

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
OCTOBER 2023

SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



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

AUGUST 5, 2024, 75th Anniversary of the Mann Gulch Fire: A Call to Action. The Mann Gulch Fire was an event that every smokejumper knows about. The unthinkable happened! The fire blew up and resulted in 13 fatalities. While those killed suffered the greatest loss, others who were associated with the fire and its aftermath—most especially family members—were scarred for life.

August 5, 2024, will be the 25th anniversary of this tragic event. In this month's issue of *Smokejumper*, **Mike Bina** (MSO-68) has written an article, A Call To Action, which is a compelling account of how he has personally been impacted upon learning about Silas Raymond Thompson, one of the victims. Mike learned that Raymond had lived nearby. He had attended the same elementary school where Mike taught some years later. Mike writes movingly of his reaction upon visiting Raymond's grave

and the home in which he had grown up. Mike writes of how Raymond's death affected his family and those around him up to the present day.

While Mike's account is a must read, it is also a call to action. In August of 2024, the Helena NF in coordination with others, including the National Smokejumper Association, are planning to honor those lost at Mann Gulch. Mike is also soliciting the help of fellow smokejumpers who are likewise interested in honoring the fallen and who may live near where the victims are buried. His intent is to be sure each victim is honored at the site of burial.

Read Mike's article. Learn how you may help. Consider volunteering.

National Smokejumper Association (NSA) Endorses Position Statement of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR): Climate Change Effects on our Nation's Forests

At its April, 2023, board meeting, the NSA overwhelmingly approved a motion to endorse and support the position statement of the NAFSR: Climate Change Effects on our National Forests. Salient points of the NAFSR position statement include those that follow:

NAFSR supports and promotes the science-based

Continued on page 4

Still Looking for Your Biography

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

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

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

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

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

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

Having Your Correct Email Addresses Is Very Important

In order to save the NSA time and money, Chuck Sheley is sending renewals and the merchandise flyer via email. Sending via email is a good cost-efficient move.

To see if we have your correct email address, go to the NSA website at www.smokejumpers.com. Click on "News and Events" at the top of the page. Click on "Jump List" on the pulldown, type in your *last* name.

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

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage.....ANC	GrangevilleGAC	MissoulaMSO
BoiseNIFC	Idaho CityIDC	ReddingRDD
Cave JunctionCJ	La Grande.....LGD	Redmond.....RAC
FairbanksFBX	McCall.....MYC	West Yellowstone WYS
		Winthrop.....NCSB

Get *Smokejumper* One Month Earlier

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

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

NSA Director **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) says: "I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing."

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

management of natural resources.

NAFSR believes that changing climatic conditions and weather patterns have contributed to increases in the frequency and intensity of some disturbances, altering the succession and fate of forests and rangelands—both in the near and long term.

NAFSR believes the cascading effects of extreme events require greater focus and attention. In the case of wildfires, not only are extreme events leading to more acres burned, communities damaged, and firefighters worn out, extreme fires also are outstripping reforestation capacities

and exposing shortages in tree seed and seedling nursery production.

NAFSR supports the purposes and actions outlined in the USDA Secretary's Memorandum (June 2022) and believes that the six adaptation actions outlined in the USDA Forest Service's Climate Adaptation Plan (July 2022) respond well to the Memorandum and deserve widespread support by the public and elected officials.

NAFSR Position Statement:

Climate Change Effects on our National Forests

<https://tinyurl.com/35muvfrn>

NAFSR Climate Change Science Statement.

<https://tinyurl.com/2p9axhpy> 📄

A Smokejumper's Ethical Challenge

by John Blackwell McCall '64

It was my last fire jump. It was early September in a year long ago. Sheepeater Lookout reported a smoke in Idaho's Payette N.F. in an area now designated the Frank Church Wilderness Area. Jim and I were numbers one and two on the Jump List. The weather was cool as a wet thunderstorm moved across Idaho's Panhandle. We weren't expecting another jump before we returned to our college forestry schools, Jim to Colorado State and me to Washington State. Without that final fire jump, we would not have struggled over an ethical challenge.

We were staying busy with projects near the base, ready if needed. Peeling lodgepole pines for fencing logs seemed beneath the dignity of highly trained firefighters and parachutists. Thus, we were excited to hear the klaxon horn erupt. One, two, three, four blasts we counted, demanding that four jumpers quickly prepare to be in the Johnson Flying Service Twin Beach heading to a wildfire.

Once suited up, with modified football helmets under our arms, Vibram-soled boots on our feet and clothed in yards of protective fabric, we boarded our plane. Seemingly, we flew for hours crisscrossing high mountain ridges along an azimuth reported by Sheepeater Lookout. The

air was turbulent following a storm, the cabin was stifling as we sat in our jump gear. We were having difficulty spotting the smoke plume that would identify our fire. Rich radial engine exhaust fumes siphoned into the open door of the noisy plane as we bounced above one high elevation ridge to the next. We could see patches of snow left by the passing clouds skimming 7,000-foot ridges. Finally, the pilot dipped his port wing and began a long circle around a rising smoke column contrasting with mountain fog. We found our fire, a lightning strike. The spotter twice dropped weighted crepe paper streamers to anticipate the wind drift for our parachute ride. After a low fly-by to look at the fire, the pilot gained elevation to prepare for our jump.

The spotter announced two jumpers were needed for a fire which appeared to be burning in the top of a tall, dead snag. The other two jumpers in the plane were disappointed to not be exiting with us. Normally two jumpers would depart the Twin Beach on the same pass. I was eager to get out of the suffocating plane, but I understood the spotter's decision to make a second pass in case he'd misinterpreted erratic winds. Jim went first and we watched him land near the designated spot, an opening which appeared to have a skiff

of snow. On the next pass, I pushed out the door, eager for cool, fresh air. That sensory experience has stayed with me all my life. My 32-foot canopy opened properly with no twists in the risers, and I was pointing into the wind watching the airplane fly away. Suddenly, it was quiet with only the sound of fresh air jetting through the parachute's Derry slots. I had a good ride literally on top of my world, but as I approached the designated landing spot, I saw Jim waving his arms. He seemed to want to help me find the spot. Paying close attention, I hit dead center and in the thin high elevation air I landed harder than ever imaginable. The white target was not snow but instead was a broad granite rock. Jim rushed up, asking if I was okay and explaining he was trying to wave me away to a softer landing. Tangled in my 'chute and sliding off the rock, I pronounced myself bruised but fit.

The plane made another pass, dropping two pulaskis, two shovels, one cross-cut saw, personal gear, and food rations. We laid out red crepe paper double L's visible from the air to signal that all was good. The plane saluted with dipped wings and flew away. Suddenly, it was just Jim and me, miles from roads and civilization. The excitement of our call to action, an airplane ride, and a parachute jump was over. Now it was to be hard work, work that would lead to our aforementioned ethical dilemma.

We packed up our parachutes, shouldered our hundred-pound loads of gear, and covered the quarter mile of steep forested terrain to our burning tree. We waded a small spring, pleased that cool drinking water would be available. Our firefighting challenge was quickly assessed. A large ponderosa pine snag was burning at the top. Dead limbs were flaming and falling. The snag was immense, more than 30 inches at its base.

It was midafternoon. We built a fireline around the area. The tree had a natural lean that told us where it should fall. After the line was established, we cleared the inner area of fuel. The tree was too large to remove a wedge of undercut with Pulaskis, so we used our crosscut saw. The snag, long dead, was hard and dry. Dragging a "misery whip" through it was exhausting. The snag stood on a steep sidehill, and its lean required it to fall perpendicular to the slope of the mountain. One end

of the level saw was near ground level, the other at head height. Neither position was comfortable or efficient for pulling on the saw. We worked on the undercut until near dark, mostly looking skyward and avoiding falling branches. After a visit to the spring for drinking water, we ate our canned K-rations and turned in for a few hours of sleep.

A cold dawn revealed the that fire in the top of the snag appeared to have burned out. Still, it was our challenge to lay it on the ground. We stopped referring to it as a snag. We named it the Bastard. Burning branches had fallen into the cleared area at the base. After smothering smoking branches,

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we were tempted to declare the fire out. Rationalizing as hard as we tried, we both knew we had to finish the job and fell the Bastard to feel for hot spots that might rekindle. A heightened responsibility overwhelmed us. Our soul-searching was caused by an embarrassing incident with four of our jumpers earlier in the summer.

The infamous four, led by a senior career jumper, were dropped on a remote fire, and returned a few days later, reporting that their fire was extinguished. Ten days later another fire was reported in the area and McCall jumpers again responded. What they found was a reburn of the previous fire because of a sloppy control effort by the original team, plus a messy campsite with debris from food rations and discarded personal items. The incident was not officially reported but shame was apparent as word quietly spread among us that some of our own had brought dishonor to the McCall Smokejumpers. Pilots, spotters, jumpers, and planes had needlessly been put at

risk because of the laziness of a few. To the extent that two 20-year-old jumpers dwelt on ethics, Jim and I knew we didn't want to ever have a reburn of a fire for which we were responsible. We renewed our efforts to bring down the inert appearing snag. We took turns working on the high and low sides dictated by the steep slope. The resin in the dead ponderosa gummed our sawing effort. After hours of sweat and swearing, we saw the kerf begin to broaden as the Bastard leaned ever so slightly toward its prepared bed. Then with a noisy suddenness, the Bastard seemed to jump off its stump and fall straight for its bed with a mighty crash. It bounced once, and to our horror rotated 90 degrees and headed downhill, noisily crashing through brush, trees, and rocks until it finally rested somewhere near a tributary of the Salmon River thousands of feet below us.

We were dumbfounded. For all our effort, we had only broken tree limbs and a stump to attest to our felling effort. Lots of talk, more rationalizing, and a painful decision followed. We had to track the runaway snag to its resting point. That meant another night and day before we could return to our McCall base. With only pulaskis in hand and a few candy bars for rations we slid down the mountain on a difficult reconnaissance. We tracked the giant log through brush, green forests, and to a broad ankle-twisting talus slope where we lost its trail. A previous winter's avalanche had littered the slope with debris, and we were defeated. With low morale we climbed back to our site, unfulfilled. It took hours. We finished our day checking for hot spots among broken limbs, cleaning up camp and planning our next day.

Our spotter had advised a helicopter would be dispatched over the next couple of days, so we should devise a suitable heliport. It was evident that we needed to reach a high flat spot for that purpose. At first light on our third day and with hundred-pound packs, we began climbing. It was extremely difficult on a steep slope. We pulled ourselves with hands and pushed with flailing feet. I had the crosscut bowed and tied over my pack and unfortunately, I fell and snapped the saw into two worthless pieces. Jim looked at me with scorn and then with a shrug, expressing the obvious. We might have needed the saw at the

top of the ridge. He was right. Upon finding a marginally suitable spot for a helicopter pick up, we needed to clear a few small trees for the path of the helicopter if and when it arrived. Pulaskis are poor felling tools.

At 7,000 feet elevation, we and our gear would present a heavy load for a small helicopter in the thin air. As dusk neared, we heard a faint chopping sound of a helicopter, and we grabbed our feeble flashlights to signal our location. It was a weak effort, but the keen-eyed pilot finally spotted the two of us, jumping from stumps to rocks and back again and waving with unheard shouts. It became apparent that the pilot had little regard for our hastily prepared landing spot as he jockeyed the chopper to a position with the port rail on the ground and the starboard rail still in the air. He commanded us to gently put our packs in the exterior basket and cautiously climb into the chopper. As Jim crawled in, I gradually put my weight on the railing as the pilot corrected for the additional burden. Before I was even seated, we lifted off and skimmed down a razor back ridge on a cushion of air, eventually gaining air speed and altitude.

We were flown to a ranger station at the townsite of Warren, Idaho. From there we hitched a ride in the back of a truck to McCall where we slept in comfortable beds. I dreamed about the specter of a runaway snag sparking fires for a mile down a mountain with the trail of flame beginning at the site of our ponderosa pine stump. Within days we both left for the season to return to college. The last I heard from Jim was a note I received when I was back in school. It read, "cold, wet weather they're having in Idaho." We both knew we'd escaped the disgrace of a reburn. The Bastard was dead out. Our reputations were unharmed. We just might graduate forestry school and obtain professional jobs. 🌲

John Blackwell did graduate forestry school. He worked for the State of Oregon before joining the World Forestry Center as President and CEO for 28 years. He presently serves as Honorary Consul for the country of Malaysia in Oregon, serves as a trustee for the Harry A. Merlo Foundation, travels extensively by motorcycle and spends time in France with his bicycle and wife Christina.

Ernie Abides: A Ghost Story

by Conor Hogan (North Cascades '21)

Gabe Merton sat on the bottom bunk in his room and traced the cryptic message carved into the wood above him: BIG ERNIE WATCHES ALWAYS YOU KNOW YET CHOOSE TO NOT. Save the desperate buzz of a hornet circling by his window, the bunkhouse was quiet. The other rookies had gone for pizza. Gabe's thoughts returned, once again, to the problem of his parachutes.

That morning, Henderson, the loft foreman, informed the rookies that they were on hold until they finished their 20 practice packs. After training, Gabe's class boosted Alaska for a month and a half and spent the whole time in the woods. Now it was nearly August, and not one of them had been signed off to pack live. So, after work, the four rookies stayed late and rigged their remaining practice chutes, which now sat in the loft, waiting to be inspected.

Gabe was nervous. Upon breaking down his 17th parachute, Henderson told him that unless his last three were flawless, he was going to need extra practice. Where his rookie bros had developed the patience required for packing a CR-360, Gabe tended to get frustrated and rush through the process. He always ended up wrestling a billowy wad of fabric into its D-bag and rubber-banding his lines into loose, slipshod bights. *It doesn't matter*, thought Gabe. *The parachute wants to open. Who cares how it looks inside?*

Gabe ran his finger over the R in ERNIE. The hornet slammed itself against the windowpane twice, then crawled toward the blinds. The window was cracked open. All the insect had to do was search downwards instead of up. But the instinct to rise ensured its prolonged starvation. Eventually, it would fall and join the other tiny corpses that littered the sill. Gabe watched the hornet for a while. Then he made the decision he'd been contemplating all afternoon and walked over to the loft. At the end of the runway, arterial light bled from gathering thunderheads into a bottomless horizon.

Gabe found a glue stick in one of the packing

table drawers and pulled his parachutes from the shelf, along with Garcia's. He peeled off each masking tape label, applied a bit of glue, then switched them. Garcia's parachutes were now labeled Merton, and vice versa. Gabe replaced the parachutes on the shelf and hurried back to the bunkhouse. A sparkplug of adrenaline popped in his belly.

The next morning, Carlsbad took roll call. "Rookies on hold?" he asked Henderson, who nodded. Carlsbad slid their four magnets to the right. Then he told the crew to stay close for PT because they were anticipating an order. Henderson said, "Okay, rooks. We're gonna check your chutes and get you back on the list." He fixed his electric green eyes on Gabe. "Hopefully."

Gabe brought one of the parachutes now bearing his name to Henderson. "Good presentation," said Henderson, turning the container around. He clipped the risers to the table and freed the drogue. "Proper sequence." Henderson slid the parachute to the end of the table, examining each line-stow carefully.

At the next table over, Gabe heard Sparky Levine, who was breaking down Garcia's parachute, say, "Dude, your S-folds are pretty egregious." Garcia mumbled an inaudible reply. Gabe decided to yawn, then shut his mouth, thinking it might look suspicious.

Henderson finished the six-line check and said, "Okay, let's see the next one." He broke down the next two parachutes in silence, then signed Gabe's log. "Whatever you did with these three, keep it up. Every pack needs to look like those," said Henderson. Gabe thanked him and pretended not to hear Sparky tell Garcia that he would have to rig a couple more, just to be safe.

McMichael, another rookie, was plucking weeds over by the bunkhouse. He looked up when Gabe walked by. "Hey, RB," said McMichael. "We're gonna make breakfast burritos. Wanna help?"

"Definitely," said Gabe. "I got some AgLearn that's due today, but once I finish, I'll be there." In his room, Gabe launched *USDA Security Training*, then opened another page and started browsing a

Dragon Wars forum, searching for hints about how to beat the penultimate boss. He kept his cursor hovering over the red X in the corner.

McMichael announced on the intercom that breakfast was ready, and Gabe hurried to the cafeteria. In the kitchen, McMichael spooned scrambled eggs into a glass dish while Lorenzo gave the bacon one final flip. "Sorry guys," said Gabe. "That class took way longer than I thought."

"Don't worry about it," said Lorenzo, exchanging a look with McMichael. Gabe carried the eggs and a jug of orange juice outside.

"Nice," said Sparky, pulling up on an orange beach cruiser. "Thanks for cooking."

"No problem," said Gabe. One by one, the older guys arrived, and soon, most of the crew stood outside, eating burritos and discussing rumors of a potential tree climbing assignment out east.

"You're back on the load, by the way," Carlsbad said to Gabe through a mouthful of bacon. "Henderson said you're good to go."

"Copy," said Gabe, eating his second burrito. Inside, Lorenzo washed dishes. Slowly, the group dispersed, pairs and trios wandering back toward the loft. Sparky stopped to examine the freckles of rot spreading up one of the oak trees. Gabe wondered whether Sparky had any suspicions about what he'd done. Sparky worked a finger into one of the soft patches, then pulled it out and smelled it. *Probably not*, thought Gabe, smiling. Both men jumped at the siren's metallic wail.

In the loft, Carlsbad called out their names. Gabe got a zipper stuck, and by the time he was suited up, everyone else was outside getting a check. He opened the freezer and saw a white package of meat marked *Lorenzo*. Gabe shoved it into his leg pocket. He'd buy Lorenzo another steak when he got back.

"Hey, RB," said Garcia, waiting outside. "You ready for a check?"

"Yep," said Gabe.

Garcia checked the label on his riser. "Jumping a CR-360. Stirrups under boots, zippers down," said Garcia. After the check, he offered Gabe a high-five. "Have fun out there," said Garcia with a weak smile. Garcia would have been on the load instead of Gabe if his parachutes had passed inspection.

"Thanks, man," said Gabe. He turned as Carlsbad started briefing.

"Multiple starts on the Frank Church," said

Carlsbad. "Reverse load order: Merton, Kumar, Alpenheimer..."

The flight took an hour. When Carlsbad shouted, "Five minutes out!" everyone did their pin checks, then pressed their faces to the window. It didn't take long to spot the fire, hauling itself upslope through tangled blowdown. Carlsbad said something to Sparky, who passed the message down the plane.

"Dispatch says there's at least two," Kumar yelled to Gabe. They flew south, to the other side of the river. Carlsbad pointed out an enormous meadow. A thread of smoke hung above the treetops to the west. Carlsbad spoke with Sparky for a moment. Sparky shook his head, then turned to the back of the plane and flipped Kumar off with a grin. "Ernie's favorite strikes again!" Sparky shouted. Another message was passed back.

"Dispatch wants boots on both," said Kumar. "We're goin' six and two. Me and you'll take this one." Gabe nodded, trying to suppress his smile.

They flew back to the first fire and started looking for a jump spot. Carlsbad finally chose a ridgetop with no alternates and plenty of hazards: bleached snags with granite knuckles jutting up from the cheat grass and a cliff to the south. Everyone made it, but Sparky radioed up for the med gear after Chester came in hot and sprained his wrist.

Once the first group had their cargo, they flew back across the river and Carlsbad threw streamers at the meadow. He called, "200 yards," then said, "Okay, boys. Glory jump. Make sure you take a look around and enjoy it." Kumar stood and Henderson put him in the door. "Get ready!" He hit Kumar's shoulder, and Gabe sat down behind him. When he felt the slap, Gabe launched himself out, the throttling rush of air swallowing his jump count.

Gabe landed near the edge of the meadow, and his parachute capped a small subalpine. By the time he untangled his lines, Kumar had the chainsaw on his shoulder and a Pulaski in his hand. "See you there," Kumar called across the meadow.

"Copy!" Gabe replied. He stuffed his parachute into a seamless, then walked over to the food box and rifled through it, looking for candy bars and Spam. By the time Gabe got to the fire, Kumar had already lined it. They spent a few hours mopping up, Gabe peppering Kumar with questions and Kumar offering terse replies. Kumar rookied in '95, Gabe learned, but never advanced past a GS-7 because he

didn't want spotting duties to restrict his time on the list. Kumar had 188 fire jumps; this was 189. He had four jumps in Canada. In 2001, he jumped three fires in one day. Eventually, the conversation petered out, and the pair spent a while in silence, chopping embers into dust.

Around 1600, their radios crackled. *Kumar, Sparky. You got me on, Bro?*

Kumar flipped his radio up by the antenna. "Go ahead," he said.

This is a big ask, said Sparky. But could one of you hike up and look across the river? We're getting serious rollout and can't see anything below us.

"Not a problem," said Kumar. He looked at Gabe expectantly. When Gabe didn't say anything, Kumar said, "Uh. You wanna flip for it?"

"Sure," said Gabe. Kumar shook his head and fished a quarter from his pocket. "Tails," said Gabe. They looked at the coin lying in the dirt. George Washington stared up at them. Kumar clicked his radio. "Rookie's comin for y'all."

Copy, said Sparky. He'll be in some thick timber, so he might not be able to see much, but any intel would be appreciated.

"He copies," said Kumar, watching Gabe strap his pack on.

Gabe hiked slowly, his resentment building. Why couldn't the other group post their own lookout? Brambles clawed at his face as he climbed over moldering logs and up crumbly limestone shelves. As he was preparing to take a break and fry up some Spam, Gabe stumbled into a clearing. He gasped.

Pale sheafs of steam uncurled from a wide, clear pool in front of him. Through the trees, Mount McGuire's broad, snowy shoulders flashed in the sun. Gabe looked up at all the hill he had left to climb, then back to the spring. The air smelled suddenly rich with minerals, like deep, primordial earth. Cheerful bubbles piped up on the far side of the pool. Gabe stripped down and climbed in.

The hot water washed away the aches gnawing at Gabe's back. He exhaled and leaned into a mossy rock, looking up through the shifting branches at a faint veil of smoke spreading across the sky. Behind him, Gabe's radio made a noise: Sparky asking Kenneth how far he'd made it up the left flank. Kenneth replied between gasps: *No idea, bro! This thing is going for it!*

Gabe smiled and sank deeper. *Just a few minutes,*

he thought. The water licked his chin. Wrens volleyed small, shining syllables through the branches above him. A damselfly darted through the dappled shadows, sunlight glittering on its wings. Gabe struggled for a while against the water's narcotic pull, but eventually, he dozed off.

Gabe woke to the sound of his name. *Merton. Merton, you got me?* He looked around, confused. The first tendrils of evening snaked through the trees. Behind him, his radio squelched.

Gabe pressed transmit. "Somebody calling Merton?" he asked, trying to sound out of breath.

There you are. It's Sparky. You make it to the top yet? You got eyes on anything below us?

"Yeah, man," said Gabe, thinking quickly. "Like you said, it's pretty hard to tell through all the timber up here, but from where I'm at, I can't see anything of concern."

Good deal, said Sparky. Sorry to make you hike all the way up there.

"Happy to do it," said Gabe. He climbed out of the hot spring and sat with only his feet in the water. After a while, he put his clothes on and hiked down to the meadow, where Kumar crouched beside a campfire.

"How'd it go?" Kumar asked.

"Pretty steep around here," replied Gabe, sling-ing his pack down beside the cargo. "Soon as you walk a hundred feet, turns into goat country."

"Yep," said Kumar. The fire popped and spat a mouthful of embers into the dusky air. "You seen any Spam? I could only rustle up one can."

"Really?" asked Gabe. He walked over and pretended to look through the food box while, with a deft sleight-of-hand, pulling the other can from his pack. "Here's one," Gabe said, popping the tab and sticking it into the coals.

"All right," said Kumar. He wore a backwards trucker hat and a shirt that read *The Ernie Abides*, above a silhouette of a long-haired, goateed man wearing shades and a scowl.

"So, what's the deal with Big Ernie?" asked Gabe, gesturing to the shirt. "I've never gotten a straight answer on who he's supposed to be."

Kumar looked across the fire. In the distance, coyotes cackled, and Gabe felt a strange familiarity, as though he'd inhabited this exact moment before. "Funny you ask," said Kumar. "I was just thinkin bout Ernie." He began to roll a cigarette. "People

got their theories, but very few know the truth. I only know because my daddy was ther, the night Big Ernie came into this world.” Kumar flipped the cigarette between his lips and struck a match. “Well. I suppose I should say he was here.”

Ernest Haggard rookied in 1949, *three years after my daddy. People in town liked him. He was a good student, captain of the wrestlin team, student body treasurer. Occasionally, there was suspicious happenins with Ernest's name floatin nearby: his wrestlin rival's dog croaked after eatin arsenic. Some of the money raised by the school's fundraiser up and vanished. His girlfriend tended to show up to school with thin bruises on her arms and always claimin she bumped into somethin.*

Mostly, though, Ernest was held to be a good kid, and the base was pleased to hire him. He was clever and strong, and he did well during trainin. But again, there was some strange incidents. Ernest had words with one of his RBs during a run. That afternoon, his RB's letdown rope snapped, and he busted his ankle. Two crosscuts went missin, then showed up a week later at a pawnshop three towns away. A trainer was rough on Ernest one afternoon, then spent the next few days in bed leakin from both ends.

But folks wasn't near as hungry for conspiracy back then, and they chalked it up to coincidence. Ernest graduated and two weeks later, he jumped a two-manner with my daddy. Middle Fork of the Salmon, right north of Poor Man's Creek. Fire musta been within a few miles of here. It was a tight spot, and those afternoon winds was shifty and strong, so they decided to jump one, then the other. My daddy jumped first and got in. But soon as Ernest jumped, the wind came howlin and blew him down, down range. Somehow he landed okay, punchin through the trees and pilin into a sticker bush. When he picked hisself up, Ernest was lookin at the most beautiful hot spring he ever saw.

“No way,” said Gabe. “There's hot springs around here?”

“Way,” said Kumar, staring at Gabe. The flames inside the circled rocks twitched like a creature being tortured and threw epileptic shadows across Kumar's face. Through a rush of static, Sparky's voice came over the radio. *Bros at camp, we got a spot down here. At least an acre. Bring food. We're not getting much sleep tonight.* The moon hid her pockmarked face with black scarves of clouds, and darkness pressed against the small firelight.

And not just a hot spring. A hot spring with two heartbreakers sittin inside it. Ernest could scarcely believe his eyes, when he saw the pair of em, lookin up from the water, naked as the day they was born. My daddy called on the radio to see if he was okay. Ernest replied, sayin he was just fine, but it might take a little while to get to the fire. One of the women, with dark hair spreadin from her bare shoulders, smiled and crooked a finger. You got you a little time, don't you? asked the other. Ernest thought for a while. That was one of those moments where this here pattern mighta changed. But then Ernest shucked his gear and climbed into the water, and the awful loom began to weave once more, and what was always gonna happen, did.

Kenneth called Sparky to say he'd found two more spots, a quarter-acre apiece. Gabe looked into the campfire. The Spam sizzled and blistered. A few more ounces of flesh burned; another pittance paid toward the ancient debt. Superheated air escaped from the widening space between meat and metal and made a sound not unlike a scream.

My daddy called a few more times. Ernest called back, sayin there was a creek blockin his way, and that he was lookin for a place to cross. He spent the evenin with those women, doin what man and woman does. My daddy, meanwhile, managed to catch the fire by hisself, but only just barely. He knocked out round three in the mornin, whupped and scared, hopin Ernest was okay out there by his lonely.

Ernest woke to find hisself tied to a great slab of granite. He heard a strange chantin, in a tongue like nothin he had ever heard before. Tween his feet he saw two old hags, bent and ugly, lurchin round a bonfire. Ernest struggled against his shackles and tried to shout, but his voice was gone. The hags came close, each holdin a red-hot iron poker.

You done sinned, one whispered, touchin Ernest's cheek with her withered thumb. The other smiled, showin off her sharp and bloody teeth. Ernest saw the gnawed-on bones of little forest critters all throughout the camp. He opened his mouth in a silent wail. The hags shook with laughter, then pressed that searin metal to Ernest's eyes.

My daddy woke as the barest seep of red pooled along the east and found Ernest sittin beside him, lookin toward the slice in the blackness with empty sockets. Ernest whispered a long and twisted confession, his hideous soul laid bare. All the lies he'd done told, all the pain he'd caused. Worse than what anyone done

suspected. My daddy offered no absolution. He watched Ernest's limbs stretch with each admission, like the boy was tied to some invisible rack, cranking him farther and farther apart. My daddy watched him become a creature known nowhere else in this or any other universe. Big Ernie told my daddy he'd seen his fate: to wander these woods forever, judging those of us who dare jump hellfire's earthly seed, rewardin rare virtue, and exactin proper punishment upon those who go astray.

Kumar lit another cigarette. "We been lied to, Merton," he said. "They went and murdered God, then told us we was free to do as we please. That our selfish ends justify any means. That we're alone on this forsaken rock. No one watchin, no ledger bein kept." He blew twin streams of smoke from his nostrils. Kenneth called Sparky on the radio to say that the whole river bottom was on fire, and that they needed to start hiking up to the ridge. Fast.

Gabe looked up and saw a figure sitting beside Kumar. Impossibly tall, impossibly thin. Slowly

sharpening a Pulaski, the metal gleaming even in the dark. "But what do you feel in those fragile bones of yours?" Kumar asked. "You think anyone gets away with anythin?" He tipped the ash clinging to the end of his cigarette into the campfire's writhing flames. "What are these bodies, if not instruments for pain? You think that there's an accident?" Sparky called Kenneth back, real fear inside his voice. He and his group were trying to find a deployment site. The fire was moving too fast to outrun. Kenneth replied, saying no way, come on, they had to try. The tall, thin figure stopped sharpening and examined the edge with empty sockets. Then Big Ernie looked up at Gabe, and in the vacuum of his face, Gabe saw again the terrible truth: things mattered. Nothing but energy and its return. Every action tabernacled to a reaction. How many times, how many ways, must man rediscover the way of things before he learns.

You know, yet choose to not. 🔪

Response to Conor Hogan's "Defending the Tribe"

by Norm Pawlowski (Cave Junction '57)

In his article, "Defending the Tribe" (*Smoke-jumper* April 2023), **Conor Hogan** (NCSB-02) describes rookie training with the phrase: "rookie training is another form of birth: bloody, sweaty, and painful." Mr. Hogan goes on with "various rites of initiation jumpers have invented," and "an impatient, aggressive training cadre." He uses the word "brutal" to summarize rookie training. Mr. Hogan then, in the next four pages, justifies the current harsh training methods for newly-hired smokejumpers.

Alas, I am compelled to respond. It is always instructive to look at and analyze ourselves. At the same time, I do not want to insult the currently employed membership and create a gap between the contemporary generation and us "old-timers." (And you all will grow old, too.)

While attending college, the room I rented was flanked on three sides by fraternity and sorority

houses. Walking down the streets to class, it was impossible not to observe some of their initiation rituals, which could be described as extreme, humiliating, and sometimes brutal. What purpose did it serve? Did it help a Frat member's academics? If brutal harassment serves any useful purpose, why not apply it to 2nd year frat members, and thus, to returning smokejumpers? Following fraternities' examples, why not paddle rookie smokejumpers?

Basic courses in General Psychology teach that raising the stress level beyond moderate does not improve learning. High stress reduces learning. A priest, who grew up in a 3rd world country, told me about how children were brutally abused by schoolteachers if they failed to understand the lesson. Similar attitudes towards learning have existed in areas of Western Civilization. Hopefully today, we have advanced beyond that.

In schools, one of the justifications for PE class is

to improve self-esteem of the students. From what I have observed, smokejumpers' self-esteem needs no further inflation.

Track pushes the conditioning of the athlete more than most other sports. Ask your local track coach: Can a brutal training protocol improve fitness any more than a planned, regular conditioning program? One thing is for sure, "brutal" does not change the physiology inside the athlete.

Early Smokejumper Training

I had the good fortune to witness the 1950s transition as the smokejumper population changed from WWII vets to college kids. My training was administered by WWII vets, some of them classified as partially disabled veterans because of the war wounds they were carrying around daily. If there ever were real men walking this earth, these were real men. They were real enough that they did not have to prove it to anyone, nor repeatedly let everyone know about it. Politeness, good manners, integrity, and consideration of others were the trademarks of these veterans, distinguished by exceptional courage and fortitude.

There were 2nd and 3rd year jumpers assisting with the training my first year because we had a double crew in 1957. Base manager **Jim Allen** (NCSB-46) **had hired over 40 new jumpers for** the purpose of splitting the crew and sending half of us to the newly created Redding base. The two crew houses were double packed, and there were people sleeping on the lawns. No one, and I mean NO ONE, treated us like a drill sergeant in Hollywood movies who degrades and abuses new recruits. Every single member of the training cadre was polite and considerate. We learned because it was intensely interesting. The trainers knew their stuff and communicated it well. Learning and practicing new skills should be fun, and it was.

Politeness did not mean the running and calisthenics were any less intense. With 40+ new hires, people were spread out on the runs. Some rookies were runners, some were not. But it was clear to me, no one was loafing. Not one rookie needed a drill sergeant degrading him for him to give his best effort. The guys who were not runners endured extra pain trying to keep up. In general, those with muscle-men physiques were not the best runners. Why abuse them?

Jack Harter (CJ-51) oversaw Cave Junction training in 1957. Jack was an infantry officer who, wounded twice, had led his men up Heartbreak Ridge in Korea, and earned a high commendation for his valor. Jack never mentioned anything about his heroism. Although I came to know Jack well, I did not know about his wounds and formal military commendations until they were reported in his recent obituary. Although Jack was in outstanding physical condition, he never showed off, never acted tough, nor displayed any type of boisterous behavior. Jack was never rude, never raised his voice, never humiliated anyone while informing a jumper of his errors and/or delinquencies.

Eight a.m., Monday morning on our first day of employment at Cave Junction, Jack gave an hour-long orientation lecture to all the newly-hired jumpers. Part of that lecture went something like this: "Today, you are smokejumpers. Yesterday, you were not. You are no tougher today than you were yesterday. The only industry around Cave Junction is logging. If you go to town and brag that you are a smokejumper, some logger may say, 'you don't look so tough to me,' and smash you. These loggers work hard all year, they are plenty tough, and they have a reputation of disrespect for smokejumpers."

Jack went on: "Some people may brag about the number of jumps they have. How many jumps you have means nothing. If a jumper pays attention and learns from every jump, he can have more experience and skill than someone with hundreds of jumps who does not learn from his experiences." Jack's overall message was very clear: Hubris is one of the seven deadly sins.

Jack also told us to stay out of the Woodsman Tavern in town. There had been some trouble in the Woodsman Tavern where smokejumpers were a target. Since then, the story of the Woodsman Tavern and **Cliff Marshall** (CJ-46) has been verified to me by several reliable sources, including smokejumper supervisors, and an old-time, local resident and a physician. Otherwise, I would not repeat this story because it sounds like a fantastical, Hollywood movie scrip. I am convinced the story is true.

Cliff Marshall (CJ-46) was hired as a squad-leader in 1946 and became Base Manager in 1947. Before that, Cliff was a Master Sergeant in the Airborne, and one of the few to have three combat jumps over Europe (Sicily, D-Day, and Market Gar-

den). Cliff was also assigned to ground action in the Battle of the Bulge. He was reputedly a nice, gentle, polite fellow. When Cliff became CJ base manager in 1947, he took care of his jumpers like a mother hen. Under Cliff, training was nothing like the army, no harassment, no yelling at new recruits, no abuse. It was all about learning, being smart, and thinking ahead, a tradition that was still alive through the mid-1960s when I left the CJ base.

The Story

During the late 1940s, Cave Junction was an isolated community, far off the beaten path, wild, and with no law enforcement. There was some big logger who patronized the Woodsman Tavern. When the bar was full and crowded, he would tap someone on the shoulder, and when that someone turned around, the big logger would knock him out with a hard right to the jaw and then take his place at the bar (and even finish the victim's drink). Eventually, the unfortunate customer would get up off the floor. Everyone ignored this rude, offensive, and illegal behavior.

Then, this happened to a new, unsuspecting smokejumper, who for his first time was sitting at the bar having a beer. A few days later, it happened to a 2nd unsuspecting smokejumper, innocently having a beer. This was too much for Cliff. He went to the Woodsman Tavern, sat at the bar, and ordered a beer. When tapped on the shoulder, quicker than a snake, Cliff immediately turned and decked the guy, laying him flat out on the floor. The brawl was on. A few minutes later, Cliff walked out of the Tavern, leaving several loggers laying on the floor. No one had managed to land a single punch on Cliff. Did I mention that Cliff had done some professional boxing? Although this story sounds too fantastic to be true, the CJ residents who told this story were all in agreement with the same details.

Cliff Marshall was as tough and quick as anyone, yet Cliff was known as a polite, considerate leader of men who knew how to get the job done. None of the WWII veterans condoned anyone acting tough or boasting. No one was rude to rookies. Acting tough was out of place at all the early smokejumper bases. Smokejumper training was a learning process with a classroom atmosphere at all the smokejumper bases.

Cliff Marshall's crew loved him. When manage-

ment would call Cliff to find out the status of the CJ base, Cliff would be out on a fire. This was very frustrating for the Siskiyou Forest supervisor and the Region 6 fire officer. They wanted Cliff to agree to stop jumping fires. Cliff disagreed. He argued that he needed to jump fires to understand the situations and problems that jumpers were facing. Cliff argued that management should be from the jumpers up, not from top management down. Due to this disagreement, Cliff Marshall and the U.S. Forest Service parted company, July 1953.

From Cave Junction, Cliff went to the Parachute Development Center in El Centro, CA, where a record was set by dropping a 35,000-pound bundle of cargo from a C-130. Cliff worked on the reentry systems for the space program, where he became "Chief Engineer." The point here, Cliff did not become the leader of a major corporate R&D group by acting tough and abusing his employees. He advanced by being polite, ethical, considerate, and having good people-management skills.

Jim Allen (NCSB-46) replaced Cliff as base manager in July 1953. Jim was all man, and at the same time, he was the nicest, most considerate guy in the world. Early on D-Day, Jim Allen landed on Utah Beach as part of the 101st Airborne Division. Later that year, Jim made a combat jump as part of Operation Market Garden. The 101st Airborne Division had seen so much action, that they were sent to Paris for a rest when the "Battle of the Bulge" erupted. Jim was climbing over a fence when a Nazi grenade landed on the ground in front of him. Jim could not decide if it were better to stay high on the fence or to jump back off. He had one second to decide before a large grenade fragment tore a gash and embedded itself in the top of Jim's right leg. His leg was bandaged, leaving the grenade fragment inside, and Jim continued with the battle. He carried that grenade fragment inside his leg for the rest of his life. On the positive side, that metal fragment could be used to forecast the weather because it hurt like Hell just before a rainstorm.

When I arrived on the CJ base, they told me Jim was the nicest, most considerate guy you will ever meet, a correct and true statement. When a jumper needed a disciplinary word (and there were plenty over the years), everyone remarked how Jim remained polite and never raised his voice. He was a more effective leader than any tough-guy, Holly-

wood-type drill sergeant, and Jim did *NOT* tolerate that stuff on the CJ base. Training and conditioning do not have to be unpleasant, and certainly not “brutal.” Many a smokejumper has used Jim Allen as their life role model for how to behave successfully and make decisions in later life.

Ground Pounders Are People Too, Just-Like Us

During our orientation lecture, Jack Harter told us that calling district people “ground pounders” or “gravel agitators” was not only insulting, but it was also ostentatious vanity and arrogance. “Many of those district people have better woodsman’s skills than you, and they can dig fireline and do most things every bit as well as any smokejumper. We are dependent upon the forest districts to call us for fires, and these people you meet there are part of the districts. Treat them well and with respect.”

When hiring new recruits, Jim Allen gave preference to forestry majors and people with woods and/or forest service experience. All the bases back then had about the same mix of different types: short, tall, small, large, hefty, slender. We always had a couple guys who looked like Charles Atlas bodybuilders. Charles Atlas types had no advantage while riding a parachute back to earth. When it came to digging fireline, a Pulaski can move only so much dirt regardless of the muscleman behind it. Many times, I observed that the smaller, slightly built guys dug and cut fireline every bit as fast as the body-building musclemen. When it comes to chopping & cutting, skill is far more important than brute force.

Let Us Face Some Hard Facts

Smokejumping was/is unskilled manual labor. We learned to jump out of airplanes with a week of fire school and three weeks of parachute training. Now, according to Mr. Hogan, full training is “six weeks.” But still, that is quite brief compared to the training required for more skilled professions. The only difference between us and “ground pounders” is that we had an easy, quick ride to the fire, and a great view of the countryside where we could pick out the trails and roads and other helpful features. If we could not find smoke from the air, we did not jump. We did not

have to run around in the woods searching for a smoke, like district personnel often must do.

The one big difference between us and “ground pounders,” is that we received a fun, invigorating, one-minute ride to the ground on a parachute. As soon as a smokejumper hits the ground, he becomes a “ground pounder,” no better, no worse than district personnel. We were fresh when we started work on a fire. District personnel had to go through an ordeal to get there. Not for one moment should any smokejumper think he/she is more precious, or better than a “ground pounder.” Treat district personnel with the respect they deserve.

When I hired on as a smokejumper, the Forest Service had no obligation to employ us during the winter. We knew it was a dead-end job. We knew there was nowhere else to go in this organization. At the end of the season during the 1950s and 1960s, if a jumper did not have another job or school to attend, Jim Allen would find him a job on a district somewhere, generally starting at the bottom of the manual labor force.

That’s why many (most) of us used smokejumping as seasonal work while we went to college during the off-season. That’s why we did not make a career out of smokejumping. We jumped for a few years, then moved on to better paying, more secure careers. I loved every minute of it when I was employed as a smokejumper. It was the best job I ever had, the best part of my life. I wanted to be young and care-free forever, but I knew that was not possible. And like most of my brother jumpers from the 1950s and 1960s, we knew that we had to look ahead and plan for our futures. No one was going to do our planning for us. Back then, there was no welfare, no food stamps, no government benefits of any kind for young, healthy males.

One Last Point:

Everyone who jumped during the 1950s, and some during the early 1960s, was born during the Great Depression. Until WWII, we witnessed our parents finding it tough to find a job and feed a family. We were alive while our parents were living through a great economic upheaval that was consuming the entire world. Those lessons in life have been completely forgotten and lost by the current U.S. population. We were lucky to find work, no less such great employment as smokejumping.

When Jim Allen started hiring “Baby-Boomers” mid-1960s, there was a noticeable change in attitude, work ethic, and self-indulgence. We are now living during an easy age created by the hard work of others in the past. Let us not forget how we got here. “Anyone who does not learn from history, will find themselves repeating history.” 🍄

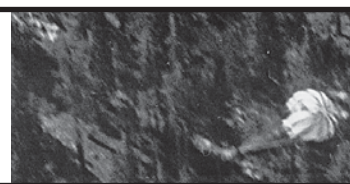
Norm jumped at CJ 1957-61 and 1964. He earned

his Ph.D. in both Physical and Organic Chemistry from Oregon State University. He was an instructor at the University of Michigan, Professor at Illinois State University and Oregon State University, and Chemist and Regulatory Manager for Hewlett-Packard in Corvallis, Oregon. In retirement, he is a Christmas Tree Farmer and a longtime Basketball Official and Evaluator/Trainer of Basketball Officials. (Ed.)



THE JUMP LIST

The Men of 1957



This column is part of the NSA History Preservation Project. All information will be kept in the Smokejumper Archives at Eastern Washington University. The following jumpers have responded to my request for bio information. Many thanks. I have more bios but am only doing NSA members at this time.

John Edwin Parkes (McCall '57)

John was born August 9, 1935, on a houseboat on the St. Johns River in Jacksonville, Florida, where he grew up. At age 17, he hitchhiked alone from Jacksonville throughout the U.S. to Vancouver, Canada, and returned. At age 18, he joined the U.S. Army Airborne and served with the 508th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. Later he served in the 101st Airborne Division.

Then John rookieed at McCall where he jumped 1957-61. He received the coveted gold wings for having made more than 50 fire jumps and is listed

on the bronze plaque at McCall. He made 66 parachute jumps with the smokejumpers and 24 with the paratroopers, making 90 parachute jumps, having just turned 26. Being from Florida, the smokejumpers nicknamed him “Gator” and listed this on his fire cache bin.

John attended the University of Florida and subsequently attended and graduated from the University of Idaho (BS, Geological Engineering), the University of Iowa (MS, Hydraulics and Mechanics Engineering), and the Netherlands University at Delft (MS, Sanitary Engineering).

In his early years, he looked for gold in the United States, Mexico and Canada. He dredged gold in streams in California, and panned gold in streams in Colorado, Idaho, and the Yukon. In these years, he also explored the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon on a rubber raft, which included running Lava Falls, a Class 7 rapids (the only one in the U.S.).

John liked to climb mountains. He climbed mountains in Mexico, the U.S., Nicaragua and Iran. He climbed Kings Peak, the highest point in Utah, Mount Katahdin, highest point in Maine, and Mount Damavand, highest point in Iran. He climbed a smoking volcano (Mt Merapi) in Indonesia and another in Nicaragua.

In his professional career, he worked as a Civil Engineer/Water Resources Engineer in the western and eastern United States and nine foreign countries (Nicaragua, Indonesia, Iran, Yemen, Philippines, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Sudan).

Under the Shah's National Water Program, as the hydrogeologist engineer, he developed the safe yield for over 150 groundwater basins in Iran. As team leader, developed over 125 municipal water supply systems in the Philippines. In Maryland, as the Engineer of Record, did the Civil Engineering design and construction management for the Rocky Gap Golf Course,

Hotel, Conference Center and Casino.

In his later years, he has tried his hand at writing. Under the writer's name JOHN EDWIN PARKES, he has completed four novels, 1) *The Gold and the Mountain*, 2) *Three Maidens and Stanley Park*, 3) *Annie of Houseboat Chinquapin*, and 4) *The Old Hobo and Eight Other Short Stories*. In addition, he has in final draft a two-act stage play, *The Graduate*, and a novel, *Gallagher*.

Norman E. "Norm" Pawlowski (Cave Junction '57)

Norm was born August 22, 1938, in Lynnwood, California, and grew up in Southern Oregon "in the wilds of Applegate-Rush-Jacksonville area." He graduated from Jacksonville HS in 1957 and continued his education at Southern Oregon College where he earned a bachelor's in Math-Science in 1961. Norm then earned his Ph.D. in Physical-Organic Chemistry from Oregon State University in 1965. He jumped at Cave Junction 1957-61 and 1964 before starting his career.

Work Career: Instructor, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1965-66

Assistant Professor, Illinois State University, Bloomington, 1966-68

Associate Professor, Oregon State University, Corvallis, 1968-85

Hewlett-Packard, chemist and Regulatory Manager, Corvallis, OR,

Gene Tool, Philomath, Or-

egon, making anti-sense genes, 2000-02

Retirement: Christmas Tree Farmer, Basketball Referee, Monmouth, Oregon. "The Highlight of my life was smoke-jumping, more fun than anything."

Robert Eldon Reid (Missoula '57)

Bob was born September 12, 1937, in Knoxville, Tennessee, and moved often while growing up. "In so many places I don't remember them all. I attended 12 schools before graduating from Bremen HS, Bremen, Georgia, in 1955." He then earned a bachelor's in Zoology from the University of Georgia in 1960, graduated from the Air Command and Staff College in 1973, and earned a master's in Public Administration from Troy, Alabama, in 1977.

Bob was a career USAF officer March 1961-87.

Work career: Air Force Navigator, Combat Control Officer, Transportation Squadron Commander, NATO Logistician.

Retirement: Retired from USAF in 1987, after 26 years, 3 months, 10 days and currently lives in Niceville, Florida. He jumped at Missoula 1957, 59, 60 and at Redding in 1995.

Personal comments: Grew up on a hard scrabble farm in rural NW Georgia. My dad, a bomber pilot during the war, was born there and came back to raise our family. He'd been a forester for Tennessee Valley Authority before the war. Tried to return to TVA Forestry but

didn't care for the post-war bureaucracy and opted to restore the family farm that had fallen into disrepair while he was gone. He died of sudden heart attack when I was eighteen and a freshman at UGA.

Oldest of three boys, I was left without strong parental guidance and pretty much followed my instincts. Fellow Georgia Forestry freshman, **Ken Purcell** (MSO-57) and I applied for employment "out west" with USFS the following summer and hitchhiked to Idaho in June 1956. I went to Riggins, Ken to Grangeville, and we had no contact until time to return to college. But we'd both had a similar odd experience. We had hauled fire-packs uphill for miles to small lightning strikes, only to find a couple guys had already lined the fires and were lounging in the shade. We learned these were "smokejumpers," and this sure looked like the job for us!

We both applied and were accepted the next year. Hitchhiked back to Missoula as rookies in 1957. Ken and I made our first fire jump together, a six-manner in the Selway. Our jump plane was the Ford Trimotor with Bob Johnson at the controls. Can't find my jump logs but think I got 3 or 4 fire jumps and one rescue jump that first year.

Ronald H. Roberts (North Cascades '57)

Ron was born February 8, 1934, in Okanogan, Washington. "We lived in Omak at the

time and then moved to Seattle where I graduated from Lincoln H.S. in 1953.” Ron was drafted into the Army and went through Airborne training. He spent two years in the 82nd Airborne and made the All-Army Rifle Team in 1955. “I made the all army team and shot in national marches in the Master Class and got a second and third place.” He attended Wenatchee Valley College 1957-58 on the G.I. Bill where he played on the football and basketball teams. Ron jumped at NCSB 1957-58. Ron was the manager for a large floor covering wholesaler in Spokane for 32 years before retiring at age 58.

“We bought a 97-acre ranch north of Deer Park, Washington, in 1967. We lived there for 49 years before moving to Deer Park Golf Club.” He and his wife, Vicki, have been married for 64 years (2022).

Warren Edward “Swabie” Schwab (North Cascades ’57)

Warren was born August 20, 1935, in Roslyn, Washington, where he was raised and graduated from Cle Elum H.S. in 1935. He then attended Wenatchee Valley College, Central Washington University, and graduated from the University of Washington in 1962 with a degree in Business Administration. Swabie then served in the Navy 1953-56 on the submarine USS Trigger. He jumped at NCSB 1957 and 1959.

Swabie went to work in the Aerospace industry on the Boeing Minuteman missile pro-

gram 1962-66, then the Rocket Research Company 1967-75 where he was on the Mars Viking Lander Program credited with the first Mars landing. He was self-employed 1975-85 establishing a furniture store before returning to Rocket Research until 1998 when he retired. Swabie is currently living in Roslyn, Washington.

Randolph “Toby” Scott (McCall ’57)

Toby was born October 17, 1937, in San Antonio, Texas and grew up in Nix just 11 miles west of Lampasas where he graduated from high school.

He jumped at McCall 1957-58 and Idaho City 1959-60. Toby was in the Army National Guard 1960-66.

“I worked for Intermountain Aviation from February 1962 to September 1964 as aerial cargo specialist, where we did research and development work on cargo and personnel parachutes and delivery systems. We developed the reefed parachute system which was dropped at a high altitude and opened at 500 feet to avoid ground fire. We also developed the Fulton Skyhook system on the B-17 which we used successfully on Operation Coldfeet in 1962. Forty-seven years later at CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia, we received the Agency Seal Medal for this operation.

“While working at Intermountain, I helped train Tibetans at Camp Hale, Colorado, and Vietnamese at Long Thanh, South Vietnam. I made 17 jumps in Vietnam, four of them

night jumps. While at Marana, we dropped a 3,000 lb. bundle from a C-46 (100-ft. chute). I think that’s the only time that has ever been done. We did it twice.

“I hooked logs on a skidding jammer in Montana for a couple years, worked as a kicker for Continental Air Services in Laos on C-46s and the Lockheed 382. Also worked five and a half years for Alaska Barge and Transport in South Vietnam. I was self-employed in Texas from 1972-95 before buying a ranch in Montana in 1988. I built my cabin in 1995 and never looked back. Enjoyed every damn bit of it.”

Ronald R. Stoops (Missoula ’57)

Ron was born November 19, 1936, in Los Angeles, California, where he grew up and graduated from Covina High School in 1954. He attended Mt. San Antonio Jr. College before graduating from the University of Montana in 1959 with a degree in Forestry. Ron did post-graduate studies at George Washington University. He entered the Navy flight training program in 1960 and was designated a Naval Aviator in October 1961. His first tour of duty was on the USS Enterprise flying the A-4 Skyhawk. Ron then went to China Lake, California, where he participated in the initial development of the air-to-ground tactics for the Phantom aircraft. In April 1969 he reported to NAS at Miramar, California, and completed two deployments on

the USS Constellation and the USS Enterprise.

In 1975 Capt. Stoops was Executive Officer and, subsequently, Commanding Officer with the "Red Rippers" on the USS Forrestal. In May 1984 Ron reported to Commander Carrier Group Four as Operations Officer and served as Chief of Staff to the Commander Naval Air Force, Atlantic Fleet. He flew over 200 combat missions in Vietnam, logged over 4,800 flight hours, and had more than 900 carrier landings. Among his military awards are the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, and eleven Air Medals. Ron jumped at Missoula 1957-58 and is currently (2022) living in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Kenneth E. Wilder (McCall '57)

Ken was born October 27, 1935, and grew up in Middleton, Idaho, where he graduated from high school in 1953. He then earned his bachelor's in Business Management from the University of Idaho in 1963. Ken served in the Navy 1953-56 as an aviation electrician before jumping at McCall 1957-62. He worked for two corporations as chief accountant before opening his own business as a tax accountant in 1973. Ken is not retired and still in business at age 86.

He currently lives in Camden, Alabama, where he has been since 1965. Ken was mayor for 12 years and on the city council for another 12 years. He jumped on the Silver City Crew

in 1960. "We had a great time being with a group of people that enjoyed beer and having fun.

"Yes, the danger was there, but we didn't know it. It is sad that so many have gone on. Just a few left in the rookie class of 1957. I think that we all paid our dues. Most jumpers turned out to be great Americans with a sense of duty and love of country."

Donald D. Wilson (McCall '57)

Don was born May 14, 1936, in Pocatello, Idaho, lived in Portland, Oregon, and moved to Middleton, Idaho, in 1945 where he graduated from high school in 1954. He went to what is now Boise State University for two years, transferred to the University of Idaho where he received his bachelor's in Forest Management in 1958. Don was in the USAF Reserve for six years.

He spent his summers while in college working for the USFS as a Lookout, trail crew, packer, and fire dispatcher. Don jumped at McCall during the 1957-58 seasons before being called to active duty in the USAF. In 1960 he worked as a Forester on the Hornet R.D., Council, Idaho, and was then transferred to the Weiser R.D. as the Assn't District Ranger. In 1962 he was assigned to the Regional Office in San Francisco, California. From there to 1983, he worked in R-10 (Alaska), the national office in D.C., R-4 Ogden, Utah, and finished his career as Director of Personnel

for R-2 in Colorado.

Don retired in 1983, sold Real Estate, and was a Manager at Sears finally retiring in 1992. "Since then, I have been a home builder, airplane builder and general airport bum. After 50 years of flying, I sold my last airplane and now fish, travel in an R.V., and take care of family. After all of this, my summers as a smokejumper are still the highlight of my Forest Service years." Don lives in Grants Pass, Oregon.

Charles W. "Chuck" Sundstrom (Missoula '57)

Chuck was born December 18, 1936, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, grew up there, and graduated from Olney H.S. in 1954. He then moved to Missoula to attend the University of Montana where he obtained degrees in Wildlife Technology (1959) and Forestry (1963). Chuck spent six years in the National Guard (1960-65). He jumped at Missoula 1957-58 and West Yellowstone in 1959 where he assisted during the Yellowstone Earthquake that year.

Chuck had an extensive 40-year career with the USFS which included Research Biologist Wyoming Fish and Game, Bridger NF, Biologist Toiyabe NF, John Day NF, Beaverhead NF, and RO Juneau, Alaska. He spent a stint on the Deer Lodge NF before finishing his career as the R-1 Fire Cache Manager in Missoula. Chuck retired in 1994 and moved to Petty Creek, Montana, where he lives now. 🌲



SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

Wildfire Smoke Affects East and Midwest— Great! About Time!

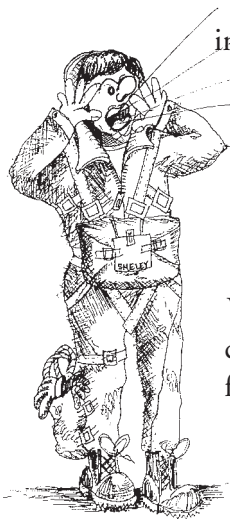
I LIVE IN Chico, California, 70 miles south of Redding. As I have stated in past editorials, we have lost over 102 people in wildfires in the past four years. To the west, the Mendocino N.F. has burned over a million acres. To the east, we have burned another million acres and a few towns in the Dixie Fire. I do not take well to the current USFS "Managed Fire" strategy. They "managed" to kill 16 people at Berry Creek a couple years ago.

I have been beating the drum echoing the current science saying that wildfire smoke is much more dangerous than the cigarette smoke which has killed thousands over the years. We have universities and highly educated individuals telling us that

wildfire smoke will kill thousands in years to come. However, do you ever see this in the fire plan of USFS fires as they continue to "manage" fires?

Simply put, by letting fires burn, many people will be killed down the line. The USFS currently fights fires with a "risk adverse" attitude. Heaven forbid that we lose a firefighter on the job. Let's not work at night, let's forget quick initial attack. Get the crews on the line by 1000 and get them into camp by 1800 for dinner. Don't spike out crews where they can be on the line 24 hours a day. Apparently, no one reads current science and the effects that wildfire smoke has on the population of the area under smoke. Let's be "risk adverse" with our firefighters but forget the health and risk of the citizens who are paying our salary.

I get a number of requests for interviews from East Coast TV and radio stations concerning wildfire in the western U.S. Early on I see that they have no clue as to what we are experiencing in the West. I tell them that, as far as the East Coast is concerned, we, in the West, might as well be



in China.

Now that smoke from the Canadian fires has been hitting the East Coast, there is this sudden concern about wildfire smoke. I'm glad. I hope that Washington, D.C. will be covered with wildfire smoke for the whole summer. I

hope that the workers in the USFS offices in D.C. must wear N-95 masks all summer. Now they get a taste of what we, in Northern California, have been experiencing for the past years. At times, we are under unhealthy air quality for weeks at a time. Wow, these "managed fires" are really clearing our fuel load. We spend well over \$5 billion a year on wildfire.

A current smokejumper relayed a comment from the USFS personnel on a district where a fire was "managed." "I'm glad this is burning, and I won't have to deal with it before I retire."

This is what you as taxpayers are funding. Forget the days when initial attack was our objective. What difference does it make if you are off the ground in 10 minutes when the request comes in three days after the start of the fire?

From the *New York Times*: "Smoke particulates from wildfires could lead to 4,000 to 9,000 premature deaths

and cost \$36 to \$82 **billion** per year in the United States, according to new research by the University of Houston and Cornell University. We think of automobile tailpipes and factory emissions polluting our air, said Liver Gao, Cornell's Howard Simpson Professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, an author on the study. We don't necessarily think about air pollution from natural sources like wildfires.

"Wildfires release fine particulate matter – called PM2.5, which are tiny particles in the air that consist of inhalable organic compounds, aerosols and metals that are 2.5 microns or less. Epidemiological studies suggested that exposure to wildfire related PM2.5 was positively associated with mortality and some common respiratory diseases.

"Los Angeles – downwind from fires in the western U.S. – may see 119 premature deaths annually, and \$1.07 billion in financial burden, according to the new model the study's authors created. Downwind from southern U.S. fires, Atlanta could have 76 premature deaths annually with \$690 million in economic fallout, while Houston, estimated to have 65 premature deaths attributable to fire-induced particulate matter, may see \$580 million in economic fallout.

"In the model, the researchers estimated the New York City metropolitan area would incur 86 premature deaths resulting from similar events and

see \$780 million in associated economic costs.

"Thick smoke from the seemingly endless Canadian wildfires has again blanketed large swaths of the United States, prompting warnings for residents to stay indoors with few signs of any immediate respite. Air quality: Chicago-Very Unhealthy, Detroit-Very Unhealthy, Pittsburg—Very unhealthy."

Wow, after years of the USFS "managed fire" policy, the people on the East Coast get to be welcomed into the game. I love it. At no time did the western governors and our representatives in Congress seem to give a s--- as to what was happening to us in the West.

I really hope that Washington, D.C., and anywhere there are USFS higher ups, experience a summer of wildfire smoke. Their kids need to experience a season where they have athletic contests cancelled due to wildfire smoke.

Our local congressman lives near Chico. But does he care about his constituents? 102 killed in the past four years. Just another statistic?

I know that I am pushing a ball up a hill. Common sense will tell you that quick initial attack will reduce wildfires and the stress put on our fire-fighter over a long fire season. If you can put out a fire at a couple acres, why let it burn and involve a fire which costs millions and over a thousand firefighters? Management like this would not succeed in the business world. But it goes on

and on at the USFS level. An open check book. The public has little knowledge about wildfire. They buy what is given to them by the USFS.

Bring it on! More wildfire smoke from Canada. No, a poor wish on my part. However, after people in D.C. start experiencing what we have been dealing with in the West, maybe at some point, they will become concerned. But the only way those in higher fire management are going to realize what a dilemma we are facing, is to experience what is commonplace with us in the West.

Our hope for change—little and next to none. The USFS will continue to "manage" fires increasing the acreage burned. More pollution will be moved into the atmosphere, at the expense of our citizens and those who will die in 10-20 years. Those killed by wildfire smoke pollution will not be recorded in the fire report. They will have done a "risk adverse" wildfire with little accountability to those citizens who will die in the next ten years.

The USFS, will continue to burn millions of acres each year. They won't listen to those academics who know that the smoke from wildfires will kill thousands down the line. Use the Ostrich approach—head in the sand with little or no vision on what is happening to those of us in the West.

I'm glad that I had a dual career—teacher/coach, and wildland firefighter. At least I was accountable to the taxpayer as a teacher. 🐢

Honoring the Mann Gulch Smokejumpers on the 75th Anniversary

by Mike Bina (Missoula '68)

WARNING: Be fully forewarned. At the end of this article, you will be asked to volunteer to honor, in a special way, the smokejumpers who died on August 5, 1949, in the line of duty on the Mann Gulch Fire.

Norman Maclean, in his book *Young Men and Fire* wrote, “The Mann Gulch smokejumpers were young and did not leave much behind them and need someone to remember them.”

Bob Sallee (MSO-49), one of three survivors of Mann Gulch Fire, aptly said at the Mann Gulch 70th Anniversary memorial:

It is time to rededicate ourselves to the memory of these fine young men and the lesson they best taught us, that wildfires are, and always will be, dangerous and we must respect its potential to put a firefighter in harm's way. Life is precious and for some very short.

When I read Norman Maclean's book *Young Men and Fire*, I noted that **Silas Raymond Thompson** (MSO-48), one of the 13 Mann Gulch fatalities, was from Charlotte, North Carolina, a city in which I was living. I discovered that his grave was only eight miles from my home and that I had driven past the cemetery thousands of times. I Googled “Silas Raymond Thompson” and found a wonderful 54-minute video on his life, entitled *Death at Mann Gulch*, which I highly recommend you watch.

Watching the video, I was “blown away” to discover that Raymond went to the same elementary school in Charlotte where I was teaching blind students part-time. Even more amazing was that his home was only three houses north of the school. I recognized his home immediately in the video as I walked past it many times teaching my blind students to

travel independently in the neighborhood.

When I visited his grave, I experienced many emotions that are near impossible to describe. I felt a distinct kinship to him being a fellow smokejumper. While we both were trained in Missoula 19 years apart, we very likely did our training jumps at Nine Mile and perhaps, after work hours, frequented the same popular Missoula “watering holes” in search of young Missoula co-eds. I am sure he was more successful than me.

I found it coincidental that we walked the same Eastover Elementary School hallways. We also shared the commonality that we were both U.S. Army Airborne soldiers, with Raymond being Airborne trained first and then a smokejumper and I, first a smokejumper and then Army Airborne. He no doubt did those long Airborne training runs, as I did, singing the cadence, “I want to be an Airborne Ranger, I want to live the life of danger, all the way, Airborne,” and no doubt also did 12,007 pushups.

Even though we had many similar experiences and commonalities, *what really hit me hard was how we differed*. After his fate at Mann Gulch, he returned home but was buried there at age 21. Yet, I was privileged and fortunate to go on with my life. He, unlike me, never married, had children and a career, traveled, or enjoyed a full life, including having the delight of grandchildren. That made me sad for him and his family. As I stood at his grave site, it struck me— “This could have been me.”

Wayne Williams (MSO '77) did a superb job organizing the 50th Mann Gulch Anniversary Memorial. Wayne put me in touch with Raymond's niece and nephew, who were born after Raymond died. They individually shared with me how devastating Raymond's untimely death was on their family. They described how Raymond's parents' lives were shaken, and that his mother and father never recovered from the tragedy of

losing a son at such a young age.

Despite the passage of 73 years, Raymond's death and his loss were very much fresh on their minds. They both talked fondly of "Uncle Raymond" and his love of "all things outdoors." He loved hunting, trapping, fishing, and how perfectly smokejumping aligned with his love of adventure and fit his lifestyle interests. They also talked about his poetry that described his smokejumping experience. Talking with Raymond's niece and nephew, it was apparent that his loss will forever be felt, and the deep wound will never fully heal. Yet, on the other hand, the positive memories of jumpers like Raymond are forever safeguarded and passed down to the generations that follow.

I was driven to learn more about Raymond, who went by his middle name. One day after school, I knocked on the door of the house in which he grew up. I introduced myself to a young 35-year-old woman who answered the door. In 25 words, I reassured her that I was not selling "home or car warranties" or Fuller Brushes but was a teacher at the nearby elementary school. I explained that the house she recently purchased was the former home of a smokejumper who died in the Mann Gulch Fire in 1949. She smiled and said that the previous owner shared with them this legendary story.

Explaining that I was a former smokejumper, I was immediately invited into her home. I entered the home feeling that perhaps I shouldn't be intruding, but my hostess was most welcoming and fully understood my intent. I shared with her that Raymond's funeral service uncharacteristically was in the home's large backyard versus the family's church. My hostess insisted that we go in the backyard. As I stood there, I envisioned the extreme sadness of the family and that Raymond, the smokejumper, literally returned home before his burial in a nearby cemetery.

His grave, in a beautiful Charlotte cemetery, was marked by a large granite tombstone. I paid my respects, bowed my head, and tried to "put my feet in the family's shoes" processing their loss. While I knew that buried in the grave was a smokejumper, there was no indication of his being one, or that he died in the line of duty. As I walked back to my car, my eyes were drawn to numerous six-to-eight-inch bronze American Legion

or Veteran of Foreign War grave markers for U.S. military veterans.

In sharing this experience with other smokejumpers, the idea was generated that for the 75th Anniversary, an NSA member or members would visit the individual grave site of each of the 13 Mann Gulch jumpers throughout the United States on August 5, 2024. The purpose would be to pay respects by marking their graves, supporting the families, and communicate to them "we remember."

The idea evolved to include inviting families of each jumper and developing a short memorial program. The program would include a written handout detailing the historical account of the fire, a verbal tribute to the individual smokejumper, the laying of a wreath, and a presentation of a brass memorial grave marker, if the local cemetery allows such.

Fred Cooper (NCSB-62), who serves on the NSA board of directors, is a member of the Helena National Forest 75th Anniversary Mann Gulch Memorial Committee. Fred took the proposed idea to the organizing committee, and they approved the idea as a component part of the anniversary activities. The proposal was also taken to the NSA Board of Directors, and they approved the initiative.

The Helena-Lewis and Clark NF plans to have Ms. Montana, the plane that dropped the Mann Gulch jumpers, do a fly over and drop wreaths. The NSA has agreed to fund replacing the grave markers placed at Mann Gulch. While the Helena/LC NF is planning many other local public events as part of their memorial activities in and around Helena, this NSA project reaches out throughout the United States to the families in their home communities where the Mann Gulch fatalities are buried.

Two companies were asked to design a grave site marker like the markers that the American Legion and VFW places on the graves of U.S. military veterans who died in the line of duty or served in a branch of the U.S. military.

The cost of each marker is \$93 plus shipping. The NSA Grants Committee solicited funding for this project. **Milt Fredenberg** (MSO -67) graciously made a donation to fund the 13 markers for the Mann Gulch jumpers, including the other

20 jumpers detailed in **Chuck Sheley's** (CJ-59) "Smokejumpers who have been Killed in the Line of Duty" website article.

The NSA later, in due course and with time and volunteer availability, plans to expand the reach of this Phase I Mann Gulch proposal. Phase II would be to recognize the other 20 smokejumpers who have died in the line of duty on other fires. Phase III would allow smokejumpers or their families to purchase these markers to recognize smokejumper service.

The markers can be attached onto a ground stake or to a cemetery headstone or footstone memorial. If the cemetery doesn't allow these placements, the committee will abide by their rule. In this case, the family will be offered the marker for them to decide if they wish to place it in another meaningful memorial location.

Larry Lufkin (CJ-63) provided the committee a spreadsheet of the names of NSA members who reside in or live near the cities where the Mann Gulch jumpers are buried. The committee will be contacting these jumpers and ask that they visit the graves on or about August 5, 2024.

The Mann Gulch jumpers, their ages, hometown, and the cemetery in which they are buried follow:

- **Robert J. Bennett**, 22, Maplewood Cemetery, Paris, Tennessee
- **Eldon E. Diettert**, 19, who died on his birthday, from Moscow, Idaho, buried in Missoula Cemetery, Missoula, MT
- **James O. Harrison**, 20, from Missoula, buried in St. Mary's Cemetery, Missoula, MT
- **William J. Hellman**, 24, from Kalispell, Montana, buried in C.E. Conrad Memorial Cemetery, Kalispell, MT
- **Philip R. McVey**, 22, from Babb, Montana, buried in Ronan Cemetery, Ronan, MT
- **David R. Navon**, 28, from Modesto, California, buried in Lakewood Memorial Park, Hughson, California
- **Leonard L. Piper**, 23, from Blairsville, Pennsylvania, buried in Bethel Cemetery, Mansfield, Pennsylvania
- **Stanley J. Reba**, from Brooklyn, New York, buried in Long Island National Cem-

etry, East Farmingdale, New York

- **Marvin L. "Dick" Sherman**, 21, from Missoula, Montana, buried in Lone Pine Cemetery, Darby, Montana
- **Joseph B. Sylvia**, 24, from Plymouth, Massachusetts, buried in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Plymouth, Massachusetts
- **Henry J. Thol Jr.**, 19, from Kalispell, Montana, C.E. Conrad Memorial Cemetery, Kalispell, Montana
- **Newton R. Thompson**, 23, from Alhambra, California, buried in San Gabriel Cemetery, San Gabriel, California
- **Silas Raymond Thompson**, 21, from Charlotte, North Carolina, buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Charlotte, North Carolina

Millie Heister of Kalispell, who is sister of Mann Gulch smokejumper William Hellman, after reading the August 5, 1999, feature story in the Daily Inter Lake newspaper about the 70th anniversary of the Mann Gulch wildfire felt grateful that the 13 young men who died that day were not being forgotten. The article reported that "her love for her long-dead brother remains palpable." Mille recalled "This was a really hard time for my family. I want people to know Willie was a good father, a good husband, and a wonderful brother.

A committee will develop a written brochure of the Mann Gulch tragedy, invite family members, provide funding for the flowers, and send the grave markers to the smokejumpers who volunteer to visit the graves. The local and national media will be invited to do feature stories on Mann Gulch jumpers buried across the United States. In addition, Chuck Sheley will publish photos of each of the grave visitations in *Smokejumper* magazine.

As former NSA President **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) said, "As 'Keepers of the Flame,' we in the NSA must forever honor and remember the loss of our fellow jumpers whose lives were ended short in the line of duty protecting our natural resources. We must have 'long memories.'"

If you live in or near any of these cities and are interested in representing the National Smokejumper Association by visiting the gravesites to pay respects on or about August 5, 2024, please email or call Mike Bina at beanuh1@yahoo.com or 704.905.3399. 📧



Mann Gulch Casualties

August 5, 1949



David R. Navon



Robert J. Bennett



Leonard L. Piper



Silas R. Thompson, Jr.



Henry J. Thol, Jr.



Phillip R. McVey



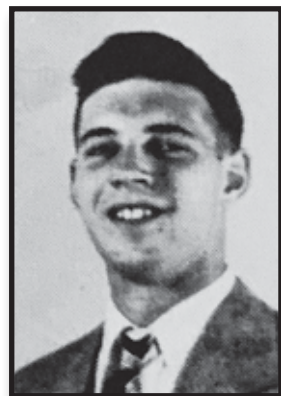
Newton R. Thompson



William J. Hellman



Stanley J. Reba



Eldon E. Diettert



James O. Harrison



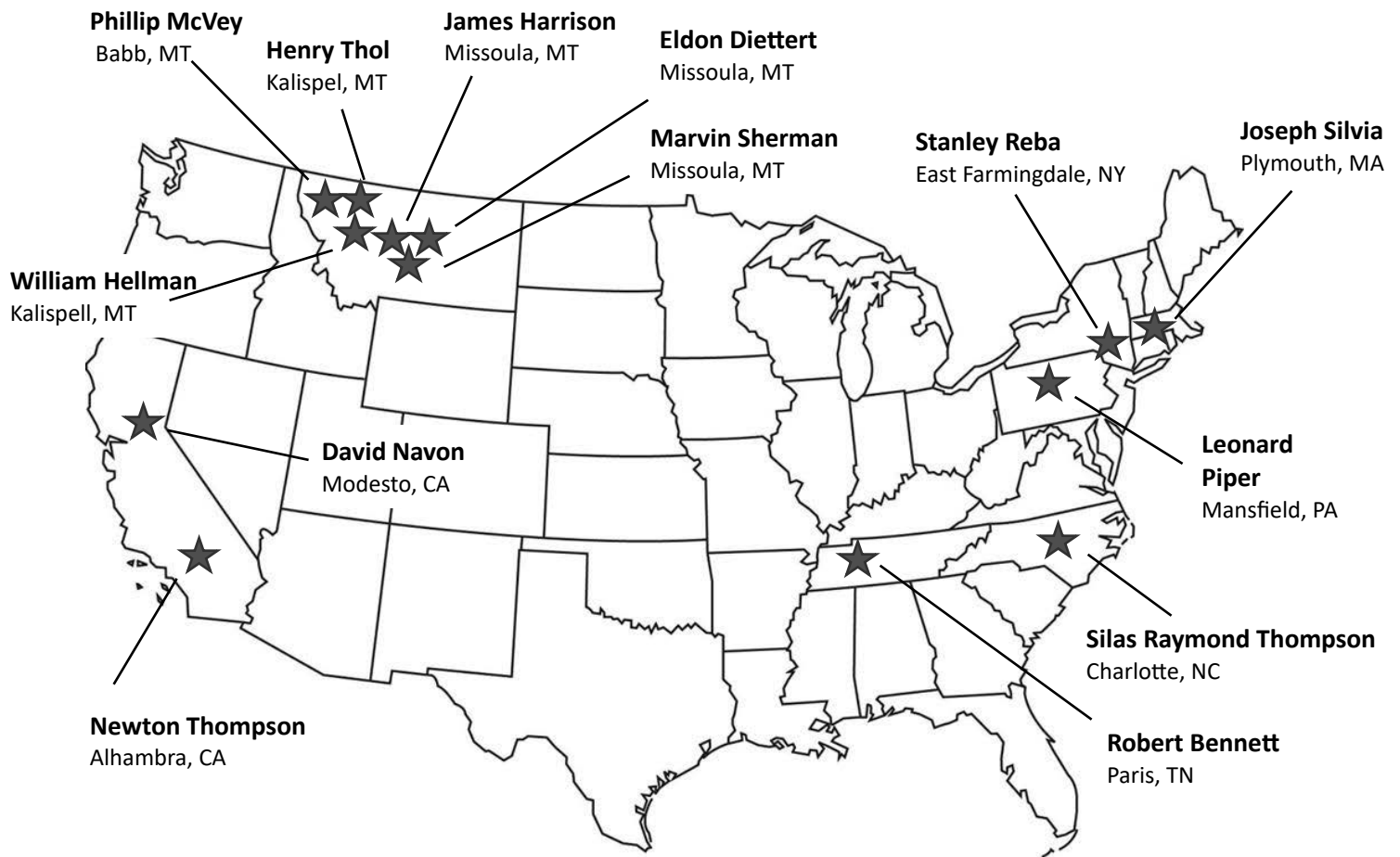
Marvin L. Sherman



Joseph B. Sylvia

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

MANN GULCH SMOKEJUMPER HOMETOWNS



The map shows that while this tragedy occurred near Helena, its national impact was far reaching. Six jumpers were from Montana, but a majority of them came from (and returned) to the southeast, northeast, and the southwest of the United States.

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

Mr. Larry Looney Was My 7th Grade Teacher

by Ron Fritsch (Missoula '68)

In 1957 Larry and Arma Looney interviewed and accepted their first teaching positions for the Edwall School District. Edwall is located in Lincoln County, 35 miles southwest of Spokane, Washington, in the middle of wheat country. Larry graduated from University of Idaho that spring. The Edwall School consisted of four classrooms, grades 1 through 8. Each of these classrooms had two grades. Mr. and Mrs. Looney accounted for one half the faculty for the Edwall School District. Arma taught 1st and 2nd grade and Larry taught 7th and 8th grade. They were a welcomed addition to the Edwall community. They had one daughter, Christy, at that time. Later the family grew with the addition of Lana Rae, Alisa, and Stacy. The school district provided apartment housing for teachers near the school. The school is now called Christian Heritage School (K-12) with an addition of a high school building. Students come from a 40-mile radius to attend classes.

I was in Mr. Looney's 7th grade class during the 1959-1960 school year. He made learning fun and spontaneous. There were seventeen 7th and 8th graders in his classroom. We found out early, as a new teacher and principal, that he had an interesting job as a smokejumper with the USFS during the summer months. The first year he jumped (1954) out of a base in Idaho City, Idaho. He later transferred to the McCall Smokejumper Base 100 miles north of Boise, Idaho.

I remember some of his stories about smokejumper training and fire jumps Larry made or witnessed. One story was about a two-man fire jump made in the early evening hours. The jumpers looked for their cargo, chute, and fire tools that had been dropped separately from the fire that evening. They had to wait for morning light to find the gear after spending a cold, hungry and sleepless night in the wilderness. Another story he related was the time a jumper got too close to his

jump partner and landed on top of his chute. He skimmed the top of his fellow jumper's canopy and slid off the side of the chute. The jumper below could see his partner's boot prints and indentations in his canopy. It happened so quickly there wasn't even time to be scared.

We learned new terms about parachutes and malfunctions—complete parachute inversion, Mae West, and panel blow outs. He told us about protective equipment jumpers used while jumping and the seven-mile pack out trips with 100 pounds of smokejumper gear and fire tools carried out in a pack. Larry would incorporate some of the stories with other aspects of fire detection and suppression with classroom material. An example of this was teaching a geometry principle of triangulation and use stories how fire lookout tower staff in two towers could pinpoint fire location by using an azimuth with 360-degree fire finder instruments. He read "Lookout Tower" by Ruth Kingsberry about a brother and sister adventures on a tower on Stamped Pass in the Cascades to the class. We practiced PLF (Parachute Landing Falls) in the gym. Larry would tell us why it was important to distribute your weight when landing or falling. He demonstrated this to the class. Some of the class advanced to jumping and landing from the 3-ft high stage in the gym.

Mr. Looney brought his personal black and white TV to school for the class to watch educational programming. Public TV or Radio was not available at that time. One of the commercial TV stations in Spokane offered German language for beginners. Both the 7th and 8th graders took this class together. This was a spontaneous and innovative idea Larry had. The classes enjoyed learning German this way.

The stories and excitement of Mr. Looney's smokejumper adventures got all around the school. My 3rd grade brother, Ted, and his classmate Bill Moos (yes, the same Bill Moos that later



Larry and Arma Looney. (Courtesy Arma Looney)

became an athletic director for several universities) decided to make their own parachute out of gunny sacks (burlap) and bailing twine. They used a shoe box as a deployment bag and stuffed the gunny sack (canopy) in the box. The top of the box served as the pack tray with twine (shroud line) neatly placed on top. They brought their chutes to school to be tested out on the school yard swing and slide. They used the swing as the jump ship. They swung as high as possible and jumped out and threw the “parachute” out at the same time. The only problem was that the chute hit the ground before they did. They then tried another jump platform, this time it was the 8-foot-high slide. This time the chute hit the ground at the same time the jumpers did. Larry had been observing this from a distance and called the boys over to him. Ted and Bill thought they were in big trouble. Larry said, “You boys need more twine on those chutes to make them more stable and make them look like a real parachute.” Ted and Bill both breathed a sigh of relief, but

their chutes were not seen in the school yard again.

Larry was also a coach and bus driver for the school. He coached the 7th and 8th grade flag football team. We barely had enough boys to make up an eight-man team. I recall one game we played at a Catholic school in Sprague. The opponents had a couple good-sized guys on their team. It became apparent shortly after the game started that we were getting (literally) crushed. Our guys were getting knocked around pretty hard. Coach Looney saw enough and was about to load up the Edwall Broncos and head for home at the end of the first quarter. He first went over on the other side of the field and had a meeting with the Sprague coach. I don’t know what was said, but we resumed the game without further injury. I don’t remember which team won that game.

There was a carnival at the Edwall School. Mr. Looney thought this would be a good opportunity for the carnival crowd and community to witness a live parachute jump into a stubble field next to

the school. This was something a lot of the Edwall folks had not seen before. Larry hired Jack Mann, a farmer/pilot to fly him in his single-engine aircraft over the school and field to jump and entertain the carnival goers. The carnival was going strong when the participants heard a plane circling overhead. Everyone went outside to see what was going on. Shortly after that, drift streamers started flying from the plane to see which way the wind was blowing. The kids raced out to catch the streamers in the stubble field. The parents and adults could see what was going on and started yelling from the playground. "You kids get back here. Mr. Looney is about to jump. You'll get crushed, get out of the way." Mr. Looney exited the aircraft and steered the chute away from the crowd. As soon as he landed, he was greeted by several kids. No one was squashed.

Our class went on a memorable field trip in the spring of 1960. We drove down to Lewiston, Idaho, to tour the Potlatch sawmill. We stopped at the top of the Lewiston grade. The thing that really stuck out in my mind about that trip was the bird's-eye view of the Lewiston / Clarkston

Valley from the top of the grade. Larry told stories of his Lewiston area memories as a boy. He told of the geography of the area. The old road going into Lewiston drops 2000 ft in elevation and has 64 switchbacks (corners) in 7.3 miles. You cross the Clearwater River before entering Lewiston. Larry and his brother Ray drove to the top of the grade when they were in high school. Larry bet his brother a Coke that he could beat him to the bottom of the grade on foot going straight down the hill through gullies and trails, while his brother drove the car down the winding grade. Mr. Looney said he waited 10 minutes at the bottom of the hill before Ray arrived in the vehicle. I remember those stories at the top of the grade more than the visit to the Potlatch Mill.

My wife, Elizabeth, and I met Larry and Arma the summer of 2009 for breakfast at Hunter's Restaurant in Post Falls, Idaho. We had a great visit and enjoyed our meal together. They were headed for Portland, Oregon, for some medical tests for Larry. My 7th grade was one of the best school years I remember as a kid because I had Mr. Looney as a teacher, a great teacher. 🙏

Jerry Ogawa—Breakfast in Fairbanks

by Mike Neilson (McCall '73)

In June of my "Ned" year of '73 in McCall, I was on the booster crew with Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67) called to Alaska. When we landed at Fairbanks, we were bused downtown for breakfast. In all likelihood, it was the Chena Cafe across the street from the Chena River, adjacent to most every other storefront with the name Chena something. Four of us piled into a booth, Jerry on the inside, and began perusing the menu. When the waitress came to take our order, she looked

at Jerry after taking everyone else's order and said, "And you, Sir?" Before Jerry could answer, I interrupted and said, "Oh, he doesn't speak English. He's a Japanese exchange smokejumper and I'll order for him."

Jerry didn't say a word, wondering where this was going. I asked the waitress, "Do you have any raw fish? Sashimi? Pickled ginger? Wasabi?" The waitress was speechless other than to say, "Huh? Uh, no." The other jumpers at the table decided to remain quiet

as they had already placed their orders and were curious as to where this cultural intervention was going. "OK then, let me have a word with Mr. Ogawa." I leaned over and whispered every bit of Japanese wording I'd gleaned from reading James Clavell's *Shogun*, nodded a couple of times to Jerry's whispering back and reported to the waitress, "He'll have a short stack of sour-dough pancakes, two eggs over easy on the side and a refill of black coffee." Breakfast in Fairbanks. 🙏

Yergy's Sauna 1973-2023 Is 50 Years Old

by Leo Cromwell (Idaho City '66)

I recently received an email from a former McCall dispatcher asking for my knowledge of the history of the Smokejumper Sauna. Samantha, wife of **Tobin Orient** (MYC-12), asked if I had the “scoop” on the building that fondly has an interesting history.

I remember that from the start of training it was a very popular place and must have already amassed a lot of stories. It seemed like the place to go to remove the day's kinks and soreness from a “hard” day of training. It was not uncommon for the smokejumper wives and girlfriends to spend time up there together as a social gathering place. I knew I needed some help to find the “Rest of the Story.”

Checking with McCall legends **Bill Yensen** (MYC-53), **Neal Davis** (MYC-69), and **Jerry Oga-wa** (MYC-67), I received a variety of information, so I opened it to those who gave me the following stories. It was finally agreed that it was built in 1973 with a few additions in 1974.

Rod Dow (MYC-68) and others said that the Sauna idea started because of all the fire activity in Alaska in 1972. McGrath was putting the finishing touches on its sauna at the State of Alaska base when many McCall jumpers visited the base. If Dow said the idea came from Alaska, who's going to argue with someone that would eat a horse shit sandwich to win a bet and make a few bucks. The Sauna idea came from Dow, **Jeff Fereday** (MYC-70), and **Dean Hovdey** (MYC-70). Fereday recalls how **Dallas Bruce Yergenson** (MYC-54) was immediately very interested.

Fereday said Yergy designed it and showed the jumpers how to scribe and saddle-notch the logs. Yergy was involved in, and in control of, every aspect of the project, although Jeff said working with Yergy one never felt he was the boss. He was just Yerg, a quiet, curious, intelligent, and highly skilled guy. Yergy retired from the US Forest Service first as a smokejumper and finally as a district carpenter. Neal Davis added that the logs were cut from standing lodge pole from Paddy Flat. He said it was fun learning the saddle-notch, scribed log technique.

If it was made of wood, Yergy could make it. I remember visiting Yergy at his home in McCall and seeing a pair of White's jumper boots carved and ready to wear, made of wood. Bruce came out to our cabin in Price Valley many times to add and show his expertise in many projects.

There seems to be some debate as to whether the logs that were gathered from Paddy Flat were green or dry. There was no question that nearly all this project was on government time. No one seems to know if the Forest Supervisor had given his approval. **Del Catlin** (MYC-47), Smokejumper Foreman, seemed to ignore the trips to Paddy Flat and the project that was mostly hidden from sight. Jumpers were more interested in the project than spending the summer painting the buildings at the McCall District Office and the Payette NF warehouse.

Most of this story came together when Dean Hovdey checked out his jumper diaries from 1972-74. Nothing in '72 or '74, but a lot of entries in 1973 about the building of Yergy's Sauna. His first entry was on July 20 saying, “We were peeling logs for the sauna.” Then on July 26 it said, “Some of us were splitting Tamarack shakes with a hammer and froe for the sauna roof.” On August 8 it told of picking rocks at Stinky Hot Springs for the sauna stove and laid the first logs on the foundation of the sauna. After many entries, Dean's last entry of 1973 read, “The sauna is looking good. Yergy is amazing.”

Fereday, Hovdey, and later **Duke Norfleet** (MYC-70) mentioned the use of a froe to split logs. Again, building skills and terms taught by Dallas Bruce Yergenson were never forgotten by those who worked with him.

It seems like a few logs were brought to McCall and peeled and made ready for the project in 1972, but the real work was done in 1973. The sauna was in use during the winter of 1973-74. Dow says he remembers using it that winter when he and three other jumpers warmed up and raced down the hill naked before diving into the snow in the parking lot then returning to the sauna.

A few more shakes were made by the Neds of 1974 reported **Steve Mello** (MYC-74), who remembers cutting shingles out of Tamarack blocks. Also, in 1974 Jeff Fereday said that a spoked steel ring was added at the sauna's apex through which the stovepipe passed to prevent an unwanted fire. These welding skills were performed by rookie

smokejumper **Larry Boehm** (MYC-74).

That's the story of Yergy's Sauna as best as I can put together the stories of some 20 old smokejumpers who got "fired up" one more time to tell this great story of how the McCall Smokejumpers built their own sauna led by greatest of craftsman, Dallas Bruce Yergenson. 🪵

The Muster at Massanutten

by **Tom Boatner** (Fairbanks '80)

It took a while for the plan to come together. Phone calls were made, emails were sent, options discussed, and alternatives considered. A bunch of former Alaska Smokejumpers would meet in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia at **Allen Biller's** (FBX-82) 120-acre property. It was **Rod Dow's** (MYC-68) idea originally and **Richard Fort's** (FBX-80) idea to call the gathering "the Muster at Massanutten," after the Massanutten Mountain—the long, narrow, forested ridgeline that bisects the Shenandoah Valley and dominates the skyline from Allen's place. We would gather at "The Rock Farm" for a long weekend in May. Our purpose was twofold: first, to come together on

Allen's land to show our support and friendship for our old friend, and second, to get some work done for Allen on various chores and maintenance around the place.

Virginia seems like an odd place for a bunch of old Alaska jumpers to meet up, but we had our reasons for picking that 120 acres. Most of us have known Allen for three or four decades, and he has always been a great friend and a renowned smokejumper. He bought the land originally in 1990 and paid for it with many years of firefighting, smokejumping, and working as an AFMO and FMO for both the BLM and the National Park Service. Over the years, he has



The Muster Crew (Courtesy T. Boatner)

planted over 50,000 trees, and 1000s of wild-life shrubs on the property, dug two fishponds, and provided the local foxes and coyotes with a steady diet of chicken. It's an impressive place and its Allen's home.

Allen spent many years fighting fire in Montana, Oregon, Alaska, and Virginia and in his off seasons, he traveled the world from New Zealand and Australia to Nepal and China, to Argentina and Chile, and throughout Europe, Central and North America. But there was no doubt where Allen was going to end up in his retirement, and it was back home in the Valley on the "Rock Farm." Allen's final job was as the FMO of Shenandoah National Park, so he was able to live on his land while he wrapped up his fire career.

In recent years, Allen's world has shrunk considerably. Because of a series of bad strokes five years ago, Allen is blind and confined to a wheelchair. With the help of a few dedicated caregivers and a number of lifelong friends, Allen has been able to stay in his home on his land. It has not been easy for Allen—no more traveling, no more working on his land planting trees and cutting firewood, no more sitting quietly in a tree stand waiting for a big whitetail buck to come into view.

Allen's family has been in the Shenandoah Valley for generations, a place that is rich in both American history and natural beauty. The first road across the Appalachians in Virginia, called the Williamsburg Road, crossed Allen's land. Allen has found coins from the late 1700s at an old camping spot by the road on his land. He also has framed an old journal entry describing a young George Washington traveling the Williamsburg Road as a young man to scout and survey some of the wild mountain country beyond the valley.

Bordering Allen's land is the original homestead of Abraham Lincoln's great grandfather. His old house is still there. Abe's father was born on this homestead, but left Virginia in his youth to seek land and fortune in Kentucky. The Civil War ebbed and flowed across the Shenandoah Valley for four years. Allen grew up on land that was part of the New Market battlefield. To this day, Allen can point out the foundations of barns burned by Phil Sheridan and the Union Army in the last

summer of the war as they ravaged the Valley and eliminated it as a source of sustenance for the dying Confederacy.

So, we came together to visit our old friend and show our support and friendship for him. Eighteen former Alaska jumpers showed up. Nineteen, counting Allen. **Gene Stone** (NIFC-90) and **Rob Jones** (FBX-80) flew from Alaska. Rod Dow drove his camper from Washington state, and **Paul Bannister** (FBX-91) rode his motorcycle from Utah. **Tom Hilliard** (MYC-67) and **Glenn McGahee** (FBX-80) drove north from Georgia. **Brent Woffinden** (FBX-89) drove south from Long Island, New York, where he was doing prescribed burning on the property of the Brookings Laboratory. **Richard Fort** (FBX-80) and **George Battaglia** (RAC-78) came up from North Carolina, **Mitch Decoteau** (GAC-78) from Arkansas, and **Mike Tupper** (FBX-85) from Washington, DC. **John Gould** (FBX-81) flew from New Mexico, **Scott Dewitz** (FBX-82) from Arizona, **Trooper Tom Edmonds** (CJ-66) came from Oregon, and **Jim Raudenbush** (FBX-82) and me from Idaho. **Bob Mauck** (FBX-79) drove east from Ohio and **Steve Nemore** (RAC-69) drove up from southwest Virginia.

We did an excellent job right from the start on all our storytelling, laughing and enjoying old friends' company. Getting organized to get some work done wasn't as easy, but we eventually got there. First came a lot of grunting and groaning and a bunch of discussion over what to do and how to do it and who would do what. Kinda like being on a fire. By the end of the weekend, we had cut, split, and stacked about two cords of firewood; moved an old, heavy gun safe; rebuilt a big, second story deck; built a new vent for the dryer; replanted the clothesline posts, and restrung the clothes line, as well as numerous other smaller projects. We worked pretty hard for a bunch of old guys. We laughed a lot and helped our friend. Not a bad way to spend three or four days in the Shenandoah Valley.

All the Alaska Smokejumpers who were at the muster, and those who weren't, are very grateful to Allen's caregivers and old friends in the Valley who have supported him with such friendship and love since his strokes. He is lucky to have so many caring people close by. 🌲



ODDS AND ENDS



Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)
Congratulations and thanks
to **Ken Coe** (FBX-80) and **Ron
Hogan** (Associate) who just became
our latest Life Members.

Karl Brauneis (MSO-77): "I
think that **Bill Vaughn** (RAC-69)
nailed the panels in referring to the
limited use of smokejumpers (April 2023
issue *Smokejumper*) in initial attack:
'Because it would stifle the money pump
that large fires have come to provide.' I
have observed this truth in my life. Bureau-
cracies exist not to solve problems but rather to
manage problems in order to justify their exis-
tence."

Bob Burns (Assoc.) referencing the April 2023
article on the Trimotor Crash that killed his close
friend, **John Rolf** (MSO-57): "My thanks to each
of you for helping me get information on my
friend John and his love for smokejumping. This
helps me know him better.

"Chuck—Thanks for the invitation and the
help you provided to get my words published. I
like the way you expanded the story to include
some relevant history. I have worked with a ton of
editors, and you are one of the very best.

"**Roger Savage** (MSO-57)—Thanks for giving
me a batch of your photos shot in the 1950s. One
was in the article, and I got credit for it, but it was
your shot.

"**Roland Pera** (MSO-56)—Knowing that you
were on site for John's last hours and sang to him
at his request is quite comforting to me."

Mike Hill (WYS-95): "I am working on a
video project to better explain wildfire situations
around the world and last summer filmed a video
tour of old smokejumper aircraft I wrote you
about them when I was doing it. I filmed it origi-
nally to share with the older jumpers who would
like to see their planes again but are unable. Here's
the link. Hope you enjoy it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ktvm5pTs2Qg>."



Chuck Sheley (CJ-59): Arlene
Mansfield, wife of **Dr. Chuck
Mansfield** (CJ-59), sent me an
interesting article from Science
News April 2023. This article
throws a new light into the wildfire
mix which, I know, is not considered
in the current "managed fire" policy.
"Towering clouds of smoke into the
Stratosphere by wildfires eat away at the
Earth's ozone layer thanks to a mix of
smoke, atmospheric chemistry and ultra-
violet light." The article goes on to explain
the effects of wildfire smoke in destroying
our ozone layer.

The problem is, from what I see, the
"managed fire" (let burn) policy does not consider
the effects that wildfire has on our ozone. This is
understandable as I have never seen any documen-
tation where the fire management has any concern
about the effect of a wildfire on the local economy
and the people who live under unhealthy air con-
ditions for weeks.

We know that wildfire smoke is extremely haz-
ardous to our population. Where is that figured
into the managed fire plan? There are enough
studies by academics that show wildfire smoke will
cause a large number of deaths down the line in
the future. But who cares? That is someone else's
problem. Talk about kicking the ball down the
road.

My local congressman, Doug LaMalfa, has
been selected to preside over the **Subcommittee
on Forestry** as Chairman. He lives some 25 miles
from Chico. I send a copy of *Smokejumper* maga-
zine to all four of his offices.

At first, I thought that I would be able to give
some input on the current "managed fire" policy.
Over two million acres have burned on either side
of Chico. That should raise some questions about
the current fire policy. Even if acres burned is not
important, we have lost over 100 lives locally,
killed by wildfire, in the past four years.

I wish all of you readers lived in Northern California, the wildfire capitol of the U.S. You would have a different attitude toward the current managed fire policy. You would demand quick initial attack. What chance is there of this happening—zero and next to none.

In 30 years or so, all of this will be coming to Oregon, Washington, and the northern states. Maybe, somewhere down the line, you taxpayers will demand results rather than increasing the annual firefighting budget by another **BILLION \$**.

In past years smokejumpers responded to wildfire with quick initial attack. That has changed. But I ask, why under the current burning conditions is it not important to have quick initial attack? Sometime you as taxpaying citizens of this country, need to demand results rather than “global warming” excuses. Your choice—demand results or pay the bill!

Brad Sanders (MYC-88) on the death of **Leo Cromwell** (IDC-66): “Leo was such an icon for my generation of jumpers: patient, philosophical, quiet. He was meticulous in detail for computerizing the ‘Ops Desk,’ providing insight and wisdom when jumpers were in the door, and inspiring to his commitment and preparation by training and running a marathon just before his open-heart surgery so many years ago. I am deeply saddened by Leo’s passing. He will always be remembered as an icon in the McCall jumper world.”

Jim Miller (CJ-68): Regarding *The Rescue Jump for Animal Ed Weissenback* (April 2023 *Smokejumper*)—“Had I read this story somewhere other than in *Smokejumper* magazine, I would have thought of it as a beautiful work of fiction, so well written. It touched so many nerves. Thank you, **Bruce Jackson** (RAC-69) and **Bill Vaughn** (RAC-69), for bringing it to life.”

Dave Wood (RAC-66): “I just read the review of *Too Steep and Too Rough* by Murry Taylor. I got a copy soon after it was available and, simply stated, I shook my head at the lack of competence at the upper levels of the Forest Service.

“When I was a young kid, I dreamt of becoming a forest service ranger. After my junior year and senior year in high school, I was a suppression crewman for the Department of Natural Resources for the State of Washington. It increased my commitment to be involved as a career someday.

Why under the current burning conditions is it not important to have quick initial attack?

When I graduated from high school, I enrolled at the University of Idaho in Forestry, staying with my longtime dream.

“During my freshman year at the U of Idaho, **Roger Richcreek** (RAC-66) and I became friends, and he convinced me to apply to be a smokejumper. We applied and were accepted at Redmond and McCall and selected Redmond because of its newness.

“Sadly, being involved with the forest service during those first three months and seeing the ‘promote the incompetence’ and all going on, it was clear to me that the forest service was not where I wanted to be, and I changed my major when I went back to school.

“In reading Murry’s book, it looks like things have gotten even worse. That saddens me. With twelve years with the smokejumpers, including ten as a squadleader, I gained a lot of experience as to the ways of fighting fire, and with the vast amount of experience of far more career smokejumpers, their knowledge is golden. But marginally competence or incompetence seems to be the rule of the day.”

Bill Dennison (Associate): “I enjoyed the latest issue of *Smokejumper*, particularly the article by **Jon Klingel** (CJ65). Penetrative comments and questions about lack of a USFS aggressive initial fire attack and prescribed burns, aka Burn Outs.”

Rogue River/Siskiyou N.F. Supervisor **Merv George** will be taking a temporary assignment as the Acting Deputy Regional Forester for Region 6. Merv, much to the displeasure of many USFS personnel, has had an amazing record in shutting down the annual acreage burned on the Rogue River/Siskiyou N.F. in the past four years. Prior to Merv, the Siskiyou burned fires that cost the taxpayers well over a billion \$. **Dan Quinones** (RAC-02), Fire and Aviation Staff Officer, sent along these stats: 2020-39 fires for 6 acres, 2021 62 fires for 55 acres, 2022 80 fires for 20 acres, 2023 22 fires for 7 acres. Amazing what can be done with planning and pre-positioning of resources. 🧯

Jumping into Fire in Twisp 2023

By Bob Bartlett (Associate Life Member)

Although the title might suggest otherwise, this is **not** an article about squares vs rounds, the politics of fire management, jump planes or fire jumps. Rather, it is a “feel good” story about growing friendships and opportunities within the smokejumper family. I continue to count my blessings as a welcomed outsider. My most recent experiences and relationships stand as a prime example.

Last year’s Smokejumper Reunion in Boise was only my second. My rookie experience with this group was in Missoula 2015 after being invited by **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) to make a presentation on

the Triple Nickles. It has been nothing short of an amazing journey ever since.

In Missoula in 2015, I somehow found myself helping to set up merchandise tables with past jumpers I had just met, **Harold Hartman** (CJ-65), **Dave Laws** (RAC-66) and Chuck and KG Sheley, and then selling T-shirts and other NSA merchandise before my scheduled talk. That experience carried over last year in Boise, only this time helping was deliberate. I had no official reason for being there except to support NSA and to socialize with old friends and hopefully make a few new ones.



L-R: Daren Belsby, Bob Bartlett, Bill Moody. (Courtesy B. Bartlett)

The recent “Jumping into Fire” event in Twisp this past June 20-21, 2023, had its humble beginnings selling merchandise last year. Some smokejumpers are legendary and there is something special about accidentally meeting one, and that meeting leading to a new friendship. After about twenty minutes at the T-shirt table, I turned to my right and introduced myself to my selling partner. He, in turn, introduced himself, “Hi, nice to meet you Bob, my name’s Bill Moody.”

Bill and I spent hours together that first day at the reunion and before it was over, he hatched a plan for me to travel upstate to Twisp, WA, from my home in Spokane for the purpose of giving a Triple Nickle presentation. His offer was genuine and not a hard sell.

In the months following Boise, Bill and I exchanged many emails and a couple Zoom calls during the early planning phase. Bill soon pulled in Suzanne Perin from the Shafer Museum in Winthrop and recently retired jumper and base manager **Daren Belsby** (NCSB-86). I pulled in Steve Bingo, the archivist and lead person in charge of our Smokejumper/Triple Nickles digital archives collection at Eastern Washington University (EWU). A great team and equally great plan quickly took shape.

After many meetings we decided on a two-day affair and with the help of NSA, posted an invitation to any and all in the smokejumper family to join us in Twisp. Thanks to the hard work of new smokejumper friends and the fund raising/grant writing and promotional efforts of Suzanne and Bill, folks came to the event from far and wide along with my EWU colleague and archivist Steve Bingo. Steve was there to gather more smokejumper history and photos for our joint digital archive’s holdings at the university.

There was both a smokejumper and a Triple Nickle display set up in the Methow Valley Community Center. I brought my traveling exhibit and **John Doran** (NCSB-72) brought the NSA traveling exhibit. The volunteers who helped set things up were mostly jumper friends of Bill’s and a few others. The second half of the day was spent at NCSB, and the flow of visitors kept the base tour guides busy.

Although never a jumper, it feels familiar whenever I’m on a smokejumper base or around

jumpers. I attribute it to my past military years and time spent around helicopters, planes, and crews. The mission preparedness, strong leadership skills, team mentality, and the obvious love for what flight crews and jumpers do also feeds my soul. It’s a “good” familiar feeling and while at NCSB, I gained a greater appreciation for those who have and will jump fires in that vertical country.

At the base, rookie training was in full swing. It was hot and dry as we watched seven rookies in full gear (minus main and reserve) being worked to near exhaustion. They were being pushed to their limits, developing the necessary grit and muscle memory required for jumping squares. Jumping squares comes with a physical and mental training cost on jumpers called repetition, ad nauseam. It is interesting to note that current NCSB jumpers and those from last year’s class only know the square canopy experience. All the round chutes once at NCSB have found new homes in Canada.

Old friends and a few current jumpers, pilots, and visitors gathered in the loft, and the stories and friendly banter was instant, much of it within ear shot of exhausted rookies. They appeared unphased by the gray-haired company and occasional stares.

At one point Daren caught my attention and asked if I had seen the Triple Nickle shadow box. To my amazement, there it was hanging in the loft, a three-foot-wide white parachute carved out of wood with string for shroud lines coming to a point below the canopy. The strings (shroud lines) are held together with an official Triple Nickle patch. The display also has three cutout windows with badly faded pictures of Triple Nickle jumpers in them. In the center of it all is an official looking plaque with a gold plate that reads:

555th Infantry Battalion
Dean Creek Fire
Heather Creek Fire 1945
Okanogan National Forest

The Heather Creek Fire is listed as a jumped fire, but the forest in 1945 was called Chelan. According to the Report of Forest Fire, filed by Triple Nickle group leader 2nd Lt. William F. Buford, a load of 22 Triple Nickles landed in

Twisp (actually Winthrop), WA, 23 August. After departing, Buford lists the drop zone (DZ) as The Parks. Buford then notes six casualties by parachute and an 8-hr march to the fire camp. He lists two casualties by fire. After arriving at the fire camp, their food, bed rolls, etc., were not there. He and his men spent two days and nights without much food or shelter.

At time of departure 0815, 29 August, Buford notes three horses and on foot were used to travel 15 miles to Pasayten Airfield. From there the men were flown to Bellingham before heading back to Pendleton. Having Lt. Buford's actual fire report in hand and studying the plaque hanging in the loft, I felt that mission of 23 August 1945. Without Daren I would have likely missed it. The creator of the plaque and its back story remain a mystery.

At one point the familiar sound of an arriving Casa jump plane threatened to drown out those of us visiting in the loft—but didn't. Pilots had been putting spotters through their refresher training that morning, and they were in full debriefing mode. The twenty-some jumpers at NCSB remain hopeful that all seven rookies will make the cut, especially with a busy fire season in the forecast. NCSB is a unique base situated in a jaw dropping, beautiful part of this State.

The second day at the Community Center was busy with a constant flow of approximately 100 curious visitors touring the exhibits and asking questions. Later that evening Suzanne introduced Bill, me, and Daren, and we made our presentations one after the other to an estimated crowd of 125 folks. Bill covered the beginning of smokejumping, and he brought the audience up to 1945. I covered the Triple Nickle experience, and it was special to debut a revised Triple Nickle Fire Map created by **Karl Hartzell** (BOI-70). It was also special to share with the audience an actual Triple Nickle Fire Report and that a plane load of Triple Nickles landed nearby on their way to the Heather Creek Fire.

Daren closed with the future of NCSB and smokejumping as he sees it. As you can imagine, history is less complicated to share than recent experiences in changing times and predicting the future. Daren shared pictures of rounds and squares, talked a little bit about today's jumpers,

the ever-changing technology, and the evolution of jump planes. There is a distinct difference in how past jumpers like him see the present and the future of jumping fires. Time will tell.

The gathering in Twisp was a great good time, and for those of you who missed it, you missed something special. Reunions like this one are about connecting with old friends and making new ones who share the experiences of doing "the best job they ever had." Bill Moody is legendary for good reason. He is a walking history book. It was awesome to witness him in his element. Folks were constantly asking him to recount jump stories and to remember names and events long forgotten by most. From my vantage point, the two days went off without a hitch.

As my wife, Shonna, and I drove south out of Twisp, we both talked about what a "feel good" time we had and especially the quality time spent with new friends Bill and Sandy Moody of Twisp and with Daren and Sarah Belsby of neighboring Winthrop. We all need, especially in these difficult times, more "feel good" experiences. Here's to "feeling good," to accidental meetings, and new lasting friendships. I am blessed. Wheels up and soft landings everyone. 🍄



Higgins Ridge rescue helicopter pilot Rod Snider when he was a rookie smokejumper at NCSB in 1951. (Breanna McCabe)

Lost On The Seward Peninsula Alaska

by Jon Klingel (Cave Junction '65)

It was a normal 1974 tundra fire somewhere on the Seward Peninsula in western Alaska about 150 miles west of Galena. Seven of us jumped the DC-3 with **Mike Clarkson** (RAC-65) as fire boss. With the help of retardant drops from Bob Slafley's 05 Charlie Catalina we had the fire contained quickly. The next day the weather turned to light rain, so we set up a cargo chute over the campfire. We were quite comfortable waiting for the Huey 205 to arrive and de-man us.

Hearing the helicopter quite a way out to the east, we took a compass bearing on the sound and radioed the pilot with a bearing to fly. The sound disappeared and after awhile we heard the helicopter to the west of us and the pilot radioed that he should be right over us. We gave another bearing to the pilot and a few minutes later he came in and landed. We were packed into the 205 like sardines with all the jumpers and gear, but we took off OK and headed for Galena.

The weather deteriorated; the ceiling was coming down. We got to a ridge we couldn't get over in the clouds, so we set down by a creek to wait. A couple of the guys went fishing while some of us built a fire and made a pot of coffee. I always carried a pound of real coffee and a pot in my PG bag for such occasions. The fisherman came back with grayling, which we roasted and ate.

The ceiling lifted a bit, so we took off. Pretty soon there was another ridge in the clouds, so we repeated the coffee and grayling routine a second time. When the ceiling lifted a little, we continued. It was mid-July, so it was starting to get dark at night, and these were the days of flying with an air sectional map before loran and GPS.

Our pilot wasn't acting too confident, but we didn't worry until a light came on the dash, "LOW FUEL WARNING." Jumpers started waking up and paying attention, but the pilot acted unconcerned. A few minutes later, a LOUD HORN started honking and a big bright light on the dash started flashing, "MASTER CAUTION." We were all wide awake by then. The

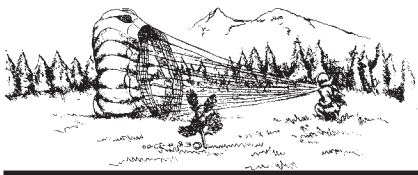
pilot flew the ship up against the ceiling, looked around, shook his head, and landed by a creek. We were down and out of fuel, so we set up the single side band radio and called Fairbanks with the situation and the pilot's idea of our position. We advised Fairbanks to send a fixed wing to locate us before sending fuel.

Mike Clarkson and I climbed a ridge with an air sectional and compass. The pilot's position was not making sense, but we eventually figured out exactly where we were with numerous compass shots plotting to the same point on the map. We were about 35 miles from where the pilot thought we were. In all fairness, I must say that navigation with a map in the clouds on the Seward Peninsula is not easy. It is fairly low rolling terrain, and the drainages go every direction. We radioed our position down to the rest of the crew at the ship who forwarded the location to Fairbanks on the side band.

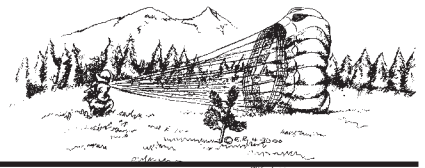
Fairbank's responded, "You mean that fuel isn't there yet? Should have been there hours ago." Shortly, a 205 arrived with fuel, coming in with a fast, hot, landing, which I wondered about until the pilot explained they had a window blow off and thought it might have hit the tail rotor.

Their story was equal to ours. They had taken off the previous afternoon with two fuel barrels inside and two on the sling load. As they were flying around looking for us, the ceiling kept forcing them lower, until they were afraid they would catch their sling load on the ground, so they punched it off. They flew some more and then set down to get some sleep. The fumes were so bad they rolled the two inside barrels out the door. When the weather improved, they flew around some more and then couldn't find any of the fuel they had dropped. So they flew out to a village on the coast, which is where Fairbanks reached them with the correct coordinates.

Because of the concern for the tail rotor, we loaded the gear into that helicopter and the jumpers into the "good" ship, then followed the "injured" helicopter back to Galena without further incident. 🐻



Notes from the Ranks



Pat McGunagle
(West Yellowstone '19)

HAPPY SUMMER! THIS 2023 fire season is just kicking off in the Lower 48 with RDD and NCSB/RAC jumping their first fires yesterday, and MSO and McCall jumping out today. There are about 70 US SMKJs on fires or traveling to Canada now. The cross-pollination of fire culture happening right now in Canada by US, Aussie, and Canadian fire crews is going to be talked about for this generation's careers. In jump world, one fire last week in Canada was staffed by nearly thirty jumpers from three jump ships (a US Sherpa, US Otter, and Canadian DC-3) and representing seven jump bases. Good deal!

I don't have much else to go on because it's been a wet, green spring in Idaho. I'll pass along a different essay I wrote as I try to bring the perspective of jumper attitude back to other parts of fire culture and non-fire circles. Enjoy!

Excerpts from Essay: The "Real Job"

...I think if I had more courage, I'd have been a trails dawg, but I'm in wildland fire for the money. Well, at least I think so. The first person to tell me about wildland fire only recommended I do it for a few years. Fund my trips to Burning Man, to Europe and Southeast Asia, and a girlfriend or two, if practicable.

Ha. If practicable. The Civil War general Robert E Lee is infamous for these words: "Take Cemetery Hill, if practicable." I'm in my early thirties now and still a wildland firefighter, and for some reason it seems males my age get really into the Civil War. Heck, the USDA Forest Service even designed a firefighter leadership staff ride about it at the Battle of Antietam. We're all looking for Truth anyhow, maybe we can look for it in the past, too (though I think you may also find it when you're halfway through an iffy back cut on a burning snag).

They say it's a job for heroes and that we fight what other people fear. I'll never buy those bumper stickers. However, life seems to be a bit more about normalizing risk that any amount of sensationalism or even ego can give to this job's quirks. I think the most scared I've ever been in wildland fire was for my own hear-

ing when I pulled out my left earplug a time or two cutting a sketchy snag on the hotshot crew—keep that ear pointed to my spotter who'd shout if I was gonna get bonked on the head. No matter that gravity is 9.82 meters per second *per second* and sound travels at 340 meters per second (just once). Everything's in meters for me since high school cross country and all the engineering classes I've taken since then but my hotshot captain, a guy with a Game of Thrones name and the stature to boot, only asks me, "McGunagle, what the fuck is a meter, and am I going to have to get used to how you talk?" during my annual performance evals. Love that guy. The people in this job are what make it real. (Quick aside- those guys are in Canada right now, and that guy must be dealing in meters every day, joke's on him!)

The cutting the tree part wasn't worrisome, but for some reason, in those exact moments the words of the Hearing Guy that the Forest Service (caring for the land and helping people!) pays a lot of money to each year to test us, well, his warning (twenty seconds of unguarded chainsaw noise is permanent hearing damage!) seems more scary to me now than any Fire Dragon or Freight Train I'd ever seen or run from in the woods.

Anyhow, I can't hear shit in a crowded bar anymore. Damn it, Hearing Guy. At least you were always on my team.

The off-seasons were long, those seasonal years. I think my second year's Development Plan was "give the training opportunities to the next guy; I have an engineering degree and will get a real job in a year or two." Then I met a smoke-jumper in eastern Montana. The smokejumper was wondering who the kid on the Type II crew was, why he was out in the middle of the fire cutting down snags while the rest of the crew was keggered up in the shade. I had pissed all of them off with my incessant "can you believe we're getting paid for this?" Brutal. Anyhow, I got to cut a few days with the smokejumpers, and my next few years were set—hotshot crew, then jump, if practicable.

I want to jump. I *need* to jump. I *gotta* jump. Here I am.

The spotter turns to me. "Alright, we are on final at 3000 feet. Jump spot elevation is 6900 feet. I'm calling 250 yards of drift, there's tall trees and it's a small spot. Don't fly over the snags. Are you armed? Do you have any questions?"

If I can think back to one moment in my fire career so far, it's this. Yeah, f---, I have lots of questions. How did I get here? Who's that guy who is my jump partner? What's this mountain called? Is this real life?

Also: This is about as real as it gets. The spotter assures me with: "Hope you boys have your A game on, this is

as real as it gets!"

My friend **Tim Hart** (GAC-16) died on a jump on a fire in New Mexico. In the coming years, bills in Congress will be named after him, grand litanies of legal jargon all bottled up under his name. But for now, I just wonder where my friends go when they die. My friend Sara also died driving through the night on her way home to family and to make the most of her two days off after a long hotshot roll. But it wasn't a line of duty death, so she didn't get the Sherpa smokejumper aircraft flying her to her funeral, the fire engines shooting water across her casket, all that. At her memorial, I did get to pick up her tool, though. I held her tool, that she fought fire with and carved herself. If you're not in fire, I'm not sure if you'll get it, but that meant something. I can't thank my hotshot superintendent enough for that cool aspect of that year's crew, two years after I'd left. I can't thank him enough for a lot of things. I pour some rye out for Tim now and then, and I say hi to a sagebrush now and then for Sara.

...The plane travels onward on final. My jump partner is in the door and I'm just kinda hanging out, flexing my ham-mies and quads so my legs don't fall asleep since my leg straps are so tight. I remember packing the very chute that's on my back just a few hours ago. It kinda felt like a shitty pack job. Sweaty hands. My mom gave me a St Christopher sort of Catholic good luck charm token for travelers, and

my grandma gave me a St. Florian token. Perhaps between the two of those things in my man purse sort of cargo pocket notebook thingy, maybe they'll make up for the shitty pack job. I'm pretty sure it was a shitty pack job. Maybe this is when other guys think of their wives or kids or girlfriends. I think about some discount steak (didn't look too grey yet) I bought that morning at Safeway that I hadn't been able to cook before the fire call came, much less throw it in my leg pocket. Good steak. Like eight bucks. Not inconsequential.

The spotter yells, "Get Ready," to my jump partner and slaps him a second later. He's gone. I'm in the door, I'm slapped, I'm out the door, and after Pat's Robot Voice counts the Jump Sequence out, in a few seconds I get a great chute above my head. Not sure if it was St. Florian or St. Christopher.

In the air, I remember the morning briefing. It was Haines 5 today, but what if it was Haines 6? LAL... not important. The big shift from the hotshot crew to smokejumping is the weather. You ask someone about the weather, you get, "Well, it's hot, isn't it?" as a response. Think for yourself. Bro! You worried? Well, what does it feel like? Listen to those feelings rather than waiting for a FFT1 trainee to tell you in breathless monotone about unshaded PIGS.

I often joke about a fire T-Shirt I'm going to make, something cartoonish, saying "Is it a BIRD? Is it a PLANE?!? No!

It's the U.S.D.A!" Something like that. U.S.D.A. Certified SMOKEJUMPER. Goddamnit, I'm in the air again. Gotta be dialed.

I think that the flight of a chute to the ground was the last part of Tim's life. Could be stressful, could be fun, could be a lot of other emotions. The last few seconds: we'll worry about those when we get there. This part's about setting myself up for success at that time. And we never know our time.

The fire's great. It's unreal. A wilderness mountain range in a state I'd never jumped a fire in before, a fantastic jump partner, all around ideal, a great deal. We get burgers on

the way back to our outstation after a long hike out, get rigged up, both jump new fires within a day or two. Fast forward a few years to NOW.

...I'm nine years invested into wildland firefighting, and I have finally found a real job: wildland firefighting. What makes a job a real job? I think it's the feeling that it's all worth it. I want to help wildland firefighters understand when and how it is worth it to take that ridge, when it is practicable to cut that tree, how it is within our capacity to say YES to something that could just as easily be turned down. The most professional workforces I've been privileged to be a part

of, modern smokejumping and modern hotshot crews, attracted me because of the leadership that empowered me to believe I could do new and great things. I don't know if those leaders get official recognition, but I don't think they'd hold that in any greater value than the buy in from the workers they mentor. They're the real backbone. They're the reason this job is a real job, and why I'm excited to be in it with them, to ask hard questions and get unabashedly hard answers.

...When the plane flies away with all jumpers and cargo on the ground, most of the time, it's just quiet. That's the best. 🌲

*National Museum of Forest Service History Awards Chairman and member of the Board of Directors, Phil Aune presents the **2020 Conservation Legacy Award** to Chuck Sheley at the National Smokejumper Reunion in Boise.*

The Conservation Legacy Award recognizes an organization, company, or individual that demonstrates an exceptional commitment to advancing the legacy of conservation of our National Forests and Grasslands. This prestigious award is intended to recognize significant accomplishments that are unique or have national or regional influence. The Award is a bronze bust of America's first Forest Ranger, William R. Kreutzer.



Men and Women That Don't Fit In

by Cecil Hicks (North Cascades '62)

I'm sure most smokejumpers have read the Robert W. Service poem entitled "The Men That Don't Fit In." If you haven't, you should read it as it refers to a race of men (in his case, gold miners) that leave their homes, families, wives, and friends and head for the Yukon gold fields in search of an elusive gold strike they are sure they will discover somewhere in their future.

I first read this poem as I headed to Alaska in 1963, switching from the Forest Service's North Cascade Smokejumper Base at Winthrop, Washington, to the Bureau of Land Management in Fairbanks, Alaska.

In the poem, the author talks about a group of men that, although they might be considered brave and true, just don't fit in with their society. They don't want a standard life routine but want something different and new. To me it sounded like a bunch of smokejumpers.

During my smokejumping career, which extended for seven years with 91 jumps, I had numerous opportunities to work with jumpers on fires or on work assignments around the base and hear their war stories (all true of course).

For the most part, smokejumpers (like Service's men that don't fit in) are a different breed of humans. A lot of people probably think we're crazy to be parachuting out of an airplane fighting forest fires. When your life might depend upon your fellow jumper in fire emergencies, good comradeships are built.

While smokejumping was the best career I ever had, in my case, it ended after I married and started raising a family. I went back to school to study Journalism and worked nearly seven years as a reporter on weekly newspapers. And, finally, I ended up going back to college again and earned an elementary education degree. I taught fourth graders in Sandpoint, Idaho, for 17 years before retirement. However, I don't recommend taking 26 years from the time you start college to earning a degree like I

did, as I never did fit in with the standard college student who takes four or five years to earn a degree.

Over the years, I've interviewed hundreds of people (including two governors) and learned about their life stories. While I wrote news and

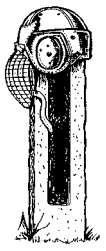
For the most part, smokejumpers are a different breed of humans

feature stories for newspapers and taught school, I also wrote freelance magazine articles part-time for some 30 years. All total, I published more than 160 articles in local, regional, and national magazines (mostly feature and travel articles).

When our oldest daughter married a commercial beekeeper, I did a little honey extraction and helped sell honey at local farmers markets. Soon I started interviewing beekeepers and ended up writing a total of 90 articles covering beekeepers living in 47 different states and two Canadian providences and selling their articles to American Bee Journal magazine.

While I've interviewed some very interesting people with all my writings, some of the more interesting stories I've heard are from smokejumpers. The list of career accomplishments among jumpers is outstanding, ranging from church pastors, business CEO's, pilots, military careers, teachers, college professors, farmers and ranchers, high school coaches, federal law enforcement officers, writers, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, foresters, etc., to some who made smokejumping their career choice.

For the most part I've discovered that smokejumpers are truly a different breed of men and women that don't seem to fit in with the standard work mode of modern society. They often lead active lives, are largely independent thinkers, highly motivated and dedicated to excelling at their chosen careers. 🌲



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

Clyde Augustus Hawley (Idaho City '48)

Clyde died July 5, 2023. He was born May 22, 1929, in Salmon, Idaho, where he graduated from high school. Clyde then graduated from the University of Idaho with a degree in Biology. He served in the Army in the Korean War. Clyde jumped at Idaho City 1948-50, 53-55, and 1957. He then took a job with the Atomic Energy Commission in Vienna, Austria for two years. Clyde continued his work in nuclear research with the Idaho National Engineering Lab until retirement.

Burton John "Burt" Lenker (McCall '47)

Burt, 96, died June 26, 2023, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He was born April 12, 1927, in Gooding, Idaho. Burt grew up in Gooding on the family farm and graduated from Gooding H.S. and attended the University of Idaho, Albion College, and Idaho State College. He received his bachelors degree in 1953 and a masters in Education from Eastern Oregon College in 1963. Burt served in the Navy 1945-46 aboard destroyers and fleet repair ships.

Burt's career was in education. He was a public schoolteacher, school principal and a Superintendent of Schools at schools in Idaho and Oregon. Burt jumped at McCall 1947-49.

Michael H. McCormick (North Cascades '56)

Mike died June 10, 2023, in Portland, Oregon. He was born October 7, 1937, in Tawas City, Michigan, and grew up in Okanogan, Washington, Enterprise, Oregon, and John Day, Oregon, where he graduated from Grant Union H.S. in 1956. He earned a bachelor's in Political Science from the University of Oregon in 1960. Mike was career U.S. Army (1960-86), retired as a Colonel and served two tours in Vietnam as an Infantry officer. Mike jumped at NCSB 1956-57.

S. Dirk Chandler (Redding '64)

Dirk, 83, died May 17, 2023, in Redding, California. He graduated from Shasta Community College and San Jose State University. Dirk was a career USFS employee starting with seasonal work in 1958 and retiring in 1994. Dirk jumped at Redding during the 1964 season.

Eric M. Hagen (McCall '83)

Eric died June 8, 2023, from pancreatic cancer. He was born in San Diego, California, May 15, 1953. He attended the University of Montana and received a Bachelor of Science in Resource Conservation. He was a smokejumper in McCall from 1983-88 with 57 fire jumps and took on several other positions throughout his life as a wildland firefighter and AD. He spent time working for the Forest Service, BLM, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Eric was married to Jodie on November 29, 1997.

John W. Walden (Missoula '65)

John died May 25, 2023, at Samaritan Evergreen Hospice in Albany, Oregon. He was born in Republic, Washington, on September 15, 1943. John spent his boyhood on Curlew Lake fishing, swimming, and water skiing. He learned to alpine ski in the mountains of Washington and British Columbia, and this was one of his lifelong passions. Later in life, he served on the Ski Patrol at 49° North for many years. John worked for the forest service after high school as a wildland firefighter, becoming a Missoula/West Yellowstone smokejumper in 1965. He retired from smoke-jumping in 1975 to move back to Republic with his wife, Sarah, to build their home in the country and start a family.

John graduated from Eastern Washington University, receiving degrees in mathematics and computer science. He was the computer program-

mer for Ferry County and an Army veteran. John was a complicated and brilliant man who was happiest when solving problems and building almost anything, including kayaks and an experimental airplane. John jumped at Missoula 1965-66, 68, Grangeville 1969, and West Yellowstone 1970-75.

Leo R. Cromwell (Idaho City '66)

Leo died on May 24, 2023, surrounded by his family and friends. A few days earlier, Leo quietly reflected, "I wonder if God is ready to bring me home."

Leo was born in Cascade, Idaho. This memory holds the essence of what we loved most about Leo: He was always eager to step in and bear weight in service to others. At Cascade H.S., Leo excelled at football, basketball, and track, served as Junior Class VP, Student Body VP and attended Boy's State. Leo was a team player and leader in all walks of life.

Upon graduating from University of Idaho, Leo accepted his first teaching/coaching position in Cambridge, Idaho. Despite never having seen a wrestling match, Leo threw himself into motivating his students and athletes at Cambridge. Later he taught and coached at Boise West Junior High and retired from teaching math and coaching at Borah High School.

Leo's solid character contributed to another life passion—fighting wildfire. He started fighting fires with the State of Idaho at age 17. A year later he joined the Forest Service. Leo was a smokejumper from 1966-1997 and worked Air Tanker bases from 1999 until his passing. Leo enriched his friends, family, and colleagues with fire stories for every ridge or creek around Idaho, and beyond. His love of history, fighting wildfire, and the deep comradery he shared with his colleagues and friends motivated countless volunteer hours spent organizing smokejumper reunions and the development of r4jumpers.com, a database attempting to catalog each jump out of USFS Region 4. In service to the tanker base world, Leo created his "All-N1" software that tracks every gallon and every flight minute to the penny.

Leo was an NSA Life Member and on the NSA Board of Directors for many years. He jumped at Idaho City 1966-67, Fairbanks 1968, Boise 1974-79, and McCall 1980-97.

Austin L. Young (McCall '54)

"Barney" died May 12, 2023, in Boise. He was born May 2, 1934, in Shoshone, Idaho. In 1939 the family moved from Shoshone and lived in various parts of the United States. The family returned to Shoshone when Austin was entering the sixth grade. By this time, he had attended eleven different grade schools. He completed elementary and high school and graduated from Shoshone H.S. in 1953. Austin was active in high school football and basketball.

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

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

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

Bruce A. Courtright (Associate)

Bruce died May 10, 2023, in Yreka, California. He was born in Glenridge, N.J., February 24, 1939. After high school, he served in the USAF and started his career with the USFS in 1963. Bruce ended his federal career at the USFS Washington Office as Chief for Management Improvement, splitting his time between working for the Chief of the Forest Service and the Assis-

tant Secretary of Agriculture. He was well known nationwide for leadership training and facilitating positive organizational change. He was an early champion of moving women into Forest Service management positions.

Saving our national forests for future generations and reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire was his passion. He and his board drafted bills, put on workshops and lobbied tirelessly both in and outside federal and state government to improve the health and fire resilience of the nation's wildland areas. He was also instrumental in developing a process for including community liaisons during planning large wildfire suppression campaigns.

Rodney D. "Rod" Snider
(North Cascades '51)

Rod, 93, died May 4, 2023, in Boise. He was born April 16, 1930, in Denver, Colorado, where he grew up and graduated from East H.S. in 1948. He received his bachelor's in physical science from Colorado A & M in 1951. Rod was a 1st Lt. in the USAF for four years and flew jets and helicopters. He joined the Johnson Flying Service and had a longtime career in aviation flying many types of aircraft and helicopters while dropping everything from cargo and retardant to smoke-jumpers.

A landmark in Rod's career happened August 4, 1961, on the Higgins Ridge Fire on the Nez Perce N.F. Twenty jumpers took refuge on a rock pile when the fire blew up around 4:15 p.m. Out of nowhere appeared Rod in a Johnson Service Helicopter. He meticulously maneuvered the helicopter into a tight spot taking two jumpers out at a time. When the situation got worse, Rod flew four jumpers, two in cabin and two hanging on to the skids, to safety.

For his actions, Rod was awarded the North American Forest Service Medal for heroism and the Stanley-Hiller Pilot of the year award. Rod jumped at North Cascades 1951-53.

Forrest Reed "Buster" Moore (Redding '57)

Buster, 84, died April 25, 2023. He was born February 11, 1929. Buster was one of the original members of the crew that started the smoke-jumper base in Redding, California, in 1957. He

jumped 1957-61 and 1965-69. Buster was living in Castle Rock, Colorado, at the time of his death.

Randall Ova "Randy" Evans (McCall '77)

Randy died April 10, 2023. He attended Boise area schools and graduated from the University of Idaho. Randy jumped at McCall 1977-81 and 1983. He was an Idaho River Guide and a Fish and Game Officer.

Thomas William "Tom" Schroeder
(Grangeville '60)

Tom, 85, died April 3, 2023, in Green Cove Springs, Florida. He was born May 22, 1937, in the Town of Lake, Milwaukee county, Wisconsin. He attended A.E. Burdick Elementary School and Racine Lutheran High School. Tom played the cornet and was a member of the "Three Tom Trio." He participated in Burdick's award-winning marching band, along with his sister, Barbara.

Tom graduated from the University of Idaho with a degree in Wildlife Management. He rookied in 1960 and jumped at Grangeville 1960 and 1963. He jumped the 1964-65 seasons at Missoula.

Tom graduated from aviation school and served in the U.S. Army, based in Alabama and Germany, and earned the rank of First Lieutenant. Following his military service, Tom joined United Airlines, where he retired after 31 years of employment as a navigator and commercial pilot. Tom had a lifelong love of flying and always kept his private Cessna hangered nearby, whether he was residing at his log home in northern Wisconsin or the many years he lived in Washington and Idaho.

David "Bruce" Reay (Idaho City '58)

Bruce died April 4, 2023. He was born December 16, 1938, in Boise, Idaho, and grew up in Garden Valley living near where his father worked for the USFS. Bruce graduated from Garden Valley H.S., attended Boise Junior College, and the University of Idaho where he earned his bachelor's in Forestry. Bruce jumped at Idaho City in 1958 and at McCall in 1959.

After his university graduation, he was drafted into the Army where he served two years as a paratrooper. Following his discharge, he went to work for Boise Cascade in the logging business.

He had a 30-year career as their fee lands manager for southern Idaho. In 1975 Bruce started a Christmas Tree business that he and his wife ran for 40 years.

He spent 12 years on the Horseshoe Bend School Board and was proud to be part of the successful effort in 1990 to finally build a high school in the community after two previous failed attempts. He viewed this period of service along with his time in the military as his most important contributions of giving back to society.

John Clifford Marsh (Idaho City '66)

John, 76, of Nampa, Idaho, died March 28, 2023. He jumped at Idaho City 1966-68.

William Dennis “Denny” Richter (North Cascades '58)

Denny died March 3, 2023. He was born in Bremerton Naval Hospital in Bremerton, Washington, January 10, 1939, and spent much of his life on Long Lake, between Bremerton and Port Orchard, Washington. He graduated from Lincoln High School in Seattle in 1957 where he was a running back in football and on the track team. Denny jumped the 1958 season at NCSB. He was drafted in 1959 and was a member of the 101st Airborne rising through the ranks and being commissioned as a 1st Lt. He was the Distinguished Graduate of his class in Ranger School in 1961.

Denny was assigned to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, as an ARVN Ranger advisor to the south Vietnamese army and served in the Highlands along the Laotian and Cambodian border. He was wounded in both legs in 1962. After returning to duty, he was assigned to the 505th Parachute infantry Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division and returned to Vietnam with the Golden Brigade. He served in 1968 during the TET offensive in Hue. His military career took a turn, and he was transferred to the Military Police Corps in 1974. Denny finished his degree at Central Washington University, earning a master's in criminal psychology.

Denny's military career would span 35 years and many duty posts. He retired from the Army as a full Colonel. He then moved to Italy where he did contract work as a policeman for MPRI until retirement in 2015.

Thomas Olene “Tom” McCullough (Missoula '53)

Tom, 83, died August 19, 2018, near Nashville, Tennessee. He was born April 14, 1935, in Tacoma, Washington, and graduated from Enumclaw H.S. in 1954. Tom studied forestry at the University of Washington graduating in 1958. Tom moved to Oregon after graduation, obtained his surveyor's license and was a partner in McCullough/Bryant Associates. He was named co-surveyor of the year in 1981 by the Professional Land Surveyors of Oregon. Tom moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1983, and established Intermountain Aerial Surveying and Mapping. He jumped at Missoula during the 1954-55 seasons.

Thomas Sterling “Tom” Monroe (North Cascades '58)

Sterling Thomas Monroe III, or Tom, as he was known at the jump base, was born in Okanogan, Washington on March 24, 1939. He died December 12, 2022. Tom graduated from Okanogan High School in 1957. He was an outstanding quarterback on the football team. In 1959 Tom married his high school sweetheart, Carol Adele Schmidt.

In 1958 Tom was a rookie smokejumper at NCSB. During his five-year smokejumper career, Tom made 53 jumps, 34 to fires, and was promoted to squadleader/spotter.

Like so many jumpers of the era, smokejumping paid his way through college. After graduating from Washington State University in Business Management in 1963, Tom was employed by the Seattle Seahawks as a Systems Analyst, a position he held from 1979 until 1994.

William Ralph Redfox (Missoula '88)

William Ralph Redfox, 58, died at a Boise, Idaho, hospital August 30, 2022. He was born on September 2, 1963, at the Crow Agency Hospital. His early years were spent on the reservation in Busby, Montana, and in Seward, Nebraska, where he attended the Concordia Lutheran School. He graduated from St. Labre H.S. on the reservation. William enjoyed sports and excelled at Cross Country running.

William joined the Army in 1984, was Airborne, and was stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washing-

ton. He was a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in Montana. William is laid to rest at the Busby Cemetery in Busby, Montana. He jumped at Missoula during the 1988 season.

LTC. Robert Lyle Webster Jr. (Missoula '55)

Bob died March 26, 2021, in Box Springs, Georgia. Prior to enlisting in the military in 1958, Bob was a graduate of Virginia Military Institute. He was especially proud of being a smokejumper in Montana during his college summer breaks. Bob had an honorable and lengthy military career. He fought in the Vietnam War as an aviation pilot and was awarded many commendations during his service, including National Defense Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Vietnam Service Medal w/ 1 Silver Star, Bronze Star Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal w/ 60 Device, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry w/ Palm, 3 Overseas Service Bars, Ranger Tab, Parachutist Badge, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and Air Medal. He was also awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Master Army Aviator Badge, and Meritorious Ser-

vice Medal. Bob retired with Honorable Service on February 28, 1978, as an Armed Forces Lieutenant Colonel. Bob jumped at Missoula 1955-57. He was an NSA Life Member.

William S. "Bill" Laney (Missoula '63)

Bill died December 18, 2013. He was born May 24, 1953, in Springfield, Arizona. Bill graduated from Cliff H.S. in Cliff, New Mexico, in 1953. He attended the University of Houston 1953-55 and spent two years in the Army in Korea. He worked for the USFS 1960-62 on the Gila NF before jumping at Missoula in 1963 and Grangeville in 1964. Bill worked for the Pacific Western Land Company and was living in Las Cruces, N.M.

David Anthony Smerker (Missoula '04)

David died at the Logan Health Center in Kalispell, Montana, January 17, 2022. He was born February 12, 1979. David graduated from Libby High School and completed one year of college at Montana State University. He worked for Fun

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	Austin Young (MYC-54)

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Contributions since the previous publication of donors July 2023

Total funds disbursed to Smokejumpers and families-\$310,815.

Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:

Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico CA 95926

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Beverage when he was in high school. Dave then became employed by the U.S. Forest Service, where he worked in timber and fire, served on a Hotshot Crew and was a smokejumper based out of Missoula.

He loved fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, competitive pistol shooting, bull riding, wrestling, football and dancing. Dave jumper at Missoula 2004, 06, and West Yellowstone 2007, 08, and 2010.

George T. “Tom” Tutt (Missoula ’64)

Tom, 79, died July 11, 2023, in Seattle, Washington. He was born October 26, 1943, while his father was in the Air Force. After the war, the family moved to Elkhart, Indiana, where he graduated from high school in 1961. Tom participated in football and track all three years in school. He enrolled in the University of Montana and graduated with a bachelors degree in Forestry in 1966 followed with a masters in Economics in 1967.

While at the University Tom worked for the Forest Service in the summers as a fire technician and a season with the Nine Mile Hotshots. He jumped at Missoula 1964-65.

“After graduation from college, I entered the Air Force and attended Officer Training at Lackland AFB and commissioned December of 1967. I was assigned the navigators training at Mather AFB in Sacramento, California and was awarded

my wings September 1967. My next duty assignment was at KI Sawyer AFB in Gwinn, Michigan, where I served as a Weapon Systems Officer flying the F-101.

“Our squadron closed June of 1971 and I was immediately assigned to the 362 TEWS, Danang, Vietnam, flying the EC-47 on aerial reconnaissance missions in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. After my 365-day duty tour in Vietnam, I was discharged at Travis AFB, California, given a pat on the back, and a plane ticket back to Missoula, Montana. I joined the Oregon Air National Guard in 1972 after moving to Portland and served there for the next 25 years. I retired as a Colonel and flew part time as an air crew member in both the F-101 and the F-4. Military decorations include Distinguish Flying Cross and numerous Air Medals from my service in Southeast Asia.” He had flown 1500+ hours in the F-101 and 1200+ hours in the F-4

“I was employed as a lumber trader for North Pacific Lumber Co. for 14 years, and then had my own company until 2010. While flying and trading lumber, I worked for my wife in her wholesale European Import business. She imported wooden German holiday items and needed someone to do her heavy lifting. She had the business for over 25 years but was forced to close when she lost her sight.

“We retired to Seattle in 2014 to be close to our daughter and family.” 🕊

Not Forgotten

North Cascades Eight Mile Ridge Fire

Smokejumpers **Robert “Bob” Carlman** (NCSB-57), **Gerald “Jerry” Helmer** (NCSB-53), and **Keith “Gus” Hendrickson** (NCSB-47) were killed while dropping cargo June 23, 1958, on the Eight Mile Ridge Fire, Winthrop RD, Okanogan NF Washington. Also killed in the crash of Twin Beech N164Z was pilot Robert Cavanaugh.

Severe lightning hit the North Cascades area June 21 and 22, resulting in a small fire on Eight Mile Ridge, 15 miles north of Winthrop. Initial

attack was provided by two NCSB smokejumpers. When the fire blew up under windy conditions, the response was quickly upgraded to two additional smokejumpers and a “ground pounder” crew consisting of the base “rookies” led by Foreman **Elmer Neufeld** (CJ-44). Cargo, including food, chain saws, fuel and a tracked fireline digger, was requested by the fire. With Bob Carlman sitting in the co-pilot seat, Gus and Jerry successfully made the first cargo run, putting the supplies down with a “perfect drop”

near the base camp. Shortly after the Twin Beech departed, a “thud” was heard in the distance, and the fire lookout at Sweetgrass tower confirmed to Neufeld the aircraft had gone down. A rescue team from the fire set out immediately to the crash area, a couple miles away. There were no survivors. With thunderstorms in the area, it is thought that the Twin Beech was caught in a severe downdraft.

Robert Carlman, 24, a 2nd year smokejumper, was at the time the Winthrop RD Timber Sales Officer. He was survived by his wife and 2 young sons.

Gerald Helmer, 24, was a 4th year smokejumper, trainee squadleader and US Army Korean War veteran paratrooper. He was survived by his mother and father.

Keith Hendrickson, 29, an 11th year smokejumper and squadleader, was also a veteran of the US Air Force. He was survived by his wife, who was 9 months pregnant.

Robert H Cavanaugh Jr, 35, was a US Navy veteran pilot of World War II and the Korean War.

Missoula Smokejumpers - Moose Creek Airstrip Crash

John Rolf (MSO-57) and **Gary Williams** (MSO-59) died August 4, 1959, in the crash of Ford Trimotor N8419 at the Moose Creek Ranger Station airstrip, Nez Perce NF, Idaho.

Rolf, Williams, and spotter **Ron Stoleson** (MSO-56), along with Nez Perce Forest Supervisor Alva Blackerby, had boarded the Trimotor N8419 at Grangeville, Idaho. Piloted by Bob Culver, the mission was to deliver supplies to the Ranger Station and then to check on the location of a fire to the southeast near Pettibone Ridge.

A tricky wind prevented the aircraft from landing on the first attempt. Culver then took the Ford up and around for a second try. The plane landed but was pushed forward by a tailwind to the end of the strip, where barrels of gasoline were stored. Stoleson recounts, “After touchdown, Bob yelled back to us that we were going to hit. He tried to ground loop the Trimotor. After hitting the trees, there was momentary silence. I thought we had made it. I was sitting on the floor, facing aft, immediately adjacent to the door with my back against a chainsaw box. John Rolf was seated to my right. Gary Williams was in the center of the fuselage toward the cockpit and Blackerby (Forest Supervisor)

was in the co-pilot’s (right side) seat. As I turned my head toward the cockpit, a blast of flame blew back through the fuselage at which time I dove out through the open door. I had to crawl through the burning limbs of a pine tree (evidently knocked down in the crash) to get away from the aircraft. Culver came running from the front of the aircraft. We were both burned, and he looked pretty bad.”

It is thought that Culver and Blackerby were able to escape through the Trimotor’s side windows, Rolf and Williams exited through a crack in the fuselage, all were seriously burned.

A doctor was flown in from Grangeville that afternoon and by that time, Gary Williams had passed. John Rolf was flown to the hospital in Grangeville where he died that evening. Stoleson, Culver and Blackerby were all hospitalized in Grangeville where Alva Blackerby died several days later.

John A. Rolf, 25, a three-season smokejumper, was born in Peekskill, N.Y., and graduated from Hendrick Hudson H.S. in Montrose, N.Y. He served in the US Navy from 1951 to 1954. He had attended Paul Smith College and Hartwick College in New York.

Gary G. Williams, 23, a first-year smokejumper, was born in West Valley, N.Y., and graduated from West Valley Central School. He had previously served in the US Army and was a forestry student at Montana State University after attending the New York Ranger School in New York. 🐼

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