MiG continued flying for a few precious seconds, and then went end over end, “shedding large portions of the aft section. The aircraft, now emitting black smoke, went into a flat spin, falling through the clouds like a leaf.” The Sparrow’s warhead, which consisted of expanding rods, had unfolded like a carpenter’s ruler and, in the words of Wetterhahn, “basically cut the ass end off this MiG-21.”

“Break left, we’ve got one at six!” Wetterhahn shouted to Olds as soon as Wetterhahn’s missiles launched. All three planes then broke left and the MiG overshot. Olds 4, flown by Captain Walter Raedeker, then blasted this MiG-21 out of the sky with a Sidewinder.

As if this fight were not complex enough, another MiG popped up through clouds at Olds’ ten-o’clock position and he again took a shot, this time with AIM-9 Sidewinders. “When the first MiG I fired at disappeared,” he explained, “I slammed full afterburner and pulled in hard to gain position on this second MiG. I pulled the nose up high, about 45 degrees, inside his circle. Mind you, he was turning around to the left so I pulled the nose up high and rolled to the right. I got

up on top of him and half upside down, hung there, and waited for him to complete more of his turn and timed it so that as I continued to roll down behind him, I'd be about 20 degrees angle off and about 4,500 to 5,000 feet behind him." As Olds pulled up low and behind the shiny MiG-21, he let it have his last two Sidewinders, one of which hit and took the delta-shaped wing off the airplane. What was once an aircraft outlined against a brilliant blue January sky became a twisting, corkscrewing, tumbling hunk of metal. No pilot ejected.

Four other pilots from the Eighth Wing would end up with MiG kills—Everett Raspberry, Phil Combies, Lawrence Glynn, Jr., and of course John Stone—for a wing record of seven kills in one day. Stone, flying in

the number one slot of the third wave of West Force fighters (Rambler Flight), got his MiG from behind with an AIM-7E. So exhausted was John Stone that he didn't even bother with a victory roll that day. Why push his luck?

In all, Stone's Bolo plan helped raise the Air Force kill ratio from 2.6 to 1 when Olds came on board to 15 to 1 by the end of January 1967. It also whetted Robin Olds' appetite for more MiGs. Perhaps he would emerge as the only two-war ace of the Vietnam War. Robin began to "read every damn combat report written by any outfit that went to Route Pack 6." He even plotted MiG positions at his own desk so he would know "what the hell was happening up there." His hard work would pay off. 🇺🇸



NSA Trail Crew



Glacier National Park—Two Medicine Lake 2011

by Richard Trinity (Missoula '66)

Volunteers: Jimmie Deeds (MSO-64), Dan Hensley (MSO-57), Ivan Kays (Associate), Gary Lawley (MSO-57), John T. McMahon (MSO-58), Mike Overby (MSO-67), Jim Scofield (MSO-66), Gary Stitzinger (MSO-65), Richard Tag (Associate), Bob Thompson (Associate), and me.

Work completed: 88 feet of turnpikes, 16 feet each of three bridges; three water bars; removal of unsightly beach debris; 0.4 miles of trail tread maintenance and brushing.

Fortunately, Logan Pass opened so those who desired could experience a spectacular airplane view from the road. It was also nice to wave and drive by the long park entrance line with the use of Senior and Park Volunteer passes.

Everyone arrived by suppertime and set up at a spacious group campsite along the creek at the Two Medicine Lake campground in southeast Glacier Park. We were at the extreme eastern edge of the campground with a beautiful vista of Two Medicine Lake.

Jimmie served the first of consistently good, hot meals including, later, freshly baked apple and blue-

berry pies (lucky us). Park officials arrived and pleasantly informed us of the camp rules, including grizzly bear precautions – which were in all the handouts and stickered to each picnic table.

We spent the first evening going around the circle introducing ourselves and kibitzing. As always, the stories were varied and wide-ranging.

Mary Schneider, Glacier Park Eastside Volunteer Coordinator, met us the next morning for introductions and directions to the project site about 2.5 miles away. The camp dock, a mile west, was the departure point for loading and transporting bridge supplies on the boat down the lake to the end of the trail.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group took the tools down the trail around the shore to meet the boat and unload. We broke into two bridge groups and had most of the old bridges torn apart by midday. Mary outlined the construction plans and then hit the woods with her chain saw to harvest timber for the turnpikes and water bars.

A small team of Hensley, Stitzinger, Lawley and I peeled and transported the poles to the worksites. Tag

and Thompson directed the bridge construction with Overby and McMahon. Scofield and Stitzinger did the bulk of the shoreline work and shoveled fill material for the turnpikes.

Actually, most of us drifted from one project activity to another, as help was needed when bottlenecks developed or smaller projects were completed. The wheelbarrows came in handy bringing fill from the lakeshore.

We finished the main projects a day early, so we moved on to the alternate activity. This was tread and brushwork on a trail further down the lakeshore trail and up to a scenic outlook. As we came off the last project, John McMahon served as sort of a nature guide for some of us from his years of working for Weyerhaeuser.

The weather was sunny with very cool nights. The last day was foggy and cool with intermittent light rain. Gortex was a good idea for that day. We enjoyed meeting and visiting with people using the trail while we worked. Their words of thanks were sincerely appreciated.

The campground lodge had for sale pints of vanilla or huckleberry soft ice cream, which went down very

nicely on the way back at the end of the day. Evenings were spent with some fishing (no luck) or Gary Stitzinger cruising the lake in his kayak. He had some interesting stories about his oceangoing kayak trip last year off the Alaskan coast.

Campfire time each night provided opportunity for true stories and lore. Gary Lawley gave us more insight on the recent Yellowstone River oil spill. Bob Thompson told of railroad episodes from his career as an engineer. Richard Tag, Mike Overby and Ivan Kays had an open discussion on trails they had hiked in Glacier Park.

Dan Hensley had tasty snippets of intriguing information in the security world. Jim Scofield and I enjoyed dinking around with the campfire each night.

We had a couple of days and nights with strong winds that blew over the cook tent several times and finally wrecked it for good – even though it was staked to the ground and anchored to a picnic table.

The park's grizzly-bear biologist toured the campground with the local ranger one day. We learned that the park personnel are dedicated to preventing unwanted bear/visitor encounters—"A fed bear is a dead bear" was their mantra. 🐻

First-Ever Trail Project In Eastern U.S. A Big Success



by John McDaniel (Cave Junction '57)



Sixteen former jumpers and one associate gathered at the Black Water Falls Lodge on the Monongahela National Forest near Davis, W.Va., June 12, 2011.

Coming from as far away as Montana, Utah, Kansas and Alabama, they were there to work two projects – the first ever on an Eastern forest by a trail crew.

Forest Supervisor Clyde Thompson and Wilderness and Recreation Manager Eric Sandeno hosted the crew. Its members gathered to repair and construct 1 1/2 miles of the Alleghany Trail System – the Davis Trail – which is approximately 10 percent in the Black Water Falls State Park and 90 percent in the Monongahela National Forest.

The state park provided five four-man cabins that were fully equipped with kitchens and hot showers. In addition, breakfast and supper were served in the lodge with sack lunches provided for the noon meal while on the trail.

After a welcoming by Thompson, crewmembers participated in a safety briefing and a discussion of the work schedule. In addition to the trail work, some 600 yards of post and wire fencing would be replaced. A third of the crew would complete this project in one week. The rest of the crew would concentrate on the trail repair, while a Forest Service crew relocated some 600 yards of the trail that was far too steep for hikers or horses.

From a safety standpoint, the crew was blessed to have an emergency medical technician (EMT) on hand, along with a safety officer and three experienced wire-fence jumpers. We were further lucky to have a Forest Service representative on site at both projects at all times.

All this, plus a beautiful setting in the Alleghany Mountains and a magnificent park lodge – together with a stunning view of the Canaan Valley and the Black Water Falls – greeted the crew.



Front row L-R: Doug Stinson (CJ-54), Duane Mooney (MSO-57), Jim Phillips (MSO-67), Dennis Pearson (MSO-62), John Payne (MSO-66), Allen Biller (FBX-82). Back Row L-R: John McDaniel (CJ-57), Chuck Reinhardt (MSO-66), Bill Tucker (MSO-50), Darron Mooney (Assoc.), Denis Symes (MYC-63), Bob Miller (MSO-61), Dan Mitchell ((RAC-78), Rick Blackwood ((CJ-79). (Courtesy J. McDaniel)

The Monongahela National Forest, headquartered in Elkins, W.Va., encompasses some 919,000 acres and borders the state of Virginia. There are six ranger districts and two major recreation areas, as well as numerous camping sites. It is a major recreation area that boasts more than 800 miles of hiking trails and a very extensive wilderness area.

A large portion of this area was used to train Army Rangers during World War II. Unexploded ordnance is still being found in one particular area: Dolly Sods. Elevations range from 1,000 feet to 4,863 feet, with some of the most rugged and beautiful terrain you can imagine.

The trail portion of the project required extensive water diversion, coffer dams and armoring of streambeds to cancel erosion. The soil is very rocky with shallow-to-deep humus making tread construction and reconstruction difficult. In addition, thick growths of rhododendron required the use of chain saws to clear. Afternoon thunderstorms added to the mix.

The fence line required new black locust posts every 10-12 feet on fairly steep terrain, but the use of a motorized hand auger eased the post placement. An initial crew of four – led by Jim Phillips (MSO-67) – completed the post placement in five days. Then, augmented by four other jumpers from the trail crew,

the group strung four strands of wire to complete the project.

The entire project – fence and trail – was completed one day early. The entire project was done to the satisfaction of the Forest Service.

The crew was invited back for 2012 to work another trail in the wilderness area, resurface a walking bridge and replace flooring in a Forest Service cabin at Blue Bend Recreation Area. 🐾

Please Tell Us When You Change Your Address

The postal service does *NOT* forward your copy of *Smokejumper* when you move or leave home for an extended time period. It is returned to us and the NSA is charged an additional first class postage fee. With 30–40 returns per mailing it gets expensive and takes a lot of time. Please let Chuck Sheley know if you have any change in your mailing address. His contact information is on page three.

THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE THE FENCE



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

IN THE LAST issue, I asked for an update on the effort to locate the final resting place of Pfc. **Malvin Brown** (PNOR-45). **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) and **Fred Donner** (MSO-59) rang in.

Fred said he and **John Maclean** (Associate) had spent some time searching cemeteries in the greater Baltimore area and were unable to find anything. I know from searching cemeteries, myself, that trying to find a headstone in a cemetery is analogous to looking for a needle in a haystack. It's very difficult, at best.

Mark and I also bounced a few ideas off each other. If, for no other reason, the gravesite should be located to determine if it is marked and, if it isn't, getting a military headstone placed there should be the next step.

I'd like to wish **Dale Longanacker** (RAC-74) and **Walt Wasser** (MYC-79) a long and healthy retirement and lots of laughs. I have been giving a lot of thought about the federal mandatory

retirement age of 57 lately. It's an arbitrary number with no scientific basis.

After an article in Lee Newspapers about a retiring law enforcement ranger in Yellowstone National Park, the Bozeman *Daily Chronicle* weighed in: "... Safety is the rationale for forcing a person out of a position. Mandatory retirement for pilots, law officers and firefighters were justified on the grounds that physical and mental faculties were diminished at a certain age. But diminished capacities should not be determined by an arbitrary number – a specific age. They can and should be determined by testing."

You can find the full editorial at: http://www.bozemandaily-chronicle.com/opinions/editorials/article_1308d6cc-362d-11e1-8c01-001871e3ce6c.html.

I have to agree with the *Chronicle*. People are in tremendously better shape and far healthier at 57 that they were a generation or two ago. It's time to eliminate the mandatory retirement age of 57.

Last October, author **Gayle Morrison** (Associate) and I spent a couple of hours at the end of the season with Missoula Loft Foreman **Keith Wolferman** (MSO-91). Keith gave us a briefing on the Ram Air Project.

As the smokejumpers are a big family, Gayle was kind enough during our visit to give one of the young men on the Great Northern Crew a ride over to the airport terminal so he could catch a flight home to California.

Speaking of Gayle, her book on **Jerry Daniels** (MSO-58) has once again been delayed due to budget problems with the publisher – Texas Tech – and the book is now scheduled to be published early next year.

The visit to the loft coincided with the NSA board meeting held the same weekend. The social was very well attended with smokejumpers from the 1940s to the present in attendance. A tip of the hard hat to **Doug Houston** (RAC-73) and **Paige Houston** (FBX-95) for hosting what has been called the best NSA social ever.

My friends at the non-profit Heritage Trimotor Foundation (<http://www.trimotorheritagefoundation.org/home.html>) are looking for photographs of Johnson Flying Service Trimotor NC-9684 that is the former Island Air Ford that Johnson bought in 1953. The plane was wrecked about six months after it was purchased by the Johnson Flying Service.

The plane is being restored to flying condition at the Erie-Ottawa Regional Airport in Port Clinton, Ohio. Ground was broken last October for the Liberty Aviation Museum, Trimotor Heritage Foundation, and the Tin Goose Diner at the Erie-Ottawa Regional Airport. Please look around the bases and in your collections and contact me if you have photographs of this plane.

As always, whatever your endeavors are this summer, heads up, work safely and wear all of your PPE.

Speed-Range-Payload. Aggressive Initial Attack! 🇺🇸

Bob Hilbun And The Hard-To-Find Cow Camp

by Bud Filler (McCall '52)

The summer of 1952 was Bob's last year at McCall and it was my first season. **Bob Hilbun** (MYC-51) was my jump partner at the end of that summer and we had already been on several adventures together.

The fire season that year had been slow. The weather was dry, but without much lightning in the mountains. October was a week away. The camp was almost empty. Bob and I were determined to get in "just one more fire."

I was enrolled in forestry that year, supposed to start classes in late September, and my mother had sent in the required registration and was threatening me with bodily injury if I didn't get back soon. Just as I was packing my duffel to catch the bus to Boise, the buzzer at the loft sounded off – two long ones.

Of course, a real jumper couldn't miss the next fire, whatever the circumstances. Bob and I suited up fast and climbed aboard the Travelaire.

We didn't have far to fly. The fire was off Pollock Mountain, north of New Meadows. It was a pretty good sized smoke for a two-manner, several acres burning in the alder and buckbrush thickets. We could see some large snags burning at the top.

We were spotting ourselves in the Travelaire, and I was sitting in the open door. "We'll get some nice OT on this one," Bob shouted above the engine noise, while I was thinking about how to get the fire out, get the hell out of there, and get to class on time.

I was first out, had my hands on the sides of the door, looking down at the meadow, which was our jump spot, when Hilbun tugged on my sleeve.

"Down there," he said. "A cabin at the edge of the woods. It's Circle C's cow camp. We'll put this fire out and go check the cabin for magazines."

"I see it," I shouted back and stepped out.

After three days of digging line through the alders and dropping the smoking snags, we decided it was time to relax. Bob said we needed three more days to watch for smokes. I said we were running out of grub, and I needed to get my ass to college.

"Stay through October. We'll go elk hunting."

"It is tempting, but I can't."

"You can hike out. I'll spend three more days here to watch for smokes in the brush. I'll go up to that

cow camp tomorrow; maybe pick up a can of beans and something to read."

The next day Bob hit the trail, was gone for four hours, came back at noon, and declared he couldn't find the cabin. "It's just down the ridge from the top. I'll see if I can find it," I said, then set off, determined to locate the cow camp.

There was an old trail that angled uphill through the woods and out to the meadow below the summit. The dust lay like powder two inches deep and went poof with every step. That part I remembered well.

After hiking for three miles, I couldn't find the cabin either, and after turning around on the trail to go back, an interesting thing happened. The Circle C cows were suddenly everywhere – some in the little swales of cottonwoods, some in the woods, some in the meadow, and some on the trail in front of me.

The cows were ahead, mooing and bawling, and kicking up a hell of a lot of dust. The herd became larger and larger as the ones to the sides didn't want to be left behind. This cowboying work is easy. Just wait 'til Hilbun sees this roundup.

Now the cows and me – there must have been 50 of them by then – came around the open ridge, and there was Bob through the dust, shirtless in the afternoon sun, a pulaski in his hand, standing next to our white parachute teepee tent, and his eyes as big as saucers.

The cows, still mooing and bawling, split into two herds, went around our camp, and continued on their happy way – probably downhill.

"What in the hell is going on?" Bob shouted.

"I thought I'd bring you a steak for supper, if you were fast enough to catch one."

"I've never seen cows in a fire camp. We got some chow. The Travelaire came over while you were gone and dropped enough for three more days. We don't need the cows," he said.

"I've got to leave tomorrow for sure or I'll miss a whole school year." So I packed the elephant bag, hiked down off the mountain, came out at Boulder Station on Highway 95, hitched a ride to McCall, and was on a bus that night for the east. It would be 20 years before I saw Bob Hilbun again.

And 20 years later, there he was. I was skiing the powder at Anthony Lakes in Oregon, and while stand-

ing in a very short lift line, this guy comes up and tugs on my sleeve, just like in the door of the Trave-laire. Then, in front of God and everyone, he gives me a big bear hug. And it's Bob.

How he recognized me behind the parka and ski goggles, I'll never know. But it was him all right.

We drank some coffee, got caught up on 20 years. He was still flying his plane; just came back from a Montana to Alaska trip. He had a successful business going in Montana. We skied together for the afternoon, the steep and the deep, and he floated through the snow like an Austrian ski instructor – the

“bend zee knees” type.

Bob and his sidekick, **Bus Bertram** (MYC-47), were a formidable pair. Not only were they pros in the firefighting business, but they also considered the jumpers an elite group, and if you went into the bars of McCall or Salmon with them, which I frequently did, no loose cannon dared to give anybody any flak.

Bob Hilbun said he finally did find the cow camp. Fun memories. 🦋

Bob died July 18, 2011. See “Off the List” January 2012 issue.

Judge For Yourself: Courson Has Enjoyed A Fabulous Ride

by Kathy Aney

(Copyright 2011, The East Oregonian, Pendleton, Ore.)

PENDLETON, Ore.—**Richard Courson** (CJ-46) is the last man standing.

Every two years, the Pendleton man has traveled to a reunion of smokejumpers from the now-defunct Cave Junction Smokejumper Base. The number of jumpers from his original training class of 2 men dwindled with each reunion.

This summer, Courson found himself the lone jumper from his training group from 1946. He mingled with smokejumpers from later classes, wondering where all the familiar faces had gone.

Courson, 87, isn't one to flinch at danger. The Marine paratrooper came home from World War II having survived the fierce Battle of Iwo Jima. He returned to Portland and started looking for a job. He had a limited skill set, he said, that included jumping out of airplanes and killing his enemy.

The retired Umatilla County circuit judge has a wit as sharp as a carbon steel knife and a sense of

humor dryer than the Sahara.

“I could have gone to Chicago and worked for Capone,” Courson added, “but that wasn't real practical.”

When he noticed a newspaper ad for Forest Service smokejumpers, Courson applied and got the job.

He learned to parachute Forest Service style, wearing a heavy canvas jump suit with stand-up collar and helmet with open-lattice face protector. He parachuted from Noorduyn Norseman bush planes onto mountainous, rocky terrain of northern California and southern Oregon. The jumpers aimed for trees close to the flames.

“Smokejumpers inevitably got hung up in the timber,” Courson said. “You're talking 80-percent slopes with nothing but rocks.”

A huge pocket on the right leg of their trousers held 80 feet of coiled rope. Using the rope, the firefighters rappelled from the canopy and started looking for equipment that had free-fallen from the aircraft – cross-cut saws, shovels and pulaskis (double-edged

tools with an ax on one side and an adze for digging on the other). The firefighters communicated with the pilot using surplus World War II radios.

“The darned things usually wouldn't work,” he said. “The pilot would have to throw notes out of the plane. There was a lot of waving. It was really clumsy.”

Radios are better now, but “not much has really changed,” said **Bill Selby** (RAC-91), smoke-jumper program manager at the Redmond Air Center. Kevlar has replaced canvas, he said, but jumpsuits have the same design. Modern jumpers use GPS units and chain saws, he said. Ropes are made from tubular nylon, instead of natural fibers. Tools have their own chutes.

The Redmond Smokejumper Base opened in 1964, consolidating jumpers from Cave Junction and North Cascades. *(Six jumpers from each base went to Redmond that first year, though each base continued to operate independently. – Ed.)*

When Courson started jump-

ing, the practice of delivering firefighters by air was in its infancy. The Forest Service deployed its first smokejumpers in 1940 on a fire in Idaho's Nez Perce National Forest.

After two fire seasons, Courson became a spotter. That meant he lay on his stomach on the plane's floor and called the shots. From that vantage point, he could signal both the pilot and the jumper perched in the doorway. After gauging the timber, wind drift and possible landing sites, he motioned the pilot to slow down and patted the jumper on his back to go.

He watched the first man land, then made his own jump.

Other than bruises and scrapes,

Courson sustained only one injury in five years of smokejumping. The bad sprain came after parachuting over Crater Lake. Tourists watched wide-eyed as he floated to a small lightning-caused fire about a mile from the water. His ankle twisted painfully in deep gravel upon landing.

The jumpers shared solid bonds forged during their battles against flame. They worked hard, jumping into precarious spots, scratching fireline, and hiking miles carrying heavy equipment. Courson remembers hives of angry bees and even a bear that scattered embers outside a fireline where they restarted the blaze.

His fellow jumpers eventually

scattered to the winds. Courson left smokejumping after five years and entered law school. He settled in Pendleton, working as an attorney from his Court Avenue office and later becoming Umatilla County district attorney. Ultimately, Gov. Tom McCall appointed Courson to the bench, where he stayed for 25 years.

Despite a frenetic schedule, he took time to attend jumper reunions every couple of years. Over time, his original band of brothers faded away, but not the bonds forged while battling wildfire and floating toward flame.

Courson said, "I always felt closer to them than fraternity brothers." 📌

Andersen Was One Mentally Tough Jumper

by Kent Lewis (Missoula '62)

I first met Ted Andersen (MSO-63) when we were second-graders in Missoula. He passed Sept. 30, 2011, in Libby, Mont. His obituary has been submitted to this magazine as it was printed in the Western News at Libby. Type in "Ted P. Andersen" in your search engine – you should be able to pull up the original.

I share with you a special story about Ted – a story that jumpers can appreciate.

During the winter following the year Ted trained, the winter of 1963-64, he was stricken with Hodgkin's disease. I was one of many who sat with him at the hospital. We took turns making sure that someone was with him at all times as we waited for a change in his condition.

Ted was comatose and not expected to live. He remained that way for several days. Then one day he moaned a little and very weakly asked for something to drink. He rallied and a week or so later he was released from the hospital.

At that time he was down to something less than a hundred pounds. His subsequent recovery was remarkable – nothing short of pure guts on his part. The tale

of his recovery says much about the man.

Shortly after his release from the hospital, Ted called me. He wanted to go for a day hike, so we went up Petty Creek, west of Missoula. His medical problems had left him with atrophied muscles in one leg and ankle for which he wore a knee-high metal brace built into one of his White boots.

Ted selected the trail and we left the road. The best he could do was to walk slowly and stop every few steps to rest. Ted was leading. Suddenly, he stopped and put both hands out as a signal for me to stop: he had seen an elk. That made the trip a success for Ted. Elk were an important part of Ted's life.

We reported for refresher training in the spring of '64. Ted was grounded for lack of a medical release; he was still very much underweight. Even so, the jumper organization put him to work. He was assigned to the retardant plant, mixing fire retardant and pumping it into aircraft for delivery to fires. The retardant plant was located only a hundred yards, or so, across the apron in front of the jumper ready room.

The rest of us started our annual refresher training, part of which included two practice jumps. On one of

those jumps, **Laird Robinson** (MSO-62) and I were assigned to the same aircraft – a DC-3. We had suited up and were waiting in front of the ready room for our plane to show up.

Ted was there, and he mentioned to us that he wished he could make a jump. Laird turned to me and said, “We are going to get Ted on that plane!” Ted, of course, was all for it – anything, any time.

The three of us walked, inconspicuously, back into the ready room and around behind the storage racks, which contained jump gear and parachutes. We located Ted’s jump gear from the prior season and helped him suit up. Then we snapped the main and reserve chutes to his harness.

Ted put his helmet on and pulled the facemask down – anything to be incognito. Staying out of sight, we then waited until we heard the aircraft taxiing up to the ready room door.

When the pilot cut his engines, we made our move – out of the ready room, across a hundred feet of tarmac, up the short ladder and into the aircraft. We went back to the tail end and sat down on the floor. Then the rest of the jumpers, perhaps 18 or so, boarded the aircraft.

As the pilot fired up the engines, the spotter, **Roy Williams** (MSO-60), walked down the aisle with the jump list clamped to a clipboard. He was counting heads. When he got to us he stopped, looked down and bellowed, “Hey, wait a minute! I’ve got too many people in here!”

We were caught. Neither Laird nor I was called on the carpet for our little caper, but Ted was kicked off the aircraft and told to report to **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40), the project superintendent. Whatever Ted told Earl in his defense must have been something.

Later in the day, Earl talked to **Cole MacPherson** (MSO-55), a squad leader and spotter. Together they hatched a plan to give Ted a practice jump. However, before they could execute the plan, cooler heads prevailed, and Ted remained grounded pending a medical release.

Anyway, Ted, Laird and I had a little fun, and Ted proved that small details like a medical condition would never prevent him from trying.

At the end of the fire season, we all returned to school at the University of Montana. Ted called me one Saturday evening in late October. He said he had an elk down and asked me to help him pack it out of the woods. He picked me up early the following morning.

At that time he was still very much underweight. On the way he told me how he happened to get the elk: he had gone hunting in the Rock Creek drainage by him-

self. He had chosen that area because, in his own words, “Nobody ever gets elk in Rock Creek.” He wanted to avoid having to dress and transport an elk, which would have been much heavier than a deer. Therefore, he had chosen to do a nice, simple deer hunt.

He completed his deer hunt shortly after daybreak. It was a nice four-point buck. He had dressed it and loaded it into his trunk, all by 8:30 in the morning. Since he still had hours of daylight available, he drove further up Rock Creek, parked and crossed on the cable car at Welcome Creek for a hike. From there he had hiked up a ridge.

He heard a bull bugle in the next drainage to the south, and the unplanned elk hunt began, which led to success and his need for a helper – me.

Ted and I arrived at Welcome Creek, crossed on the cable car, walked up the ridge and dropped off into the drainage, and there he was – a big, mature bull. We each packed a quarter to the road, then went back and packed the other two quarters out. Each of those quarters weighed almost as much as Ted weighed at that time.

I thought about it later and concluded that Ted was the toughest man I have ever known. It was sheer determination. He drove himself, hard, ignoring his physical problems. He would never quit, and that was his trademark.

Ted gained his medical release the following spring and returned to the jumpers for the ’65 fire season. He continued as a jumper for the ’66 and ’67 seasons, returning each fall to the university. He graduated with a degree in forestry, which led to a career with the Forest Service, where he worked until retirement.

Over the years, Ted and I usually met in camp for the opening week of elk hunting season. As his kids and mine became old enough to hunt, they joined us in camp from time to time.

Ted’s wife, Carol, also came to camp a few times. The two of them enjoyed a very gentle, respectful, sincere and loving relationship. Ted was the absolutely perfect role model for his kids, and he loved each of them dearly. He also developed a deep and uncompromising love for his Lord and Savior. In later years, he had more bouts with cancer, which slowed him down. However, he never allowed himself the luxury of quitting.

I will think of Ted often, especially when I am in the woods. I am going to miss him. Mentally, he was the toughest guy I have ever known. When I get to the afterlife, I am going to give him a call – on a Saturday evening. He owes me a pack job. 🐾

Ted, 69, died September 30, 2011, in Libby, Montana. See “Off The List” in this issue.

Carl Rosselli: A Friend, And A Hardworking Smokejumper

by Bill Yensen (McCall '53)

Carl Rosselli (MYC-48) was a very special person and a great smokejumper. He was an “old-timer” when I showed up in 1953. He helped train me along with Seymour “Paperlegs” Peterson (MYC-46). I remember what an athlete Carl was when he went across the overhead ladder, grabbing each crossbar with both hands, snapping them to the next crossbar, and he flew across – and I mean fast.

I jumped nine fires with him, and one was a two-manner up on Sheepeater. We had an easy time with our fire and had it out before dark.

The next morning a Bell G-1 helicopter came to get us. At nearly 8,000 feet elevation, it could not lift us and our gear, so the pilot took our gear up to the lookout and we walked. It was not much more than a quarter of a mile. The pilot had the copter sitting close to the cliff. We got on and he lifted off and went over the cliff to gain air speed. He took us to Warren, Idaho.

In Warren, the ranger grabbed us and made us fight another fire for the rest of the day and finally let us go home.

In 1961 we jumped a Beech and a Doug load on Cat Creek. That fire blew up and we had to hide from it. Carl was hunkering near where we had our jump gear stacked and saved it from burning up. Burning embers were falling out of the sky and Carl put them out. I had two burn holes in my Beamuse bag in which I stored my jump gear and, thanks to Carl, it was saved.

I was on the Cold Springs Fire in 1955 when Carl came in to land and hit his jump partner’s chute just off the ground. This caused him to land awkwardly, and he broke a spinous process on a thoracic vertebra. That is technically a broken back, but Carl was back jumping in three weeks.

Two weeks before, Carl spotted me out of a Twin Beech on the Robinette Fire on the Oregon side of the Snake River. The jump spot was a huge patch of sagebrush. The pilot was on his very first jumper run. He had been taught that we threw two sets of streamers.

The only communication the spotter had with the pilot was a toggle switch that he could indicate right or left to the pilot and then flash it back and forth to indicate “jumpers away.” Carl looked at that huge jump spot, which you could not miss, and decided to throw only one set of streamers.

When we lined up for our second pass, Carl got me in the door. The pilot thought we were on another streamer pass, so he didn’t slow up at all. We were doing about 150 mph when I got in the door. Carl slapped me on the back and out I went!

My chute was an old FS-2 Pioneer, candy-striped flat pack. I got the hardest opening shock of my 30-year jumping career. When the cover comes off a flat pack, it opens explosively and you stop. Before that jump, I had always measured 5-foot-9, but after that jump I was down to 5-foot-8!

That shock came very close to knocking me out, and I saw stars all the way down to the ground.

Carl and I had one thing in common: we both married girls named Arlene.

Carl was a treasure to all the smokejumpers who knew him. The jumpers’ wives – who included my wife, Arlene, and my sister Charlotte, wife of Merle Cables (IDC-48), both loved him. He was in charge of maintenance in the old trailer park, so he spent a lot of time trying to keep the gals happy.

Carl was an easygoing but hardworking man. He was a true gentleman and a great friend. I was fortunate to work with him for all those years and call him my friend. 🙏

Carl died December 26, 2011. See “Off the List” page 39.



L-R: Jim Allen (NCSB-46) and Lee Gossett (RDD-57) at Lee’s induction into the Oregon Aviation Hall of Honor at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum October 16, 2011.

Carl Rosselli: Older, And Quite A Bit Wiser

by Jeff Fereday (McCall '70)

Carl Rosselli (MYC-48) was a gentle soul, the quintessential quiet man. But the first time I met him in early September 1968, he made the kind of impression that usually is reserved for heroic characters. That day he saved several lives, including mine.

I had gotten myself hired late in the season in 1968 on the McCall Hotshots, and by late August, which had been a rainy month in McCall, I had been on only one fire. So I had essentially no experience when, in early September, we were called to the massive San Gabriel Canyon Fire in Southern California.

By that point in the season, a number of our crew had left to return to college, as had many of the McCall jumpers. So the Forest Service combined the remnants of the hotshots with some jumpers and we headed down there as a ground crew.

The jumpers with us included **Coy Jemmett** (MYC-63), **Tom Hilliard** (MYC-67), Carl Rosselli, and a few others I don't recall now. Carl would have been about 44 years old at the time and was, by a long way, the eldest of the group. At 18, I was the youngest.

Our first day on the fire involved hiking in a couple of miles to a ridge top on a trail through thick, eight-foot-high manzanita and then working down a canyon building fire line. A knob on top of the ridge was rocky and only partially vegetated, but the brush down canyon was so thick a person could not see out.

When we arrived and got our orders from an orbiting sector boss to build line downhill, Carl looked around and in his quiet voice said, "I think I'll stay up here and keep a lookout." I remember thinking, "Gee, that's an easy job for the old guy, but the rest of us really have some work to do here. Oh, well ..."

In the gathering heat of late morning and with the crew strung out down canyon in the deep brush, the word came down the line from Carl: "Get up to the knob, fast. Now!"

Carl had seen the spot fire that had come from a nearby draw and gotten below us. None of us had a clue and could see no fire.

I remember moving as quickly as possible up our line on that steep, brushy hillside, with Coy Jemmett ahead of me poking one of the slower guys in the butt

with the handle of a brush hook and shouting, "Move it!"

We got to the knob where Carl had cleared an area for a helicopter evacuation. I finally could see back down slope, seeing what Carl had placed himself to see: the fire was fully across the draw and was flaming in the manzanita a few hundred yards below us. We would not have survived had we still been down that slope. Even at the top, we were in a dicey situation.

We were evacuated in a small Bell helicopter, two at a time, to a nearby safe ridge top. That took less than 10 minutes, with the pilot barely landing at either end of the ferry, signaling guys off and on as quickly as possible, letting the passengers worry about seatbelts.

The last guys off literally saw the knob burn over below them. We saw it, too, from our vantage point on the escape ridge. No one really talked about it, but I vividly remember thinking, "That old jumper has just saved all our lives."

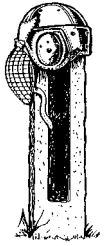
There are many other parts to this story, including the emergency rescue undertaken by the jumpers (led by Jemmett and Hilliard) who hiked up yet another draw to rescue that same copter pilot when his ship went down just after delivering the last of our crew to the safety ridge.

The pilot lived, but he had severe injuries and it was an arduous job getting him stabilized and evacuated – in that case, just ahead of another part of the oncoming fire. Eight men died later that week in another sector of the fire, caught in the manzanita and burned over.

What I saw in that very first on-the-job encounter with smokejumpers sealed my desire to join them someday. I saw people who exercised sound judgment, who took charge in times of crisis, and who had the physical ability to make things happen for the good of the crew and those around them. Of the several jumpers who exhibited these qualities that day, the quiet and unassuming Carl Rosselli stands out.

I am grateful I had the opportunity to work with Carl for five years as a McCall smokejumper. And to thank him for what he did that day. 🙏

Carl Rosselli died December 26, 2011. See page 39.



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

Donald A. Brennan (North Cascades '54)

Don died November 4, 2011, in Olympia, Washington. He jumped at NCSB for two seasons, then spent the 1958 season in Redding. He was on the first Alaska Smokejumper crew in 1959 and also jumped there in 1962.

Hubert Rohrer (Missoula '44)

Hubert, 91, died June 20, 2011, in North Vernon, Indiana. He attended Kansas Wesleyan University, and after graduation moved to Key West, Florida, to work for the Public Health Service to control mosquitoes carrying yellow and dengue fevers. Hubert joined the Civilian Public Service as a conscientious objector during World War II, jumping from Missoula in 1944-45. A bad landing after a jump – resulting in a broken leg and foot – put an end to jumping for him. He then worked for the American Friends Service Relief Committee, organizing European relief efforts following the war. Hubert taught English and journalism at Seymour High School for 27 years until retiring in 1984.

James “Jim” Mullin (Redding '68)

Jim, 69, died Oct. 31, 2011, in Cold Springs, California. He attended Humboldt State University and earned a bachelor's degree. Jim served in the Army in the Vietnam War, and later joined the Army Reserves as a drill sergeant.



Josh Voshall (RDD-03) at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum (Courtesy J. Voshall)

Following college, he worked for the Forest Service, ultimately in the Stanislaus National Forest. Jim jumped at Redding during the 1968 season.

Philip C. Hanson (McCall '51)

Phil, 79, died November 20, 2011, in Bigfork, Montana. He joined the U.S. Air Force after graduation and always appreciated the opportunity to fly a jet. Phil jumped from Missoula in 1951-53 while working to earn his bachelor's degree in Forestry from the University of Montana. After marrying his wife, Sue, in 1977, Phil continued farming for some years before moving to Bigfork to pursue his hobbies, including crafting fine furniture during the winter months.

Gus Janzen (Cave Junction '43)

Gus, 91, died September 25, 2011, in Okeene, Oklahoma. He jumped at Cave Junction during 1943-44 as a conscientious objector, and was among the first group of CPS-103 jumpers to train in 1943. Gus began farming in the Okeene area in 1957 and also owned a custom, wheat-harvest operation that traveled from Oklahoma to Montana. He was a member of the Okeene Mennonite Brethren Church and was active in Mennonite charitable efforts. Gus was inducted in the Blaine County Hall of Fame in 1998.

Carl Rosselli (McCall '48)

Carl, 87, died December 26, 2011, in McCall, Idaho. He joined the Army in November 1943 and was a member of the 82nd Airborne Infantry Division, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Company I. Carl served as a guard at Gen. Dwight Eisenhower's headquarters in 1945 and was discharged honorably in January 1946. He jumped at McCall 1948 to 1965, and again in 1974-75, also serving as spotter, trainer, retardant expert and hotshot supervisor. Carl retired from the Forest Service in 1978.

Ted Andersen (Missoula '63)

Ted, 69, died September 30, 2011, in Libby, Montana. He earned his bachelor's degree in Forestry from the University of Montana, while jumping from Missoula

in 1963 and 1965-67. That launched a 33-year Forest Service career for Ted, who worked in fire management and land exchanges in the Kootenai National Forest. His work took him to Missoula and Helena, Montana, to Riggins and Sandpoint, Idaho, and to Libby, where he retired. Following retirement, Ted wrote several environmental assessments for land exchanges through his own business, Rocky Mountain Ecosystems Service. He served on numerous community committees, including the Lincoln County Planning Board.

Henry “Hank” Shank (Missoula ’47)

Hank, 89, died December 28, 2011, in Boise, Idaho. He attended Weber College (now Weber State University) for a year before joining the Navy in 1943, serving as a radio operator on the USS Missoula. Hank saw action in Iwo Jima and Okinawa before mustering out in March 1946, whereupon he returned to Weber College. He enrolled at the University of Montana, earning a degree in Forestry. He jumped at Missoula in 1946-50 before embarking on a career as a forester in Utah and Idaho, retiring in 1983.

Larry Riser (McCall ’55)

Larry, 75, died December 30, 2011, in Bend, Oregon. After graduating from high school, he jumped at McCall in 1955, 1957 and 1958. Larry worked 34 years

as a heavy-equipment salesman for Hyster-Pape, with stints in Portland and Bend, where he retired in 1999. He was an enthusiast in hunting, fishing, camping and snowmobiling.

Richard “Dick” Singletary (Missoula ’51)

Dick, 81, died September 28, 2010, in Surrey, British Columbia. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Black Hills State Teachers College, his master’s degree from the University of Colorado and his Ph.D. from the University of Washington. Dick jumped at Missoula in 1951-52 and taught high school mathematics for 28 years, retiring in 1984. He earned a maritime captain’s license and piloted several boats in British Columbia waters. Dick was nearly electrocuted and fell 30 feet from a tree when he was 5, but recovered without any ill effects, and stood and walked at age 81 despite suffering from stenosis of the spine at his neck and lower back.

Richard A. Rasmussen (Missoula ’71)

Dick, 60, passed away Thursday, Dec. 22, 2011, at his home. Born in Missoula to Anker and June (Love) Rasmussen on April 8, 1951, he was raised and educated in the Arlee area. Following his graduation, he became a truck driver and heavy equipment operator who most recently was working in North Dakota. Dick jumped at Missoula in 1971. 📍

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Contributions since the previous publication of donors, January 2012

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Total funds disbursed to smokejumpers and families since 2004 – \$15,800

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

1971 Missoula Rookies Fete 40th Anniversary

by Joe Stutler (Missoula '71)

Missoula's 1971 rookie class met in West Yellowstone the weekend of Sept. 9-11 to celebrate a 40-year reunion.

The event was originally the brainstorm of **John Lammers** and **Steve Vittum**, who had discussed the possibility of such a gathering the previous year. John and Steve worked diligently for more than a year to gather mailing lists, e-mail addresses and contact information, and soon enough it became a reality. A big "thank you" from all of us attending for their great idea and follow-up.

From a historical perspective, the 1971 Missoula class began with 50 young men. After new-man camp and a few weeks on the "units," we lost 11, thus finishing up with 39 graduates. In 40 years, 37 of us remain

as we lost **Doug Marriott** and **Dick Rasmussen** a few years back. At the reunion we had 21 of the original 1971 class attend.

We met the first evening for a social and reception at the historical Union Pacific Dining Lodge, and most of the attendees were able to make it. The next day we toured the West Yellowstone base and the National Smokejumper Center that **Barry Hicks** (MSO-64) has established at West Yellowstone, which was a "good deal."

In the evening we reassembled at the Lodge for an evening of great food, camaraderie, storytelling and reminiscing, which lasted late in the evening and into the early-morning hours. Some had brought along pictures of the early years which were great to look at



Top L-R: Ron Beagle, Will Curdy, Bob Parcell, Larry Jansen, John Lammers, Larry Wright, Joe Stutler, Paul Chamberlin, Bill Duffy. Middle: Dan Derrick, Al Kyles, Garry Pitts, Perry Whittaker, Joe Chandler, Rich Krenkel, Grant Godbolt, Gary Elmore. Front L-R: Jan McLaren, Jim Coyle, Tom Rath, Steve Vittum. (Courtesy J. Stutler)

and share war stories. All jumpers and guests (more on those folks later) had an opportunity to share the highlights of what each had been up to the last 40 years.

It was incredible hearing the diversity of those tales and, in all cases, it was clear that the attendees had lived rich lives and, of course, were influenced by the smokejumping experience.

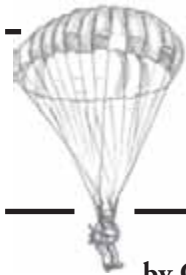
We were indeed fortunate that the reunion attracted other smokejumpers and friends who came to help celebrate. Those folks were **Hal Samsel** (1949), **Bill Samsel** (1961), **Rod McIver** (1964), **Bill Werhane** (1966), **Dick Rath** (1973), **Phil Difani** (1967), **Roland Moore** (1967), Barry Hicks and Rex Mann. It was great to see some of our squad leaders, foremen, and, frankly, some of our early heroes of the program and, of course, to hear the stories they continue to tell.

We said our farewells September 11, but not good-

byes; we have re-connected to our youth, friends, roots and history. We are a bit saddened that others from our class were unable to make the reunion, but suspect that we will organize again in the future and, hopefully, we'll see some of those folks at the next reunion.

The attendees who made the trip were: **Ron Beagle, Paul Chamberlin, Joe Chandler, James Coyle, Willis Curdy, Dan Derrick, Bill Duffey, Gary Elmore, Grant Godbolt, Larry Jansen, Al Kyles, Rich Krenkel, John Lammers, Jan McLaren, Bob Parcell, Garry Pitts, Tom Rath, Joe Stutler, Steve Vittum, Perry Whittaker and Larry Wright.** 🐼

Joe Stutler has a complete mailing list along with e-mails of all the attendees, including our guests, if anyone is interested in making contact. You can reach Joe at jstutler5@gmail.com.



ODDS AND ENDS



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to Mike Overby (MSO-67), Bill Selby (RAC-91), John Berry (RAC-70), and Shawn McKenna (FBX-79) who just became our latest Life Member(s).

I'm happy to lead off this column with a success story. Last May (2011) I got an email from a gentleman named Pete Hutchinson (not a jumper) who found a Missoula 50th Anniversary belt and buckle in an airport in Texas. If he would have turned it into the TSA personnel, I'm sure it would have been lost forever.

Instead, Pete went to the Internet and came up with our NSA website. He emailed me with the story, which I put into the October issue of *Smoke-jumper* in this column.

I had forgotten about this until I received the following email from **Jack Benton (MSO-59)**: "Another subject: Lost belt and jumper buckle found at Love Field, TX. The belt was mine, and Pete Hutchinson forwarded it to me after I gave him my explanation of how it got left in the TSA security operations area. **Pete Hutchinson is one very ethical and thoughtful citizen for making the effort to locate the owner.** The story is simple: If you



have never tried getting yourself and a wheel-chair-bound wife through TSA, you just haven't experienced controlled chaos. We thought that we had policed up all of our gear after multiple passes through their security screening (I have surgical steel in my chest and the dang buzzer kept going off until the operator reset its scan values, after determining that it might not be a proper search to open up my chest). Anyway, I missed the belt just before boarding and couldn't complete a thorough area search. Pete went through the same security line *two days later* and found the belt under a chair. What is amazing is that he was thoughtful enough to contact you. I also appreciate your note in the *Smokejumper Magazine* as it led to recovery of the belt and buckle.

Keep up your great work on the magazine; it is the highlight of my day when it arrives."

I had to find out a bit more about Pete, so I dug out his old email and touched bases with him and also thanked him for some great follow through.

Pete's response: "Hi Chuck—Sorry for the delay in responding to your very kind email. I can't tell you how thrilled I was when I heard from Mr. Benton. It took me 45 minutes to decide whether to take that

belt or turn it in to the lost and found. I was very early to the airport so I just sat there in the security area hoping someone would show up to collect it. Finally, I decided to take it with me and take a shot at finding the owner.

I live in Kansas City with my wife and seven children (well, five now as two are in college). I am vice president and general counsel of Landmark Legal Foundation, a conservative public interest law firm where I've worked for over 22 years. I really admire the guts and commitment of guys like you and Mr. Benton. Thanks for what you've done and continue to do for the country.

Returning an obviously well-worn and important item like the commemorative belt buckle is the very least I could do. But as I said—it was a real thrill to solve the mystery. And, of course, I couldn't have done it without you, so, well done partner!"

Ed Hotalen (MSO-76), living in Eureka, CA, has retired after 37 years with the USFS.

From a press release (Nov. 2011): "The Payette National Forest is pleased to announce the promotion of McCall Smokejumper Base Manager **Frankie Romero** (MYC-89) to the position of Fire Ecologist with the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, ID. Frankie will serve as a national resource and policy advisor in applied fire ecology, fire effects, and the use of fire to meet land management objectives. Frankie will continue to work and live in McCall, traveling to Boise as necessary to fulfill his duties.

"Frankie began his firefighting career on the Gila N.F. in New Mexico in 1985 and has been the McCall Smokejumper Base Manager since 2005. He has a B.A. degree in Computer Science from New Mexico State University and a Masters of Forestry (Fire Science) degree from Colorado State University."

THANK YOU DONORS

The NSA thanks the following for their generous donations to our organization in response to our President's Annual year-end letter.

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Aug 12, 2011, *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA): “There is a man in Florida who, I am sure, is convinced that only a dozen or so people live in Montana,” wrote **Carl Gidlund** (MSO-58). Here’s why.

“During a recent Mediterranean cruise, I was stopped during a deck stroll by a man who spotted my University of Montana sweatshirt. He asked if that was home, and I said it had been. The man then said that for years he had been looking for a Montanan he had served with in the Marine Corps. And he asked Gidlund if he knew **Cliff Blake** (MSO-55).”

Gidlund answered: “Sure. We were smokejumpers together, and he was at my wedding.” The Floridian was amazed.

“I promised to send him Cliff’s phone number when I returned to my Idaho home. I did and they subsequently renewed their friendship.”

Don Baker (MSO-65): “Just finished the latest issue of *Smokejumper* and read about **Richard C. ‘Dick’ Eriksson’s** (MSO-60) passing. Before I came to Montana and became a smokejumper, I was on the Region 2 Hotshot Crew in 1963 in Fort Collins, Colorado, on the Roosevelt N.F. Dick’s twin brothers, John (Jack) and Jim were members of that crew, and we fought fires all over the Northern Rockies that summer. They told me their brother was a smokejumper in Missoula. Little did I know that when I transferred to the Univ. of Montana and became a jumper in ’65 that I would meet him. He was a very personable fellow and a good squadleader. I knew that he had been quite ill the past few years, and I am sorry to hear about his death.”

Randy Nelson (GAC-87) retired from the Grangeville Smokejumpers at the end of Dec. 2011. Randy has been the Base Manager in Grangeville since 2003. He began his career with the Forest Service many moons ago on the Red River Ranger District of the Nez Perce National Forest. Becoming a smokejumper was always Randy’s dream, and he pursued it until it became a reality when he rookied for Grangeville in 1987. Randy worked his way through the ranks over the years to accomplish many goals, both within the program and in the larger fire organization. His accomplishments include Operations Section Chief on a Type II Team and Air Attack to name a few. Randy reached a milestone of 365 total jumps in his career and will be remembered as doing great things for the program, as well as his love of Husqvarna chainsaws and Ford trucks.

Lee Lipscomb (MSO-58): “One of our own made his final jump recently, **Donald A Brennan** (NCSB-54), and I don’t know if the association is aware or not. He was born in Helena, Montana, and last resided

in Olympia, Washington. Don started in 1954 and was on the first Alaska crew in ’59 with **Orville Looper** (CJ-49). We were best friends on the Alaska crew in 1962, his last year of jumping. Don was a steelworker for over 30 years and received the Purple Heart in the Korean War. He was a true friend, and I will always remember him fondly. He also did a lot of skydiving.

“In his later years he had his entire back covered with a detailed tattoo of the Mann Gulch Jumpers jumping their fire with a biblical reference in their memory.”

Esquire magazine December 16, 2011 issue: “This fall, in partnership with Colum McCann and the Aspen Writers’ Foundation, we held a short fiction contest. Very short: Entries had to be exactly 78 words long. The winner, chosen from 4,300 entries, is **Nate Ochs** (MSO-2011), a 33-year-old smokejumper from South Dakota.

“How the Blood Moves in Winter” by Nate Ochs

“If you buy Marv a scotch he’ll tell you he hasn’t slept with her in a dozen years. The body that burned in his mind became silt; little by little the veins went varicose and oh yes, kiddo, as he is, so you shall be. But once he’d caught her humming in the weedy garden and it was as if she’d taken off all her clothes, and lain down in the red vines of an orchard, and sung.”

“**MORE ABOUT THE WRITER:** *Nate Ochs hasn’t written a word for 10 years—since it left him frustrated as a 20-something bartender in New Orleans. The 33-year-old father of two has since moved on and now works for the Tatanka Hotshot Crew in South*

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Dakota responding to wildfires. This summer was his rookie season with the Missoula Smokejumpers in Montana. His years behind the bar though, not the adrenaline-filled ones jumping out of airplanes into wildfires, inspired him to delve deeper into barstool confessions for his winning story.—Elizabeth Sile

Gary Romness (MSO-62): “My wife and I have been living in southern Norway for the past 36 years, but this past fall we decided to move north of the arctic circle to be closer to our grandchild and family. Here the northern lights are showing their splendor of colors almost every night (not much sunlight this time of year) upon the rugged mountains. We now live just south of the Lofoten chain of islands, which are world famous for their fishing quality and quantity. Hunting, both bird and moose, is also superb. I retired from the plastic industry six years ago and have since devoted a good share of time to hiking, fishing, hunting, skiing, and doing quality R&R at our mountain cabin. My family is rather international as my wife is Norwegian, son and daughter both have dual citizenship with daughter married to a Norwegian and living in Fauske, while son is married to a wonderful girl from Finland and living in Dublin, Ireland.

Chuck, I want to thank you and your associates

for putting out such a great magazine every quarter. I read it from cover to cover the first day and again a couple weeks afterwards just to make sure I get every word. Later I store them in a growing number of which I review every once in awhile. Thank you!”

Tim Schaeffer (MYC-92): “Last season jumped was 2011. Finished with 375 total, 152 fire jumps. Took a job on the Nez Perce NF, Moose Creek Ranger District. Site of the first fire jump ever.”

Josh Voshall (RDD-2003): “Hiya Chuck! I hope you and your family had a great Holiday season. Hey, I stopped over at the CJ base before New Years and I have to say, I can’t believe how much different it looks. You guys have done an incredible job restoring the buildings. I can’t wait to go into the ready room and the other buildings this summer to check them out. I’ve often wondered how it would be to be a part of the Gobi. I’ve told family and friends that if CJ were open today, I’d be there in a heartbeat, but most of my family don’t even know what I’m talking about, go figure.”

Thanks for the good words Josh. The Museum Project continues to move forward under the leadership of Gar Buck (CJ-66). For any of you driving Southern Oregon this summer, stop in see the restoration of the Gobi. (Ed.)



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