

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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APRIL 2024

SMOKEJUMPER



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Front cover

Russian Smokejumper (NSA files)

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, please contact Editor Chuck Sheley chucksheley@gmail.com.

YOUR CORRECT EMAIL ADDRESS 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.

IF YOU MOVE OR ARE "TEMPORARILY AWAY"

Smokejumper magazine is mailed USPS bulk mail to get the best mailing rate. However, **bulk mail is not forwarded**. It is returned with first class postage due. If remailed to your new address, we are charged another first class postage. Its mailing cost then exceeds the printing expense.

Please notify us of any change in your mailing address. If you are going to be temporarily away, we could send you a PDF of that issue saving us all mailing expenses. Please send any address changes to chucksheley@gmail.com.

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

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



Message from the President



ON BEHALF of you, the members of the NSA and smokejumping family, the Board of the National Smokejumper Association (NSA) is very active in carrying out its Mission.

"The National Smokejumper Association, through a cadre of volunteers and partnerships, is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and rangeland resources, and responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families."

Activities include publication of *Smokejumper* magazine and numerous historical books about smokejumping as well as a host of other historical preservation projects. The NSA provides a Website and Facebook page. The NSA sponsors the trails program, TRAMPS. Over \$345,000 has gone to smokejumpers and their families through the NSA Scholarship and the Good Samaritan Programs.

The NSA is involved in numerous other activities as well. For example, next year will mark the 75th year since the Mann Gulch Fire, a landmark, historical tragedy in the history of smokejumping. Accordingly, the NSA is currently engaged with the Forest Service in planning a commemoration of the event to honor those lost and their families.

There are 13 NSA Board members who dedicate their time and effort on your behalf. Over the next couple of issues of *Smokejumper*, I will provide brief bios of each so you will know who they are. The most recently elected members of the NSA Board follow:

Sarah Altemus-Pope (MSO-01): NSA By Laws and Policies Chair

Sarah A-P was an active smokejumper for 11 years (MSO 01-11). She received her law degree in 2014 from the University of Oregon. Sarah worked as a disaster management specialist for the Forest Service for several years before joining the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative as the Coordinator in 2014. Sarah is currently the Executive Director of South Willamette Solutions, a 501(c)3 nonprofit that oversees the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative and Oakridge Air projects. Sarah resides with her husband in Oakridge, Oregon.

Sarah Doebling (MSO-91): NSA Treasurer, NSA Investment Committee Chair



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

Sarah D. had a long, successful career in smokejumping where she gained extensive knowledge of firefighting and firefighting leadership. Sarah jumped for 24 seasons (MSO 91-96, 98-11; GAC 97, 12-14). During her career, she served as Base Manager in Region 3 (Silver City, New Mexico), was the Operations Foreman in Missoula and the Base Manager in Grangeville, Idaho. Sarah spent her last three years on the Gila N.F., retiring as the Forest Aviation Officer. During active fire seasons, Sarah continues to fill in where

needed as a dispatcher. Sarah resides with her husband in Silver City, New Mexico.

Rod Dow (MYC-68)

Rod was an active smokejumper for 31 years (MYC 68-74, FBX 75-99) and a wildland firefighter for a total 45 years. He retired from smokejumping with 284 fire jumps and approximately 480 total jumps; close to evenly split between rounds and squares. Early in his career, he used his smokejumping money as a way to pay for college at Washington State University where he earned two bachelor degrees, one in education and a second in world history. A few years back, he archived 70 jumper stories in a book called, *Just a Few Jumper Stories*. A recent issue of *Smokejumper* magazine included a poem he wrote that was inspired by smokejumping called, "So, Is There a Fee?" He loves to travel. Recent trips include a month in Bali, three weeks in Switzerland and Italy, three weeks fly fishing in New Zealand, and two trailer camping trips back to Virginia and Wisconsin. Rod resides with his wife in Yakima, Washington.

Patrick McGunagle (WYS-19): NSA Liaison to Current Jumpers

Pat has been an active smokejumper for 4 years (WYS 19-20; BOI 20-21). He grew up in Whitefish, Montana. He began working for the USFS on the Flathead NF. Pat aspires to be a district ranger someday. While he may not have jumped his last fire just yet, he's exploring other opportunities in the USFS that utilize his engineering and masters degrees to better effect. Pat enjoys hot springs, skiing, hunting, learning Russian, and writing science fiction. Pat is currently a Fire Prevention Technician on the legendary Salmon Challis NF in Salmon, Idaho. 🔧

Remembering Mike Silva

by Row Dow (McCall '68)

The twin-tailed Beechcraft, 401 Tango Hotel, was sliding across the Seward somewhere south of Buckland, AK. The Volpar's light blue and white livery fit comfortably into the late evening light. A row of anvil-topped thunderheads had marched across the treeless expanse earlier in the afternoon, and an occasional hard lightning bolt still shot out from under a distant cumulus, some of the clouds in angry shadow and others boasting towering white faces. Low sunlight graced the margins with traces of rose and salmon. The jumpship had taken off from Galena a few hours before and had dropped six jumpers on a fire downstream from Shungnak. It looked like a few days of mop-up, but the sheefish were probably biting, so life was good.

The two jumpers still inside 401 were sacked out. One was stretched along the floor and the other took up a few of the hard plastic bench seats. Both were fast asleep and were using their mains as pillows. The younger jumper on the bench hadn't figured out how to do it very well, but the guy on the floor had loosened his harness so the main slid up nicely into a position that cradled his head. They'd had to refuel in Kotzebue and had managed enough time for a piss and some burgers, but otherwise had been flying since about 1600. The younger one, lying on the bench seats, was a second-year jumper out of MSO. He'd never been to AK and was fascinated, but a bit nervous about the possibility of giant Alaska moose, big brown bears, wolverines, and caribou, and by how huge everything was. And weird. It was nearly 2300 and the sun was still up, skirting the Brooks Range way off to the north.

The other jumper was Mike Silva. A rodeo cowboy, mostly bulls, from Red Bluff, California, who had rookied in Redding in '72, transferred to McCall for the '73 season, and moved up to Alaska in '74. Confident, experienced, thick-chested, and very comfortable in the northland after 13 years of AK fire. Nothing scared Mike, in fact a new challenge kinda made him smile.

Without warning, the plane banked over hard right, waking both guys. The spotter stepped past

the two jumpers and pointed out the door of the plane. Silva moved back by the spotter and was on his knees with one fist around the vertical door bar. Both were looking at a huge stretch of black. It was treeless tundra with sporadic heat on the perimeter. There were long stretches of low flame and other areas showing just an occasional puffer here and there. The heat along the edge was narrow, so it didn't appear to be burning very deep. The young Zoolie didn't know much about Alaska fire, but it seemed like a couple Volpar loads could maybe handle this one. Sixteen jumpers? Yeah, probably.

"Two jumpers . . . hook up!" The spotter had already thrown a set of streamers and clearly intended to drop jumpers. But there were only two of them here on the plane, and that had to be at least a thousand-acre fire he was looking at. Both jumpers clipped into the vertical cable and did their final checks. The high-pitched roaring whine of twin Turbines. A hundred knot wind blasting by the open door. The spotter's head was thrust outside the plane. Ghoulish skin wrinkles in the cheeks and lips. "Get ready." The spotter rocked back on his heels and hesitated. Nothing happened for two full seconds. Silva sat in the door and appeared to be gazing off at something on the horizon, maybe lost in thought about some bull ride or a previous girlfriend. SLAP! Then it was the young kid's turn to drop down into the door, and it was the same slap, but felt kind of distant somehow. In a few seconds the roaring, blasting, tumbling clamor was replaced with silence and seclusion and an open T-10 canopy. He was looking out over a vast landscape that dwarfed any he'd seen before.

The young Zoolie landed a hundred yards off and by the time he'd gathered his gear and hiked over to Silva, the Volpar had spit out a fire pack and a cubie. Mike had broken open the fire pack and pulled out what he figured were the essentials. He gave the kid a small, dark green, plastic bottle of Type II bug dope. "You'll need this and maybe this", handing him a small, tightly taped bundle of Visqueen. "Here's your half of the gunnies", eight or ten gunny sacks. "Grab a handful of tundra and

stick it in the gunny like this. Any time you get to a wet spot, get your beater wet by stomping it into the wet moss. Help yourself to the food and water. You take the right flank, I got the left. See you sometime tomorrow.”

Silva turned his back on the kid and walked over to the fire edge. He began swinging the weighted gunny sack in a rhythmic vertical arc. At the end of each swing, a thump rolled out across the landscape and a couple feet of fire died out. One step to his left, another arc, another thump, and some more dead black. Within a few minutes, Mike was part-way down a low draw. Only his broad Portuguese back and the rotating gunny was visible. The sun disappeared behind a ridge far to the north. Streaks of brilliant orange lit up the cloud bottoms and dusk gave the rolling terrain a soft, ghostly tone.

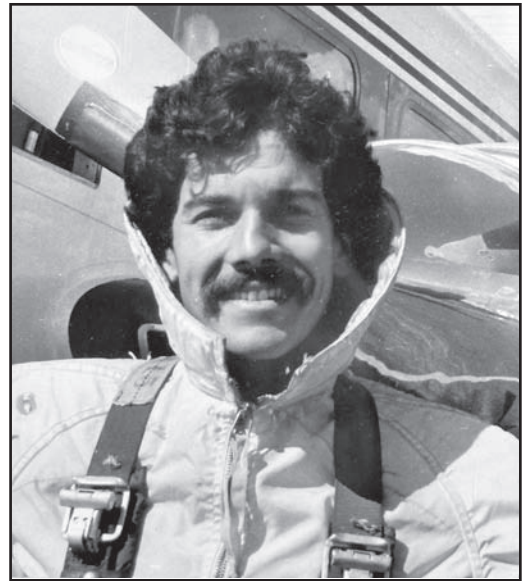
Some Personal Notes from Jumpers

Mike Silva has moved on to better jump country. After a battle with cancer that he kept quiet until the end, he passed on last November at his home in Fairbanks, leaving his wife, Patty, and daughter, Shayla. He was 74.

Mike was good lookin', tough as rebar, and was definitely his own man. He was a rodeo cowboy in his younger days in Red Bluff, CA, and rated #15 bull rider in the nation. He trained in Redding in '72, spent a year in McCall in '73, and moved up to Fairbanks the next year. He spent the rest of his career up north fighting fire in several capacities.

Mike spent a good part of everyday laughing about whatever happened to amuse him that particular moment and had that ready grin available. He was completely fearless when facing a new challenge, whether that was a new situation on fires or a brand-new job he had applied for. He rapidly moved up in the organization and was an excellent squadleader and spotter. In the mid-80s, he was one of our main air attack bosses, something he was particularly good at because of his bold personality. He was injured on a practice jump in about '86 or so, and moved into zone FMO positions, where he stayed until retirement.

Mike was very strong, both physically and mentally, and had a fearless approach to whatever job he took on. He was always strict but fair with those who worked for him. Of Portuguese descent,



Mike Silva (Courtesy R. Dow)

he was long-legged, deep chested, and had thick, curly, black hair. He normally sported a wry, crooked smile and an easy laugh. Definitely one to remember.

Although he was fair with everyone he dealt with, he didn't have much patience with weakness. When he was an FMO, if you went in to get your fire time sheet signed, he gave you a hard time about it, not really because he doubted your word, but because he loved coming up against other tough people. When he questioned you about it, all he really wanted was for you to stand up to him. As soon as you did, he would usually back off and say, "Oh, OK, sounds good," and sign your slip. I loved that about Mike. It took me a while to figure it out, but then I thought it was pretty cool. As I discovered much later, he took all those same qualities into being a top-notch family man and father.

The world would be a better place with a few hundred more Mike Silvas. **Gary "Big Mac" McMurtrey** (MYC-73), who passed on a few years back, was Shayla's godfather and is, no doubt, serving cheap beer and cooking up some gawd-awful, freezer-burned hot dogs at a lawn party for Mike as we speak. See you on the other side, Mikey.

Bob Mauck (FBX-79): Fire near Minchumina. Silva + 7 jumped in support of a state helitack crew. Silva walked up to the fire boss who began telling him about the fire weather and the dew-point and the predicted rate of spread. Silva just looked at him, then said, "We'll handle it." I wasn't

there. Just heard about it, but, to me, it goes a long way in explaining why he didn't tell anyone what he was facing all the way to the end.

Tom Romanello (FBX-88): The world feels a little emptier without him.

Matt Allen (FBX-95): RIP Mike. Peace, and condolences to his family. I knew him as FMO, but the jumper legend lived strong. In 04 (right around his retirement time), **Burt Mitman** (RAC-90) had a fire out by Frozen Foot Creek, north of Chena Hot Springs.

We were taking care of a few structures, and we heard Mike checking in fires with dispatch and saying, "He was going to go swing by Mitman's dairy operation."

Chuck Yeager (RAC-65) and I couldn't quit chuckling about it.

Dave Stephens (FBX-76): Damn! Mike was as tough as the bulls he rode, spoke his mind, and stood by his words, a true gentleman, a great friend and one hell of a smokejumper!

Rod Dow (MYC-68): (This one was sent a few days before Mike passed.)

Mike-You and I go back quite a ways, Bro. I remember when you joined us in McCall in '73, and that year you and I drove down to Boise and Idaho City together for a weekend. I think you were still riding bulls in the winter if I recall. Most of my memories of you, though, are in Fairbanks. You and I roamed the downtown bars on Two Street in '75 and '76, and you were quite the lady's magnet until Patty snagged your ass in the mid-80s. My girlfriend at the time told me about the first time Patty laid eyes on you in some BLM class or whatever. She said Patty took one look at you and whispered, "Oh my God, who is that hunk?" I think your bachelor days ended at that moment.

The most vivid fire memory I have of you is when I was the Incident Commander on all jumper fires NW of McGrath with a bunch of lower 48ers. The only other AK Bro I remember was **Al Seiler** (FBX-85). We jumped an eight-man load on the fire in mostly black spruce and tussocks and got around it by early evening. We could see another fire maybe a 1000 yards off to the south, and I was pretty confident that our fire wouldn't spread if I left two guys to watch it. So when you flew over in the air attack ship, I asked if you thought we should head over to the other fire. You called McGrath and told them what was up, but we couldn't hear the other end of the conversation. You came back to them on the radio and said, "Um,

McGrath, do I understand correctly that you have a bunch of available jumpers on the ground offering to catch two fires and you're turning that offer down?" We all got a chuckle out of that, and within ten seconds, Mike called back, "Yeah Rod, they like that plan."

Mike, Mike I want you to know something from me and from a lot of Bros I know who feel the same. You have been excellent, Mike. Bold, tough, unafraid, and fair as a jumper, as a spotter, as Air Attack, and as a person. And you and Patty raised a wonderful, fabulous daughter that will continue to spread that same attitude throughout her life as well. Congratulations on a life very well lived, Mike. You handled these 70-odd years with a lot of capability, compassion, and class. Here's to you, Brother. Save me a cubie at the campfire.

Tom Boatner (FBX-80): Rest in peace, old friend. You were one of the great ones. 🙏

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. (*Ed.*)

Five Elements of Pro-Active Aging

by Gary Shade (Missoula '69)

I'm in my 10th week of co-instructing my Better Bones and Balance (BBB) class. It's going well and I'm so fortunate to have Ellen as my coach and mentor. The class has evolved to a group of elders: 16 hardcore women and one real man come regularly to class. Ellen seems to be traveling professionally, so I am teaching more classes solo. Still a rookie but don't mind making an ass of myself.

Early in my writings on the topic of aging, I mentioned that I was beginning to develop or formulate notions about active aging, or what I now call "Pro-Active Aging." Judo Aging was another term I used. This adversary, oldness, will always overcome our best efforts, but I can channel the momentum of a deteriorating body into new avenues of experience.

I want you to seriously take a moment and reflect on what your life and body will be in five years and then ten years. I realized, if one is over 70+, the vision of a 5-10-year time travel into the future turns into a horror show. Somewhere on this time continuum you will experience suffering health and death.

In managing my own aging process and expectations, I am developing a program to remind me to check the boxes as I continue in becoming an Elder. In my class, I took time with the girls and boy and presented my thesis. I provided the group with the handout below and I developed a narrative using my own experiences to develop the stories and analogies.

To the class, I mentioned there is nothing new or exciting about fleshing out these elements, but I found working on this a good brain exercise. It was with trepidation that I presented this material to the class. I stated that this was not BBB, but I wanted to share these unauthorized thoughts of my own. Over the months, I had built a solid level of trust with the class. They had come to recognize that my intent is always what is in their best interest and had come to trust me.

For purposes of illustration, I used activities in my own life that are part of Pro-Active Aging. My question at the end of the presentation was, "Did anyone find this material helpful?" I got a number

of compliments on the material with several women stating they are sharing this piece of paper with their husbands. One woman commented that I had "rizz". Assuming "rizz" was a compliment, I smiled back but had no clue what that word meant until I just looked it up.

1. Body Fitness: Actively engaged in physical fitness centered activities. Incorporate fitness awareness into activities of daily living. 30-150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. "It's my decision to live a life of discipline or a life of regret."

Actively engaged in monitoring the foods and liquids I use for nourishment. "Who you think you are is what you eat. Change who you think you are and your change in eating habits will follow."

2. Brain Fitness: Actively engaged in developing creative interests, hobbies, and intellectual pursuits. The brain is like a muscle. To develop and stay healthy, muscles must be stimulated with moderate stress. Brain health also requires stimulation and moderate stress. "The brain is not the mind, but a part of the mind."

3. Mental Fitness: Actively engaged in inquiring, understanding, and developing the "thought-filled" and "thought-full" part of my being. This is the religious, spiritual, and or philosophical aspect of thought: Who you think you are. The mind is the residence of the ego. "Know Thy Self"

4. Social Fitness: Actively engaged in seeking and developing relationships with others. For some this can be a very challenging endeavor. However, the decision to interact with strangers is more significant than actually doing it. "I need to reach out to others rather than waiting for them to reach out to me."

5. Service: Actively engaged in sharing one's time and skills with others. This is the most important element. That which you are passionate about, share with others through service. "The value of gifts one receives, in return for service to others, is the immeasurable." 🙏

History Update

CIA and Smokejumpers

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

In the July 2015 issue of *Smokejumper*, I published “The List,” smokejumpers who worked for the Agency (CIA). Smokejumpers and the Agency were involved in various operations around the world. Mostly unknown is that the largest use of smokejumpers by the Agency was in the “Secret War,” a parallel war to the Vietnam War but run in Laos. You will not find the “Secret War” in many textbooks. Only a very few students of history have written about it. But it is out there if you want to do research and read some excellent writing and research by some great authors.

At the time I printed “The List,” there were a few jumpers involved who did not want to have their names in print. I was accused by one of our members, who considered himself to be the “expert” in this area, of not having an accurate list. However, I had two “inside” sources that ran every name by the man at the top of the list. I am sure that the final “List” is accurate.

One of the limitations thrown at me at the time of writing the original “List” was that I only include those smokejumpers who had operated overseas. It is time that we added those who worked for the Agency in the U.S. to complete the record.

At CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, there is a Memorial Wall in the building lobby with 140 stars, no names, representing employees who died in the line of service. **Four of those stars are smokejumpers.**

The original article is below. **I have updated “The List” and added those jumpers who worked in the U.S.** The CIA, without any planning, found a group of people who could, as **Jim Vietch** (MSO-67) says, “do a tough, confusing job and then keep our mouths shut. I think smokejumpers have what it takes. They are not just fit and strong but have the ability to think independently and work towards a solution, no matter what the odds.”

The Selected Few and “The List”

(July 2015 issue *Smokejumper*)

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

Keeping in mind our 75th Anniversary Reunion, and the fact that we are all growing older, I have decided to share some information concerning important smokejumper history. As managing editor of *Smokejumper*, and a historian at heart, I have for many years tried to nail down how, when, and where smokejumpers began to be recruited by the CIA to carry out special operations—worldwide.

Over the years I’ve read pages of written documents from William Leary’s Air America collection at the University of Texas at Dallas. Numerous books chronicle operations in other locations. After 40 years there is nothing secret about the outstanding work these individuals have done under some of the most difficult circumstances.

Some individuals have requested that their names be left off the list and that request is honored, even though their names are public record, and some have given interviews to authors of books.

One of the main reasons for recognizing these men for their service is that we should record an accurate list of smokejumpers who were involved.

It is common knowledge from many written sources that smokejumpers have been involved in numerous far-flung operations from Tibet and India to the Congo, from Cuba and South America to the North Pole, and from Arizona to Vietnam. Finally, to Laos where a cadre of smokejumper air operations officers and ground support officers fought side by side with indigenous Lao troops and General Vang Pao’s Hmong army in their 15-year battle against the North Vietnamese. This war, known as the “Secret War,” became the final chapter in the lives of seven former smokejumpers employed as Air America “kickers” and one who was employed as a pilot (**Charles Diefenbach**/GAC-56). Further, there was a case officer (**Jerry Daniels**/MSO-58) who died in Bangkok,

Thailand, under suspicious circumstances, and another pilot (**Frank Odom**/MYC-63) who was shot down in Zambia, Africa.

All information was obtained from public sources. There are many books and websites available to anyone who wants to research the subject. Over the years many articles have been published in *Smokejumper*.

Back in November of 2002, I was communicating with **Jim Veitch** (MSO-67) while working on a story about the "Ravens." We were communicating about Jim's time in SEA, and I asked about recording smokejumper/CIA work in that part of the world. His response was very thought provoking:

"I was in charge of Saravane for about six months. One Raven died there, and two others were shot down.

"As far as giving info on what went on with the Agency, it's fine with me. I would like to see the emphasis put on smokejumping. There have been a lot of smokejumpers involved in Agency work over the years and basically no one knows about it. I don't know why the Agency chose jumpers, but there had to have been a reason. I think it was because we could go anywhere, anytime, and do a tough, confusing job and then keep our mouths shut. I think smokejumpers have what it takes. They are not just fit and strong but have the ability to think independently and work towards a solution, no matter what the odds.

"The real story is about the type of people it takes to make a smokejumper because you can take that type of person and drop them anywhere.

"One thing that amazed me then, and now, is how the war in Laos was so much like fighting a forest fire. I think that was because smokejumpers set the pattern in the early 60s in Laos. They must have started running Op's like they'd run a fire out near Huslia with four village crews. Same damned thing, except I ran four battalions and over 1200 soldiers.

"If you ever do write about the smokejumpers and the Agency, I think it would be a great contribution to the history of the smokejumpers and to that of the Vietnam era. Big project though, big."

Since 2003, I have seriously tried to identify the former jumpers who were involved in the above-mentioned activities. Many of the names you see on "The List" have come directly from those involved. I came across other names when reading various books, newspaper articles, and stories published in *Smokejumper*.

It is my opinion that the relationship between the smokejumpers and the CIA began in 1951, when the Agency sent two paramilitary-types to Missoula to go through smokejumper training. Apparently, when the two trainees returned to Washington, D.C., the people in charge figured out that there was a group of people out west who were already trained in most of the skills they were looking for, and who were ready and willing to take on any challenge. Hence, the CIA recruiting began in Missoula, and the rest is history.

I used the following criteria to determine who belonged on "The List": Former smokejumpers who were Air America "kickers" or pilots and/or were field employees of the CIA in "overseas" positions between 1951 and 1975 when the "Secret War" ended. I'm sure that the list is pretty accurate, but it is always possible to miss someone, and I am always interested in any updates and corrections.

It is important to record history accurately. As seen in the April issue of *Smokejumper* and Operation Firefly, if it is not recorded accurately, what is written in later years is far from the fact and is created by writers far removed from the events. (**This is the end of the original article.**)

The Updated List

I have found two smokejumpers who were OSS during WWII and have added them to "The List" even though they were prior to the 1951-75 era.

Allen, Max (MSO-48), Deceased 7/6/98
Andersen, Roland "Andy" (GAC-52), Deceased 12/12/17
Ball, Herman (MSO-50), Deceased 4/16/14
Banta, Louis (CJ-51)
Barber, James (GAC-60), Deceased 4/4/02
Barber, Michael (MSO-68), Deceased 10/10/07
Barnowsky, Fred (MSO-42), Deceased 7/15/08
Beasley, Ray (MYC-52), Deceased 2/1/18
Bevan, David (MSO-55), Deceased 8/13/61
Bober, Mike (MSO-46), Deceased 4/15/05
Bowles, Bill (RDD-57)
Brown, Lyle (GAC-54), Deceased 4/13/12
Bustamante, Ed (GAC-61), Deceased 1/9/16
Butler, Tom (MSO-61)
Cahill, Jack (MSO-58)
Casieri, Al (MSO-52), Deceased 1/26/05
Cochran, Art (MSO-42), Deceased 10/3/08
Courtney, Don (MSO-56)
Daniels, Jerry (MSO-58), Deceased 4/28/82

DeBruin, Gene (MSO-59), Shot down 9/5/63 MIA
 Demmons, Bill (MSO-51)
 Dieffenbach, Charles (GAC-56), Deceased 7/23/62
 Dobbins, Wallace (MSO-47), Deceased 11/18/02
 Eubanks, Darrel (IDC-54), Deceased 8/13/61
 Evans, Charles (MSO-56), Deceased 11/10/62
 Fessler, Loren (MSO-46) OSS, Deceased 2/21/02
 Fite, Larry (MSO-60)
 Gordon, Don (MSO-59)
 Gossett, Lee (RDD-57)
 Graham, Richard (IDC-58)
 Granquist, Gary (RAC-65), Deceased 3/7/86
 Grasky, Jim (MSO-67)
 Greiner, Claude (MSO-54), Deceased 5/5/17
 Greiner, Tom (MSO-55), Deceased 10/1/17
 Grenager, Lyle (MSO-48), Deceased 4/5/22
 Grenlin, Les (MSO-46), Deceased 9/10/95
 Grover, Dayton (MSO-55), Deceased 7/23/15
 Hale, Glenn (MYC-57), Deceased 8/24/10
 Hamilton, Cliff (CJ-62)
 Hannon, Gary, Deceased 10/10/21
 Harrison, Reed (MSO-60), Deceased 7/23/93
 Herald, Robert (MSO-55)
 Hessel, Ken (MYC-58)
 Hester, Billy (MSO-58), Deceased 4/10/70
 Houston, Everett (MYC-71), Deceased 6/18/08
 Johnson, Miles (MYC-53), Deceased 10/26/97
 Johnson, Shep (MYC-56), Deceased 4/20/16
 Jukkala, Art (MSO-56), Deceased 7/12/99
 Kalbfus, Charles (MSO-45)
 Kapitz, Russ (MSO-58)
 Kirkley, Johnny (CJ-64)
 Kofford, Larry (MSO-63)
 Kriebel, Norman (MSO-43), Deceased 12/14/04
 Lehfeltdt, Bruce (MSO-54)
 Lewis, John (MYC-53), Deceased 8/13/61
 Locklear, Bill (GAC-63)
 MacKay, Robert (MSO-51), Deceased 6/9/18
 Manley, John (CJ-62)
 Marlow, Glen (MSO-57)
 Mathews, Jack (MSO-48), Deceased 2/12/01
 Mellin, Dave (RAC-66), Deceased 1/26/98
 Moloney, Bob (MYC-64)
 Moore, Larry (IDC-59)
 Moseley, Charley (CJ-62), Deceased 4/8/14
 Newton, Gideon (CJ-55), Deceased 7/17/63
 Nicol, Bob (MSO-52),
 Nyquest, Ted (MSO-54),
 Odom, Frank (MYC-63), Deceased 4/5/77
 Oehlerich, Mike (MSO-60)

Parker, Ray (MSO-53)
 Peterson, Richard (MYC-47), Deceased 10/19/99
 Pope, Clem (CJ-46) OSS, Deceased 10/10/14
 Rainey, George (RAC-68)
 Reed, Barry (MSO-60)
 Roberts, Harry (MSO-53), Deceased 5/17/10
 Saltsman, Joe (MSO-46), Deceased 3/28/13
 Samsel, Kirk (MSO-60), Deceased 9/9/94
 Schas, David (MYC-48), Deceased 7/14/88
 Schenck, Ray (MSO-56), Deceased 6/94
 Scheid, Pat (MSO-58)
 Scott, Lavon (MYC-48), Deceased 1/18/23
 Scott, Toby (MYC-57)
 Seethaler, Karl (MSO-55)
 Smith, George (IDC-62), Deceased 8/16/06
 Smith, Kenn (IDC-55), Deceased 8/22/97
 Smith, Glenn (NCSB-40), Deceased 5/28/88
 Spence, John (MYC-58)
 Stoleson, Ron (MSO-56), Deceased 9/9/19
 Stone, Dale (MYC-57)
 Swain, Charles (MSO-51), Deceased
 Swift, Mick (CJ-56), Deceased 10/5/93
 Thompson, "T.J." (MSO-55)
 Thorsrud, Gar (MSO-46), Deceased 11/23/14
 Veitch, Jim (MSO-67)
 Wall, Jack (MSO-48), Deceased 9/28/10
 Ward, Hal (CJ-62)
 Watson, Bob (MSO-51), Deceased 12/6/12
 Webb, Wayne (MSO-46), Deceased 11/7/99
 Weissenback, Ed (CJ-64), Deceased 12/27/71
 Whipple, Greg (MSO-59)
 Wolfrum, Fritz (MSO-53), Deceased 10/9/18
 Yeager, Charley (RAC-65)

Inside U.S.:

Bell, Doug (MSO-58), Deceased 5/18/19
 Black, Jim (MSO-58), Deceased
 Blaine, Jim (MSO-63)
 Blake, Clifton G. (MSO-55)
 Crowder, David (MSO-59), Deceased 1/5/06
 Fleming, Bob (NCSB-54), Deceased 9/24/00
 Krout, Leonard (MSO-46), Deceased, 4/17/92
 Miller, Jerry (MYC-63)
 Murphy, Bill (MSO-56), Deceased 2/23/16
 Olson, Jim (MSO-54), Deceased
 Russo, Mike (MYC-67)
 Savage, Roger (MSO-57)
 Tag, Paul (GAC-60)
 Tracy, Dick (MSO-53), Deceased 3/24/06 🕊



THE JUMP LIST

The Men of 1958



This column is part of the NSA History Preservation Project. The bios may have been shortened due to lack of page space. The complete bios 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.

Douglas F. Baird (North Cascades '58)

"I was born on May 22, 1939, in Brigham City, Utah, and grew up in Brigham until my senior year when my family moved to Laramie, Wyoming. I graduated from Laramie High School in 1957. The summer after graduation, I worked for the USFS in the Boise N.F. on a brush and fire crew out of Lester Creek Guard Station.

"I attended the University of Wyoming for the next two years (1957-59) and was hired as a smokejumper during the summer of 1958. Francis Lufkin was the base manager.

"I served as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for 2 ½ years, from November 1959-June 1962 on the Navajo Reservation in Northern Arizona during that time. I then continued my education during the summer of 1962, choosing to attend BYU in Provo, Utah.

"During the summers of 1964-65, I was hired as a smokejumper with the BLM in Fairbanks, Alaska. A few years later, while we were

living in Anchorage, Alaska, I was hired part-time by the USFS during the summers of 1973 and 1974 as temporary foreman of a helitack crew and the next summer as a spotter for a few weeks.

"I graduated from Brigham Young University in 1965 with a degree in education, and 1967 with a master's degree in educational administration.

"I was employed for the next 35 years as a teacher/administrator in the educational system of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I taught high school and college-age students and supervised other teachers. My assignments took us back on the Navajo Reservation (2 years), Victoria, BC, Canada (3 years), then to Anchorage, Alaska, (4 years), and to Ashland, Oregon (26 years). I retired in 2001 and presently live in Eagle, Idaho, near some of our grandchildren.

"My employment as a smokejumper was filled with excitement, high adventure, and tragedy. It was during a time when most of life's critical decisions were made. My training helped provide me with the courage and faith to pursue noble goals, as well as the financial means to continue my education and secure for myself and loved ones a fulfilling career. I am grateful for those early pioneers who paved the way for those of us who came later. I was privileged to work under some of them and learned to appreciate and respect them."

Ronald L. "Ron" Baylor (Missoula '58)

Ron was born January 10, 1938, in Amboy, Illinois. He graduated from Lee Center H.S. in Lee Center, Illinois, and received his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Illinois in 1956. Ron conducted his Veterinary Practice in Othello, Washington (1966-69), Ritzville, Washington (1970-80), and Green Bay, Wisconsin, 1980-2010. He jumped at Missoula 1958 and 1960 and at Grangeville 1959.

Daniel L. "Dan" Colgan (Missoula '58)

Dan was born January 26, 1938, in Great Falls, Montana, where he grew up and graduated from high school in 1956. He went on to Montana State University where he graduated with a degree in Forestry in 1960. Dan then went to work (1960-63) for North Pacific Lumber and then to a position in lumber sales for Teton Studs (1963-71). In 1971 he founded Teton West Lumber out of Cheyenne, Wyoming, until 2020. Dan went on from 2020-23 to mentor Teton West in Fort Collins, Colorado.

"My few years jumping helped me to get through Forestry School and left me with a grand experience. Tested with the best people ever. I had to graduate before I determined that working for the USFS bureaucracy was just not a good fit. So, it's been 63 years

working with almost every Rocky Mountain sawmill and marketing our wood to the world. Although the industry is smaller today, I remember seven operating mills in Missoula in 1960. But the fight for good forest management is not over yet—we have to win!” Dan jumped at Missoula 1958 and 1960.

John P. McMahon (Missoula '58)

John was born on April 24, 1938, in Meriden, Connecticut, and lived in New London, Milford, and Waterbury while growing up, before graduating from Newington H.S. in 1956. He then enrolled in the School of Forestry at the University of Montana and completed his B.S. degree in Forestry in 1960, and later a Master of Forestry degree at the U. of M. in 1964. He worked one summer on the Powell District of the Clearwater N. F., completed smokejumper training in 1958, and jumped during the summers of 1958 and 1960.

In parallel with his career in forestry, John had enlisted in the U.S.

Marine Corps Reserve at age 17 during his junior year in high school. Following graduation from the University of Montana in 1960, he transferred to the Montana Air National Guard and completed USAF navigator and radar intercept officer training at James Connally AFB at Waco, TX, in 1962. From 1962 to 1966, he served as a radar intercept officer in the F-89J Scorpion with the 186th FIS, Montana Air National Guard at Great Falls, and the 123rd FIS, Oregon Air National Guard at Portland. In 1966, John transferred to the U. S. Naval Air Reserve at NAS Seattle and NAS Whidbey Island where he served for the next twelve years as a patrol plane navigator and tactical officer in the SP2H Neptune and P3A Orion with Patrol Squadron 69, retiring with the rank of Commander in 1981.

John started his forestry career with Weyerhaeuser Company in Longview, WA, in 1964, at Snoqualmie Falls, WA, Chehalis, WA, Hot Springs, AR, and Springfield, OR. In 1977 he was assigned to the corporate Timberlands staff in Federal Way, WA, became a Vice President

in 1981, and for the next twenty years was responsible for providing direction and staff support to Weyerhaeuser's timberlands and forestry operations in the U.S. and Canada in forest regeneration, forest inventory, timber harvesting, and forest practices. He retired in 2001 as Vice President of Timberlands External & Regulatory Affairs.

John Conrad Magel (McCall '58)

John was born September 18, 1938, in Twin Falls, Idaho, graduating from the Twin Falls High School in 1956 where he was a marksman in their Gun Club. John is a 1960 graduate of the University of Idaho and later, the UC Berkeley School of Law. He passed the Idaho State Bar examination in 1965. John entered the U.S. Army and was promoted to Captain in 1966. In 1971, John was a Deputy Attorney General. In 2007, he was an applicant for the Idaho State Supreme Court. 🦋

Off the List

Alford “Omar” Roos (Redding '83)

Omar, 79, died December 30, 2023, died due to complications from COVID. He was born August 11, 1944, in Panama City, Panama, where he grew up and graduated from Balboa H.S., Canal Zone, in 1962. He earned in AA from Canal Zone College and a BA from New Mexico State Univ. in 1965. In 1968 he earned a degree in Applied Science and Land Surveying from Montana State University and another AA in Medical Assistance from Santa Fe Community College in 2014. Omar served in the Army 1968-73 as a Captain in Vilseck, Germany. Omar had a diverse work career: USFS Trail Maintenance 1978, Helicopter firefighter 1981-82, USFS Smokejumper 1983-84, survey party chief 1990-91, and several other surveying positions in Santa Fe until he took over the care of his parents. He

lived in Santa Fe, N.M. until moving to Los Alamos, N.M. after the passing of his parents.

Bruce B. Hronek (Idaho City '55)

Bruce, 87, died November 19, 2023. He was born January 9, 1936, in Pocatello, Idaho, and later graduated from the University of Idaho with a degree in Forest Management in 1958. After graduation he was a lieutenant in the Army trained as an artillery officer and as an airborne officer. Bruce had a 33-year career with the USFS. During this time, he earned an MBA from Western International University and a law degree from Antioch Law School in Washington, D.C. Bruce continued a second career as a professor at Indiana University teaching Recreational Resource Administration and Legal Liability for 20 years. He jumped at Idaho City during the 1955 season and at McCall 1956-57. 🦋

NEPA and Its Affect on Wildfire Timber Salvage: The Summit Fire of 1996

by F. Carl Pence (USFS Ret.)

Yearly, thousands of acres are burned in our nation and millions of dollars are spent in attempts to control fires, rehabilitate burned areas, and recovery of involved communities. The resulting smoke also damages human health and adds to the specter of global warming.

As a professional Forester and Forest Supervisor, I tried to offset those costs with salvage of merchantable timber when the opportunity was available. Fire salvage on private and state-owned commercial timber lands is common practice and occurs right after the fire is controlled.

However, on federal lands, the opportunity is seldom pursued successfully or even attempted. If the manager selects to do so, he or she faces a time-consuming, expensive and controversial process, which was created by the National Environment Protection Act (NEPA) of 1969 and a plethora of additional environmental acts of the following two decades.

To someone educated in Forestry, salvaging merchantable timber, if done professionally, can be a valid part of fire recovery. If there is an existing, nearby timber industry, salvage can also offset the impact of the fire to the local population. However, to someone who views human interaction with nature as a negative thing, they likely feel timber salvage only can add to the fire damage. During my efforts to salvage merchantable timber on the Summit Fire of 1996, I was accused of **“wanting to rape a burn victim.”**

The Summit Fire started in the neighboring Umattilla Forest in the middle of August. It developed a large convection column. Uncontrollable momentum was created as it entered a “roadless area” with heavy fuel loading. That added to the “column driven effect.” During that afternoon, the Type-2 Incident Command



F. Carl Pence

Team had to rapidly relocate its headquarters to avoid being consumed. That left the fire unstaffed as it rapidly moved into the Malheur N.F. The positive thing was that most of the area it burned on the Malheur NF had been managed intensely as commercial forest land over the past 50 years. Because of that, fuel loading was low. The fire’s momentum slowed, and the “crown fire” eventually converted to a “ground fire.” This helped Malheur Forest crews stop its momentum and they controlled it the following day.

That day, the District Ranger and I drove through the fire to assess damage. As we viewed the burned area, we felt there was a good opportunity for timber salvage which could possibly amount to about 100-million board feet of very merchantable ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and larch.

I had years of experience with NEPA application on previous assignments as a Forest Planner, Deputy Forest Supervisor and Area Ranger. There are two choices in a project like we were contemplating. We could do an Environmental Analysis (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). EAs involve one published document and can be successful if there was no significant opposition to the decision. If successful, it normally takes about a year to finish. An EIS, on the other hand, requires publishing a draft (DEIS) for public review and then publishing a Final (FEIS), which responds to public comment to the Draft.

The EIS process normally involves at least two years of intense work. If a manager elects to do an EA and significant public opposition occurs, the manager has the option to drop the project or decide to do an EIS. That’s like going back to the starting point, adding about two more years to the decision process. I elected

to initiate an Environmental Impact Statement, as I felt we would have opposition to any salvage operation and wanted to get it done as soon as possible to minimize loss of timber value.

The timeliness of timber salvage is critical following a fire, especially with pine trees. Beetle larva rapidly drill holes in the trees. In that process, beetles also introduce a blue fungus into the wood, which stains the wood with a light blue color. After three summers following a fire, dead pines have little value as dimensional lumber. Douglas Fir and Larch, however, tend to retain merchantability for two or three years beyond the pines.

Eastern Oregon and Washington forests were being targeted by environmental organizations following their success in closing most of timber harvesting on forests on the west side of the Cascade Mountains. Because of that, we started the EIS process by identifying likely appeal points and systematically made decisions to reduce the possibility of a successful appeal on those points. However, in doing so it reduced the amount of salvage in our decision.

Issues included large dead trees for snag-dependent birds and sedimentation of streams for anadromous fish spawning and rearing habitat. I also knew an additional appeal point would be harvesting mature ponderosa pine which had green needle damage following the fire. The green needle issue had been the subject of a demonstration the previous March when 24 environmentalists had barricaded roads accessing a different fire salvage operation which involved large Ponderosa Pine that had some green needles following a wildfire. We also doubled the normal setback of harvest activity from riparian areas.

Our recovery plans also included reseeding desirable grasses and forbs over all the area and planting conifer seedlings throughout the burn. In the riparian area, we planned to plant willows and other riparian species to help streambank recovery. As I mentioned earlier, the area included significant past timber harvests. As a result, the area was heavily roaded to accommodate antiquated, short cable logging techniques. Our plan included closing and rehabilitating many of those old roads and replacing culverts at stream crossings with bridges. Metal culverts at stream crossings created barriers to anadromous fish spawning migration.

We planned to design timber salvage units to create a natural mosaic of forest age classes. As we laid out the harvest plan, actual harvest acreage included only about 30% of the total burned acreage. The decision would

also leave standing snags throughout the burn to provide ample habitat for raptors and woodpeckers.

By the time we applied all these mitigation actions, the proposed timber volume was 50 million board feet, essentially half of what the Ranger and I originally felt was possible. We completed the Final EIS before the second summer before significant deterioration to merchantable timber occurred.

We felt we were prepared for appeals and lawsuits from opposition groups, which were sure to come. However, an unexpected internal opposition occurred an hour before we were scheduled to open industry's bids to identify the highest bidder on the timber volume offered. It involved a conference call from the FS Washington Office.

On the phone were three WO staff officers. They called to inform me and my staff we should not proceed with the bidding process. Frankly, I was shocked by their timing, and I explained to them I needed very good reasons for such a decision to give to my employees, the timber industry, and the community. Lots of local jobs were tied to the salvage of that timber and we needed to start the action before natural deterioration of the timber would render the salvage unprofitable.

All reasons they gave me were untrue or we had already covered them in our plan and public involvement. A good example was they stated US Senator Ron Wyden was opposed to the sale. I had been working with the Senator's local staff all through the process and had discussed it personally with the Senator when he visited the county. I told them I knew that was not true and added when we were through with the call, I was going to call the Senator and inform him of their call (he later requested an apology for the inappropriate use of his name).

I pressed them for the real reason for their demands, and they finally admitted the White house had called and said the administration knew lawsuits would be filed regarding the EIS decision. If I didn't sell the timber, timber Industry would likely sue. If I did, the environmentalists would sue to stop the sale. They admitted the Clinton administration wanted to be on the environmentalist's side of any lawsuit about the proposal. I laughed at that and asked if that was what I should share publicly as my reason to not proceed?

I was getting very frustrated and asked if any of them were "line officers" versus "staff officers." They

answered, “no.” I also asked if they had discussed their concerns with my immediate supervisor, the Regional Forester. I pointed out I was responsible to him, not to them. I knew they had not discussed their concerns with my immediate supervisor because I had called him during a “potty break.” He was very upset the WO staffers had circumvented his authority by calling me directly.

At that point they finally agreed I could open bids and determine the high bidder. By this time, it was nearly 11am and they did not know I had already directed my timber staff officer to open bids and award the sale to the highest bidder as planned at 10am. At that point, I informed them I didn’t need their “... .. help” and hung up. Through all this debate, I kept assuring myself I was going to be old enough to retire with full benefits in a couple months, so figured what could they do to me anyway?

As expected, environmentalists filed lawsuits. They also tried to keep us from initiating logging by filing a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) motion pending the results of the lawsuits. If the judge agreed, that would stall implementation of all the decisions in the EIS until the judge issued his final decision. Their TRO motion was expected, I was prepared, and responded to the judge with a letter explaining the planned fire recovery efforts and fire salvage were linked and was necessary for recovery. Salvage would help finance much of it and would reduce future fuel build-up and create a more natural fuel mosaic. Fortunately, the judge agreed and denied their TRO.

The largest timber operator in Oregon had the highest bid and he began harvest activity immediately as the highest bidder. At the time, he owned two mills in John Day Valley.

There were casualties. The Umatilla Forest tried to salvage their part of the burn using the shorter Environmental Analysis process. Environmentalists appealed their decision and filed a successful Temporary Restraining Order. Sadly, they had already started logging, and some logs were already stacked in the field. Another casualty was my decision to not harvest large ponderosa pines that had significant needle damage, but still had unburned needles. We knew most of those trees would be weakened sufficiently to allow beetles to kill them. That happened, and the timber operator asked me to write an addition to the decision letting them include them in the harvest. I would have liked

to. However, I felt an amendment would likely open the decision for another appeal.

It was a bad fire year, and the Oregon and Washington National Congressmen held a public hearing in John Day to understand decisions relative to fire management and efforts to salvage merchantable timber. They specifically questioned me on why I reduced the harvest to 50MMB, half of what the Ranger and I felt was possible as we started the EIS, and the politicians wanted to understand that, and other issues associated with the other large fires in the Region.

The timber company gave me a picture of the first load of logs from the sale. Two years later, they sent me a picture of the last load of logs from the sale. That same week I received the judge’s final decision regarding the legal action environmentalists filed. He denied all their claims. That same day, the lawyer representing the appellants called me and said he admired how we handled it all and said he would not represent environmentalists in future similar cases.

While that gave me closure, there were human casualties associated with that fire and other changes occurring in the Forest Service, which still bother me. The worst casualty to me was the unit’s District Ranger, who rode with me as we considered the opportunity for fire salvage, had a massive heart attack and died a couple months after we started working on the EIS. He was an excellent example of an old time, professional Forester who took pride in applying active management to his district.

In addition, timber harvesting of National Forests was declining rapidly nation-wide due to opposition and loss of political support for that use. As a result, I had to significantly reduce staffing levels. I helped relocate about a third of the Forest employees. Many others selected the option of early retirement. While working through it all, I experienced clinical depression. Doctors prescribed Paxil and it worked for me. The community doctors informed me depression was epidemic throughout the valley’s historic logging communities, and they were medicating many.

1996 was the start of the large wildfires we face today. My wife and I happily escaped as I transferred to an Interagency job in Boise, Idaho. I retired three years later. I doubt the success we achieved in salvage and recovery of this fire could be repeated given today’s Forest Service staffing, mission, and the lack of national political support. 🙏



George Ostrom, MSO-50. (Courtesy Heidi Ostrom Duncan)

George Ostrom, 95, holding the latest copy of *Smokeyjumper* magazine. That's him on the cover when he was the lone jumper at the dedication of the new Missoula jump center (1954), in front of Pres. Eisenhower and 40,000 others. After breaking a bunch of bones, he turned to radio and journalism. George is a member of the Montana Broadcasters Hall of Fame and a Distinguished Alumni of the University of Montana, with a journalism scholarship in his name.

New Life Members Since April 2023

466	Julio Bilbao, Idaho City, 1964	477	James Kautz, Missoula, 1974
467	John Doran, No. Cascades, 1972	478	Robert Kautz, Missoula, 1979
468	Elijah Stunkel, Associate	479	Rick Elefant, Redding, 1974
469	Harold Flake, Idaho City, 1961	480	Lance Stryker, Redmond, 1967
470	Larry Wright Cave Junction, 1956	481	Larry Peters, Cave Junction, 1963
471	Kenneth Coe, Fairbanks, 1980	482	Anell Slavick, Idaho City, 1969
472	Ron Hogan, Associate	483	Don Whyde, Missoula, 1966
473	Steve Henry, Missoula, 1965	484	Doug Gochmour, Boise, 1974
474	Charlie Wetzal, West Yellowstone, 1992	485	Pat Mcgunagle, West Yellowstone, 2019
475	K. G. Sheley, Associate	486	Chuck Sundstrom, Missoula, 1957
476	Terry Reece, Fairbanks, 1964		



SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

A few months back, I got an email from **Vince Massier** (MYC-77) with a heads-up on **Ken Axelson** (MYC-47) who will turn 100 in April 2024. I went to our database which showed no contact information for Ken. More research found that his correct name is Albert Kenneth Axelson and that he lives in Wanamingo, Minnesota. By doing further research on the internet and using information gained in some emails, I've put the following story together about Ken Axelson. Some good reading here about his amazing WWII experiences. Let's start with the following:

"Twin Cities Pioneer Press"
Richard Chin (2014)

Seventy years ago, Friday, the 20-year-old Minnesotan (Ken) was in one of the deadliest places in a big, bloody battle in the middle of a devastating worldwide

conflict. He was an American soldier hitting Omaha Beach in the D-Day invasion of German-occupied France, a crucial turning point in World War II.

Axelson lived through what has been called "the longest day." But more bad stuff would happen before the war was over for the Welch, MN, farm boy. He became a paratrooper and fought in another brutal battle, the Battle of the Bulge. He was captured and spent three months as a prisoner of war, where he wondered if he would live long enough to be liberated. But now at age 90, he's in his tightest jam.

"I know I'm not going to get out of this one," said the Wanamingo resident. "I read the obits, and most of them are younger than me. I was part of an adventure, a big one," Axelson said. "I was there on D-Day. There's not that many people who can say that anymore."

Axelson was inducted in the Army in June 1943, just after graduating from Red Wing High School. Axelson told the army he liked to hunt and shoot, but the Army didn't give him a gun. They made him a medic attached to an engineering brigade. When his landing craft hit the beach, he waded ashore, avoiding the



German artillery fire. They got the ship we were on. The skipper lost his arm," Axelson said.

The invasion force landed at low tide, and Axelson was confronted with a strange assortment of debris littering the beach, possessions that earlier waves of soldiers had dropped. He also started to see the dead, including a man from his unit, the mail clerk, crumpled on the sand with his skull pierced by a chunk of shrapnel.

Axelson's unit set up an aid station in a tank trap, and he spent the day and night carrying in the wounded. His first experience with combat "was just hard work, that's all it is, with a little fear thrown in," he said.

He doesn't talk in detail about all he saw that day, but it must have been the worst that modern weapons can do to a human body. Some men fell apart under the strain. "This is what we trained for. This is what we did," he said. "Some people could handle it. Some couldn't."

"I did what I could," he said. "It was a pretty wild day." The next day he walked by bodies of the dead stacked on the beach "like cordwood." They were three or four high, in a row stretching 200 to 300 feet. "I walked on the foot side. I didn't care to look at the faces," he said. He also saw his first Germans, a group of about 100 prisoners sitting on the beach.

Over the summer, Allied forces fought their way inland, and Axelson ended up taking a crash course in parachute training, jumping five times in one day, because the 101st Airborne Division needed medics after fighting in Holland in September 1944. As part of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, he fought in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.

Holding a key crossroads in Bastogne, Belgium, the 101st Airborne Division was surrounded and besieged by German forces for five days at the end of December. He can recall the wounds of the other men involved in the fighting and the times he narrowly missed being hit himself.

"Machine gun tracers like a garden hose, and someone goes down, and I thought, 'Shoot, I'll have to go out and get him.'"

"I stood on the steps and counted seven of our airplanes going down."

His full head of hair is white now, but back then he was a redhead. Most of his fellow soldiers knew the shy farm boy as "Red the Medic."

One night, he was trying to sleep in a haystack when another soldier woke him up with this greeting: "Get up right away, there's 100 Germans coming into town." "That's how I woke up, Christmas morning, 3 a.m., 1944," Axelson said.

On Jan. 3, still fighting near Bastogne, Axelson helped evacuate one last wounded soldier just before six German tanks overran his position. He and a handful of Americans there were captured. When the Germans grabbed him,

he had to leave behind his medical bags where he had stashed five chocolate bars he had been saving. The loss of that precious food would haunt him for the rest of the winter while he was a prisoner of war.

When he was interrogated by an English-speaking German officer, Axelson tried to convince him that as a medic, he was a noncombatant and should be sent to a neutral country like Sweden or Switzerland. The officer said, "I've been to Sweden many times. Beautiful country. Too bad you'll never see it."

He and the other prisoners were marched through German towns and jammed in crowded boxcars for days. He saw fellow prisoners die of hunger, sickness or just despair. "They were dying every day, maybe a half-dozen would starve to death," he said. "I never gave up. I was going to live for spite if nothing else."

When the prisoners walked into Germany, he joked about the competition between Allied generals to be the first to cross the German frontier.

"Hey guys, we beat both Patton and Montgomery across the Rhine," Axelson remembers saying.

But he wondered if he would live long enough to be liberated. "We tried to anticipate how many days we had left. It wasn't weeks. It was days. If someone didn't intervene, we knew it was over. I hadn't lived much yet. I hadn't had a serious romance yet."

On April 2, 1945, he turned 21. It was also the day that American Sherman tanks knocked down the gates of the prisoner of war camp. "The elation, the euphoria. It was just unbelievable. I like to eat. After that POW camp, food is important."

Axelson's parents, who had been

told only that he was missing in action, didn't learn he was alive until they got the letter Axelson wrote to his mother a few days after he was liberated. He got back to Fort Snelling on May 2, 1945. He took the streetcar to the end of the line, hitched a ride for part of the rest of way and walked the last few miles through the Cannon River valley back into his hometown. A farmer who saw him passing by said, "You look pretty lively for a dead man."

After the war, Axelson got a job briefly as a smokejumper, parachuting out of planes to fight forest fires. He used the G.I. Bill to get a pilot's license. He built houses and was a Culligan man. He got married and had six children and 13 grandchildren. Before retiring in 1989, he was a building inspector in Goodhue County.

"My brain is still working good," he said. "And I don't feel old. In my heart, I don't feel old." He said that he's outlived all of his enemies.

"Who knows?" he said of his knack for survival. "I love life."

Ken jumped at McCall during the 1947 season. Happy birthday Ken! 🍄



“Animal Ed” Was a Remarkable Smokejumper and Man

by Lance Stryker (Redding '67)

My rookie year roommate at the Redmond Air Center barracks in 1967 was **Ed Weissenback** (RAC-64). Ed was 5 foot 8 inches tall and weighed 212 pounds. He had a 28-inch waist and his biceps were larger than my thighs. He bought size 56 pants and had a tailor neck them down to fit.

Ed was swarthy with straight, jet black hair and mustache with no neck to speak of. It was rumored that Ed had once been considered Coach Joe Paterno's next great running back at Penn State until he was caught with three naked women in the football dormitory.

Ed had a tic rumored to have been acquired in combat in Southeast Asia and which made him all the more imposing.

Although Ed never revealed to me what branch of the military he was in before he hooked up with the CIA, he showed me a picture of himself in front of the gate to a euphemistically named “Freedom Village” in South Vietnam. There were two human heads on bamboo poles. Ed might have been part of a Phoenix assassination squad.

Among other things which Ed kept in his closet in the barracks was a blender and an assortment of powders and supplements. Most mornings Ed put at least four raw eggs, some citrus, and various powders and supplements in his blender. He would then walk around the base in the morning sunshine with his blender and his T-shirt tucked under his canvas belt drinking his ugly brown concoction.

I was with Ed in the DC-3 one afternoon in the middle of a thunderstorm somewhere over Southern Oregon when he was the spotter. Ed stood near the open jump door and broke wind courtesy of his raw egg breakfast. The pilot, Bob White, and the co-pilot gagged and inquired who had died in the back. Ed just smiled his shit-eating grin and cackled.

When there were no fires, Ed's job at the base was to head up the “Sunshine Crew.” The crew's assignment was to sweep the red cinders off the roadways and sidewalks and see to the landscaping.

This lasted, at most, half an hour. Ed would then lead everyone down to the PT area. While there, Ed

would proceed to do sets of 25 pull-ups, first two-handed, front and back, then one-handed, front and back. Ed was one of the most muscled and strongest individuals most of us had ever met.

Packing out of a fire with Ed was an experience. Just before reaching the trailhead where a Forest Service ride was waiting, Ed would have everyone rest by the trail out of sight and listening for our Forest Service ride. When everyone was rested, Ed took the lining out of his hard hat and put his hat on his head. He resembled a Yuruk-Hai out of Lord of the Rings.

He had us don our packs and then would lead us running down to the trailhead, pretending that we had run most of the way out from the fire.

Among the things Ed kept in his closet in the barracks was a small terrarium. In it, he kept a small rattlesnake nicknamed Adolph.

One night when we had too much to drink at the Pastime in Redmond, Ed took Adolph out of his terrarium and let him crawl around on my face to the laughing amusement of the other inebriated jumpers. I was way too far gone to care as I was passed out, face up, on my bunk. The next morning there was a rush to my room by the other inebriates to relieve their anxiety as to whether I was still alive.

Unfortunately for young Adolph, Ed reached into his terrarium one hot afternoon and startled Adolph. When Ed grabbed him, Adolph bit Ed in his hand. Ed bit off Adolph's head on the spot.

Most rattlesnake bites, especially in the hand, would require medical treatment and long physical therapy. Ed, however, had some special potion which he brought back from Southeast Asia, and his hand was healed with full flexibility within a week.

My first encounter with cannabis was also courtesy of Ed. Additionally, among the things which he kept in his closet in the barracks, were two or three grocery bags full of Thai stick—very potent stuff.

How he managed to smuggle that much cannabis back from Southeast Asia, Ed never revealed. He had been employed by the CIA kicking cargo for Air America, so I guess it should have been no surprise.

When Ed returned from approximately three weeks in the hospital after his jump accident rescue, described by **Bruce Jackson** and **Bill Vaughn** (RAC-69) in the April 2023 issue of *Smokeyjumper* magazine ("Rescue jump for Animal Ed"), he weighed about 168 pounds and looked like a miniature version of his previous self. He was miraculously cured apparently

by having his body utilize all of the muscle protein he had built up over the years.

There are surely stories others could tell about Ed, but all in all, Ed was a remarkable, one-of-a-kind individual, and certainly deserved the moniker of "Animal Ed." 🐼

Why We Wore Whites History of White Boot Company

by **Harvey Harden** (Idahao '59)

Edward White learned to make boots from his father and made his first pair of boots in 1853. He made boots for Virginia loggers before the Civil war. John White, son of Edward, was born in West Virginia in 1879 and continued the family boot making business. In 1902, John White moved the family business to Saint Maries, Idaho, and taught his son, Otto, the boot making business. John and Otto focused on providing silver miners with the best boots available. By this time, they had the reputation of making the best boots that money could buy. They were the most comfortable and the longest lasting boots available. In 1915, John moved the business to the corner of Main and Stevens in Spokane, Washington, where Otto joined him in 1920, and continued to expand the business. Windows in the Spokane business allowed sidewalk traffic the opportunity to watch skilled boot makers at work. In 1995 the business was moved to Ferry Street near the Spokane County Fairgrounds to provide additional space that the growing boot company required. In 2019, the White Boot Company was purchased by LaCrosse Footwear of Portland, Oregon. When mining in the Silver Valley slowed, the focus of the White Boot Company expanded from serving the mining community to serving those working in the forest and specifically to those fighting wildland fires. White boots are still made in Spokane and the number one seller is the "Smokeyjumper," which currently sells for \$550.

My First Boots Were Not Whites: During NED (new employee development) training at McCall, I wore a pair of "Redwing" boots and realized that I was going to have to step up and get a better pair of boots before the fire jumps started. The Redwings

were comfortable and light, and I could almost keep up with **Del Hessel** and **Craig Desilvia**, the two track stars of the 1959 NED class. What the Redwing boots lacked that the Whites provided was good arch support and ankle support. I wanted a pair of White Boots, but there was no way that I was going to spend \$89.95 for a pair of boots in 1959. I would go into Shavers in McCall, which sold everything from groceries to boots to hardware to bakery goods, and buy a donut. Then I would visit with Jim Eiseman, who operated the bakery. I had known Jim since grade school, and I would ask about his family, which included two attractive daughters. Jim always made sure that I knew he did not want his daughters "anywhere near that Smokeyjumper Base." At the time, I wondered if he was politely telling me to stay away from his daughters? Regardless, he was an excellent baker who made wonderful pastries enjoyed by many McCall Smokeyjumpers. After visiting with Jim, I would go look at White boots and leave Shavers with a good taste in my mouth, but no boots. Finally, I went to Boise and bought a pair of Buffalo Boots for a more reasonable price of \$35. The jumpers, being polite and timid, called my boots "Buffalo Chips." I thought my \$35 boots looked good and they were comfortable. Best of all, I had an extra \$54.95 in my pocket.

Quality Is Remembered After Price Is Forgotten: On July 26, 1959, **Clarence Teichert** (IDC-55) and I jumped a small fire on Sand Creek in the Sawtooth NF. That was my first fire jump and my first jump out of the Idaho City base. The fire was easy to control and the mandatory 24-hour watch for smoke was a good time to get better acquainted with "Ty," as he was known. The fun ended when it

was time to hike out ten miles to the nearest road. It was mostly downhill, very rocky, rough, and brushy. After the better part of the day with a heavy pack on a steep, rough, downhill grade, my beautiful \$35 "Buffalo Boots" were completely ruined. They were "run over" so bad in the ankles that they could not be put on once they were removed when back in camp. The Whites worn by Ty were undamaged and looked as good as new. There was nothing to do except buy a pair of White Boots for \$89.95. Of course, now I had \$124.95 invested in my White Boots. That really hurt, however, they lasted until the end of the 1963 fire season, with one rebuild. It has long been said, "Do not try to save money on your boots or your bed since you spend most of your life in them." I learned the hard way.

Why White Boots Stand The Test Of Time: The best boots are comfortable, provide excellent foot protection, and longevity while providing superb arch and ankle support. That means they have a full leather upper, solid brass hooks and eyelets, all

leather insole and midsole, all-leather shank and all-leather heel counter and heel base. Most work boots use a steel shank but sacrifice comfort by doing so. White's all-leather shank allows the boot to conform to the individual foot much more than steel allows. That is why White's just keep getting more comfortable the longer they are worn. The "Smokejumper" model is hand sewn and rebuildable with fireproof thread and the best Vibram sole on the market. It has a ten-inch upper. The "Smokejumper" model still dominates the market for those working in wildland fire suppression. I never thought I would see the day when White boots would be a fashion statement, but in Japan many young people are wearing White's in an urban setting because of their prestige. We did not wear White's because of their prestige, but we did wear them for their comfort and rugged durability. And what happened to the Buffalo Boot Company? The Buffalo Boot Company was purchased by the White Boot Company.

Harvey jumped at Idaho City 1959-63. 🧑

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Denali (Mt. McKinley) Revisited

by Don Halloran (Missoula '53)

I'm glad that non-jumping articles are appearing in our magazine as they add breath and depth to the varied experiences in the lives of jumpers. A recent case in point is **Walt Vennum's** (FBX-62) enjoyable article "Denali, The Great One—An Early Ascent of North America's Highest Peak" (July 2023 *Smokejumper*). He presented a concise history of early ascents of Alaska's Denali (Mt. McKinley), a summary of his challenging climb in 1969, and coverage of the "carnival atmosphere" of current climbing expeditions. His article has prompted me to comment further on mountaineering and my ascent of Denali in 1968.

From 1910 to 1972, there were only 100 successful climbs of Denali (Bradford Washburn publication). I noticed that Walt listed his 1969 climb as number 69. Good news, Walt—Washburn lists your climb as number 66.

My familiarity with Denali came in 1968 with the Smith-Nash expedition when we became the 59th group to summit Denali. I may have been the first smokejumper to reach the summit. My fascination with the history of Denali and, as a physiologist, the effects of high altitudes on human behavior has continued.

There are two ways to ascend peaks like Denali (20,320 ft.) and the approximately 1,000 other peaks, over 20,000 feet: rapidly, before hypoxia (low blood oxygen) sets in, or slowly, allowing the body to counter hypoxia by increasing its oxygen carrying red blood cells.

Most groups use the slow approach, as illustrated by Vennum's and my group. Using Denali's West Buttress approach means a climb of around three weeks after landing on the Kahiltna Glacier at 7,300 feet. Charter flights from the town of Talkeetna cover the approximately 40 miles in about 30 min.



Smith-Nash Mt. McKinley Expedition of 1968. Group is taking a rest day at 17,200 ft before the final climb to the summit at 20,320 ft. Don Halloran middle back row. (Courtesy D. Halloran)

After our arduous trip of 21 days, I was amazed to read an account of a rapid ascent entitled, "Up Mount McKinley In 19 hours" (Quest magazine 1979). However, the two climbers, both obviously in excellent condition, did suffer the beginnings of pulmonary edema (excess fluid in the lungs). Their descent, after summiting, to lower altitudes with denser air, reduced the edema.

Expeditionary mountaineering puts climbers at the mercy of three potentially deadly conditions: extreme weather, (cold, snow, wind, avalanches), reaching the physical limits of human endurance, and group dynamics.

As smokejumpers, we certainly know about group dynamics, especially the role of cooperation on the fireline.

Speaking of being at the mercy of extreme weather, Walt mentions a blizzard that restricted them to a snow cave for three days at 10,000 feet. Similarly, my journal indicates that we were hit by a three-day storm at 10,000 feet. However, we had marked our route with 4 ft. bamboo sticks (wands) which we followed in white-out conditions during the storm to bring up supplies from a lower camp. Thus, we didn't lose three days waiting out the storm.

Many an expedition has failed through a combination of extreme cold, prolonged blizzards, and avalanches burying camps and suffocating climbers. Two years earlier, some members of our team failed to summit when an avalanche buried their camp and supplies.

The physical limits of human endurance are easily reached at high altitudes. Excellent physical condition at sea level is no guarantee of good performance at these altitudes. Acute Mountain Sickness is a catch-all phrase for a systemic deterioration of all bodily functions from hypoxia. Breathing lower pressure air at over 15,000 ft. begins a cascade of events from hypoxia. Severe impairment includes muscle fatigue, labored breathing, and possible edema in the lungs, eyes, and brain. Carrying heavy loads only exacerbates these symptoms and diminishes a climber's overall performance and judgment. At about 18–26,000 feet, the oxygen pressure in the lung alveoli is considerably less than half of what it was at sea level. Slow climbing allows an increase in both red blood cells and hemoglobin, the molecules in red blood cells that carry the oxygen. This blood response is not the same in all individuals. Members of a climbing

team will experience different degrees of impairment including extreme fatigue, confusion, and poor judgment from hypoxia at high altitudes.

The region above 26,000 ft. is called the Death Zone. Here the body fails to adapt and steadily declines from the myriad symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness.

Group dynamics is often overlooked when assembling a climbing team. If the individuals know one another and have climbed together, then their success is dramatically improved. Our team conducted winter mountaineering exercises on Mount Hood in Oregon, as well as winter ascents of various Cascade peaks. Our Denali climb (one of only seven in 1968) was so accident free (not even a frostbitten nose) that the reporters who met us after the climb declined to submit stories. Our group's excellent planning, cooperation, and mountaineering skills were of no interest.

The Denali climb with perhaps the worst group dynamics was the disastrous 1967 Wilcox expedition. The Park Service had allowed two groups of inexperienced and unfamiliar climbers to join together. To save money, the group of 11 approached the mountain from the north side (Karstens Ridge) and bickered with each other while approaching and climbing the mountain. There were serious delays enroute. Near the summit they were warned of an approaching storm. Ignoring the warning, they pushed for the summit and over a three-day period, 10 of the 11 summited. Descending, the previously predicted storm blasted the mountain killing seven. Most of their bodies were never found.

The book, *Forever on the Mountain* by James M. Tabor, documents in detail the trials and tribulations of this ill-fated expedition.

By 1970 only 300 climbers had ever summited Denali. In the 1960s, when Vennum's and my group climbed the mountain, we had the entire 20,320 ft. mountain and hundreds of square miles to ourselves. Our little groups slowly trekked upwards enduring the vagaries of nature. We watched ever-present avalanching, coped with snowstorms, and felt the wind compressing our parkas. There were also days with an eerie silence when you felt overheated from the sun and, without goggles, would have been blinded by the brilliant light reflecting off the glaciers. We stood in awe enjoying the views from each of our camps as we moved toward the

summit. Protected in our tents, our fatigued bodies recovered with food and sleep in the warmth of down bags. The comforts of our sea level world were forgotten as we concentrated on surviving in this inhospitable, unwelcoming, and unforgiving world of mountainous ice and snow.

During the 1980s about 700 parties attempted the climb yearly. The 1990s recorded 1300 parties per year and by the 2000s, the number dropped slightly to 1200. The mountain with its formidable weather still prevails—the overall success rate remains under 50%.

Walt Vennum describes the “carnival atmosphere” of contemporary climbs. Readers can view countless internet videos and pictures confirming this situation. Besides the congestion of climbers at the two Park Service bases (7,300 and 14,200 feet), there are endless lines of climbers walking in lockstep ever

upward. Their paths are easily trod by the next line of climbers. Only when violent storms obliterate a trail are climbers challenged to find their own way. In earlier decades, our group stood alone on the summit, humbled by the majesty of hundreds of square miles of mountains, glaciers, and snowfields. Today, the Park Service reports 40 to 80 climbers together on the summit during “busy days.”

Denali, the great one, deserves respect, not further inundation by mobs of climbers. 🧗

Don earned his bachelor's in Forestry from the University of Massachusetts in 1955, with additional graduate work in Ecology at the University of Colorado 1963-64, and the University of British Columbia 1964-65. While in college, Don jumped at Missoula 1953-55. He served in the Navy as a 3rd Class Medic 1956-58.

Dear Current Jumper An Open Letter

by **Conor Hogan** (North Cascades '21)

So, you've picked up the April 2024 edition of *Smokejumper*. Maybe you've just returned to RAC after an off-season of surfing the Baja and found this issue sitting on the couch beside the Ops box. Or maybe you spent the winter sewing in Missoula and are reading this article during a well-deserved break at one of the picnic tables in front of manufacturing. Maybe you're a rookie candidate in Redding, icing your legs during week three, and you decided to leaf through the magazine they handed out on your first day of training, in which case, two words: prednisone prescription. Thank me later.

I am typing this in December 2023, unaided by a crystal ball. However, I feel safe to assume that were you asked how you felt about the future of the smokejumper program, America's federal land management agencies, or the United States in general, you would express an understandable sense of concern. Anecdotally, rookie application numbers are down about 60% from a decade ago. At the time of writing, Congress is poised to punt yet again on per-

manent wage reform for federal firefighters, choosing instead to rely on a temporary supplement that, thus far, has proven about as effective as a Band-Aid on a hemorrhaging artery. By the time this magazine goes to print, the United States will be deep into the most acrimonious presidential election in modern history, with voters forced to choose between two staggeringly unpopular candidates.

Each of these problems is symptomatic of an underlying illness afflicting America: the atrophy of our nation's civic culture. Where once the middle class was organized and could advocate for itself, over the past half-century, trade unions and professional associations have withered, leaving individual workers in an increasingly precarious position. The anxiety produced by our sense of powerlessness has been exploited by cynical opportunists, resulting in much of the social upheaval and division we see today. Many media figures, business leaders, and politicians have amplified narratives of cultural grievance to distract from a basic truth: over the past fifty years,

our economy has come to serve the interests of the extremely wealthy at the expense of everyone else.

The catastrophe facing federal firefighters is emblematic of what happens when a society prioritizes hedge fund portfolios over the public good. A logical conclusion to America's laissez-faire economic policy is a world where smokejumpers get paid minimum wage, while millions of acres burn to matchsticks every summer. But it does not have to be this way. There is a future where America's public land is healthy and productive, where Forest Service and BLM employees feel valued and well-compensated, and where land management agencies have no problem attracting and retaining talent. Reaching that future, however, will demand our involvement. We, the current cohort of smokejumpers, can no longer wait for someone else to take care of us. It's time for us to come together and get to work.

Mainstream media offers two competing stories for how our society became so deranged. One story describes a world in which radical leftists are force-feeding an agenda of gender ideology, critical race theory, and general wokeness onto a hapless American public. The other tells of a conservative bloc that has lost its mind, where the average MAGA voter is either a white supremacist, a rabid conspiracy theorist, or an aspiring fascist. As both sides feverishly vilify their political opponents, polarization has skyrocketed: a 2022 Pew Research Center poll reported that 72% of Republicans and 63% of Democrats think members of the opposing party are "more immoral than other Americans."

However, partisan hatemongering distracts from the central reason for the United States' derangement, which is this: after the deregulation of the 1980s, our economy transformed into a perverse machine of wealth transfusion, pumping money from federal agencies (like the Forest Service and BLM) and middle-class families into the coffers of billionaires. Now, a few of these absurdly rich men, like Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk, own the social media monopolies we use to communicate and consume information. They have directed the programmers of Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) to optimize their platforms for outrage, because more than any other emotion, outrage drives engagement, and therefore, profit.

But tycoons like Zuckerberg (net worth: \$116 billion) and Musk (net worth: \$245 billion) have a

vested interest in suppressing any fury toward our society's emergent class of techno-plutocrats. Much better if the American public is at war with itself, its citizens convinced the reason for their dissatisfaction is because of a Black Lives Matter protest in Berkeley or because of the lack of unisex bathrooms in Texas. Not because, between 2014 and 2018, America's 25 richest people paid a true federal tax rate of 3.4%, while the average American paid 14%. Not because, as Christopher Hayes writes in *Twilight of the Elites*, "Between 1984 and 2009, while the median net worth of American households remained essentially unchanged, the median net worth of members of the House of Representatives rose by 260 percent." Not because, in any sane conception, current campaign finance laws constitute legal bribery, where executives of multinational corporations purchase the fealty of our legislators in broad daylight.

The fundamental goal of fiscal policy, and politics in general, should be to build a state in which the greatest number of citizens can lead lives of dignity. With that as the core aim, leaders might disagree in good faith about the role of private enterprise, the size of government, or the scope of social safety nets. Through thoughtful debate and careful compromise, we can then inch closer toward the realization of universal human thriving.

Instead, Americans have spent the last decade trapped inside a ludicrous culture war, manufactured by the most privileged members of our society to distract from the injustice that perpetuates their privilege. Take the fight over cancel culture: this is exclusively a problem for the rich and famous. Getting cancelled requires having a platform to be cancelled from. Yet because all of the talking heads who deliver us information are rich and famous, they rail endlessly about Twitter mobs, as though a celebrity trending for saying something racist represents a Gestapo-esque repression of free speech. We, their audience, then internalize this as a serious problem, because Joe Rogan has been inside our head for 12 hours a week talking about what a serious problem cancel culture is. Which it might be. For him.

However, for the rest of us, cancel culture is not a serious problem. Nor are trans people in sports, nor are the DEI policies of elite universities. Yes, there are interesting arguments on both sides of these issues. But one of the great challenges of the modern era is learning how to process the firehose of data

blasting into our skulls, then developing a hierarchy of what to worry about.

If we regard every issue as equally existential, nothing will get solved. We have a limited bandwidth and must allocate our mental resources appropriately. Activists toppling statues in South Carolina, athletes kneeling during the national anthem, students shouting down a professor at Yale: how do these supposed problems compare to the ongoing devastation wrought by a half-century of crony capitalism? More importantly, what is our realm of actionable response?

Underlying all the troubling economic and political trends of recent years has been the decline of American civic life. In a 2018 article in *The Atlantic*, Yoni Applebaum describes the most unique feature of the nascent United States as the mass membership of its citizens in associations. European intellectuals who visited the U.S. in the 19th century marveled at how many people belonged to charter-run labor unions and volunteer groups. Applebaum writes: "...these associations mirrored the federal government in form: local chapters elected representatives to state-level gatherings, which sent delegates to national assemblies... Executive officers were accountable to legislative assemblies; independent judiciaries ensured that both complied with the rules." For most of America's history, democracy wasn't some vague abstraction, a once-every-four-years vote for whichever presidential candidate you hate less. It was a ritual part of everyday life, the "shared civic religion of a people who otherwise had little in common."

But, as Applebaum describes, participation in these associations has plunged during recent decades. One study revealed that, between 1994 and 2004 alone, membership in volunteer groups fell by 21 percent. Our withdrawal from Rotary Clubs, PTAs, and trade unions tracks neatly with the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, as an increasingly atomized labor force finds itself unable to negotiate on its own behalf. The logical conclusion to America's current iteration of unfettered, late-stage capitalism is a race to the bottom, where almost everyone competes with each other to work longer hours, for stagnant wages, while a handful of CEOs and stockholders get outrageously rich.

More than any other profession, the quandaries facing federal firefighters in general, and smokejumpers in particular, reflect the grotesque failures of

public divestment. The market does not care about the health of our national forests; ensuring their survival requires government intervention. However, as America slashed taxes for the wealthy, we then had to kneecap agencies like the BLM and Forest Service to compensate for the lack of federal funding. In an analysis of wildland firefighter compensation titled *Closing the Gap*, former McCall smokejumper Sam Perkins (MYC-20) and his coauthors show how salaries for federal firefighters lag their state counterparts by an average of 32.51%. The report outlines an untenable situation, one in which hotshots return from their fifth roll of the season and see Help Wanted signs at McDonald's with starting wages higher than their own. One in which a smokejumper retiring from a GS-8 spotter position can expect a retirement package of 1.2 million dollars less than a CAL FIRE employee retiring with the same level of experience. One in which the suicide rate of wildland firefighters is 30 times the national average.

The report also describes how federal firefighters are the ones working the hardest, taking the most high-risk assignments, and providing the horsepower to keep America's wildfire problem from spinning completely out of control. Just imagine what would happen if, on August 15th, 2024, all the hotshots and smokejumpers vanished. Imagine the billions of dollars in damage, the homes reduced to cinders, the likely lives lost. Between the Forest Service and the BLM, there are about 20,000 firefighters. Is there any other group of 20,000 people whose sudden absence would cause the same level of suffering?

But we should not expect anyone to stand up for us, especially if we do not stand up for ourselves. Thus far, leaving the lobbying to agency bureaucrats has proven woefully ineffective, and there is no reason to think that will change any time soon. The National Smokejumper Association is the only existing group with the infrastructure to facilitate the mobilization our plight demands. The NSA has a membership of around 1500 people. Right now, 15 of those are active jumpers. Increasing that second number dramatically is a vital first step toward ensuring that the smokejumper program survives into the 2030s. The mission statement of the NSA is "preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and rangeland resources, and responding to the special needs of smokejumpers and their

families.” Smokejumpers and their families have no greater need than negotiating a living wage for this high-risk, critically important work.

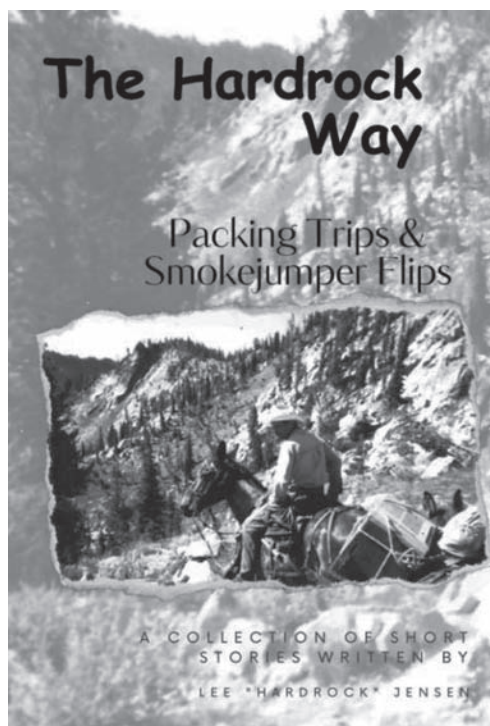
In October 2023, I attended the NSA board meeting in Missoula. It ran about seven hours long, as board members listened to an explanation of the financial health of their 501(c)3, debated a House Resolution about back-burning, and considered the specifics of how to maintain the Mann Gulch memorial site. Charles Savoia (MSO-01), the Missoula Base Manager, gave a report on the monumental difficulties regarding retention, and Robert Beckley answered questions about firefighter wage reform. The conversations tripped over procedural bylaws and there were calls for Yeas or Neys after every discussion. The meeting was protracted, and dry, and occasionally boring.

But during those seven hours, important issues were resolved. Money was allocated and priorities were set. Despite the lack of glamour, it’s in meetings like these where things get accomplished. Social media often tricks us into thinking that commenting on an article or sharing a photo constitutes meaningful political action. It does not. Congress doesn’t care how many likes the latest post on the Grassroots Firefighters’ Facebook page received. To actually affect the vast machinery of government, people must work together, in dull and unsexy ways, for a common cause.

While it is unfair that, after spending so much time away from our family and friends, doing backbreaking work for the public good, now smokejumpers must also fight to be compensated fairly, that is our situation. Along with the \$340,000 they have given out in scholarships and aid, the National Smokejumper Association has long been involved in pressuring politicians on behalf of wildland firefighters. The mass engagement of current jumpers, however, would increase the valence of those efforts by several orders of magnitude. There are few groups of 350 people with talents as myriad, or with as much as dedication and energy, as the current cohort of smokejumpers. We just need to organize and start advocating for ourselves: writing letters, arranging meetings with legislators, producing public outreach projects that explain the dire state of federal fire management. Surely, if we mobilize and put to use our diverse skillset, we can prevent this job we love so much from disappearing.

The National Smokejumper Association is the best, and, really, the only, organization that could facilitate this kind of collective endeavor. An NSA yearly membership costs 15 dollars, which is what some of us get paid an hour to parachute into mountains and suppress wildfires, with no health insurance and no retirement benefits.

Perhaps, if enough of us join the NSA and start working together, that will change. 🙏



The Hardrock Way Packing Trips & Smokejumper Flips

A collection of short stories about packing and hunting, Smokejumper Flips, and other adventures in the Idaho Mountains. In his unique and witty way, Lee Jensen (MYC-69) tells his stories as if you are right there with him. “Blessing” will tug at your heart strings as Lee accomplishes one of his goals he made to himself after a liver transplant. “Flips” tells about a Smokejumper bonding ritual.

These true and colorful stories, written by an amazing “salt-of-the-earth” guy who truly loved nature and life, are sure to put a smile on your face and entertain readers of many ages.

Contact Rainey Jensen, Lee’s wife
raineyjensen4@gmail.com
\$25 includes S/H

Against All Odds: “Jumpin’ the Umpqua Old Growth with a 50 Ft. Letdown Rope”

by Bill Moody (North Cascades ’57)

Over the past three decades, many articles have been written about the Triple Nickles and Operation Firefly. The articles covered both their accomplishments and their operational issues—a high accident rate and mission inefficiencies. Little was mentioned about the reasons behind the high accident rate and mission inefficiencies. It was not until the Forest Service Final Report did the Forest Service recognize and take some responsibility for the situation they put the 555th in. Operation Firefly was compromised from the beginning. The objective of this paper is to discuss how the Triple Nickles mission was compromised, and how they performed admirably and bravely “Against All Odds.”

A Firefly Scenario: It’s August 6, 1945. The Troop Carrier Command C-47, with 15 Triple Nickles paratroopers aboard, circles over a 20-acre fire in old growth on the Umpqua N. F. Coming from the flatlands and rolling hills of the south, this is likely the paratroopers first exposure to the steep mountains and tall conifers of the west.

As the jump ship circles, the pilot evaluates the smoke column drift and winds at the 1,200 feet AGL and prepares to drop the cargo. He will drop cargo first, followed by jumpers. No wind drift chute or drift steamers are used. For all practical purposes, the pilot is the spotter.

Equipped with a 28-foot unmodified camouflage T-7 chute assembly, a military pilot’s fleece-lined jacket and trousers, (or flight suit) with no D-rings, and a 50-foot letdown rope tied to the harness, the Triple Nickle paratroopers mentally prepare to exit over the 200-foot plus old-growth trees.

After dropping the cargo from 1,200 feet, with the “red light” illuminated and static line snap in hand, the jumpers are ordered to “stand up” and “hook up” to the overhead cable. A 9-man stick will be the first to jump. On final now, the aircraft is “slowed” to 125 knots, and the pilot guides the C-47 to the “guesstimated” exit point. The red light is changed to green, signaling the jumpmaster to drop the stick at 2-second intervals. At 2-second intervals and 125 knots, the 9 jumpers exit and

are scattered over the DZ, a couple beyond the DZ. Some stand no chance of making the intended jump spot and try to avoid landing in the old-growth trees by “slipping” their T-7 between the old growth. Those who landed in trees take out their 50-foot letdown ropes and do the best they can to get to the ground safely using the military “reserve chute letdown technique.” Now the arduous task of locating the cargo, retrieving it, and reassembling the crew to initiate the initial attack.

Author’s Note: In writing this piece I have reviewed several documents including various NSA magazine articles, books written by Firefly members of the 555th, independent authors, including Earl Cooley (*Trimotor and Trail*), other authors, and the Army’s official *Final Report on Project Firefly*. Although there is a common general account of Operation Firefly, there are some differences regarding the training they received, protective gear they were issued, and jump/cargo drop SOPs. The biggest discrepancy is in the jump statistics—number of fires jumped, and number of fire jumps made during the four-month activation. Without all the After-Action Reviews it is difficult to verify the actions taken and statistics. I have tried to use what I believe to be the most accurate and reliable information and data.

Background: In 1945 the forests of the western United States were facing a potentially severe fire season and were under threat of thousands of Japanese incendiary balloons. Note: Army intelligence was aware that no new balloons had arrived over the continent since the middle of April 1945.

The highly acclaimed black 555th Infantry Battalion was trained and ready for action, but without an assignment. President Roosevelt and the military were not willing to send them to the European or Japanese Theaters. Pressed for an assignment in lieu of a combat assignment, the military designed a plan for the Army to provide assistance to civil agencies responsible for combating forest fires which may be caused by incendiary balloons or other causes. The Army offered the services of the 555th to the USFS as part of the military

Army Assist Program. The Chief of the Forest Service accepted. There is no indication that USFS Fire Control, or the smokejumper community, requested the 555th to support the smokejumper program. This appears to be a “forced marriage.” Politically, this assignment satisfied both President Roosevelt (and wife, Eleanor) and the military.

The Fourth Air Force, Western Defense Command and Ninth Service Command, on May 3, 1945, ordered 300 paratroopers from the Triple Nickles to fire duty in the western United States. Their mission would be to counter the Japanese incendiary threat and to fortify the Forest Service smokejumper program. Ironically, there were 220 Forest Service and CPS jumpers, the highest number of jumpers since the program began in 1940. The project was designated Project Firefly, officially Operation Firefly.

The Triple Nickles reported to Pendleton, Oregon, in May 1945. At Camp Pendleton they were given a short course in smokejumping. Forest Service smokejumpers Frank Derry and Jack Allen would serve as instructors. Supporting the project would be a fleet of C-47s from the Air Transport Command (Troop Carrier Command).

After smokejumper training, 100 Triple Nickles were assigned to Chico, California, under control of Forest Service Region 5, and 200 remained at Camp Pendleton to serve Forest Service Regions 1,4 and 6.

Putting the 555th In Perspective: I’ve tried to put myself in the “jump boots” of the “Triple Nickles rookies.” If I were subjected to insufficient fast-tracked, “minimal training,” inappropriate protective and operational equipment, non-steerable chutes, deficient spotting techniques, and lack operational experience, how would I have performed? The project was compromised from the beginning.

I think it’s important to put the Firefly in perspective. Under the parameters stated in the “Umpqua scenario,” would you or the USFS /BLM programs have performed any better? Without modified chutes, with short letdown ropes, exits at +15–25 mph above “normal exit speed,” jumps in heavily timbered mountainous terrain without spotters and the aid of drift streamers? Put yourself in their jump boots. Think back to your rookie training and how the training prepared you for your first fire jump or fire jump into timber. The following sections discuss what the Triple Nickles jumpers were up against—“They jumped **against all odds.**”

Training: Triple Nickles training consisted of the 40-hour basic military airborne training conducted at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. The final stage of the training consisted of four jumps on flat terrain and one night jump. After arriving at Camp Pendleton, smokejumper specific training commenced on May 22. USFS instructors Frank Derry and Jack Allen conducted a short “smokejumper course.” They are the only instructors mentioned. If that’s the case, it’s hard to determine how much individualized training the 300 trainees received? A very poor instructor to trainee ratio. About the same time, back in Montana, the Forest Service was also training 220 Forest Service and CPS jumpers.

In addition to basic fire behavior and use of fire tools, only a few days were committed to actual jump-related training, which was supposed to include tree climbing and letdown training without the aid of D-Rings. According to an interview of a Triple Nickle by Chuck Sheley, they were not trained in the USFS letdown technique. The Pendleton base was not set up for USFS letdown procedure training, and “jump pants” were not modified with the D-Rings. Not confident in the USFS training, the Triple Nickles fallback would be to use the military letdown procedure they were more confident with.

The training also included T-7 parachute manipulation into small openings and avoiding trees by using a “slip maneuver.” Some sources state that there was an introduction to the USFS 28-foot Derry Slotted chute. It is doubtful that they ever made training jumps on the Derry slotted chute. At Pendleton two “flat land” and one timber jump were scheduled. It is very likely that they never made a timber jump.

Jumpmasters supposedly received training in techniques for dropping small groups (four men) into virgin timber. There is no indication that the jumpmasters ever got a chance to “spot” the jumpers. The pilot fully controlled the “spotting” and deployment of the jumpers.

The bottom line is, overall, the smokejumper training was poor and did not adequately prepare the Triple Nickles for standard smokejumper operations. Part of the problem was the 555th’s unwillingness to change from their military methods. In their defense, given that the USFS training was fast tracked, trainees likely did not attain full competency in USFS specific jumper skills. They had more confidence in their airborne methods than USFS methods.

Equipment: The Triple Nickles jumpers were provided a minimally protective jumpsuit. Instead of the standard USFS two-piece jumpsuit, the Triple Nickle was attired with a mix of gear—standard pilot flight suits or a pilot leather cold weather flight jacket and trousers. The protective uniform did not have sewn in D-Rings to facilitate letdowns. There was no leg pocket for the letdown rope. The letdown rope was tied to the harness.

A standard 50-foot letdown rope was issued. Some reports state 75-foot ropes were issued and one report states that ropes were as short as 33 feet. Helmets were modified to include a standard protective metal screen.

Parachutes: The standard main parachute was the T-7 28 ft. non-steerable, static line deployed, round flat circular canopy. As mentioned, it is doubtful that the 555th ever received instruction on the Derry Slotted 28 ft. canopy. Instruction was given on how to “slip” the T-7 into small openings between the trees.

Deploying the Jumpers and Cargo: Critical to the success of Operation Firefly was getting the troops in the DZ and on the ground safely. Also critical to the mission was the deployment of the cargo in the DZ where it could be readily retrieved. This proved to be a major program issue on some fires.

The Forest Service offered to instruct the Triple Nickles jumpmasters in USFS spotting techniques, but the Triple Nickles preferred the military procedures learned at Ft. Benning. The airborne method tasked the jumpmaster to determine the DZ and the pilot to determine the jumper exit point from 1,200 ft. AGL. The Army made it very clear to the USFS that they would make the final decision as to whether it was safe to jump. The C-47 pilots were given no special smoke-jumper related training. No wind indicating devices were used. Estimating the wind direction and velocity along with “smoke observations” helped them to determine the exit point. Sometimes there was a conflict between the pilot and jumpmaster regarding jump conditions and the exit point. Occasionally, the jumpmaster would serve as a “test jumper.” As a result, spotting was very imprecise and often resulted in scattering the jumpers, especially when standard sticks numbered 5–6, sometimes more jumpers. It is inferred that under some DZ scenarios, a stick size may be as large as 10–12 jumpers.

As advisors on fire mission flights, both **Francis Lufkin** and **Earl Cooley** offered to spot but were

turned down. Cooley was told to “stay out of the way.” He was to tell them where to jump, but not when! On one flight, after two sticks were badly spotted, Earl was asked by the pilot “to ring the bell” (spot)—the stick “hit the spot.”

The Final USFS Report stated that many accidents were attributed to tree landings. The report further stated that the jumpmasters were not sufficiently familiar with mountain and timber conditions to select safe landing areas.

Cargo Dropping Issues: As said, the C-47 Air Transport Command pilots did not receive special smokejumper-related training, including low level cargo dropping and USFS map reading. The cargo drop altitude was from a jump altitude of 1,200 feet AGL before the jumpers were deployed. Some pilots insisted on dropping many cargo packs on a single pass. This resulted in cargo being scattered outside the DZ and making it very difficult to find and retrieve. As a result, fireline operations were delayed while cargo was located and retrieved.

Logistics Issues: Other issues negatively affecting the mission were the unavailability of jump aircraft, unavailability of pilots, continual rotation of flight crews making it difficult for pilots to develop proficiency, and lack of parachutes at the time of the jumper request. This resulted in the men being trucked to the fire rather than “jumped.”

Of the seven C-47s assigned to the project, 50–70% were normally down for maintenance or awaiting replacement parts. For the Pendleton operation, the aircraft were stationed at Walla Walla, several miles away. This had an impact on dispatch response time and certainly was not conducive for pilot-jumper team building. In Region 5 the jumpers and aircraft were co-located at Chico, and there was a much closer relationship between jumpers and flight crews

Human Factors: Most, if not all of the 555th jumpers were raised in the south or east and did not have “western mountain experience.” The steep terrain covered with giant trees was probably quite intimidating. Add to this the anticipation of a hard opening shock from the exit at 100–125 knots (one report stated 150 mph exit) without a D-bag. Add to this imprecise spotting a flaming fire front and fear of landing in a tall tree with a short letdown rope, possibly breaking loose and crashing to the ground. The jumper was faced with an extremely emotional and challenging experience. Think back to your first fire jump?

Triple Nickle Walter Morris stated: “We know how to jump from airplanes, but the heavily forested areas of the Pacific Northwest presented drop zones that were more difficult and more dangerous than any we had faced before.”

Evaluating the Firefly Program: In 1945 the 555th Paratroop Infantry Battalion (Triple Nickles) was assigned to Operation Firefly and fast-tracked in to service in the western United States. Insufficiently trained and poorly equipped, they committed themselves to the task. They wanted to serve their country, and this was their opportunity. They were put into a very difficult position with little or no help.

What the USFS had accomplished over a six plus-year period, the 555th had to start with no operational experience. The Triple Nickles were fast-tracked into action. The timing of the activation order, with a busy fire season in progress, precluded the number of training days and smokejumper skills that they should have been required to have before committing to fire operations.

Part of the performance issue was self-inflicted, mainly due to the Triple Nickles (Army) reluctance and unwillingness to adopt USFS methods and lessons learned from the USFS experience. Adherence to USFS SOPs would have improved performance, likely would have reduced the number of injuries, and would have improved mission efficiency.

The number of fires jumped and number of fire jumps made by the Triple Nickles, according to Neal Rahm’s USFS’s Final Report, was “15 fires jumped and 444 fire jumps made.” Army records are non-existent.

Some unofficial resources stated that 33 fires were jumped and about 1,200 fire jumps made.

Subsequent research concluded that some of these fires that were initially reported as “jumped” were not actually jumped due to lack of jump ships or lack of chutes. The troops were then trucked to the fire. The dispatch record failed to correct the dispatch record from “jumped” to “trucked.” The lack of After Action Reports has made it difficult to verify the actual numbers. Regardless, this is still a significant number of fire jumps. During the four months of activation, the 555th sustained 30 significant injuries and one fatality (Malvin Brown).

At the conclusion of Operation Firefly the USFS made a final report covering both Forest Service Region 5, Chico Operation, and the Pendleton Operation. The Triple Nickles performance, or value, was

both praised and criticized. The primary criticisms were the high jump injury rate and poor mission efficiency caused by the scattering of jumpers and cargo outside the DZ. Fireline work performance evaluations varied from outstanding to poor. The Region 5, Chico Operation, tended to rate their jumpers much higher than Region 1.

Region 5 rated Triple Nickles superior in morale, physical fitness, efficiency, and leadership compared to white ground troops. Elmer Neufeld, Okanogan (NCSB) supervisory jumper, worked with the 555th on the Bunker Hill Fire, and gave the Triple Nickles a good fire performance rating. The USFS final report stated that “the benefits outweighed the liabilities by a narrow margin.

In the Final Report, the USFS took some responsibility for the situation they put the Triple Nickles in. I’m not sure if the Army officially concurred. A few of the USFS report comments: 1) Indoctrination should be at least one month. 2) Jumpmasters were not sufficiently familiar with mountainous and timbered country to properly judge safe landings and need a greater familiarity with ground cover in the back country. 3) The 555th should be given more training in jumping in mountainous country. 4) Tendency for the Army(555th) to jump too many men at a time resulting in scattering, especially in fast (C-47) ships. More passes should be made over areas where suitable landing areas are limited. 5) There was a tendency to disregard civilian methods, and it was difficult to wean away from Army methods.

Although not specifically mentioned in the Final Report, one report stated that all jumpers should be fully outfitted in standard US Forest Service protective gear.

The Final Report stated that the project “proved to be a valuable asset in strengthening the firefighting forces on the west coast when fire conditions became critical.”

Overall, considering the political circumstances of 1945 and the fact that Operation Firefly was a “forced marriage,” I commend the Triple Nickles for what they endured, how they performed, and for their contribution to the forest fire control program during the very busy 1945 fire season. They answered the call and performed the best they could with the hand they were dealt. They performed admirably and bravely—**“against all odds!”** 🙏

Redding Smokejumpers

by Jay Kelly (Redding '58)

I recently talked with **Charlie Caldwell** (RDD-65) about the early firefighting days and, more specifically, those beginning years for the Redding Smokejumper base.

I first met Charlie when I went to work for him as a firefighter on the Lakeshore Hotshot Crew in 1956. We fought many fires that year, and I was privileged to be on the Helitack crew when it began. One mishap occurred when our three-person crew flew over the ridge while preparing for a landing. We were caught in a downdraft and crashed. We all jumped clear of the helicopter and were not hurt, but the helicopter sustained major damage. I remember the pilot yelling, "Holy balls of fire!" which echoed down the canyon as he exited the craft. We controlled the fire and were later picked up by another helicopter.

The next summer I worked on the Blister Rust Crew with more firefighting and heard about the Redding Smokejumpers. I contacted Bob Kersh and **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42) at the Redding Smokejumper base on Cyprus and Akard streets. I became friends with them, and Fred hired me as a smokejumper in 1958. The training was rigorous. A news article appeared on the front page of the *Record Searchlight* in June of 1958, "Northern California Hit With Thunderstorms Resulting in Dozens of Fires."

The Redding Smokejumpers began jumping fires that morning. I jumped with fellow smokejumpers **Chuck Engstrom** (MSO-55) and **Ron Dickie** (RDD-57). It was later reported that the smokejumpers helped extinguish most of the lightning fires in about a week.

During the formative years of 1957-60, I remember many fires and conversations from other smokejumpers. "Don't get caught in the Wooly Creek drainage." "That Red Cap Fire on the Klamath was a long way from the road!"

Also, during that period, we jumped a fire east of McCloud. We almost controlled the fire, which was called the "Lava Fire." We were within feet of completing our line when strong winds began to blow. Within minutes the fire began to crown and eventually burned 13,000 acres. Our parachutes and

jump gear were burned up. We walked out like four puppy dogs beaten down. Soon we were ready to jump the next fire. The fire story with pictures was shown and told at the McCloud Ranger Station for a couple of years after.

In 1958-59, **Warren Webb** (CJ-54) took four smokejumpers to Sonora, CA, to jump fires in Yosemite. I then had the privilege to jump a fire with Chuck Engstrom again. The jump spot was a small meadow which we both hit. This, I'm sure, was mostly due to Warren who was a very good spotter. The forest ranger was in a small observation airplane watching the action.

We jumped a fire in the Lassen NF. After controlling the fire, a person from the Lassen NF showed up. We discussed where we would drop the snag with our "Misery Whip." Less than an hour later, we felled the large tree as planned with the flames still burning in the top. The success was due to the expertise of **Bill Bowles** (RDD-57). Later the Lassen Forest sent a letter to our base, thanking us for our work.

It is because of these and other experiences I had as a smoke jumper that I pay tribute to those I worked with from 1956-1959.

I recently visited the Redding Smokejumper Base and found it a much different operation now than during those beginning years. They are well organized and preparing for the 2024 fire season. I wish them all the best next year.

Here I am now 85, and the Lord has been most gracious to me with a long life. These sentiments were echoed by my friend Bob Kersh who was close to 90 years old when he died in 2014. 🙏



2023 Al Dunton Smokejumper Leadership Award Selections

The Al Dunton Smokejumper Leadership Award is presented annually to one BLM and one USFS smokejumper who goes beyond the requirements of the job and demonstrates excellence in leadership in the Wildland Fire Leadership Principles. Candidates are nominated by their base and winners are chosen by a selection committee of one BLM and one USFS base manager, and a member of the National Smokejumper Association Board of Directors.



Erik Berke (RDD-16)

Erik Berke, USFS (RDD-16), currently based in McCall, was chosen for his knowledge, skills, work ethic, and infectious attitude. He inspires his fellow jumpers, sets an example for his peers to develop relationships, and empowers them to succeed. He is an exceptional smokejumper and was voted Employee of the Year by his peers and supervisors at the McCall Base. He is recognized for his selfless devotion to excellence and for putting the needs of his people ahead of his own. His presence makes any program he is involved in stronger and more resilient. A visible example of his leadership in 2023 was the 80th reunion of the R4 smokejumpers that he organized and coordinated voluntarily. The reunion brought over 300 former jumpers to McCall for an incredible 4-day event. Erik is a great leader who is reluctant to take credit for his work, but he has earned recognition as the USFS Al Dunton Smokejumper Leadership Award winner.

Ben Faust, BLM (NCSB-15), currently based in Boise, was chosen for his professional leadership within the Boise Smokejumper program and wildland firefighter community. He is recognized primarily because of his reputation as the Lead Trainer for rookies and veterans and his overall excellence in hiring, training, and developing career jumpers. As a teacher, his insight and thoughtfulness give him an unusual aptitude to help young jumpers overcome challenging situations. He constantly evaluates better ways of incorporating safety innovation into the core mission. Whether jumping fires or sharing his valuable insight in incident reviews, his organizational skills and attention to detail set him apart. He never asks others what he is unwilling to do himself. He leads by example and is always striving to be the best. The NSA recognizes his outstanding performance in 2023 for the Al Dunton Smokejumper Leadership Award. 🙏

Off the List

Michael Martin “Mike” Silva (Redding ’72)

Mike, 74, died November 8, 2023, after a short battle with cancer. Mike was born in Red Bluff, California, September 24, 1949. He was a rodeo cowboy from an early age which served him well as he became a member of the Rodeo Team for Cal Poly State Univ. in San Luis Obispo, CA. After graduating from Cal Poly in 1972, Mike was offered the opportunity of jumping out of airplanes as a smokejumper and wildland firefighter. Smokejumping eventually brought him to Alaska in 1974. Mike was as tough as the bulls he rode and one heck of a smokejumper. He was also a man of many talents. Mike enjoyed flying high in his little

red Taylorcraft. He also loved to hunt and fish with his girls as well as hike, camp, and float the Chena. Mike jumped at Redding 1972, McCall 1973, and Fairbanks 1974-76, 1978-80, 1984-87.

Bernard Carter Hearn (Grangeville ’52)

Carter, 89, died May 2, 2022, in Fairfax, Virginia, after a year-long battle with lung cancer. He was born in February 1933. Carter earned his BA in Chemistry from Wesleyan Univ. in 1954 and his Ph.D. in Geology from John Hopkins Univ. in 1959. He was a contract Geologist at the Smithsonian Institution for 28 years. Carter jumped at Grangeville during the 1952 season. 🙏

Global Warming?

by Norm Pawlowski (Cave Junction '57)

In Smokejumper magazine over the past few years, many contributors have conceded that global warming (climate change) is real and has contributed to the increased acreage burned by forest fires.

Meanwhile, some of these same authors are presenting shocking examples where the increased forest acreage burned can be entirely explained in terms of bureaucratic malfeasance and incompetence.

Here are a few examples of bureaucratic malfeasance and/or incompetence:

(1) A "let it burn policy," deceitfully misnamed "managed wildfire." I first heard this theory in 1959, when it was "reasoned" that the forests had survived a thousand years without humans managing wildfire. Many sincerely believe in this theory without any historical data whatsoever. Are the forests different today than they were 1000 years ago? What percent of the forest had been logged off 1000 years ago? Are we to allow our forests to be entirely decimated before realizing this theory does not work?

(2) Firefighters are no longer allowed to work at night, which is the most effective time to work on a forest fire. Prohibiting night work steals 8 to 10 hours from each day's progress towards controlling a fire, besides losing the progress that was achieved the day before.

(3) If a fire manager's mismanagement or tardiness allows a fire to grow larger, his pay rate increases, . . . exponentially, . . . because he is managing a larger fire. For fire managers, that is a powerful, financial incentive for fires to grow larger. Is this why suppression crews sometimes have a slow departure?

(4) There have been examples of USFS suppression crews' late departures after fires were reported. Why are we no longer ready?

(5) Add to that, the forest service's hiring is in control of an inaccessible, outside bureaucratic agency that takes months to complete a hiring. The forest service cannot hire local, nor temporary, nor emergency firefighters, as we did in the old days. Firefighters are mostly young people, many of whom are discouraged by an intricate hiring system requir-

ing travel across several states for a seasonal, entry-level, manual labor position.

(6) There was an incidence where a know-nothing bureaucrat in an office decided that there were no jump-spots in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, resulting in a small fire turning into a major project fire. This happens too often. Smokejumpers have been jumping in "The Bob" for over 75 years.

(7) And finally, the following information is from the late Dr. Charles Mansfield (CJ-58), who investigated the ½ million-acre, 2002 Biscuit Fire, located in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness on the Siskiyou NF. After discovery, The Biscuit Fire burned for three days, completely ignored by the fire control. When three young firefighters did walk into the fire, they decided that they could not control the (estimated) 2-acre fire within a given timeframe, so they turned around and walked off to let it burn without any attempt whatsoever to retard its progress. This is absolutely shocking. But apparently, this was/is forest service policy.

I have attacked approximately 60 wildfires. Upon arrival, at least half of these fires were blazes where we did not know if we could contain the fire or not. But we would go to work on the fire and eventually get it under control. "You can't do it if you don't try."

The policies and wheels of bureaucracy have become so cumbersome and impractical that they have destroyed the ability of professionals to do their job in controlling forest fires.

To cover their bad decisions, bad policies, and malfeasance, incompetent politicians and bureaucrats are blaming "global warming" for the increases in burned acreage. Then in the next breath, they use these increases in burned acreage as evidence of "global warming." In philosophy, such logic is called an "Absurd Infinite Cycle."

Recently on a TV news channel, I saw a frightening video of a forest fire exploding and the narrator claiming that all this was caused by "global warming." With flames almost bursting out of the screen, the video was so frightening and emotional that it had me believing in global warming (temporarily). It took several minutes to tell myself, "I know better

than this.” But I was caught up in the “emotion” of it all, as are many Americans.

Alas, I can take it no longer and am compelled to respond to this issue of global warming. When I get up in the morning and there’s frost on the pumpkin, it always seems colder than it was last year. And worse, when the weather hits over 100°F, it’s much hotter than that same temperature was when I was younger. Although that is not the way to do science, “science by emotion” sells global warming to many politicians and some of the masses.

This earth has a prolific and vivid history of the human species believing that they are important enough that their behavior impacts the astronomical and the weather. For 3000 years, 190 different Pharaohs subjugated the efforts of an entire region (that reached a population of 4.5 million) to do Pharaoh’s bidding, including the massive building of temples, tombs, and pyramids, because Pharaoh was able to control the weather and bring the spring floods which fed the masses. Fear is a great political tool for controlling populations. Occasionally the weather would change, and the spring floods did not come. Pharaoh always had a plausible explanation. Are we the same sheep today?

Similarly, historians suggest 7 of Moses’s 10 plagues, brought down upon Egypt, involved weather phenomena. Moses’s parting of the sea has been theorized to be a realistic weather anomaly, opposite to the terrible storm that suddenly subsided as soon as the ship’s captain tossed Jonah overboard.

Ancient Rome blamed Christians for drought, floods, earthquakes, fires, illnesses, extreme weather, and even invading barbarians. For centuries later, more enlightened humans blamed witches. Humans so sincerely believe in whatever it is that they believe that a court found reason to execute witches in Salem, Mass.

Every generation believes they are smarter and more enlightened than past populations. This is particularly true today because we believe in “science” which has produced technologies unimaginable to the ancients. Therefore, we must be smarter (although most climate-change alarmists have not a clue about the actual science).

Before carbon dioxide was declared the villain, we blamed other human acts for changing the weather. In ancient times, invention of the bow and arrow made storms more severe, a belief that went full circle after

WWII. In 1951 Congress debated banning nuclear testing because nuclear weapons testing was making storms and hurricanes worse. Indeed, after record rainfall in 1950, several Oregon newspapers carried photos of a house being washed down the Rogue River. No one could remember heavy rainfall like this before the development of nuclear weapons. The key word here is “remember.”

During that same storm, another house near where I lived washed down the Applegate River. Admittedly, this was an unusually heavy rain for this semi-arid area, but even at my early, middle-school age, I had to ask: “Why would anyone build below the ancient high-water mark?” The river was no higher than it had been in the past.

Nonetheless, national news sources focused on the calamity, and politicians blamed nuclear weapons testing for poking a hole in the stratosphere, thus cooling the planet, and causing heavier rainstorms, more and heavier snowstorms, and more and stronger hurricanes. Sound familiar? When a powerful hurricane strikes, why do we have to put blame somewhere? The energy released by the largest H-Bomb is a spit in the ocean compared to the energy from the sun bombarding the earth daily.

Just by following the covers of *TIME Magazine*, we can see that our national anxiety turned to acid rain, then to a change in the trade winds, then to humans destroying the ozone layer (which had just been measured for the first time), then to global warming (which was changed to “climate change” in answer to negative evidence). But basically, fear of the unknown continues to be the tool of choice for influencing voters, the same contrivance continually used by politicians since Pharaoh used it over 5,000 years ago.

During 2022, EPA spent \$9 billion on climate change research. When a scientist accepts EPA’s generosity, he had better come up with the politically dictated result. Yet, many scientists, who are not on the EPA gravy train, are voicing vehement outcries, insistent with blatant warnings of false science. Why do we not listen?

Ten years ago, news media throughout the USA carried the story about an Oregon State University, 10-year faculty member (who had been given a teaching award). He was suddenly fired, without explanation, after he gave a public lecture criticizing the global warming theory. The lawsuit that followed, as reported in newspapers, claimed that EPA had told the

University that if the faculty member were not fired, EPA would pull all Federal grants from the University, about \$90 Million.

Twice, I attended meetings with a #2 man in EPA. This guy loved to tell his story. He boasted that he “was a lawyer working on the Clinton campaign.” Quote: “To show his appreciation, President Clinton appointed me Assistant Administrator.” He admitted he knew no science nor chemistry, but he justified: “I listen to my chemists.” It was public knowledge that he also hired out as a consultant to the very companies he was regulating. Apparently, that is acceptable these days. These are the types of bureaucrats making crucial decisions affecting our nation’s well-being and future. Many of their expensive decision end up releasing more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, not less, because politicians fail to understand all the interacting consequences of their mandates. Or do they simply not care?

In 2009, John Kerry, leader of the global warming movement, speaking in front of congress, told us the polar ice caps would be gone by 2013. Need more be said?

Global Warming Science. The simplistic and flawed theory that carbon dioxide (CO₂) warms the atmosphere by absorbing infrared (IR) radiation is exactly that, a theory, full of flaws with absolutely no proof that increased CO₂ would contribute to atmospheric warming. In fact, if you look carefully at the theory, you will see it is an oversimplification, ignoring all the other components and chemistries in the atmosphere. This theory is downright ridiculous. Lack of understanding does not keep politicians from selling it.

The sun bombards the earth with 10 billion wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation (of which visible light and IR are small segments). All this radiation is absorbed by the earth and atmosphere (except for a small amount reflected back into space). Carbon dioxide absorbs less than 1 billionth of it (and re-radiates back a portion of that). Any IR that is not absorbed by CO₂ is absorbed by the earth’s surface, which warms the atmosphere. Does the atmosphere warm the planet, or does the planet warm the atmosphere? Clueless politicians are ignoring one and trying to sell us the other.

But wait! All the other gases in the atmosphere, including water vapor, also absorb IR radiation. Water

vapor in the atmosphere absorbs more IR than CO₂. What are politicians, who want to worry about CO₂, going to do about water vapor (extremely variable) in the atmosphere? If you understand even a trivial amount of weather, you can see how ridiculous this theory is and how helpless humans are in controlling the weather.

Some scientists on EPA grant money tell us atmospheric CO₂ has increased by 0.001% during the past 40 years. Other scientists are claiming that the EPA-supported scientists have fudged their data to come up with that 0.001% number. Politicians choose to listen to only what they want to hear.

Based on all this delusive theory, poorly informed politicians want to change the diets, habits, culture, and behavior of the human race. And they are using climate change to cover up their incompetence and malfeasance in suppressing forest fires. Humans had better leadership under Pharaoh.

When I visited Glacier National Park, a park ranger, with high emotion, compared a 1902 photograph of a glacier as proof that the park’s glaciers were receding due to global warming. No doubt about it, North America’s glaciers are receding. But glaciers have been receding for the past 10,000 years. If we did not have weather conditions causing these glaciers to recede, North America would still be covered with ice and only Eskimos could survive here. Yes, 10,000 years ago the earth made a major change in weather and neither humans nor the Industrial Revolution were there to cause it, nor can any politician do anything about it.

At the same time, a long-term, Japanese research project at the South Pole, ignoring political correctness, is reporting that the total amount of ice at the South Pole has been increasing. Meanwhile, scientists supported by EPA report that glacier ice at the South Pole is melting as ice breaks off and melts in the ocean. Yes, glaciers move and break off into the ocean. They present this as evidence that the South Pole ice is melting while ignoring (hiding) the fact that total ice is increasing. Why do they misrepresent this? Is it incompetence, or is it to fool you?

For five billion years, earth’s weather has been changing, oftentimes to calamitous extremes. Today, politicians are selling daily highs and lows as evidence of “climate change,” from which they are promising that only they alone can save us. They

cannot manage forest fires, yet they want to manage our lives, our diets, our habits, and our culture based upon this fictitious, climate-change theory. As several notorious dictators have quoted: "The masses are capable of understanding only the simplest phrases repeated over and over." Politicians treat us as if we were fools. Are we?

Norm jumped at CJ 1957–61 and 1964. He earned his Ph.D. in Physical-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.) 🙏

Off the List

Joseph Franklin "Joe" McDonald (West Yellowstone '51)

Joe, 90, died December 14, 2023, in Ronan, Montana. He was born March 31, 1933, in St. Ignatius, Montana. Joe spent his early days growing up with family at his dad's homes at Post Creek, within eye-sight of the Ft. Connah Trading Post. During grade school and high school, Joe helped and became quite involved with the family's horses, learning to ride, race and rope, and going on many pack trips to the mountains and trips to and from the family ranch. He attended high school in both St. Ignatius and in Dixon, as the family had homes at both Post Creek and Dixon Agency. He sometimes changed his attendance based on the sport he wanted to play. While at St. Ignatius his sophomore year, the football team won the State Class C Championship. Joe graduated that spring from St. Ignatius High School in 1951.

After high school, Joe worked as a USFS smoke-jumper and was stationed in West Yellowstone. The jumpers were a natural progression for Joe as he had gotten into the business of working at wildfire support camps at the young age of 12, a time when many young men were away from the reservation during WWII.

While at West Yellowstone, he crossed paths with a coach from Dillon H.S. who promised to get Joe a scholarship to play basketball at Western Montana

College. The coach delivered and Joe played football, basketball, and baseball at Western. Joe endeavored to be on every athletic team bus that ever departed from Dillon. He earned an Associate degree and teaching certificate at Western Montana College in 1953.

After earning his teaching certificate, Joe taught and coached various schools across the state of Montana from 1953-1964. He attended the University of Montana, earning Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Education and Health and P.E. From 1964-1965 he was the Assistant Basketball Coach at the U of Montana. Other professional accomplishments of Joe's included coaching basketball and track at Northern Montana College (1965-1967), serving as high school principal and assistant superintendent at Ronan Public Schools while coaching many sports (1967-1978), serving two terms on the CSKT Tribal Council from 1974-1982, acting as the Title III Coordinator for Flathead Valley Community College, and with his Doctorate of Education from U of Montana, he supported efforts to establish and lead Salish Kootenai College as its President from 1978-2010.

Throughout his career, Joe helped create school athletic programs to help keep youth interested in school and helped set up tutoring programs for Native students, sponsored Indian clubs to help students solve problems and stay in school, introduced an Indian Studies curriculum, advocated for the Salish language to be taught for the first time in a public school on the reservation, and coached and refereed when and where needed on courts and in the classroom.

Salish Kootenai College was a love of his life. He served the college in many capacities including janitor, instructor, committee member, administrator, fundraiser, and coach. He advocated for the college to serve the broader reservation community and Tribe through teaching the Salish and Kootenai languages, drumming and singing, and other traditional and cultural skills.

His efforts in educational leadership earned him many recognitions including honorary degrees from Gonzaga University and Montana State University. He also dedicated much of his time to continuing writing and recording the history of the Flathead Reservation. Joe jumped at WYS 1951-52 and Missoula 1953-55. 🙏

Not Forgotten

Mann Gulch Fire

August 5, 2024, will mark the 75th anniversary of the Mann Gulch Fire. Twelve Missoula Smokejumpers lost their lives when a lightning-started fire, on the steep slopes above the Missouri River, blew up and quickly raced uphill to entrap them.

The deaths of these young men became a national tragedy and not only impacted their families and friends but led to changes in the way the Forest Service viewed firefighter safety and conducted fire training.

Robert James Bennett (MSO-49), 22, was born March 18, 1927, in Paris, Tennessee. After graduating high school, he joined the US Army serving in the Medical Corps and was stationed in occupied Japan and later in Korea. He attended Montana State University in Missoula under the GI Bill majoring in Forestry. A rookie in his first season smokejumping, he made a positive impact amongst his fellow smokejumpers, including Leonard Piper, a best friend. He was survived by his parents, a brother, and two sisters.

Eldon Eugene Diettert (MSO-49), had just turned 19 and was in the midst of his birthday luncheon when he was called to respond to the Mann Gulch Fire, his first fire jump. Born in Moscow, Idaho, his family moved to Iowa, and then to Missoula where he grew up. His father was a member of the Botany Department at Montana State University. An honor student majoring in Forestry at the University, Eldon had worked the three previous summers for the USFS in the Blister Rust Control program at “Camp Nowhere” in northern Idaho. He was survived by his parents and a brother and sister.

William James Hellman (MSO-46), 24, was a squadleader on the fire and son of a Forest Service employee. Born August 3, 1925, in Kalispell, Montana, Bill dropped out of high school at 17 to join the US Navy. He later transferred to the Marine Corps where he served as a combat medic, taking part in the Pacific island-hopping invasions and later in occupied Japan. With a goal to become a botany and science teacher, he attended Montana State University in Missoula, Northern Montana College in Havre, and Greeley State Teachers College in Greeley, Colorado, and was three months away from

completing his degree. Bill was a part of the group of smokejumpers that made the July 1949 ceremonial parachute jump on to the Washington Ellipse. His only child was born the day before. Bill survived the fire but was mortally burned and died the following day at the hospital in Helena. He left behind his wife of three years and young son.

Philip Rolla McVey (MSO-48), 22, was a second-year smokejumper, and spent most of the summer clearing trails and forest slash out of the Castle Creek R.S. near Grangeville, Idaho. He was born in Choteau, Montana, April 1, 1927, the son of a U.S. Immigration Service employee. The family moved often, and Phil was attending high school in Browning, Montana, when he dropped out in 1945 to join the US Navy. A hard worker and good athlete who had played shortstop in semi-pro baseball, he was well liked by his fellow smokejumpers. He was survived by his parents.

David Richard Navon (MSO-49), 28. Although a rookie in 1949, he was older than his fellow Mann Gulch jumpers. He was born in Argentina, December 19, 1920, to a father employed by International Harvester. The family returned to the US and David completed high school in Modesto, California. He then saw the world working aboard a Swedish freighter and returned a year later to Junior College and joined the National Guard. David entered the US Army in 1941. He completed Officer Candidate School as a 2nd Lt. and volunteered for the 82nd Airborne Division. He was wounded in battle at Nijmegen, Holland. Upon recovery, he was assigned to the Army of Occupation in Berlin attached to the 101st Airborne Division and discharged March 1946. David then enrolled in Forestry School at the University

of California, Berkeley, and completed his degree in June 1949, after a year at the University of Aberdeen School of Forestry in Scotland. David was survived by his parents and family.

Leonard L Piper (MSO-49), 23, was born July 5, 1926, in Blairsville, Pennsylvania, one of nine children. He dropped out of high school in 1947 to join the US Navy, serving 18 months. He then attended Montana State University in Missoula and had completed two years in the Forestry program. A first-year smokejumper, he became fast friends with fellow rookie William Bennett. He was survived by his parents and five brothers and three sisters.

Stanley Joseph Reba (MSO-48), 25, the son of Polish immigrants was born October 15, 1923, and raised in Brooklyn, New York. Following high school, he received a football scholarship to Holy Cross College in Massachusetts and stayed one year before joining the Army Air Corp. He held the rank of 2nd Lieutenant while serving in the Pacific Theatre where he received a Purple Heart. Stan continued his college education at the University of Minnesota School of Forestry and, while in Minnesota, met his future wife, Julie. Prior to his return for the 1949 fire season, he completed his ROTC training at Fort Eustis in Virginia, earning his 1st Lieutenant commission. He and his good friend Joe Sylvia then left Minnesota together driving to Missoula to complete smokejumper refresher training, arriving only days before the Mann Gulch Fire. He was survived by his wife of nine months, his parents and two sisters.

Marvin L. "Dick" Sherman (MSO-49), 25, worked for the USFS serving as the Mormon Peak Lookout on the Lolo NF prior to becoming a smokejumper. Born in Darby, Montana, on January 25, 1928, he later moved and lived in Missoula. Dick served in the US Navy 1945-47. Well-liked by co-workers and friends, he was survived by his family and fiancée.

Joseph Baron Sylvia (MSO-48), 24, was born October 10, 1924, in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Following high school, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and served in the South Pacific from August 1942 to October 1945 achieving the rank of Corporal. He was a forestry student at the University of Minnesota with fellow jumper Stan Reba, his good friend. A second-year smokejumper, Joe survived the fire but succumbed to his burn injuries the following day at the

hospital in Helena. He was survived by his parents and three brothers and three sisters.

Henry James Thol (MSO-49), 19, the son of a retired Forest Service District Ranger, was born in Kalispell, Montana, in 1930, and graduated from Flathead High School. He worked the summer of 1947 as a Fire Guard at the Condon Work Center. Henry had planned to enter Montana State University in Missoula in the fall. He was survived by his parents and family.

Newton Robert Thompson (MSO-49), 22, was born in Los Angeles, California, August 12, 1926, and graduated from Alhambra High School. A veteran of the US Army Air Corps, he had completed one year of college at Pomona College prior to becoming a smokejumper. He was survived by his parents and family.

Silas Raymond Thompson Jr. (MSO-48), 21, a second-year smokejumper, was born March 11, 1928, in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he grew up. As a forestry major at North Carolina State, he secured a fire lookout position during the summer of 1946 in Washington state atop Copper Butte Mountain. He joined the US Army following that summer and served as a paratrooper in the 11th Airborne in occupied Japan. After discharge, he enrolled in Forestry School at Montana State University in Missoula in March 1948, joining the smokejumpers that summer. His return to the smokejumpers the following summer was delayed six weeks due to his commitment to training with the US Army. He arrived back in Missoula for refresher training in late July 1949. He was survived by his parents and a younger sister.

Also killed that day was **James Oliver Harrison** (MSO-47), 20, a former smokejumper who took a "ground job" at the request of his mother. He was working that summer as the Recreation Guard stationed at Meriwether Campground, just south of Mann Gulch. James was born in Spokane, Washington, January 8, 1949, and grew up in Missoula, friends with the Diettert family. A chemistry major at Montana State University in Missoula, he would have been entering his senior year. He was survived by his parents and two brothers.

Survivors of the fire were Walter Rumsey and Robert Sallee, who outran the flame front to reach the

ridgetop, and crew foreman “Wag” Dodge (MSO-41), who laid in the ashes of an escape fire he lit.

Walter Bliss Rumsey (MSO-49), 21, a first-year smokejumper, was born in Larned, Kansas, November 18, 1927. An Eagle Scout, he earned his pilot’s license before dropping out of high school to join the US Navy, where he completed his GED. Post Navy, he worked a summer on a lookout and then as a station fireman in Superior, Montana. During his junior year in college, he joined the smokejumpers. His first fire jump was Mann Gulch. In 1951, he completed his college studies graduating from Utah State University with a double major in Range Management and Watershed. After trying farming, he began a 28-year career with the Soil Conservation Service. Walt was 52 when he died in an Air Wisconsin commuter airline crash outside of Omaha, Nebraska, on June 12, 1980. He was married to Mary Williford and had three children.

Robert Wayne Sallee (MSO-49) was 17 years old the day of the Mann Gulch Fire. Born August 18, 1931, in Willow Creek, Montana, he graduated high school in Sandpoint, Idaho, in 1949. During his sophomore and junior high school years, he worked for the USFS in the White Pine Blister Rust program. Bob jumped for two seasons. In 1949 his first fire jump was at Mann Gulch. He returned again in 1950. Completing a degree in Business from Eastern Washington University, Bob entered the paper industry where he spent his career traveling the world, setting up paper operations and consulting. Married for 39 years to his late wife, Alberta, he had two sons. A later marriage to his second wife, Bertie, blessed him with three step children. An avid outdoorsman and private pilot he died May 26, 2014, at the age of 82.

Robert Wagner Dodge (MSO-41), “Wag,” the foreman of the Mann Gulch crew, was a pioneer smokejumper. Born November 16, 1915, in Hiawatha, Michigan, he was a veteran of the US Coast Guard. A skilled woodsman, he had worked for the USFS for nine years and had been a smokejumper foreman since 1945. He never jumped again after Mann Gulch, continuing on with the Forest Service at the Powell Ranger District on the Bitterroot Divide between Montana and Idaho. Wag died a little over five years later on January 12, 1955, at the

age of 39, of Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. He was survived by his wife, Patricia.

Significant changes occurred in the Forest Service fire program in the aftermath of the tragedy. Training protocols, “Ten Standard Firefighting Orders” and “Eighteen Situations That Shout Watch Out,” were developed and are now incorporated into USFS firefighter training. The agency would also place more emphasis on fire research and the science of fire behavior, creating world class research facilities in Montana, California, and Georgia resulting in improved firefighting training, techniques, and equipment.

This is the last of a series of articles honoring smokejumpers and hotshots killed in the line of duty. We owe a lot of thanks to Larry Edwards (MSO-02) for the tremendous amount of work he has done in researching this series. (Ed.) 🧠

Off the List

Paul James May (Missoula ’70)

Paul died December 18, 2023. He was born May 8, 1946, in Grand Forks, ND, and spent the first fourteen years of his life on a farm in McCanna, ND. In 1960, he moved to the May family farm two miles north of Larimore, ND, and graduated from Larimore H.S. in May 1964. He then received his Associate Degree from North Dakota School of Forestry in Bottineau, ND, in 1966. Paul spent the summer of 1965 working on a USFS trail crew out of Grangeville, ID, and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1967. He spent nineteen months serving in Vietnam as a radio/wireman. Paul completed his bachelor’s in Forestry from the University of Montana in the spring of 1972. In February of 1974, he began working for the State of Montana Forestry Division and remained with them for his entire 30-year forestry career. Paul jumped at Missoula 1970, 1972, and at Grangeville 1971.

Mike J. Wegenka (Associate)

Mike, 86, died October 4, 2023, in South Bend, Indiana. He was a firefighter for the South Bend F.D. for 33 years. *Mike was a renewing associate member of the NSA for many years. We’re appreciative of the support we get from non-smokejumper associates. It adds to our association in many ways. (Ed.)* 🧠



ODDS AND ENDS



Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

Congratulations and thanks to **Jim Kautz** (MSO-74), **Robert Kautz** (MSO-79), **Rick Elefant** (RDD-74), **Lance Stryker** (RAC-67), **Larry Peters** (CJ-63), **Anell Slavick** (IDC-69), **Don Whyde** (MSO-66), **Doug Gochnour** (BOI-74), and **Pat McGunagle** (WYS-19) who just became our latest Life Members.

Dennis Cleary (RDD-85): "I just finished reading your editorial about Wildfire Smoke. I wholeheartedly agree with everything you said. I have been making the same comments about 'Let Burn' policy that Forest Service has adopted. I've been a Mendocino Hotshot, Engine Supervisor, Redding Smokejumper, and BLM Jumper from 1988-90. After that, retired from Boise Fire Dept. What a difference in strategy from then to now. The Forest Service knows they get a free pass as there is no public demand that they change their tactics.

"I believe a lot of that has to do with keeping the general public and reporters out of fire camps so they can't see behind closed curtains. We earned our hazard pay, but today? It's not the 'boots on the ground to blame, but the people at the top. I worked at the Brush Creek station above Berry Creek for two years, from 1986-87, **and never once did I see any fuel reduction** from the Oroville Ranger Dist. Anyways, just wanted to commend you on a great article, and, yes, our words fall on deaf ears." (*The town of Berry Creek was destroyed three years ago by a managed fire that got away. Sixteen fatalities. Ed.*)

Gerry Jessup (NCSB-59) was recently inducted into the Eastmont H.S. (Wenatchee, WA) Athletic Hall of Fame for his outstanding ability as a football and basketball player. (*Gerry died December 29, 2023. Another smokejumper who did the job in all phases of his life. Ed.*)

Astronaut and former teacher at Barbara Morgan School returned to the school that bears her name and challenged the students to keep working hard and stay curious. Barbara is the wife of **Clay Morgan** (MYC-74). Barbara took a two-week journey in space in August 2007.

Chuck Sheley (CJ-59): Was traveling today (10/27) to Red Bluff for a football game, and the smoke was so thick that you could not see the foothills on the east or the mountains on the west. The front page of the local newspaper warned about Red Flag wind warnings with winds up to 45 mph. The smoke was from a prescribed burn on the Shasta/T NF. Wonder if there are any USFS guidelines for Rx burning? Blowtorch burning. Then got the following email from **Roger Jaegel** (Assoc. USFS/Ret.):

"We just experienced a prescribed fire in Redding that leaves me further amazed and confused about the USFS managed fire program around managed wildfires and Rx burns. The Shasta Trinity decided to light a 2,000-acre prescribed fire with high winds developing on the day of the burn and red flag predictions in the next few days. The objective was to burn ground fuels to reduce future fire danger in the landscape. The burn took off in the afternoon, and a large column dominated fire burned for several hours, resulting in dangerous levels of smoke in Redding and surrounding area. This fire was aerial ignited in a big way. I'm going to bet they just created more dead vegetation and future risk. Who the hell is in charge?"

Marzulla Law represented landowners and business entities in U.S. Court of Federal Claims litigation in a case involving a USFS prescribed burn in the Santa Fe NF in 2022 that resulted in the largest and most destructive fire in the State of New Mexico's history. The U.S. Court of Federal Claims rejected the Government's arguments for dismissal. The complaint alleged that the USFS continued to light fires as **strong winds** developed. The trial judge further found that the damage to the properties was foreseeable because the USFS was aware of the **high winds** on the day of the burn. (*Common sense is really becoming uncommon Ed.*)

Susanne Nebeker Houston concerning NSA Good Sam Fund donation: "I am full of gratitude for this gift and to the compassion of Doug's (**Doug Houston** RAC-73) fellow smokejumpers. When I married Doug, I married into a special work family where I grew to adore his friends and colleagues. I admire and am comforted knowing that there is still an organiza-

tion and individuals with the morals and values that care for and help each other in this crazy, chaotic world.” (*GSF in action. It works thanks to all of you. Ed.*)

Tom Graves (NCSB-49) was honored by Rep. Dan Newhouse: “With Veterans Day approaching, we salute Tom Graves of Winthrop, shown here with his wife, Fae. Tom, now 94, proudly served in the Korean War as a US Army infantryman. Over the years he has been a smokejumper, high-country outfitter, and leader of trail maintenance crews in the Pasayten Wilderness and North Cascades National Park.”

The Grants Pass, OR, *Daily Courier* (11/5/23) had a photo of **Gary Buck** (CJ-66) at a dedication ceremony showing the latest sidewalk mural installation honoring the Siskiyou Smokejumpers and the Triple Nickles.

Del Hessel (MYC-59), one of the top Track & Field coaches in the country, continues to coach at the high school level 15 years after he retired from University-level coaching. Del has had a place winner in the Colorado State Championships in each of those 15 years.

Dr. Robert Aliber (MSO-51): “Two magazines were in yesterday’s mail. One was *Smokejumper*, the other was *The New Yorker*. Guess which one I picked up first?”

Jim Petersen (Editor *Evergreen Magazine*): “My new issue arrived today and is atop my nightstand reading stack. Still one of the best magazines I read. Many thanks for your dedication to our mutual great cause.”

Chuck Sheley: Every now and then some strange, unexplained things happen. I call them “Twilight Zone” happenings. **David Hemry** (MYC-64) inquired about his merchandise order today. I showed it shipped a month ago. Told David I would try to figure out what happened and get it fixed. A few minutes later, David emailed: “Approximately three hours after I wrote to you reporting the delay of one month receiving ordered merchandise, a box arrived at my doorstep with everything in it. I am duly impressed by the speed with which you resolved this issue and imagine you must have powerful connections in high places!” (*It had been one of those extremely busy NSA days and I needed that laugh. Thanks David. Ed.*) 🙏

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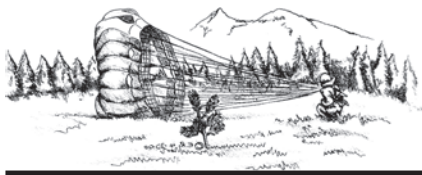


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Notes from the Ranks



Pat McGunagle
(West Yellowstone '19)

The 2023 Smokejumper Fire Season on Planet Earth looked something like the following:

Canada: Canada experienced a fire season beyond imagination. Over nine times the average annual acreage burned this year. The previous record for fire jumps, 82, was more than doubled by the 2023 season total of 165 fire jumps, an all-time record. For the North Peace Smokejumpers out of Fort St. John, hosting many smokejumpers and aircraft from the Lower 48 will be a career-defining season for everyone who popped a chute under the friendly Canadian sun. Over one third of the current US SMKJ cohort made it up to Canada this year and completed several hundred jumps out of various aircraft, including the renowned DC-3. The Canadians also enjoyed learning how US spotters work Ram Air parachutes. Canadian rounds jumped out of US aircraft, including the Missoula Sherpa and Boise Twin Otter. The North Peace SMKJ base hosts 36 crew, 8 officers and flies the DC-3T. The Omineca

SMKJ out of Mackenzie, BC, hosts 18 crew, three officers and flies a Twin Otter.

Russia: In my communication with Russian smokejumpers, 2023 was a slow year, akin to the fire year in AK. Total acreage burned was about one third of average. The Russian aviation fire program is heavily investing in drones to augment their detection capabilities for forest fires, which are mandated by Presidential Decree to not exceed thresholds in acreage burned and settlements impacted. Due to the actions of Russian SMKJs and rappellers, no settlements were impacted in 2023. The Ugra Region SMKJ jumped 356 fires in 2367 jumps and rappelled 326 fires. These SMKJ also completed 1204 practice jumps. There are about 7500 aerially trained firefighters in Russia, approximately 10% of which are currently SMKJ qualified.

Russian fire service personnel used 800 drones in 54 remote fire regions in Russia to monitor forest fire conditions. Some of the drones are equipped to suppress wildfires and were used to extinguish small fires in 16 regions of the country. This program is leading into the 2024 "Unmanned Aviation Systems" element to the Russian fire service. Additionally, 2422 cameras have been installed in 60 fire regions to provide additional detection capacity. There are 89 fire regions in Russia. Finally, in August, Russia started a new service to inform citizens about

fire hazards, bans, and restrictions when visiting forests through various regions.

United States: BLM has 134 active jumpers. USFS has 274 active jumpers (including three rounds), for a total of 408 jumpers in the US. Several bases are below target staffing levels, and large rookie classes are planned. BLM jumped 82 fires with 445 jumpers. The USFS jumped 128 fires with 738 jumpers. Neither of these numbers include Canadian jumps. Many US jumpers got several jumps up there. Very notable in the trend for the slow fire year in the US was the number of jumpers per fire and days on fire. The Great Basin SMKJ averaged three days on each fire and many USFS bases averaged four days on each fire. The average jumpers per fire continues to be right around five or six. All told, US SMKJ jumped 210 fires with 1183 jumpers. There was a grand total of 20 pounder (ground action) fires between the two agencies. With 5217 practice jumps, US SMKJ jumped a grand total of 6400 times in 2023.

The BLM graduated 13 rookies, the USFS graduated 31. With the slow fire year and low jump numbers and jump requests, it was a great opportunity to use SMKJ skillset in the single resource capacity. The USFS SMKJ filled 245 requests with 2932 shifts worked on campaign fires. The shoulder season prescribed fire opportunities are also bountiful on a year like this when Red Flag conditions don't

persist well into October. USFS jumpers completed 1783 total shifts on Rx Fire in the southeast and locally to their home forests this season. The SMKJ program continues to evolve into a critical asset to national goals for Rx fire interregional support as well as single resource qualified skillset during resource limited times of year.

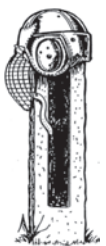
Redding received 95 boosters for 710 shifts for a great year when just about everyone else (who wasn't a NCSB or RAC jumper) was slow. Redding also opened up Silver City for a few weeks and staffed two fires including one on the Gila. RDD jumped 31 fires in total, filled five paracargo requests to remote fire personnel, and flew five detection flights. It was not nearly as busy up north. All told, R1 jumpers only staffed 18 fires with MSO jumping eight and WYS jumping one. NCSB jumped 21

fires. RAC had 34 fires and hosted 60 jumpers for 577 shifts. McCall hosted 12 boosters for 210 shifts to squeak out a decent 24 fire season after a record spring with 49" of snow in March alone and nearly 2.5" of rain in the last week of August. McCall jumped eleven of its fires out of spike bases in Price, UT, and Winnemucca, NV. McCall and Redmond continue to develop paracargo capabilities for low-cost aerial delivery systems to remote hotshot crews, as well as digital assets such as Starlink services and other critical communication needs on complex and evolving incidents, rescue jumps, etc.

The Alaska SMKJ endured a very slow season. Thirty-four fires were jumped in AK in a fire season that seemed like it was about to go bonkers, yet never really did. Alaska sent 31 boosters to Canada and filled 68 boost requests to the Lower 48.

The Great Basin SMKJ jumped 48 fires with 192 jumpers and controlled 69% of these fires within the first 24 hours and contained 91% of all fires jumped. This is closer to half of the average for fires and jumpers on fires, and the slow growth of those fires in the first burn period shows how slow of a year (and how much moisture was in the fuels) in the desert this year. Of course, some Boise bros boots on the ground really means those fires didn't have much of a chance anyhow.

It looks like a light winter just about everywhere at the moment. Tall green grass all over the US turned into tall brown grass this fall. With the strong El Nino forecast to continue, the 2024 season could look quite a bit different from 2023. Some rookies got their first fire jump in Canada this year. Who knows where next year's rookies will land! 🍄



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.

Gerald M. Jessup (North Cascades '59)

Gerry died December 29, 2023. He was born June 20, 1940, in Wenatchee, Washington, raised in the Wenatchee Valley and graduated from Eastmont H.S. in 1958 where he played football and basketball. Gerry was inducted into the Eastmont Athletic Hall of Fame in 2023. He graduated from Wenatchee Jr. College where he met his wife.

"In the winter of 1958-59 my brother challenged me to apply to the smokejumper program at Winthrop, WA. I did and was accepted after a face-to-face meeting with the Base Manager, Francis Lufkin (NCSB-40). I jumped the 1959-60 seasons and as we say, 'it was the best job I ever had.' I loved the experi-

ence and the camaraderie, but I fell in love, married my sweetheart, and 'had to find a real job.'

"I attended the University of Washington for one year but left school and returned to Wenatchee where I found work as a salesman in the fruit industry. My brother told me that if I was going to live in Wenatchee long term, I needed to work in the fruit industry. I did for the next 40 years.

"If I were to list the top four events in my life I would say my relationship with my Lord Jesus Christ, finding and marrying my wife, my three children, and smokejumping. If I was to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing."

Thomas Harry “Tom” Graves

(North Cascades '49)

Tom, 93, died November 29, 2023. He was born on August 6, 1929, on the family ranch near Pearygin Lake, Washington. Tom graduated from Winthrop H.S. as valedictorian and continued his education at Washington State Univ. and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo studying Equine Science.

Tom was a ranch hand at an early age. He began breaking horses at the age of 14, and at the age of 16 worked as a local guide on a dude ranch. Tom served in the Army as a member of the 3rd Infantry Division.

Tom was a horseman, wrangler, horse trader, guide, packer, smokejumper, rancher, soldier, wildland firefighter, logger, and owned several business in the valley including The Winthrop Feed Store. He was also a contract fire engine owner and operator. Tom was an active member of the American Legion. He as the founding member of the Washington Contract Firefighters in 1998 and a founding member of the Washington Outfitters and Guides Association. Tom jumped at NCSB 1949-50 and 1953.

Charles Richard Simons (Missoula '52)

Charles, 93, died December 18, 2023. He lived in Port Angeles, Washington, and was born January 27, 1930. Charlie earned his bachelors from Jamestown College, a Master's in Education from the Univ. of Montana, and MA from Washington State Univ. He was a lifelong Mathmatics teacher starting his career in Ekalaka, Montana, 1955-58. He followed with a long stint in the Military Schools in Europe, 1959-85, McCall, Idaho, 1985-86, and Brookings, Oregon, 1987-89. Charlie was a visiting Prof. of Mathmatics at Washington State Univ. 1989-97. He jumped at Missoula during the 1952 season.

Wilford D. “Bill” Poppie (Missoula '58)

Bill, 85, died November 17, 2023, at his home in Hamilton, Montana. He was born in Hamilton, March 11, 1938, where he graduated from high school. Bill graduated from Montana State Univ. in 1961 with a degree in Civil Engineering. He jumped at Missoula 1958-60 while getting his degree. Bill and his wife, Paulette, lived in Washington State from 1988-2015 before moving back to Hamilton.

Paul Samuel Carpino (Missoula '52)

Paul, 96, died November 10, 2023, in Spokane Valley, Washington. He was born September 30, 1927, in Hartford, Connecticut. He enlisted in the Navy in 1945. After his discharge, he moved to Missoula where he earned his degree in Social Work at the Univ. of Montana. Paul was a lifelong advocate for the poor and

a peace and nuclear disarmament activist. After graduation, he was involved in the Institute of Indian Affairs, where he resisted proposals from the oil industry to dismantle reservations. He jumped at Missoula 1952-54 and moved to Deer Lodge, Montana, where he was a social worker for the State of Montana. In 1959 he was the social work supervisor for the Deer Lodge Prison.

Throughout his life he was involved in peace activism and helping low-income projects. In 1991, Paul was featured in the War Resisters League calendar for his peace work. In 2022, he was awarded the Univ. of Montana School of Social Work Lifetime Achievement Award, and in 2023, the University's Distinguished Alumni Award. Paul was a dedicated cross-country and downhill skier and swimmer. He swam at least a mile a day until he was 92.

Peer Pauli Krane (North Cascades '67)

Peer, 79, died October 22, 2023, in Oakland, California, of complications of Alzheimer's disease. He was born August 16, 1944, in Portland, Oregon, where he graduated from Sunset H.S. before getting a degree in Political Science from Oregon State Univ. Peer then joined the Navy and served with Fleet Logistics Squadron VR-30, where he made lifelong friends and flew throughout the Pacific and on the Apollo 17 recovery mission. He flew for Transamerica before joining AGS/DNA Plant Technology in 1983 as their Safety and Maintenance Manager where he was valued for his ability to fix or build anything from carpentry to electrical to plumbing. Peer got an M.S. in Safety from USC and worked in biotech until retirement. He was known for wearing his signature uniform of jeans and a polo shirt for over 40 years. Peer jumped at NCSB in 1967.

Melvin Philip Guerrera (Pilot)

Mel, 91, died September 30, 2023. He was born November 5, 1931, in Sparks Nevada. After graduating from high school, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Univ. of Nevada, Reno. Mel then served four year in the Army as a fixed-wing and helicopter pilot. After the Army, he flew for Petroleum Helicopters. When he was age 27, he crashed in Alaska with two geologists, bouncing down a cliff above a glacier. They were there seven days and seven nights before being rescued on July 30, 1959. Mel moved to Missoula in 1961 and flew for the Johnson Flying Service 1962-75.

Jack Lee Deeds (Missoula '65)

Jack, 79, died September 30, 2023, at his home in Missoula after a 12-year battle with kidney cancer. Jack

and his twin brother, Jimmie, were born February 14, 1944, in Seattle, Washington. The family settled in Missoula where both went to high school. Jack had a long career as a smokejumper, jumping at Missoula 1965, 70, 72-78, 80, 81, 83-85, Grangeville 1966, 71, and West Yellowstone 1967. Jack attended Univ. of Montana and after three years transferred to Montana State Univ. to pursue a degree in Architecture. He accepted a position with the USFS as an architect that allowed him to continue his passion for fighting fires. Jack had a long successful career with the Forest Service, which eventually took him to Denver, Colorado.

Horace M. Cordova (Idaho City '61)

Horace, 80, died July 22, 2023, from complications with Parkinson's disease. While going to Western New Mexico Univ. he started working for the USFS and rookied at Idaho City in 1961. He then moved to Alaska and worked at the Mount McKinley N.P. Horace earned a bachelor's in Education and worked in school systems as a teacher and administrator. He first taught in Silver City and then Fort Stanton as an administrator and diagnostician. Horace earned his Master's in Education from Portales Eastern New Mexico Univ. and moved to Capitan, New Mexico, where he taught in the Hondo Valley public school system. Horace moved to Alamogordo, New Mexico, when he retired. He was well known for his art work and extensive career in art paintings, jewelry making, and sculpture. Art was his passion. Horace jumped at Idaho City 1961-62, and 1965. He jumped at Fairbanks 1963 and 1966.

John Brent Kennedy (McCall '87)

John died January 26, 2024, in Alto, New Mexico, after a long battle with ALS. He was born June 4, 1957, in Salt Lake City, Utah. John was a career USFS employee and jumped at McCall 1987-88. He was a member of the Ruidoso Hotshots before jumping. John moved to Silver City in 1965 and attended schools there and in Tucson, Arizona.

From his brother Bruce: "Perhaps some stories of interest regarding John would include how he once got a speeding ticket while riding a bicycle on Swan Street in Silver City before he had a driving license. How he was seriously injured in a car wreck when his VW Bug was totaled while coming into Silver City and he was thrown out of the car, through the windshield, while still holding onto the steering wheel. He purchased a lot in Alto, and erected a large Tepee style tent on the site and lived there the first winter while he built the home, he lived in. He was a fan of tequila and mescal and shared a shot with friends on his last day on this earth."

Donald Arden "Don" Rolfs (North Cascades '59)

Don, 82, died October 13, 2023. He was born May 28, 1941, in Yakima, Washington, and graduated from Yakima H.S. and received his bachelor's from Central Washing College in 1964 and his doctorate in Dentistry from the Univ. of Washington in 1969. He served in the Army at Fort Sam Houston 1969-72 and was discharged as a Captain. He followed that with post-doc training at the Univ. of Washington School of Dentistry 1972-75.

Don conducted a private practice in periodontics for 15 years in Wenatchee. After closing his practice in 1990, he served 15 years as a free-lance dental educator, teaching surgical and diagnostic skills at all major North American dental meetings. Don was an accomplished mountain climber and led climbs on most of the major mountains in Washington State, California, Colorado, and the Alps in Switzerland. Don jumped at NCSB 1959-62 and 1964.

Charles R. "Chuck" Hatch (Grangeville '63)

Chuck, 80, of Sandpoint, Idaho, died October 10, 2023, of prostate cancer. He was born November 11, 1942, in Seattle, Washington. He graduated from the Univ. of Montana with a degree in Forestry in 1964. Chuck continued his education, earning a master's in Forestry from Oregon State Univ. in 1966 and his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1971.

Chuck then began his 36-year teaching career at Southern Illinois Univ. and then moved to the Univ. of Idaho. He was Vice President for Research and associate professor in forest resources at Idaho where he spent the majority of his career. He was past chair of the Western Region of the National Assoc. of Professional Forestry Schools. Chuck jumped at Grangeville during the 1963 season and was a Life Member of the NSA.

Charles Richard "Dick" Komberec (Pilot)

Dick, 76, died October 28, 2023. He was born in Thompson Falls, Montana, March 18, 1947, and grew up in Drummond, Montana. Dick read the book *Tall Timber Pilots*, which forever changed his life. At 15 years, he started his first business, earning enough money to pay for flying lessons and to purchase his first airplane at 16. His first flying job was for Bob Lueck of Missoula Sky Flight in 1965 where he had taken flying lessons. Dick was an excellent instructor; he had a natural gift for understanding the mechanics of flight and of aircraft. He taught many young men how to fly and launched several of them on careers in aviation.

Dick was offered a pilot position at Johnson's Flying Service not long after his 20th birthday. As a Johnson pilot, he would go on to fly backcountry missions, spray in TBM Avengers, drop smokejumpers out of DC-3s and become an Air Tanker Pilot.

In 1975, when Johnson Flying Service was sold, Dick would go on to the next major chapter of his life. In 1977, he was hired by Western Airlines. He would retire from Delta Airlines as an International 767 Captain in 2005. In 1994, along with a couple of local friends, he founded, invested in, and became a lifetime member of the Board of Directors of the Museum of Mountain Flying in Missoula.

James F. "Jim" Gunby (Missoula '52)

Jim, 89, died November 27, 2022. He was born September 6, 1932, in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Jim lived in Wyoming and Washington before moving to Idaho where he graduated from Sandpoint H.S. in 1950. He later graduated from the Univ. of Idaho where he studied Animal Husbandry/Agriculture and was an ROTC member. He jumped at Missoula in 1952 and Grangeville in 1953. Jim later earned an M.A. in business from George Washington Univ.

Jim served in the USAF for 25 years, retiring as a Lt. Colonel in 1980. He served two tours in Vietnam earning two Silver Stars and seven other medals. He earned another M.A. in Finance along the way. After retirement he and his wife, Joan, lived in Spokane Valley, Washington, for 43 years.

Robert J. Hough (North Cascades '51)

Bob, 90, died January 24, 2024. He was born February 21, 1933, in Winthrop, Washington, and graduated from Winthrop H.S. in 1951. Bob rookied at NCSB that summer where he jumped until 1955. He graduated from College of Puget Sound in 1956 and, as an ROTC student, entered the USAF as a 2nd Lieutenant. He entered pilot training in 1957, made 1st Lieutenant in 1958, Captain in 1963, Major in 1968, and Lt. Colonel in 1974. Bob flew many different aircraft including B-47s and B-52s. In 1976 he received his master's degree from Pepperdine University and retired in 1985. Bob flew over 7,700 hours and 123 combat missions over Vietnam. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Meritorious Service Medal among many other awards. Bob retired to Olalla, Washington, and worked for the State as a Safety Program Manager for ten years.

David E. Hall (McCall '80)

Dave died on December 14, 2023, in McCall, Idaho, of pancreatic cancer. He was born on November 11, 1955, in Boulder, Colorado, and later moved to California with his family where he graduated from high

school in San Bernardino. He attended Lassen Community College in Susanville and received an Associate's degree in Fire Technology. His wildfire suppression experience included working on a Los Angeles County fire engine and the Texas Canyon Hotshots. Dave jumped in McCall 1980-84 and totaled 66 career jumps with 29 fire jumps. After smokejumping, Dave worked on a helitack rappeller crew out of Price Valley on the Payette N.F. and for many years as station foreman at Warren, Idaho, also on the Payette. Dave retired from the Payette but stayed in McCall to pursue his love of fly fishing, backpacking, hiking, and skiing (Nordic and Alpine) in the Idaho outdoors.

Frank Robert Clements (North Cascades '88)

Frank, 63, died January 24, 2024. He was born on June 27, 1960, in Tucson, Arizona, into a firefighting family. His father worked on multiple national forests and was very active in fire suppression including Type 1 Fire teams and setting up the Boise Interagency Fire Center, now referred to as NIFC.

Frank grew up in multiple states but graduated from high school in 1978 in Warren, PA. Moving back west, he was hired by the USFS on the Okanogan NF. He took classes from Spokane Community College and received a degree in Forestry Management in 1984.

From 1979 through 1987, Frank was a seasonal employee with fire suppression duties. In 1988, he rookied at NCSB and stayed there until 2003. The following year he transferred to Boise BLM smokejumpers and retired in 2015. He accumulated a total of 586 jumps and 271 fire jumps on both the round and ram air parachute. He proudly stated that he stopped counting the number of fire assignments when he hit 500 fires. Additionally, he made fire jumps out of every USFS and BLM bases including Silver City, and 17 spike bases.

Glen A. Johnshoy (Missoula '67)

Glen died August 14, 2023. He was born April 23, 1947, in Glenwood MN, and grew up on a farm near Starbuck, MN, where he graduated from H.S. Glen excelled in cross country, wrestling, and also played the tuba in the Starbuck marching band. After high school, he moved to Missoula to work for the USFS controlling blister rust and later rookied at Missoula. Glen jumped at Missoula 1967, 1973-76, and at West Yellowstone in 1968. He joined the Navy in 1969 and served on an aircraft carrier during the Vietnam War.

After his discharge, he moved back to Missoula and bought a ranch near Butler Creek and decided to "get some horses." He learned to shoe his own horses and started a 50-year career as a Farrier. Glen became an

ultra-marathon runner and finished a 100 mile ultra in the Big Horn mountains of Wyoming at the age of 70. He completed the Boston Marathon in 2014. Glen started playing the tuba again and played in the Missoula Community and City Bands for many years. He remained active and healthy until his diagnosis of acute leukemia in August of 2022.

Alva C. “Ozzie” Osborn (Missoula ’54)

Ozzie, 91, died February 13, 2024, in his home in Coeur d’ Alene, Idaho. He was born November 13, 1932, in Kahoka, Missouri. Ozzie graduated from Toluca H.S. (Illinois) in 1950 and Colorado State in 1955 with a degree in Forestry. After serving as a Lt. in the Army for two years, he spent 31 years working for the USFS as a Forester. Ozzie jumped at Missoula in 1954 and 1957. After his retirement from the Forest Service, he managed his private forest land and was

on the board of directors of the Idaho Forest Owners Association. Ozzie was active in the First Presbyterian Church and sang in the choir for over 50 years.

Rodney Wayne Sando (Missoula ’65)

Rod, 82, died July 19, 2023, in Woodburn, Oregon. He was born in Independence, Iowa, and grew up in central Minnesota. Rod was director of Forestry for the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources and later commissioner 1991-99. He then was director of Idaho Fish and Game and executive director of the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority. The current Minnesota DNR commissioner said, “Rod was a dedicated conservationist and public servant. As commissioner, he earned a national reputation for his leadership on natural resources issues.” Rod jumped at Missoula during the 1965 season. 🌲

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Brent Russ, 516 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801

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