

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
JANUARY 2025

# SMOKEJUMPER



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## www.smokejumpers.com

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Front cover

*First all jumper engine company in Southern California. Santa Barbara Fire Department Station 1. (L-R) Firefighter Jason Fernandez (NCSB-10), Firefighter Denver Chavez (RDD-18), Captain Roland Smith (FBX-05). All are former Los Padres Hotshots. (Courtesy J. Culbertson)*

### 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](mailto: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](http://www.smokejumpers.com). Click on "News and Events" at the top of the page. Click on "Jump List" on the pulldown, type in your **last name**.

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

### 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](mailto: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  |
| Cave Junction ..... | CJ              | Idaho City.....   | IDC                | Missoula .....   | MSO  |
|                     |                 |                   |                    | West Yellowstone | WYS  |
|                     |                 |                   |                    | Winthrop.....    | NCSB |



# Message from the President



FOLLOWING THE VERY successful NSA Reunion in Boise in 2022 led by **Lynn Sprague** and his great committee, this summer Missoula will host the “**Celebrate 85 Years of Smokejumping**” NSA reunion at the University of Montana June 20th to 23rd, 2025. Reserve your rooms ASAP at the Missoula Marriott Residence Inn or Holiday Inn Downtown and sign up when online registration is announced. Thanks to **Bob McKean, Barry Hicks, Sarah Doehring, Tim Aldrich, Dick Hulla, Mark Wright, Charlie Palmer, and Jeff Kinderman** for all the work organizing what we know will be another memorable get together. Reliable sources confirm that there again will be shortage of beer or restriction on embellishing our folklore with “tall tale” storytelling.

As you know, on the Mann Gulch 75th anniversary, the NSA honored the 13 men by having NSA members and Mann Gulch family relatives visit the 13 smokejumper gravesites across the United States. Bronze memorial grave medallions were professionally



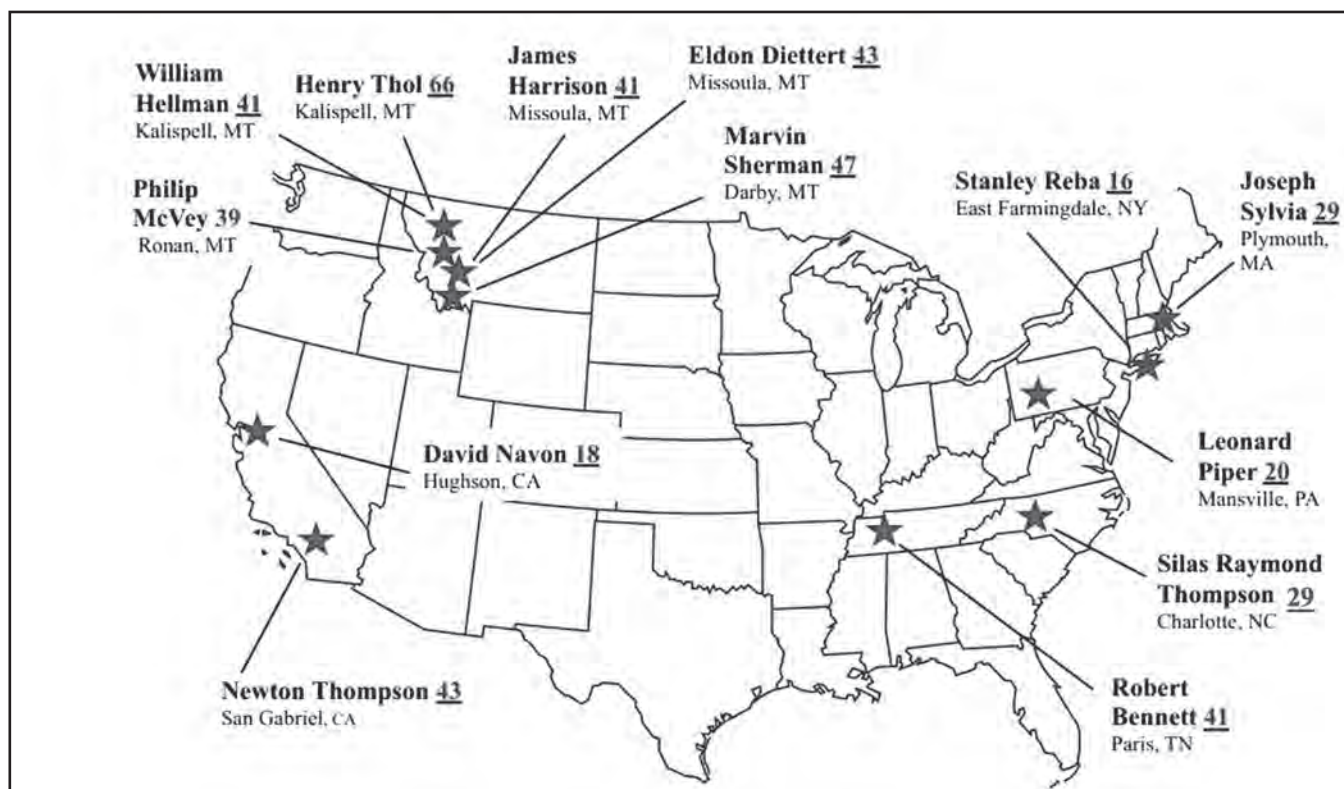
by Mike Bina  
(Missoula '68)

installed on the head or foot stones, with kudos to **Sarah Doehring** for coordinating this. American Legion or VFW posts provided color guards to pay respects to the ten of the 13 smokejumpers who were WWII military veterans.

The map shows that a total of 500 individuals signed the cemetery registries, but it was estimated that another 150 were present but did not sign the registries bringing the total to 650.

Special appreciation and grateful thanks are expressed to NSA Mann Gulch Committee co-chairs **Jim Cherry** and

**Sarah Doehring**. In addition, special credit is given to **Denny Breslin** for coordinating the two California sites and serving on the committee along with **Tory Kendrick**, for organizing the Montana visitations, and **Jodi Stone**, and **Bob Smee**, the latter who produced the wonderful individually personalized 12-page tribute booklets. Sarah and Jodi were successful in connecting with over 70 family members and an ongoing effort will be made to stay in touch with the families. Special thanks also to **Nels Jensen, Roger Archibald, John**



**Pietras, Lyle Best, Jim Cherry, Chuck Underwood, Ed Ward, Kurt Rohrbach, Dan Roberson, Jeff Kinderman, Mark Nelson, and Eric Hansen** who coordinated their assigned cemetery visit. Hats off also to Nels Jensen and the Museum of Mountain Flying for having Ms. Montana, the DC-3 that dropped the 15 smokejumpers, for the flyovers at two of the Montana sites.

Kudos to **Bob Beckley** for his work getting a U.S. Congressional proclamation honoring the Mann Gulch victims by coordinating with Senator John Tester who sponsored a bi-partisan Joint House and Senate Resolution. In addition, Bob was able to secure a letter from President Joe Biden paying tribute to the Mann Gulch victims. The Massachusetts and Montana governors also issued proclamations. Sixty-seven newspaper, television, and radio media stories featured the anniversary.

The NSA president was invited to join Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, author John Maclean, and the USFS deputy chief Jeff Marsolais (a John Berry USFS rookie hire) in making remarks at the Helena-Lewis and Clark Forest memorial tribute on the Montana capitol grounds. On August 6 Sarah Doehring and I hiked with the 13 families from the Missouri River to the Mann Gulch crosses/Star of David at which wreaths made by the family were placed. Thanks also to **Jerry Katt** for organizing an NSA breakfast on August 4 and **Joe Stuttler** who was instrumental in getting the very impressive and moving USFS color guard at the August 5 ceremony in Helena.

**Chuck Sheley** will edit a special upcoming issue of *Smokejumper* publishing a full and detailed report on these tributes. Also, Denny Breslin will spearhead posting the Mann Gulch memorial tributes on the NSA website that will include photographs and a summary of each of the 13 Individual cemetery visitations.

Thirty-three smokejumpers have died in the line of duty. The Mann Gulch memorial tribute was Phase I of paying tribute to the Mann Gulch smokejumpers. Plans are underway to implement Phase II honoring the other 20 smokejumpers with details to follow.

Within the last two months, three unique and surprising interactions have convinced me that the public is probably more aware of smokejumping than I realized. Three weeks ago, I was talking with a blindness education colleague who is a Congressional lobbyist. I shared with my friend, who graduated from a school for the blind in Sarah Doehring's hometown of Batavia,

NY that I had recently returned from the Helena Mann Gulch memorial. He immediately blurted out, "Ah James Keelaghan!" and then he broke into song, "Thirteen crosses high above the cold Missouri waters." I was speechless. I asked how he knew about smokejumpers. His response was, "Doesn't everyone?"

And then this incident likewise shocked me. A month before Mann Gulch I was walking on the beach in North Carolina. I was wearing my Smokejumper cap (and swimsuit). A man walking in the opposite direction toward me smiled and excitedly said, "August 5, 1949!" I didn't immediately pick up on the significance of his statement. He said, "You look puzzled. Mann Gulch. Mann Gulch!" He then explained that in a month he would be 75 years old on his birthday being born in North Carolina on the historically significant date of August 5, 1949. We talked for over a half an hour.

Another eye opener was telling my neighbor before leaving for Helena that I was going to hike up a mountain in Montana off the Missouri River and hoped my aging bones and atrophied muscles could withstand the effort. She blew me away saying, "Are you talking about the Gates of the Mountains and Mann Gulch and Merriwether Canyons?" She had taken the boat tour two years ago and knew all about smokejumping. And then she said, "What? You were a smokejumper? Really? Are you kidding me?" My response, "No I am not kidding. Yes, I was a smokejumper. I know you find that hard to believe."

As hard as we try to keep smokejumping a guarded secret, we have not been very successful in our efforts. Enjoy another great issue of the magazine. 🍄





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# Ring of Fire

## The Gobi, 1966—Part II

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by Wes Brown (Cave Junction '66)

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*In the October 2024 issue of **Smokejumper**, Wes Brown described his recruitment and the start of his training at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base (the Gobi). Now we will finish the story. (Ed.)*

### First Jumps

WE TRAINED FOR TEN DAYS before we made our first practice jump. **Garry Peters (CJ-66)**, **Tommy Smith (CJ-61)**, and **Terry Mewhinny (CJ-64)** did most of the training. We didn't see much of **Chuck Sheley (CJ-59)**



**Garry Peters**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

until we were ready to learn what to do in the plane on a real jump. He talked us through in-the-plane procedures and sequences, which had to occur precisely during a fire run to ensure safety and efficiency. We learned how to scoot to the door while on final and assume the correct exit position, listen carefully to the spotter's instruction after he

completed the streamer passes, and exit the plane quickly and forcefully with the proper exit attitude. Finally, it was time: our first practice jump would be the next day.

My first jump was on an early July blue-sky morning before sunrise. I was in the first of two loads. At 6:00 A.M., we suited up in 85 pounds of gear and, in scrunched-over movements, more resembling chimpanzees than humans, squat-waddled toward the plane. Through the roar, dust, and prop blast from the warming engines, we loaded into the plane and sat on the floor facing the back. It was crowded and slanted downward toward the tail as the Twin Beech was built before anyone considered adding a nose wheel. Before takeoff, as we taxied to the end of the runway, sliding all the while

toward the tail of the plane on the slick metal floor, **Dick Wessel (CJ-56)**, the spotter, asked the obligatory question, "Is this anyone's first plane ride?" Someone said it was. Suddenly, we all realized that he would jump out of the first plane he ever rode in! It turned out that he jumped out of a plane more than eight times before he landed in one. **Hal Ewing** taxied uneventfully to the end of the runway, turned, and applied full throttle. With a roar, the venerable old plane, wind rushing through the door, left the ground and climbed with a steady vibration toward the skies above Seats Field, the site of our first jump.

No one wanted to be the only rookie left in the plane, so we all jumped. We completed six more jumps in the next five days. The second was the hardest, but after that, it was routine.

On our second jump, a big surprise awaited us. The jump itself was fun and exhilarating. Afterward, we congratulated each other and stood around laughing, joking, and reveling—what studs we finally were!

After a few minutes of this, it was time to return to the base, and I started to climb into a crummy parked nearby for the five-mile ride home. "Not so fast, rookie," I heard Tommy Smith say as he pointed to a pile of big green elephant bags scattered behind another pickup. Next to the bags were pack boards and piles of black inner tube sections, which, when linked together, were used to hold packed gear bags onto frames. We knew what they were for, but what were they doing here? "Pack your gear; you're walking home," said Tommy, "and if you're too long about it, you'll miss lunch." With



**Hal Ewing**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

that, the squadleaders rolled up the jump-spot marker, hopped in the rigs, and, to the sound of laughter fading in our ears, drove away. There we were, alone and deserted, five miles before lunch!

Packing and securing our jump gear to our pack frames was a shaky proposition at best, but we somehow managed. It turns out that many rubber band lengths are required. This would not be a pleasant walk by any measure. On the way, frequent arguments broke out over things like which side of the road to walk on, whether it was better to walk with your hands in your pockets or to swing by your side, whether we should sing “Waltzing Matilda” as we walked—important decisions! “These



**Emmett Grijalhava**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

boots are made for walking, and that’s just what they’ll do...” I heard **Emmett Grijalhava (CJ-66)** sing as the rest of us argued.

Two hours of arguing and stumbling in later, at about 12:15, our band of rookies, hunger our only companion, shuffled through the gates of the Gobi, dumped our packs on the lawn,

and rushed into the mess hall and were surprised. The squadleaders hadn’t waited. “Not so fast, rookies,” they all shouted, mouths full of forks, mashed potatoes, and roast beef, “put your gear away first!” Our gear stowed and chutes hung; we returned but weren’t surprised to learn that there wasn’t much left: a few scraps of fat and gravy, some green beans, fruit cocktail cobbler without any crust, toothpicks, etc.

This bipolar scenario repeated itself daily on jumps three, four and five, the exhilaration of a jump followed by the drudgery of a packout, the “thrill of victory, the agony of defeat.” But we improved in fitness, toughness, and savvy to the point where in three short days, we were able to leap from an antique airplane traveling more than 100 mph out into the air, negotiate the 1500 vertical feet to the ground, mostly avoiding trees, strike the ground with both boots together, pack our packs correctly, tie our boot laces securely, walk on the same side of the road with our hands swinging at our sides, offer the Gobi salutes to passing loggers, pass by the

O’Brien store without stopping and stride through the gates of the Gobi while singing in unison, “and he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boil,” and all this before lunch!

## My First Fire Jump

With an anticipated lightning storm in the afternoon, our sixth and seventh qualifying jumps were completed on Sunday morning, July 10.

**Delos Dutton (MSO-51)**

had drawn rookie names out of a hat and placed them on top of the

jump list, alternately with experienced jumpers. I drew the number 10 and was in the third plane, just below **Eric (the Blak), Schoenfeld (CJ-64)**, and just above **Chuck (Buzzer) Mansfield (CJ-59)**. He, in turn, was just above my friend and fellow rookie **Davy Ward (CJ-66)**.

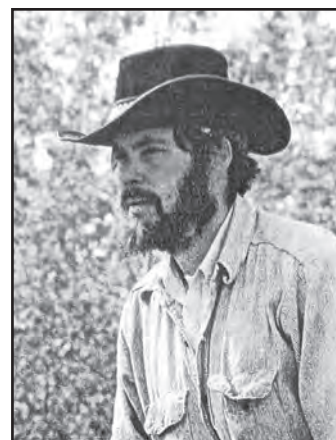
That afternoon, tension built across the base. Everyone felt it. The parachutes in the well and the radio in the loft cracked with the extra static electricity in the air. Emmett sang along as he walked past,

“Lightning is striking again and again . . .”

That night saw multiple lightning flashes to the North and East. All experienced jumpers were excited in anticipation of the imminent bust. I learned then that all jumpers are lightning experts as they debated whether they were ground strikes or sheet lightning. They even had a scientific name for lightning clouds: Cumulonimbus Overtimus. The Chit Chat Bar crew came home early that night, and the ping-pong game



**Delos Dutton** (Courtesy NSA files)



**Eric the Blak**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

broke up just after midnight. Sleep, at last, brought dreams of protecting the tinder-dry forest and its helpless inhabitants from the overwhelming orange tongues of its mortal enemy: fire.

Monday morning, we woke up and ate an early breakfast. The food was excellent, and the coffee a lifesaver, but the crew's spirits were somewhat dampened by the steady rain falling outside. Low-hanging clouds and mist pockets in the surrounding mountains were always a bad sign. There were no orange flames, smoke columns, or blossoming orange canopies against a blue sky.

Slightly depressed, we went about our daily routine. The clouds lifted a bit so we could see the tops of the mountains, and during lunch, much to our surprise, the fire siren sounded, initiating a mad chairs-flying-food-grabbing scramble to the loft to suit up.

The pilot, Hal Ewing, appeared and fired up first one engine and then, in a cloud of blue smoke, the other. Chuck Sheley, the spotter for this load, ran to the office for the map case, exited a moment later, and sprinting through the puddles, hurried the last jumper into the plane, hopped in, and clipped the safety strap behind him. Rookies Jerry Brownwood and Emmett Grijalva were on the load. "I wonder what song Emmett's singing now." I thought.

We all stood on the rain-soaked apron and offered the infamous Gobi salute as the venerable Twin Beech thundered down the runway past us, lifting first its heavy twin tail off the pavement, followed soon afterward by its wet black tires clunking into their wheel wells. "What a day for a fire," I thought, "I wish I had a raincoat."

I was to be number two in the next planeload, and while excited, I didn't see much chance of another fire that day. But, just after dinner, the siren sounded again, and another typical mad rush ensued to get everyone suited up and into the plane. I was pleased to see that Chuck Sheley was the spotter but disappointed to hear him say, "Don't get your hopes up yet. We're only going out to investigate a fog bank, which might be a fire." "Great," I muttered to myself; we'll be jumping a fog bank!"

Hal taxied the Twin Beech to the end of the runway, "ran up" the engines while checking the gauges and listening for unfamiliar sounds, turned a 180, and

applied full throttle to both engines. Slowly, at first, the plane accelerated forward. Standing in the back and dripping water, Chuck used his feet as chock blocks to keep us as far forward in the cabin as possible. As the tail lifted, we shuddered into the air, and the door flashed by the apron; we glimpsed Gobi salutes offered by sodden jumpers standing in the rain. In the air and climbing, Chuck stepped over us and into the cockpit. Sitting next to Hal, he began to study the map.

Flying north and west past Eight Dollar Mountain, we gained altitude and heard the engines throttle back as we reached cruising speed. It was a gray afternoon. Raindrops were spreading across the windshield and coming in through the door. Before too long, the plane slowed and began to descend slightly, accompanied by the sound of increased air rushing through the door and

excited talk in the cockpit. Chuck stepped back over us and called Eric (The Blak) to the door. Both began to talk and laugh while Chuck pointed out the door. It was loud in the plane, and it was hard to be sure what had their attention, but it obviously wasn't a fog bank!

As the plane circled, Chuck moved back and forth between the spotter's window and the door, alternately directing Hal and throwing drift streamers. We could smell whiffs of roasted Doug fir as the smoke column drifted upward into the plane's path. Chuck motioned to Eric and observed closely as Eric carefully clipped his static line securely onto the static cable. Motioning Eric to the door,

Chuck resumed his position over the spotter's window on the floor of the plane. With the plane on final and approaching the exit point, Chuck suddenly, with a quick backward motion and a slap on Eric's shoulder, shouted, "GO GET 'EM!" Blak was gone in a whoosh, the door suddenly empty and his deployment bag slapping on the skin of the tail.

Chuck pulled it in and motioned me into the door. He watched closely as I scooted feet across the polished aluminum floor, carefully hooked up my static line, and placed my left boot out the door and onto the step. I felt the rain on my face as the slipstream tore at my leg pocket and ripped through my facemask. I could hardly hear what Chuck was yelling in my ear.

I looked out into the rain and saw a steep and forested razorback ridge below with no breaks in the forest



**Gobi Salute**  
(Courtesy NSA files)



canopy whatsoever! At its base was a thin silver ribbon that I knew to be the Illinois River. Two-thirds of the way up the ridge in the gloom of the afternoon, a little down-slope from a fog bank and directly below Eric's chute hanging in the sky, was a bright orange towering torch of a snag, 150 pitchy feet tall, burning down there in the rain from bottom to top. At its base, fire surrounded it in a widening ring. "I know what Emmett would be singing now!" I thought, waiting for Chuck to give me a briefing. It was a scary sight, and I needed help. "I could be hiking in the Swiss Alps right now!" I thought anxiously." But as the plane banked into its final approach, I still had no instructions. I shouted: "*HEY CHUCK, WHERE'S THE SPOT?*"

He moved backward from the spotter's window and pointed out the door, "*SEE THAT BURNING TREE ON THE RIDGE DOWN THERE!*" he shouted. "*YEAH!*" I shouted back, nodding. "*THAT'S NOT IT!*" I heard him scream in my ear as he lurched back toward me, slapped my shoulder, and added the familiar words, "*GO GET 'EM!*"

I was gone in a whoosh, and after a three-second blur of wind, noise, twisting, and jerking, I checked my canopy and was pleasantly assured that it had opened correctly without a malfunction. I made a right turn into the wind. I caught a glimpse of the Beech above, turning for another pass, and down below for the first time, I got a good look at the fire. I could see it clearly now and concluded that it might be the worst jump spot on Earth! I saw Eric's canopy draped across some rocks above the fire. These thoughts aside, I spotted some shorter trees over the ridge and ran with the wind to reach them. Less than a minute later, I turned back into the wind above them and crashed through the upper branches of a Madrone tree, which jerked me to a sudden stop. There I was, "hung up" and swinging with my feet about six inches off the ground.

I could hear Eric shouting at me in the distance. "I'm OK," I answered as I looked up to see Chuck Mansfield skillfully urging his 130-pound body to the ground. He made it to the ground, and it was Davy's turn. His exit looked good, but he ran with the wind a little too long, turned back a little late, and ended up hanging about 120 feet up on the top of a healthy-looking Doug fir tree. Seeing that, I was doubly relieved to have made it to the ground, well, almost to the ground, although technically, I guess, I did hang up too.

Soon, Davy was on the ground after a successful let-down, using most of his line, making sure not to get his

glove caught in the boy-scout-D-ring apparatus, and all the while good-naturedly fielding "constructive" comments from The Blak and the Buzzer. I looked at Davy when he arrived and thought, "Hey, we made it! We're finally Smokejumpers! Give us our jump pin now!"

After that, except for the rain, the fire was more or less routine. First, move debris. Then, ring the fire with a narrow trail and dig down to bare earth. Use a "misery whip" to fall the snag. Chop open and throw dirt on the burning log. Wait six daylight hours after the last smoke before leaving. Eric and Chuck Mansfield, the mental duo, were masterful with the misery whip. Aiming the undercut and wedging precisely, they fell the burning snag exactly where they wanted it in no time. It went over in a flaming arc of sparks well within the fire line. It took some time to put the fire in the log, but the constant rain helped. We worked hard, laughing and joking as a crew. We kept a small part of the fire as a campfire and sat down to eat after the main fire was out. Anyone standing in the rain-soaked brush just outside the firelight would have seen four wet, tired, and hungry smokejumpers sitting around a fire in the rain in the dark, "bleeping" beans and eating them, burping, farting, and laughing.

That night, listening to the Blak and Buzzer, I learned many useful smokejumper folkways: how to stay somewhat dry while sleeping on a steep hill in a paper sleeping bag in a rainstorm (curl around a Manzanita bush and direct the water to one puddle inside the bag while sleeping on the dry side); how to keep the campfire going when the rain starts; how to heat cans of beans to the perfect temperature using the two-bleep cooking method; how to get rid of unwanted gear to lighten your pack (leave the saw but bring back the handles); and other valuable things too numerous to mention.

The next morning, the fire was out, and the rain had stopped, but by this time, it was evident Davy wouldn't be the best man at his brother's wedding. He still had to climb his tree and retrieve his gear before we could head out, and since we had to wait six daylight hours after the last smoke, our earliest getaway time could not be before noon. I collected my gear, dried out in the morning sun, and then helped Davy with his. While building our packs for the pack-out, Eric the Blak instructed us on the finer points of packing. "Load the bag high on the frame," he said, "and use lots of rubber bands; the blacker, the better!" he laughed, placing a pinch of Copenhagen in



his lower lip. At noon, we checked our fire one more time and left. On the way out, Buzzer informed Davy and me that real smokejumpers “ran” their pack-outs to return to the base sooner and secure a higher spot on the jump list. He demonstrated by running 20 pack-bouncing yards or so and then, wheezing and panting, gave it up. Davy and I just looked at each other in amazement at this display. I guess the Buzzer thought the concept was too difficult for us as he shook his head and mumbled something about “rookies.”

Our pack-out was two miles or so down the road. When we arrived at the trailhead, an F.S. truck awaited us. **Gary Buck (CJ-66)**, **Keith Lockwood (CJ-64)**, and Chuck Sheley were also waiting.

Gary and I joked around for a while, laughing, bragging, and repeatedly telling our one and only jump story to each other. The other guys stood back and chuckled at us. Sheley had returned to the base, suited up, and joined the next planeload out. Their fire was a piece of cake; they had finished it hours ago. Their pack out was tougher, though, and on the way out, Keith, with a full pack, raced the last mile against a ground pounder carrying only about 40 pounds. The race culminated in a hundred-yard sprint across the Briggs Creek Bridge. Keith won, of course; he was a smokejumper, after all! The Buzzer looked at Davy and me in such a way as to say, “See what I mean?”

Not much else happened on that fire. We returned to the Gobi, packed our gear, and prepared for the next jump. Later that week, Dee called a meeting in the day room. Everyone was there. We all had fire jumps! We were all finally jumpers! It was Dee’s first full crew meeting with his first smokejumper crew. The rookies-now-jumpers stood in a line. **Alex Theios (CJ-65)** was with us too. A man of few words, Dee didn’t say too much. Nevertheless, you could see the pride in his eyes, and I’m sure in ours, as he shook our hands individually, handed us a pin, and said his famous line, “If you lose this pin . . .”



**Gary Buck**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

Looking at the 1966 crew photo as I write this, I see squinting into the afternoon sun, dressed in jumpsuits, two rows lined up in front of the twin beech, its radial engines with their horizontal props, and scraggly Gobi trees forming the backdrop. In my mind, there had never before been a group of people quite like this crew, nor has there been one since. I’m proud when I look at it to see my face there, too, squinting back at me 58 years later.

I learned early on that a good smokejumper story often started something like this: “Now this ain’t no shit . . .” How it ends is a matter of choice and chance. Sometimes, you get the best of both. In the end, I guess I made the right choice after all. When I returned to Chico after that summer ’s-long dream, I had accumulated plenty of jump stories, and with these, I proceeded to impress my sweetheart till she couldn’t stand it anymore! In fact, she was so impressed she became my full-time girlfriend, and the next June, my bride and I ended up spending our honeymoon on the Gobi during the great fire season of 1967, but that’s another story. 🧑🏻‍🔥

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*Wes graduated from Chico State, earned his teaching credential, and was “by chance” hired at Chico Jr. H.S. where he taught Special Education and coached wrestling. He later moved to Cave Junction with his family where he taught and coached at Illinois Valley H.S. He jumped at CJ 1966-80 and currently lives there. (Ed.)*



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# A Smokejumper's Memory

by Suzanne Hansen

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Certain types of people are called to be smokejumpers. It's almost like forest fires pick the people who will fight them. **Dave Yonce (GAC-63)** had that desire and ability and did 39 jumps into dangerous fires as a smokejumper in Missoula, Montana, from 1963-1966. His last jump was in August 1966, and for the previous 58 years, his desire has grown to repeat his experience.

On August 5, 2024, his daughter, Suzanne, arranged for Dave, 84, his granddaughter Hanna, and her boyfriend, Rob, to gather in Shelton, Washington, to help Dave complete his 40th jump at Skydive Kapowsin.

Dave said the staff at Kapowsin were phenomenal in their help with "Old Man" Yonce. Jumpmaster Andy, the owner, suited Dave up to help him complete the jump. Andy's harness was attached to Dave's in the airplane to exit to freefall at 10,000 feet.

Hanna asked to be in the same plane as her grandfather, and it meant a lot to Dave to have Hanna by his side for the jump. It also meant a lot that Dave's wife, Aylene, was also there to continue her many years of support for her husband.

The process and gathering went better than expected. Dave said it was so realistic that he relived a jump with his old smokejumper crew in 1966. Dave was particularly moved to share this experience with his daughter, Suzanne, on the ground and granddaughter, Hanna, in the air. We don't know if Dave will continue to jump, but it was a great experience to help relive this portion of his life.

Dave jumped at Grangeville 1963-64 and Missoula 1965-66 and lives in Olympia, Washington. 🌲



*Dave Yonce at 10,000 feet.  
(Courtesy S. Hansen)*



*After the jump. L to R: Rob Freeman (Hanna's boyfriend), Hanna Hansen (granddaughter), Suzanne Hansen (daughter), Aylene Bluechelc (Dave's wife), and Dave Yonce in front. (Courtesy S. Hansen)*



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# Fire Town USA

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

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Like many locations in the west Santa Barbara County has a strong history of wildland firefighting and cooperation between the Forest Service and local fire agencies. Forest Service fire stations, lookouts, pack strings, and trail crews were central to the culture of the community since the early 1900s. Fire Departments cross-staffed Forest Service crews on days off from fire stations. The fire departments provided stable jobs for those that settled down in the area. As the last of the WWII era firefighters are passing, many of whom were Forest Service firefighters, it is gratifying to see that the tradition continues.

Times have changed and the days of firefighters holding down multiple jobs to make ends meet has passed to the current era of non-stop fire assignments with home agencies. But the firefighting tradition and work ethic continues. Green and red and white engines still sit together at fire stations. The Los Padres Hotshots and Santa Barbara County Fire Crews are a respected part of the community. Young people are exposed to firefighting as part of daily life in the area. A recent count showed over thirty Carpinteria young people actively serving as Hotshots, IA Crew and Smokejumpers across the west and Alaska. All from a town of 14,000. A full count from Santa Barbara County would be a protracted undertaking. This tradition of firefighting and cooperation between agencies is one example of what keeps the world running right. The faces in the

two photographs are from Santa Barbara County but they are representative of so many doing good work across the west. 🧑‍🔧



*Brent Manfred (L), Superintendent Santa Barbara County Fire Crew 10 and Andy Culbertson, (R) Superintendent Alaska Fire Service Midnight Suns on the Coffee Pot Fire, Kings Canyon National Park. Both from a neighborhood in Carpinteria on Santa Barbara's South Coast, moved on from seasonal fire jobs to leadership positions. (Courtesy J. Culbertson)*



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## NSA October Social

Museum of Mountain  
Flying, Missoula, MT

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*L-R: Bob Beckley, Greg Lee, Troy Jurth, and Barry Hick. (Courtesy Fred Cooper)*

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# The One I'd Like to Forget

by Dan Green (McCall '67)

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YOU WOULD HOPE THAT your first fire jump would be one of those campfire sized spot fires way back in the Frank (Frank Church Wilderness) or the Bob: elk grazing in a big meadow that was the jump spot, cool morning temperatures with just enough of a breeze to excite the dandelion parachutes, nice mountain lake with big enough fish rising to see the dimples from the plane, and an experienced "old man" as a jump partner. It was not to be.

My first jump tells a tale I buried deep in my memory banks in a seldom-visited place. Like most sad stories, it's hard to tell, and because it was buried so deep, the names and details have faded with time. Eventually, the story will disappear when we all pass. Maybe, just maybe, getting the story down on paper will make it a little easier to forget. Perhaps it will help other guys who are struggling with similar demons.

The jump was a "rescue jump," not a fire jump, so it didn't even count in Big Ernie's ledger. It was way back in the Frank along the Middle Fork of the Salmon in a box canyon beyond a cursed airstrip that is a one-way strip. You must land once you reach a landing pattern because the box canyon beyond the strip is too steep to climb out of. The pilot had tried, and the Cessna had almost reached the ridge before entering the timber. It almost only counts in horseshoes.

**Del Catlin (MYC-47)** sent four men out in the Otter. Three experienced squadleaders had taught first aid classes, and the Ned was at the top of the jump list. I don't clearly remember the other jumpers, but I recall talking with **Dale Schmaljohn (MYC-60)**, my next-door neighbor in the married men's trailer court. As I recall, **Jerry Blattner (MYC-63)** was there, and the third old man could have been Yergi, Rosi, Wild Bill, or even Dick Lynch. They were all experienced in backcountry first aid, and several worked as Ski Patrol in the winter months. I was the fourth man, a Ned (Rookie), at the top of the jump list they took along for the Pulaski work. My job would be to line and put out the fire caused by the plane and build a helispot.

Our landing spot was a rocky ridge near Timberline, and we all managed to land safely. It was one of those rock pile jumps where you hope you find some loose

scree to slide into home on. Given the urgency of our mission, we just left our jump gear, and the three experienced men clamored on down to the wreck site while I handled the cargo drop retrieval.

I broke out a Pulaski and headed down to the crash site to line and hopefully extinguish the small fire created by the plane wreck. It was only a dinner table-sized fire and I had it lined and out in no time. It still smelled a little of gas, probably a broken fuel line, so I kept the plane's fire extinguisher handy just in case. The old men were checking out the passengers. All four were still conscious but in bad shape.

The older male pilot in the "driver's seat" and copilot appeared to have cuts and probable broken bones. The middle-aged women in the rear weren't bleeding but were in a lot of pain and shock. Dale Schmaljohn told me they had radioed for a medivac and would need a helicopter landing spot as soon as possible. I headed back to the ridge and started working on a spot with a chainsaw in the cargo drop. It was a bare rocky ridge near the Timberline with just a few dwarf alpine fir. Building a helispot was mainly moving enough rocks around to accommodate the skids. After finishing the landing pad, I built a dive for the ship by cutting down a few more trees with the saw.

The Frank was not a wilderness area yet, so we were allowed leeway to build helispots with power equipment. A chopper was already on the way, so I worked fast and got a rudimentary helispot built in less than a half hour.

Then, I returned to the plane to see if I could help while we waited for the medivac. Dale explained that the two women appeared to have internal injuries (possibly punctured lungs) and had been given Demerol. He asked me to sit with them and provide support. As I vaguely recall, Dale had been a high school teacher, coach, and perhaps even a counselor. He certainly understood the need for comfort that we all felt for the two ladies in great pain.

While I sat with the two ladies, they continued to work on the pilot and copilot, getting them bandaged up and splinted and moving them with a stretcher to the helispot. We all understood that moving the ladies



would be dangerous and very painful due to their internal injuries. The “old men” collectively decided to wait for the medical team on the chopper, who would have better equipment and skills for moving patients with injuries.

I didn’t understand, but at that time, they were slowly bleeding out as their lungs filled with blood. Years later, my brother (**John Green MSO-66**), a skilled physician who worked for a few years as an ER doc, helped me understand the procedure for diagnosing punctured lungs. I expect that a diagnosis would not have helped much because there isn’t much that you can do from a first-aid standpoint for patients with punctured lungs.

One lady seemed to be still experiencing much pain, while the other gal had grown quieter. One of the experienced jumpers, probably Blattner, came back to see how we were doing and suggested another shot of Demerol. In retrospect, he understood that the situation was hopeless and that the kind thing to do was ease the pain and help with the transition. I went ahead with the shots, and it helped the gal who was so

obviously in terrible pain. The other lady was too far gone and went numb. I just took her in my arms and just held her as she passed.

I wasn’t used much after that as we just waited for the chopper, which took a long time. The lady who had been in bad pain but conscious passed out in shock, but her vitals seemed OK, given the amount of Demerol in her system. A helicopter crew loaded them all on the chopper and headed for the big hospital in Boise, hours away.

I never found out if they were able to stabilize and save the three surviving victims of the crash. I’m pretty sure that the two guys made it, but I wanted to know if the second lady also made it. I guess I’ll never know.

We never talked about the jump again, ever! It was like a page of our lives just disappeared.

My guess is that times have changed with all the disasters like Granite Mountain, and firefighters have learned to talk and let their demons out. There, I’ve done it. My demons are gone. We will see. 🙏

## NEW PUBLICATION



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## NSA Members In No. California Track & Field

*NSCIF=North Section California Interscholastic Federation*

*USATF=U.S. Track & Field Association*



Andy Thorne (RDD-82) Check In Clerk  
Mark Youmans (RDD-81) Referee



Jerry Cavaness (Associate)  
NSCIF Start Line Clerk



Bob Hooper (CJ-67)  
USATF Master Official



Chuck Sheley (CJ-59)  
NSCIF Starter



K.G. Sheley (Associate)  
Check-In Clerk



Dan Tinnel (Associate)  
USATF Master Official



Ed Booth (Associate)  
Starter

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



# Quartz Lake, Alaska, 1965

by Walt Vennum (Fairbanks '62)

ANKLE-DEEP SNOW STILL surrounded the Fairbanks smokejumper loft when the season's first jump request came into the dispatch office on May 21. A 15-acre grass fire near Quartz Lake, 20 miles NW of Delta Junction. An hour later, when our jump ship arrived over the fire, it was 60 acres and burning furiously in grass, brush, and small trees. **Steve Daniels (NCSB-58)** spotted **Bill Miller (MSO-62)** and me, then **Larry Peters (CJ-63)** and **Tom Moe (MSO-63)** in two-man sticks from



Walt Vennum

a Grumman Goose into a small clearing upwind of the blaze. All four of us slammed down hard onto the still-frozen tundra. We barely had enough time to collapse our chutes in the gusty wind, take off our jumpsuits, and shake the stars out of our heads before the wind shifted; the fire exploded and began roaring back in our direction. We dropped all our gear, most of which burned, and started running for the lake about a half mile away.

I hope all of you who are browsing this article believe what you read next. We'd stumbled maybe 200 yards across the uneven, rock-hard tundra when, just like in a James Bond movie, a US Army H-21 helicopter came blasting through the smoke, and flames, picked us up and flew to a safe area adjacent to a partially overgrown dirt road along the south side of the fire. The Army had been conducting a training exercise in the area, and their activity had presumably started the fire.

The dirt road was a natural fire break, so we began backfiring from it. By late afternoon, we had nearly half the fire perimeter under control. By early evening when a 24-man Native EFF (emergency firefighter) crew from Tanacross arrived, the north flank had burned into the swampy ground along Shaw Creek. Although the fire had jumped the creek in several places, the flames

were only slowly smoldering along. The west flank was, however, still burning unchecked.

As fire boss, I gambled and threw all my resources into the fire. I put a half dozen EFF into the Shaw Creek area to hot spot and mop up, the rest onto the west flank to knock down what flames they could when the fire cooled down at night as all Alaskan fires do.

Around 1 A.M., the west flank exploded. Alaskan fires do not do this at night, ever. Bill, Larry, and Tom stayed along Shaw Creek, and I

moved the six EFF to the west. The plan worked. By 7 A.M., the 25 of us had knocked down all concentrations of fire in that area. I knew many of the Tanacross crew from fires in previous years. They were good and acquitted themselves well but were exhausted after working all night.

When the fire exploded, I radioed in a request for more EFF, asking that they arrive by morning. That did not happen, leaving no reserves to control the fire during the day when it could easily flare up. However, about 25 Army soldiers joined in, and the entire fire was under control by midafternoon. Once again, the Army saved our butts. At one time, though, there were four Army helicopters and three BLM aircraft circling our efforts.

Late afternoon, a rookie BLM Fire Control Aide (FCA) arrived to gain some fire experience and help direct mop-up operations. He brought with him some beer, ice cream, and ice-cold cantaloupe from Bert and Mary's Roadhouse on the nearby Delta-Fairbanks Highway. A very nice thank you to the four of us for potentially saving their business.

The next morning an 18-man EFF crew arrived from the nearby village of Tetlin (perhaps 95% of that small village's eligible manpower!). They were a day late but

were in time to relieve the Tanacross crew, who had just worked their second consecutive night.

Mop-up of the Quartz Lake Fire was going well until shortly after 12 p.m. when a massive cloud of white smoke suddenly billowed up from trees along the headwaters of Shaw Creek 2 ½ miles to the west. A helicopter recon discovered a 10-acre grass and brush fire. When the Tetlin crew had been moved to the new location, the Shaw Creek Fire was up to 100 acres and raging out of control. Fortunately, the blaze was almost surrounded by a maze of dirt roads and an abandoned, partially overgrown airstrip. The Shaw Creek Fire was knocked down and under control by 6 a.m. by backfiring from the roads and airstrip and then going on direct attack.

The four of us and the FCA moved our base camp into a cabin near the airstrip, close enough to Shaw Creek to keep our beer cold. Yes, Bert and Mary were very generous! Bill Miller was easily the most avid fisherman I ever met. He was rumored to keep a telescoping fishing pole in his back pocket while rigging parachutes in the loft. Late afternoon of the 24th, he returned from Quartz Lake with a nice catch of pike. Larry, Tom, and I cleaned the fish, and the FCA, who claimed to be a great cook, volunteered to

prepare them. When the pike showed up for dinner, what remained resembled porcupine eggs that had been dropped into a Cuisinart: odd, shaped lumps of meat from which literally hundreds of bones protruded in random directions. Pike are exceptionally bony fish, and our “great” FCA cook had attempted to remove the bones before cooking them.

I spent the day after returning to Fairbank writing up a fire report (the two fires burned a total of 3,000 acres), presenting a fire critique, drawing up a fire map showing burn times and acres burned, and talking to the commander of the Army helicopter squadron. My fire map was used by two BLM administrators (who probably had no idea where Quartz Lake was) to make a presentation on the local TV evening news. No one in the media ever contacted any of the four of us who jumped the fire, but the Army pilots, one of whom was named “Big Ernie,” were given commendations.

On my drive south at the end of the fire season, I stopped at Bert and Mary’s Roadhouse to express my thanks, then made the short hike to Quartz Lake. After four hours of casting fish eggs, bait, flies, spoons, spinners, plugs, and dynamite into the lake, I walked back to my car in a gentle snowfall without getting a single bite. 🐟



1966 White show box.  
(Courtesy Chuck Wildes, MSO-66)

### 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.)



# Basics of Military Contracting Work

by Michael Scott Hill (Yellowstone '95)

FLYING OVER TO ANOTHER country, where I officially never was, and looking down at the landscape far below, I think of my many years of aviation military contracting and about a friend who recently asked for insight into our industry. I answered my friend, and below, I will share some of those insights into the field of shadows I sometimes find myself in at work.

What is it like to work in my field for as long as I have? Well, as in all things, what is seen in movies, on TV, or read in fiction novels is only sometimes the reality. I have maintained my career in a business where most people only last a few years. As military contractors in my realm, we are most expendable, and those who have been around know and accept this.

Our contracts that we undertake, at times, can be more dangerous than the missions the average US military soldiers undertake, likely across their whole careers. We often physically, like smokejumpers, sustain injuries in the line of duty that come with the territories in which we work. The pay for most of us usually differs from what most people think. The companies we work for often focus on their profits and those of their upper management. Our benefits frequently aren't the best in comparison to the civilian world. We go out on our missions, do our best, and in return, rarely get the credit that the military and other government agency personnel do. When it's over, it's over.

So why do we do it? Why do I stay in the ring? It's the spirit of adventure for me. The contracting lifestyle I know at best offers some money, freedom between

contracts, and R&Rs. At its worst, death or an insecure far-off future.

This military contracting world offers us unique experiences seen nowhere else in many of our lives. How many of you have been repeatedly flying on combat support missions for years?

How does someone interested in this field get into it? I learned long ago that the key to getting in the door is to have something others don't have. What are the unique

skills and talents you develop that could be of value in particular environments? Work on creating a track record of success. Stay out of criminal or financial trouble to maintain a security clearance. And, of course, are you willing to place yourself in danger, endure poor working environments, and stay on point to achieve your mission?

You must perform

once you enter that door, like on a fire jump. You soon learn the art of surviving in often politically volatile environments, surrounded by highly competitive individuals for whom ethics and morals may be unimportant. You learn when to walk away. You learn to make allies with your colleagues by knowing the realities of the "grays of trust" in others and politics. You develop a much higher threshold for drama. Over the years, if you make it, you will create a network of contact alliances who can and will offer you their help in times of need.

How are we organized? Countless companies undertake military-type contracts around the world. Each company usually specializes in the various niches



*Mike Hill (3rd from left) with flight crew. (Courtesy M. Hill)*

of our work, such as security, medicine, aviation, or logistics. Some large companies cover all these areas. I recommend doing some research before you jump into a contract. However, realities often demand that you get your start wherever you can.

Once you are in the ring, what advice can I offer towards your survival from my years in the game? Invest the money you make wisely. Don't buy expensive cars or give your hard-earned money away. The contracting lifestyle can end anytime, so be prepared for when it does end. Unlike having a retirement like most, you could be left with very little. There will be many costs

along the way that you'll never see or expect. The truth is that contracts always end; that is how contracting is designed.

Remember this the most of all: The military contract world is not like the federal service with the protection of appointments where how you treat others may not matter. Consistently do the right thing by others around you. When you need a hand yourself, you want someone to be there for you when that time comes. Be the one who helps others and not someone who harms them. That simple fact could make all the difference for long-term survival in our military contract world. 🔑

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## Message from Lori Messenger

(Missoula '00)

Dear National Smokejumper Board of Directors and Members—

My family and I recently received a generous check from you in response to my July story in Smokejumper. Thank you from me and also from my husband and kids. Included were a few handwritten notes and **Major L. Boddicker's (MSO-63)** memoir Fire Call. Thanks for those as well.

Since writing that story, I spent the summer working part-time in Missoula Dispatch Center and figuring out ways to do a little camping and recreating in the woods and mountains. I have developed a method to transfer out of my wheelchair onto a stepstool and then onto a mattress on the tent floor. In the morning am able to pull myself back into my chair through a front support.

In August it was good to see some of you while attending several of the events planned to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Mann Gulch Fire. I was invited to fly in Miss Montana, the DC-3 that dropped the 1949 smokejumper crew into the gulch. Pilot Art Dykstra, and Co-pilot and mechanic Randy Schonneman welcomed me warmly when I rolled into the Museum of Mountain Flying. They had been making the rounds in western Montana to honor the families at the different grave sites where their sons/nephews/cousins/brothers were buried. **Keith "Skid" Wolferman (MSO-91)**, who was my squad leader in 2000 rookie training, would be acting spotter and throwing the streamers out over the graveyard. There was an air of strange familiarity about heading out to the open-doored DC-3. Except that when we got there, Skid and two others lifted my wheelchair in through the door and helped me transfer out into the jump-configured bench seat. Art flew us past the Mission Mountains a



(Courtesy L. Messenger)

few times before descending to lower elevation to drop the streamers. The DC-3 was my favorite plane to jump fires out of, and it was amazing to get to look out over forest and mountains from that aerial viewpoint again.

Thank you, NSA and the entire smokejumper community, for the way you continue to act like the extended fire family you are. My daughter is experiencing her first fire season on the Missoula District Fire Crew, and it is a strange kind of deja vu when she comes home from an incident with firelight still glinting in her eyes, excited to share the stories of another day swamping for a saw partner or digging line. May the season finish up well for you all, wherever you are. *Best, Lori*



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# A Smokejumper's Western Legacy

by Linda Lovick

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TO CELEBRATE OUR FATHER'S centenary in January 2025, we three aging siblings posted his obituary to the Smokejumper website, overdue and complementing his presence on its Jumplist. Perhaps inconsequential in the big picture, it meant an awful lot to us. We also believed it would have made him happy, adding a capstone onto his great love of the western United States. In April of 2024, we three had gathered in the eclipse's Path of Totality, to mark our mother's centenary, near her mid-west origins of Detroit, MI. Between 2008 and 2023, we all had managed to make mini-pilgrimages to our parents' graves in eastern Ohio, where their cremains rest side by side. The date stamp of one's hundredth year is such a logical launch pad for celebration, often followed by reflection and the promise of insights or deeper knowing.

We cherish the photo of him at 22 years old (above), geared up for a jump mission. His trademark grin was an integral part of whatever uniform he wore over the years, while his glasses style and business attire changed with the times. Raised a farm boy in Columbiana County, Ohio, much of his youth spent enduring the Great Depression, we can only imagine what sparked his love of the outdoors and subsequently, forests. His first trip away from home was when his award-winning high school band competed in the capital city; he played trombone.

He started college at Purdue in the ROTC program but interrupted his studies to join the Signal Corps when he was 19. George soon found the US Army Air Corps and trained as a tail gunner from 1944-1946, which serendipitously included parachuting. WWII ended before he could be deployed and upon discharge he resumed his education, at the University of Michigan's Forestry School. His Air Corps training sites had expanded his world dramatically, taking him to



**George Russel Lodge  
(MSO-47)**

Louisiana, Florida, Idaho, California, Nebraska, Texas, and Kansas. We believe that the forests, mountains and rivers of Idaho most captured his imagination and claimed his heart for the west.

George's forestry education together with his new love of the west guided his summer job seeking. That summer of 1947, the USFS hired him into their Smokejumper program. Smokejumper utilization significantly increased in the post war period as the timber industry grew exponentially. George combined his Air Corps parachute training, his love of all things arboreal, his service

ethic, and we think a sense of adventure, as well. He only jumped that summer, ending ignominiously with being packed out of the Bitterroots on horseback after breaking his ankle upon landing. He completed his Forestry degree, got married, and commenced his trees career as a Farm Forester in Missouri, where I was born in 1950.

The family lore had it that forestry didn't pay too well, leading George to take up selling insurance for a second income. He was a devoted family man, our family size increasing with each new job he held and state we lived in. Or was it the other way around, that each next child required a salary increase to match his father-provider aspirations? His career trajectory was thus Farm Forester (FF) and first child in Missouri, FF plus insurance salesman and second child in Ohio, then the big switcheroo to the chain saw industry and a third child in Illinois, and finally the promotion-based move out west to Oregon and his fourth child. These years passed in roughly four-year increments. I'll be circling back to the switcheroo factor.

George's American West was home of the mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, and wildlife of his fondest dreams. In 1957 he had introduced his young family to the west and its geographical glories with a

vacation in our station wagon. Even though the plains states were a bit monotonous, the nation's bread-basket fields were punctuated by sites such as the Black Hills, the Badlands, Mt. Rushmore; and Indian country the farther north and west we traveled. Then the magic of Yellowstone Park, everything one could hope for plus geothermal activity as the backdrop for iconic bison sightings, and bears' antics getting into refuse bins. My dad was an avid photographer, and his slide case collection, comprising our family's history and the world's wonders he captured for our repeat enjoyment, is but one legacy component. I like to think about what I call the osmosis factor. Neither George nor our mother Ethel was the kind of person or parent who talked about, or spouted on and on about, this or that. They were people of actions over words. We all attribute our love of the west, especially the Pacific Northwest, to being in my dad's orbit, 'osmosizing' his love and appreciation for his chosen environment, without him preaching about it to us at all, ever.

The new job/new child/new state model had played out before our move to Spokane, Washington, in 1962. This is where the switcheroo factor comes alive. I spent my teenage years there in the nicest house on the block, having most of my wishes fulfilled, thanks to George's work ethic and successful management innovations. As a sometimes arrogant, know-it-all adolescent, though, I held it all against my dad, for what I saw as "selling out." I could not meld his commitment to sustaining the life of trees with his successful career in selling chain saws, that CUT TREES DOWN.

Three things nudged me out of my pompous attitude:

- 1) Another decade and creating my own family helped me understand George's commitment to doing whatever it took to generate the means for a comfortable and opportunities-filled life for his family. Lest we forget, his generation was forged first by hardship and privation, followed by an extraordinary sense of duty and patriotism; doubtless shaping the rest of his life's goals.

- 2) Letters between our parents, which we found after both had passed (George in 1977 at only 52, and Ethel in 1991) bore postmarks like Plains and St. Regis, MT, Salmon, ID, the Dalles, OR, and showed his professional reach. These were locations within his Homelite Chain Saws region from a periodic dealer support trip, wherever the forests were.

- 3) This example drives the point home, from George's Homelite tenure in Spokane. More than

once, he got called in the middle of the night—and he wasn't an on-call physician who'd signed up for that—to fill a Forest Service purchase order to help fight a fire in the northern Idaho or Montana Rockies that had gotten big. He would muster his entire staff, all meeting at the warehouse to process and ship as many as 100 chainsaws. He did still love trees! I could finally see the connection! His fire-fighting legacy began in a very direct way, then morphed to a life-long supportive industry role, an indispensable piece of the complex forest fire suppression puzzle. His only son Bruce got to go along, who sensed the urgency, service, and excitement of wildland fire fighting at his tender young age.

George's legacy, most visibly, lived on in his son Bruce's career as a wildland Firefighter spanning 30 years with the California Dept of Forestry and Fire Protection, aka Cal Fire. This tenure included stints as a Handcrew, Engine and Helitack Captain. Inspired by George's smokejumper example, Bruce took a mid-career leave to work a fire season on the USFS's Helena Hotshot fire crew. Post-retirement from State service, he continues to serve as a wildland Fire Captain with a local fire department and runs a small business making wildfire preplan maps for small rural fire districts. Bruce now finds himself enjoying a reputation as an amateur naturalist, able to speak knowledgeably and inspire others, synthesizing forest ecology, weather, flora and fauna, hydrologic realities, etc. Who could have known George's passions would be endowed so powerfully in his son.

George's youngest child, Janel, learned to love and revere nature from him, during family vacations to the west's national parks. Loving nature grew into loving science throughout high school, especially human science, influenced by George's devotion to his science-based field. Janel earned her BS degree in Exercise Physiology/Biomechanics, building on her athletic pursuits, leading to her lengthy, passionate career in health/fitness/wellness. When she turned 50, she returned to college for a degree in nursing, and a new career as an RN. Janel's many decades long passion and dedication to elite level competitive running, triathlon, and bike racing was a tribute to George; she was always happiest in the natural world where her training and races took her. Now as a recreational bike rider, she seeks the hilly/mountainous trails, riding among the amazing redwoods near her home. Janel's love of trees is a constant theme, defining her quality of life and experience. She credits her father's love and respect for



trees, absorbed from him in her very short 15 years with him, as her inspiration.

Our deceased sister, Carol, also embodied George's legacy. Perhaps inspired by the same family vacations and exposure to the chainsaw business that inspired her brother Bruce, Carol lived out west, raising three sons in the mountains of northern California. She partnered with a logger for a time, and eventually even found her way into the wildland fire industry. For several summer seasons Carol drove buses for Bureau of Indian Affairs and private contract wildland fire crews throughout the northern Rockies, Pacific Northwest and California. She, like the rest of us, loves words and vocabulary. We all grew up watching George fill in daily crossword puzzles in his neat and legible handwriting, and we all do the same.

My own received legacy from George is a mix of love of trees and continuous improvement. Commencing my adult life as rather a hippie earth mother type, I've progressed through several phases and passions. In the middle 1990s I fought hard to gain the Urban Trees

Coordinator position in a small Idaho town, in which I had to further fight hard to support trees in the face of county commissioners whose motto was "the only good tree is a dead tree." My own later in life career was that of health services development in poorer countries; living in sub-Saharan Africa for 14 years was my only chosen time away from the western US. Earning my MPH at the same age of George's death—I've come to regard that coincidence as a continuity.

We all three share George's work ethic legacy, never shirking from the necessary labors and steps to achieve the next goal over the horizon. I think that smoke jumping both attracts people of a certain character and builds that character further. We are so grateful for our father's single summer serving as a smoke jumper; It proved to be foundational for the family man and community member we knew.

George Lodge's legacy—seeded both to his family and the public—was a life lived on behalf of forests and loving trees; perhaps first manifested with his Smokejumper Summer of 1947. 🌲

### **NSA Board of Directors Missoula Oct. 2024 Meeting**



*L-R: Patrick McGunagle, Jim Cherry, Joe Stutler, Chuck Sheley, Mike Bina, Sarah Doehring, Denny Breslin, Rod Dow, Fred Cooper, Sarah Altemus-Pope. (Courtesy F. Cooper)*

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# No One Left to Say “I’m Sorry”

by Bill Dennison and Nadine Bailey (Associates)

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A revealing announcement August 2024: “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service goal is to kill up to 452,000 Barred Owls to halt the decline of the competing Northern Spotted Owls in California.”

Lest we forget: the Northern Spotted Owl is the species that environmentalists used 33 years ago to stop the timber sales on 17 national forests in northern California, Oregon, and Washington. It was not their love for the Northern Spotted Owl. The purpose was to stop the removal of all trees from the national forests. Leader Andy Kerr clarified this during one of the environmental group meetings when he said, “If we had not found the spotted owl, we would have had to invent one.”

Supported by many environmental groups, including the National Wildlife Federation, and the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society submitted a lawsuit to the U.S. District Court. Judge Dwyer ruled in their favor, resulting in the injunction that has disrupted the Forest Service’s sound management of western national forests for the past three decades.

Some of the results include:

1. The closure of 100 of 140 sawmill facilities in California.
2. The loss of tens of thousands of forest product industry jobs and the movement of thousands of families from rural communities.
3. The U.S. has become the World’s #1 IMPORTER of lumber.
4. The Reduction of the annual harvest in Region-5 national forests in California from 1.7 billion board ft. in the mid-1980s to less than 500 million board ft. in 2022. This means that without the forest service removal of vegetation, the fuel to support Megafires increases yearly.
5. The national forests have been converted into millions of acres of “jungle-like,” “fire-prone areas ready to burn. Not because of Climate Change,



**Nadine Bailey**

but because of the three decades of Forest Service mismanagement of our nation’s land resources.

Burn, they did! Beginning more than a decade ago, wildfires have become uncontrollable “Megafires,” killing and destroying everything in their path. We know them locally as the Carr, Camp, Dixie, Beckwourth, Mendocino Complex, Klamath Complex, Rim, North Complex, Caldor, and the still-burning Park and Boise tragedies.

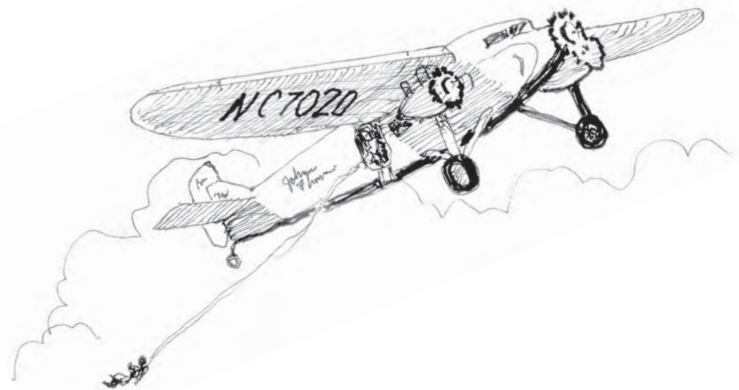
More issues have become evident throughout our nation. Hazardous fire smoke has been found to be detrimental to our

health from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Soil erosion from the barren fire areas will continue to fill our streams, reservoirs, and lakes with silt and reduce our water storage capacity.

Back to the beginning of our story: The same groups said that, based on science, logging posed a threat to the northern spotted owl. Now they say that it is the larger barred owl. Where are the “environmentalists” who said they cared about the forest and forest creatures? 🦉

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*Bill Dennison - President/ CEO California Forestry (Retired)/Former Plumas County Board of Supervisor  
Nadine Bailey CCO Water Resources Alliance*





# Introducing the 2024 NSA Scholarship Recipients

THE NSA SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE (**Jim Cherry/MSO-57, Larry Lufkin/CJ-63, Charlotte Larson/Smokejumper Pilot, Timo Rova/WYS-95**), is pleased to introduce the seven recipients of the 2024 NSA Scholarships. This program is fulfilling part of the NSA's mission "by responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families." These scholarships are made possible through the generous donations of our members, to whom we shout out our profound thanks. Hear the awardee's appreciation and aspirations in their own words.

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**Aimee Kendrick**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

**Aimee Kendrick** (spouse of **Tory Kendrick MSO-00**): I am a recipient of the NSA Scholarship. I want to send you a heartfelt thank you. I have been working on my Master of Fine Arts in creative writing at Southern New Hampshire University, and this scholarship will help propel me further in the program. My husband, Tory

Kendrick, was a smokejumper based out of Missoula, MT, from 2000-2022, ending his jumping career as Base Manager. Although being the spouse of a smokejumper has its challenges, I can honestly say that Tory thoroughly enjoyed the dynamic aspects of a jumper's life and brought home many strong values to our family. It shaped our family in the larger Missoula community and is something that we are all proud to be a part of. Thank you again for awarding me this scholarship.

**Conner Hogan (NCSB-21)**: Thank you for awarding me one of this year's smokejumper scholarships. I've been hoping to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing for about a decade, but, as you might imagine, financial restrictions make pursuing an advanced degree in the arts difficult. Your support will make buying groceries and paying rent easier during the next three years, and

for that, I am sincerely grateful.

I would also like to express my general gratitude for all the work the NSA does, from the reunions to the memorials to the advocacy. I've been in regular communication with Chuck for several years and attended a board meeting back in October, so I know the apparent lack of involvement from the current cohort of

smokejumpers can be frustrating. But in conversations with jumpers from other bases, it's obvious how many of us are deeply grateful for the NSA and that most of us recognize how important the institution is, not only for the smokejumper community but for the broader community of wildland firefighters. However, we don't communicate our appreciation enough. So, on behalf of all of us, thank you. I hope to continue my involvement with the NSA in whatever capacity I can, and I hope to see you all again soon.



**Connor Hogan**  
(Courtesy NSA files)



**Wyatt Pettis**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

my training in Land Survey and Earth measurement, enabling me to work a schedule that will keep me closer to home. We've got a 5-month-old and a 3-year-old girl making a ruckus at my house. The 5-month-old has a great layer of baby fat on her, and the 3-year-old is practicing jumping on the trampoline with one foot.

**Wyatt Pettis (FBX-17)**:

What can I say, we're in it again for another semester. Working full-time, going to school, and raising these children. We're grateful to be awarded this scholarship. It will help us roll into the future with less student debt. The goal I'm currently working toward is to be the best husband and father I can be. My education facilitates

Their Mom, who was a hotshot and firefighter for seven years, is busy making us healthy meals and making sure we get exercise every day. The dog helps by cleaning up the food the 3-year-old drops on the floor and licking the snot off the 5-month-old. I'm getting back on my school schedule, waking up early, and getting to work. 5 am ninja work, sneaking around the house, making coffee, and crunching numbers while the rest of the world sleeps. There is much to do, but I use my smokejumper training to help me get it done. I focus on one task at a time, I check and double-check my gear, I take care of my team, and we have a little fun along the way."



**Wyatt Vining**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

**Wyatt Vining** (grandchild of **Alan Dunton FBX-67**, son of **David Vining NIFC-97**, **Melanie Vining NIFC-99**): Thank you so much for your generosity and for selecting me for this scholarship. I knew that attending the College of Idaho, a private institution, would be costly. I set myself a goal to get through college with zero student debt. With your help, I am accomplishing that goal.

Opportunities like this make it possible for students to chase their dreams and aspirations without bearing the financial burden that student loans bring. I am currently studying for a business accounting major and mathematics and communication minors. I've known for a long time that I wanted to attend college to receive an education in a field I can use in a career. Though my path is still uncertain, I have identified some directions I would like to take post-graduation. I will work hard and continue to follow my values. Once again, thank you for selecting me for this scholarship. This money will be put toward the education I am receiving, which is appreciated.

**Madison Whittemore Alessi (MSO-18)**: I am reaching out to extend my utmost gratitude for selecting me as a recipient of your education scholarship! I was in fire for 12 years- seven of them as a smokejumper based out of Missoula. While I was jumping, I took on the role of running our EMT program and developed a strong sense of pride and gratitude for holding a position where the "bros" could count on me and the other EMTs to show up and perform when our skills were needed.

Medicine became a way for me to earn the trust of my peers and show them they had someone they could trust when things didn't go according to plan. I knew that if I ever left jumping, I would pursue developing my medical skills even further to eventually be an asset to the community in another way (while preserving a little longevity in my knees).



**Madison Alessi**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

Leaving the jump base was a lot harder than I expected it to be. The jumpers had become my family, and the base felt more like home than my actual home did. But as I drove off to Bozeman to start medical school, I remembered driving into Missoula for the first time while moving into the dorms before rookie training. I saw the "Smokejumper Center" exit sign on the highway, and my stomach churned. I did not have any idea what my life was going to turn into. Seven years later, when that same sign was in my rearview, I reminded myself that leaning into that discomfort and uncertainty usually is the first step towards something extraordinary. When I found out you selected me for this scholarship, I instantly felt connected to the smokejumping legacy again—knowing that no matter where we all end up, we will still have this shared history that connects us. I am humbled and grateful for your generosity and offer my commitment to "pay it forward" to the wildland community and all those who have supported us along the way.



**Nathan Kendrick**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

**Nathan Kendrick** (son of **Tory Kendrick MSO-00**): I would like to thank you for awarding me one of the NSA scholarships. It will enable me to continue my academic career at Western Washington University. I am an active honors college member, which demands a lot of time. This allows me to focus on my studies

and not worry about getting more hours for work. This year, I entered the first classes directly associated with



a recreation management major. I am applying to be a fire crew member for next summer and plan to use the skills I learn in my classes. Thank you for your time and dedication to making these scholarships available. I look forward to being part of the larger fire community.



**Kellen Strong**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

**Kellen Strong** (grandchild of **John Babon MSO-75**, great-grandchild of **John Dunne MSO-47**): I am touched and appreciative to receive a scholarship from the National Smokejumper Association. As a new college freshman, I always appreciate financial help, but this award goes deeper into my appreciation. My great-grandfather (John K. Dunne) jumped after he “snuck” into

the army as a 17-year-old and served his time in the Korean War. My grandpa (Jack Babon) jumped after his young family and returned from an East Coast attempt at making a living in the 1980s. In a way, smokejumping helped guide my great-grandfather and grandpa down the pathways that would eventually lead me to my path. I’m unsure if I’ll follow their lead to a smokejumping adventure. However, these funds are helping me follow my path to the University of Montana. It was a visit in the summer of 2023, while my family scrambled up and down Mt. Sentinel as a thunderstorm rolled in from the south, that I felt like I belonged in this valley. In high school, I was fortunate to fall into a pathway of environmental studies. This means I took enough classes geared toward environmental, wildlife, and earth studies at some point that I earned a pathway honor. I enjoyed diving into research, specifically about marine life, and was able to craft my research projects based on fish in our Willamette Valley, Oregon, area. Although I made more mistakes than not, I learned a great deal and am excited to see what the University of Montana has in store in Wildlife biology. I’m kicking off my time as a student this fall at the Flathead Lake Biological Research Center for a pre-orientation weekend. In addition to jumping into my academic area of study, I look forward to connecting with students and faculty from all walks of life. I am also seeking out places where I can grow and serve in my faith community. My parents tell me that these are some of the best years of my life, and I

don’t plan to let any grass grow under my feet. I picture myself somehow being able to pursue a degree that gets me outside into a complex and amazing world of wildlife biology but also serves and encourages people around me. I am forever grateful for This scholarship, which will help me launch on this adventure. Thank you!

### **Introducing you to the 2024-2025 NSA Education/Training Grant Recipient**

The NSA Scholarship Committee has also been able to award an Education/Training Grant to a smokejumper who is working toward pilot training and certification with a goal of working in fire aviation.



**Zac Slay**  
(Courtesy NSA files)

**Zachary Slay (MYC-21)**: I am honored to have been selected for a training grant from the National Smokejumper Association. These funds will help me obtain my commercial pilot’s license and further my professional pilot journey. I am enrolled in an accelerated commercial rating program in South Dakota with Riggins Flight Service starting at the end

of September. This rating will allow me to receive compensation as a pilot and kickstart my aviation career. I plan to start my pilot career in agriculture aviation. I’ve connected with an aerial applying outfit in Western Idaho and plan to train as an aerial applicator in the next two years. This is a challenging but rewarding job field in aviation, and it requires one to be a competent pilot and have the resolve to work long, hot days for weeks on end. I think my experience in fire has prepared me well for that. Experience in agriculture aviation is required for flying agency contracted SEATs or Fire Boss, and it would be my goal in my aviation career to fly either. My 5-year plan would be to gain the knowledge and experience in agriculture aviation to prepare myself for a career in fire aviation and give back to firefighting efforts that I have been a part of operationally for nine years. I thank everyone in the NSA who donates, organizes, and facilitates funds that make these grants and scholarships available to help folks like me chase dreams. 🌲

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# Feedback from the Field

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- **Here's what I know about the Boise Fire on the Six Rivers N.F.** Straight from the horse's mouth, our local helitack crew flew to the fire (think it was Friday-near start of fire), radioed the crew on the ground and said they had three firemen on board plus a bucket and could let the crew off, set up the bucket and start dropping water. The crewboss on the fire *TURNED THEM DOWN*, said they could catch the fire on their own. The copter pilot got on the radio and tried to change the crewboss's mind but no luck. So they flew home, and the fire went big. The river was close so bucket turnaround would have been fast. As of this morning, it's 7200 acres with zero containment. Makes me sick. Just another f-up story by the FS. Overall, based on what I'm hearing from on-the-ground crews in Region Six, they're getting better but the new culture of back-off and slack-off is taking too damned long to change. Except for a few bold fire staff here and there, leadership is sorely lacking. **Murry Taylor (RDD-65)**

- **As a retired Fire Professional who attended many large incidents as a Liaison Officer**, I witnessed fires grow exponentially with this strategy and when asked about a more direct approach was told direct attack with machinery caused too much environmental damage and excessive rehab work. What does an extra 10,000 black acres cause? A couple other factors to add are the profitability of all those involved, yes these are big money makers for many and the speed and weight of attack, especially on USFS fires. Two cases in point, Caldor Fire-limited to minimal initial attack allowing for hotter, dryer, windier conditions to blow it out of control and just recently the Crozier Fire that is not fully contained yet. This incident was within sight of our residence, and it started overnight and there wasn't any air attack or support until almost 1000 the next morning. In the decades prior, fires were immediately attacked by everyone inclusive of private landowners, logging personnel, etc. Now they are usually banned from helping. We sure could learn from everything that has been shared in these emails and benefit from practices of the past. Thank you all for trying to make a difference. **Brian K. Veerkamp**, Retired Fire Chief/Supervisor Elect, El Dorado County

- **Silver City Smokejumper Base Closes for Good, Ending A Long History in The Gila:** This base has a long and storied tradition that dates back almost 80 years. At its inception, eight smokejumpers plus a foreman from Missoula, Montana, and a pilot from Oregon were asked to fly down to the Gila N.F. in New Mexico for an

experimental trial after a large lighting bust that spring. In 1954, the Silver City base expanded staffing to 18 jumpers, and they made 105 jumps and responded to 40 fires that season.

This week, however, the base is closing, ending a historic chapter in Smokejumper history. All the photos and sewing machines have been removed from the facility, and everything has been transferred to Albuquerque. No official reason for its closing has been given publicly. It's known that there were numerous injuries jumping out of the Gila, and years ago, an open letter went out to jumpers saying they needed to reconsider how to jump the Gila because it was beginning to skew their safety numbers. If you know the Gila, you know how rough it is. It's kind of shocking to hear of this base's closure after nearly 80 years of operation. ***The Hotshot Wake Up*** (6/12/24)

- **U.S. Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández** wrote a letter to U.S. Forest Service Chief Randy Moore on Oct. 18, 2023, urging his agency to use infrared drones to better monitor all prescribed burns in New Mexico, which she said he committed to before a federal House committee. USFS staff walked back on the drone commitment about two weeks ago because the agency doesn't have enough drones, Leger Fernández said. A pile burn started up the Calf Canyon Fire in 2022, (340,000 acres), which crews had stopped monitoring because they wrongly thought it was fully extinguished. The same year, the Cerro Pelado Fire kicked up after embers sat dormant in a pile of ash that crews searched by hand. Congress overnight announced \$1.45 billion more for a compensation program for victims of New Mexico's biggest-ever wildfire, bringing the total that could be approved for the blaze to \$3.95 billion.

- **One-third of global forest is harvested for timber**, generating \$1.5 trillion annually. High-severity wildfires threaten this timber production. **Timber demand is expected to almost triple by 2050** (greater human demand and population growth, increasing urbanization). Net-zero climate targets promote the replacement of carbon-intensive building materials, such as concrete and steel, with wood. Ensuring that timber supply can meet future demand is a key challenge in the twenty-first century. To ensure increasing timber demand is met, timber producers need to **minimize the risk of fire** to future timber crops today, improve spatial planning, and adopt new technologies for fire detection and suppression. ***Nature Geoscience*** 🔔



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# My Dad Was Also on the Bataan Death March

by Gary G. "Pops" Johnson (Fairbanks '74)

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*In the Oct. 2024 issue of "Smokejumper" I wrote about a fellow teacher who survived the infamous Bataan Death March and the sinking of one of the "Hell Ships" jammed with POWs headed for slavery in Japan. In another one of those "Twilight Zone" happenings Gary Johnson told me that his dad also survived the same series of events. It is amazing that any of us knew POWs who survived both Bataan and the Hell Ships ordeals. I asked Gary to tell his dad's story. To survive either of these two horrific experiences is a miracle. To know anyone who did that is something that only a few individuals in our society ever experienced. (Chuck Sheley)*

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**Herbert F. Johnson**  
(Courtesy Gary Johnson)

My dad was Herbert F. Johnson, and he grew up on a farm in Sandpoint, Idaho, alongside six siblings. He learned to fly at an early age and was a hellion on his Indian motorcycle after high school. Dad was 22 when he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in March Field, California, prior to World War II.

In 1941 he found himself on a US vessel headed for the Philippines. The threat of war loomed, and the ship ran silent with no lights. Dad was stationed at Clark Field in the Philippines and was assigned to a B-17 squadron as a flight crew chief. Clark Field was bombed about the same time as Pearl Harbor and the US officially entered the war. The "Battle of Bataan" began and lasted four months. The soldiers, including my dad, fought a hard battle, but surrender came in April of 1942.

Dad survived the infamous Bataan Death March, where death tolls ranged from 5000-18,000 Filipinos and 500-650 Americans.

The march was characterized by severe physical abuse and wanton killings. POWs who fell or were caught on the ground were shot. After the war, the Japanese commander, General Masaharu Homma and two of his officers, Major General Yoshitaka Kawane and Colonel Kurataro Hirano, were tried by United States military commissions for war crimes and sentenced to death on charges of failing to prevent their subordinates from committing atrocities. Homma was executed in 1946, while Kawane and Hirano were executed in 1949.

Dad walked for 65 miles in jungle conditions with no food and no water. The losses were incredible, and dad watched as many soldiers were killed or died along the way. Dad buddied up with a fellow soldier and they agreed to tell the other's family if they should perish during the ordeal. My dad held up his end of that bargain once the war ended. This meant everything to that man's family.

Dad ended up at Camp O'Donnell where more than 50,000 Americans and Filipino prisoners of war were confined. While many died during the march, many more would perish during the next three years as prisoners of war. Dad had all the serious jungle diseases including beriberi, dysentery, and malaria. His job in the prison camp was on the burial crew and he had

the grisly task of laying to rest many of his friends and fellow soldiers. He also spent time waist-deep in the rice paddy fields harvesting for the Japanese. He chewed on the hard rice shell to supplement his measly rations and when the war ended, he had worn his teeth down so far that he had them all pulled at the age of 40.

Conditions as a POW were hellish, but dad was a strong individual and made it out, weighing 115 pounds when he came home. He put his trust in God, in Jesus Christ and this was his source of hope throughout his experience. He always had a hope that his Lord would deliver him, and he did. Dad also had a picture of his family that he managed to keep hidden by burying it the entire time. It was his prized possession. I have it to this day.

As the Americans took more and more of the islands in the Pacific, the Japanese moved prisoners to Japan on "Hell Ships", where they would become slaves working to support their captor's war efforts. The prisoners were put in the holds of these ships and were stacked like cordwood, with no food or water, and with no ventilation. Many died on this three-week journey. Tragically many of these boats were torpedoed by US submarines due to lack of a POW designation on any of

these vessels. Dad lost friends on some of these doomed boats.

In Japan dad helped to build Japanese war ships in super-heated conditions. Finally, the prisoners watched as B-29's began incessantly bombing the landscape. New hope was on the horizon. Being only 25 miles from Hiroshima, they felt the earth move and felt the strong winds as the atomic bomb was dropped. The war with Japan was nearing its end.

He returned safely, although severely underweight and malnourished. Without recognition of PTSD at that time, he was sent on his way to return home.

He continued in the newly formed US Air Force for 21 years and then spent 20 more years with the US Forest Service on the Kaniksu National Forest. He married my mom, raised three kids and found peace by forgiving the Japanese soldiers that held him captive for all those years. He flew his Taylorcraft airplane, split his own firewood, and rode motorcycles into his later years. After all that time of captivity and oppression, he enjoyed his freedom as an American and was a true patriot. He lived a full life and passed at 86 years old. He was a pillar in my life and influenced heavily my own career in the wildland fire service. 🙏

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# Smokejumpers Who Left

## Most for Local Fire Agency Jobs

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

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*Low wages are one of the big problems facing Federal Wildland Firefighters currently. In this reprint from "Smokejumper" April 2022 John interviewed several smokejumpers and hotshots that left for better pay and benefits. (Ed.)*

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WILDLAND FIREFIGHTERS PAY and work conditions are in the national dialogue. The October 2021 issue of *Smokejumper* commented that smokejumpers and hotshots who want better pay and benefits are finding jobs with local agencies. I wondered what those who had recently taken these jobs thought. After talking it over with *Smokejumper* Editor Chuck Sheley, we agreed that for the public good a survey should be conducted, and the results made available to the public and decision makers in addition to publishing this article in the April 2022 issue of *Smokejumper*.

To remain unbiased, I used a fixed set of questions like those used in business when interviewing for needs or solutions. The respondents were kept anonymous.

Twenty ex-smokejumpers who worked at USFS or BLM bases were interviewed. Of those, 17 have left the federal government to take jobs with local agencies in Southern California and the Sierra Nevada. Three have transferred to other Forest Service fire management positions. All smokejumper bases were represented, as are all Southern California Counties with significant fire activity. Eight jumped within the last five years, seven within the last ten years, and the other five jumped within the last twenty years and are in management positions.

It has been a busy fire season, and all were working when interviewed. Ninety percent of those interviewed either got a call while we were interviewing, had just returned from a call, or were on an overhead assignment. Most interviews involved multiple phone calls, many over multiple days. The persistence, positive attitude, and cooperation of the jumpers has been remarkable. What I found has been both encouraging and surprising.

The smokejumpers averaged six years of crew experience prior to jumping for the USFS or BLM. Experience included Initial Attack crews, Interagency Hotshot crews (IHC), and Helitack crews. Prior work with the USFS, BLM, NPS, and state and local fire agency crews is represented in this survey. Contact with an ex-jumper, frequently a supervisor or fire manager, was part of the path to jumping for almost all.

**Over half had taken a decrease in pay, GS grade, or resigned an appointment to jump in the GS-5 rookie position.** Most had been at the crew overhead level and had an AA degree, professional certificate or higher. Less than half were veterans. Years jumped averaged three.

There were two distinct groups. About half jumped one or two seasons while the rest jumped three to six seasons with one significantly more.

All spoke highly of their smokejumper experience and prior hand crew experience.

Almost all had discussed leaving jumping in detail with a spouse, ex-spouse or significant other. Time away on fire assignment, the need for significant overtime to support a family, desire to purchase a house, a stable location for family and schools, lack of employment opportunity for spouse in jumper towns, and the lack of upward movement in the jumper organization or back at a home forest unit were all frequently cited as issues discussed.

Seven hundred and fifty hours of overtime was the average families depended on while jumping. Due to Federal pay structure, this equals about fifteen hundred hours away from home. **Time away from family figured into this issue.**

**Many had hope of a future in the Forest Service, BLM or NPS and were willing to compromise and receive less pay than local agencies to make this happen but were thwarted by the federal hiring system.** A typical comment was that they received no replies to inquiries regarding positions with Federal Agencies. **The centralized federal hiring and**

**personnel management system was frequently mentioned as frustrating to deal with.** An exception to this were jumpers on detail and one who sought out an apprenticeship program appointment.

For those taking local agency fire jobs, most mapped out a course and began a transition while still jumping. This included completion of online college and fire academy classes and contact with potential employers. The average transition time was three years with 60% taking transitional wildland fire or EMS jobs with local fire agencies.

Those taking transitional jobs with local agencies on IA, vegetation management programs (VMP), and EMS crews all took on positions of responsibility such as lead, squad, or foreman. This allowed them to be available for interviews, become known locally, and complete training classes such as fire academy or EMT classes.

Many local agency fire managers assisted these jumpers in their transition to full-time local agency fire jobs even when employment was found at another agency. **For many, this filled the mentoring and career planning need they had not found at the jump base.** Full-time paramedic training and internship was a considerable undertaking. Three couples lived on the spouse's earnings while the ex-jumper used savings from jumping to go through a year and a half of classes and internship. Department of Defense (DOD) fire employment was another avenue of transition. Designation as a firefighter and DOD pay structure provided a living wage for a family without the lengthy overtime requirements cited above for the Forest Service and BLM.

With a few exceptions, the local agency fire jobs required the smokejumper to go through the same highly competitive application and testing process with all other applicants. Smokejumping was simply an added plus to meeting the education, academy, EMT, written and physical test requirements. Contact with local agency managers and local wildfire transition jobs also helped.

Adapting to this process was noted as an adjustment by many. Interview skills were something that had to be developed. Once hired as firefighters, the smokejumpers, like all recruits, had to meet stringent probationary requirements that included frequent testing and evaluation. **Pay structure during probation varied by agency but was greater than that received as a smokejumper.** Average age on obtaining

local agency probationary status was thirty-three with average interview age of thirty-seven.

On completion of probation, the new firefighters starting salary averaged about \$80,000 **plus significant benefits.** The range of starting salary was \$68,000 to \$92,000. **All noted the salary was sufficient to support the family without overtime.**

Adjustment to the new job was noted by most. These adjustments were to the call load, witnessing human tragedy, sleeplessness, need to study, commuting, and working with people that lacked the camaraderie of crew and smokejumpers the firefighters had worked with in the past. This was not a criticism but an acknowledgment of the reality of living in a fire station. In some cases, jumpers considered a return to a natural resource agency job for a simpler life, although none did. Discussion with a spouse or significant other was described as part of this process. **All noted the clear-cut mission and service to the public of local agencies.**

Some chose to compete for and take wildfire or vegetation management jobs within these local agencies. Some aspect of vegetation management programs, prevention, IA crew, dozers and helicopter operations exist with many of the local agencies. After completion of probation, some were able to return to their transitional crew in a leadership position. **Multiple jumpers noted that local agency VMP and IA crews are both efficient and increasing in number.**

**All noted the importance of the portal-to-portal pay structure** with a huge factor being fewer hours spent away from home and simplicity of paperwork. Local agency overtime is compensated on a portal-to-portal basis, be it for shift work, filling in at a station, short term call back to cover draw down, or out of town assignment.

While on probation, all were used for out-of-town wildfire assignments with engine strike teams. All were able to use their qualifications for overhead assignments on completion of probation, and most interviewed had been on multiple extended attack and large fires this season as overhead or had occupied backfill positions at the station for the wildfire draw down.

Looking back at their smokejumper jobs, all felt improvement in pay was in order and this extended to their thoughts about crews in general. **Inconsistency of jumper use for Initial Attack between bases and agencies was noted by most.** "Sitting on the ramp at PLS (Highest national fire preparedness level)," was a repeated phrase. This extended to winter work for those



on some form of permanent status. “Sewing canteen covers (in the winter) is not meaningful work.”

All wanted the best for Federal wildland firefighters, and many felt re-classification to firefighter from forestry tech was important. Parity with state wildland agency pay was frequently mentioned as was looking at other Federal fire models, such as DOD.

Flexibility in use of employment status and underutilization of existing appointments was mentioned by more than half the jumpers. This related to both the need to retain jumpers that had other things to do during the winter, such as ski patrolman, as well as the needs of those that wanted permanent jobs and the importance of mentoring those that desired a return to the districts with fire management and district ranger tracks in mind.

Jumpers who had advanced to management roles, including those who returned to the Forest Service, were particularly concerned with the potential use of solutions already available. **Making incremental but meaningful change kept coming up.** Retention of GS grade (or equivalent) and appointment status when training as a jumper was considered important. Second-year (GS-6) jumpers automatically receiving a 13 and 13 appointment (if they did not already come on board with one) and starting to accrue retirement and access to the TSP (Thrift Savings Program) were frequently mentioned as possible solutions. **All those now in management roles felt there was a strong need for local hiring and administration of personnel matters at the Forest, District, and Program level. This included local administration of injured firefighters.**

Frustration was frequently voiced over the encouragement of and even the counseling jumpers on how to sign up for unemployment. Jumpers wondered why that money was being wasted by the agencies on unemployment when so much could be done with the money by simply running programs that further the employment and well-being of crews.

**A repeated phrase in the interviews was that those that stay with jumping in the Forest Service feel stuck and not valued.**

What stood out to me on completion of these interviews was that these jumpers represent skilled, experienced, and motivated people with high agency loyalty and an outstanding positive outlook. If I were seeking people to manage our National Forests and public lands or any fire agency, I could not find better candidates. Any loss to the agencies in training dollars

and administrative costs when jumpers leave for other fire jobs is small in comparison to the loss of talent and initiative.

**It is my opinion that the Forest Service and BLM are dealing with career-focused employees (in this case) and yet not providing a professional career environment for them to work in. Pay is one of several significant factors.**

One could take a blunt view and say the Forest Service took a simple job and made it complicated with no net gain in efficiency. Something seems wrong. I think there is some truth to this as it relates to the work force and agency needs. I was left wondering what the Forest Service mission for jumpers is.

My more pragmatic view is that, except for pay and a cumbersome personnel management system, things are OK. Smart people within the Forest Service and BLM, including the jumpers, Interagency Hotshot Crew overhead, and fire managers at the district and forest level, are working to make things better. The Forest Service and BLM continue to attract talented and motivated individuals that receive excellent training and experience and then go out into the world of fire and enrich many agencies in this most important work. For this, the Forest Service and BLM should be proud.

I want to note that in the process of tracking down jumpers, I talked with several IHC and IA overhead as well as fire managers from many agencies. Many expressed similar concerns and made thoughtful comments. I feel surveys of these highly skilled and experienced people would be meaningful to any agency seeking improvement. There are many solutions and great strength in the diversity of thought I encountered.

### **Afterword, by John Culbertson**

This article was the brainchild of *Smokejumper* magazine editor Chuck Sheley and was produced with the assistance of *Wildfire Today* editor Bill Gabbert. Both were concerned with the current state of employment of federal wildland firefighters. We decided to ask former smokejumpers why they left the program and what they did after that as an easily targeted cohort. I created an interview format and tracked down the smokejumpers. Bill Gabbert published the article at midnight 26 October 2021 in *Fire Aviation* so that it would be available for Congressional hearings that day. The article was also published in *Wildfire Today* and *Smokejumper*.

Following publication, I received phone calls, texts and emails. I talked with Forest Supervisors, District Rangers, Fire Management Officers, program managers and Congressional Legislative aids. The article was used as a discussion piece at administrative meetings and as a talking point for proposed legislation.

Recently, I have been approached by current smokejumpers who speak of improving employment evolving in their programs. It is good to know that the article played some small part amongst all the good work done by so many to assist our wildland firefighters. A high five and, "You are the guy that wrote that story," is something I wish I could tell Bill Gabbert about.

Bill and I were sharing a pickup scouting a section of fire years ago. No crews were in the area, and it was clear that an old CCC era campground was going to burn. Although we were weary, it was clear a little work could make a difference. We grabbed tools and scratched line around the classic camp and let the fire back around the site. Bill said, "people will still camp here. This might be the only useful thing I did today."

Years later I realized Bill was a writer and editor also. A quick thinker that could help me piece together a story late in the night. He hoped it would make a difference. His passing was a big loss to the wildfire community. 🕯

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## North Needs to Fix Forest Fuels

by Roger Jaegel (Associate)

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*The following is an Op-ed by Roger for the Redding Record Searchlight in 2008. As you read, you can see that the same problems exist today on a larger scale.*

Trinity County has been under a pall of smoke for more than 30 days. Contrary to popular media, the slew of lightning strikes that started over 100 fires is neither unique nor unprecedented. They've been here before; they will be here again.

The people of Trinity County and indeed most of the counties of Northern California have petitioned the federal government again and again over the past 20 years to thin the brush and crowd trees, build fuel breaks, clean up after fires, and help create a safe, sustainable forest. Our elected officials have pleaded with our congressmen and senators to help us get sustainable management back in place in the forest we love. We have cited science and our experiences until we are blue in the face.

It's past time to create a wildfire strategy for Northern California. It is past time to face the effects of wildfire on the condition of our health, our forests, our future.



**Roger Jaegel**

Our productive forests are being converted to brush. The evidence is these frequent and fierce wildfires. Each year these wildfires are emitting millions of tons of greenhouse gases and worsening global warming, destroying thousands of acres of important fish and wildlife habitat, sending sediment into our clean water and leaving hundreds of tons per acre of fire-killed trees and brush on the forest waiting for the next firestorm when that dried out wood will burn up the soil.

The north state needs help. We must ask the San Francisco Bay Area environmental groups and our governor to help craft a saner forest policy for California. We must move this issue out of the partisan arena that has trapped for over 20 years.

California is leading the nation in carbon accounting practices. Wildfire accounts for over 30% of global greenhouse gas releases. 🕯

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*Roger is retired from the USFS and was a director of the Hayfork Fire Protection District and lives in Redding, California.*





# SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

## **Robert E. Trimble High Altitude Helicopter Pilot**

I remember the 1961 season in Silver City more than any other. I had graduated from Chico State and was tending bar and making pizza with one of my good friend, **Ron Thoreson (CJ-60)**. We were both lucky enough to be selected for the Silver City Crew that season. The New Mex crew was made up of twelve Missoula, eight McCall, two NCSB, and two Cave Junction jumpers.

After we did refresher training in Missoula, we boarded the DC-3 and flew to N.M. On June 8, six of us jumped to make a helispot in the Gila NF. The FMO for the Gila was very aggressive in fighting fire. Jumpers were called immediately, and the number of built and marked helispots on the forest meant that jumpers were retrieved quickly and

back on the jump list. On June 11, I jumped my first of 16 fire jumps on the Gila.

Other than Ron, I didn't know any of the other jumpers on the crew. There was always this feeling of "base wars," as **Jim Vietch (MSO-67)** called it. We're better than you etc. Complete bunk. I learned that jumpers are jumpers, regardless of where they were based. The Silver City Crew was a bunch of "All-Stars." I met some Smokejumper Legends down there.

We flew the thunderstorms and did not sit and wait for a fire to be called in. Jumpers were put on fires within an hour or so of a tree being hit by lightning. The fire was put out and we were picked up and back to the base in a minimal amount of time. I think we did 420 fire jumps, and the average fire was 1/10th of an acre that season. We jumped so much that I actually appreciated a heavy monsoon in early July. I felt a sense of relaxation as some of us sat in the ready shack at the airport and had a few brews. I'm not sorry about starting before we were off duty. Too late to dock me now!

One thing that stands out in my mind is the skill of one of our helicopter pilots who took us out of spots that had, it seemed like, inches to spare. Ron Thoreson recently sent me that pilot's name. I knew he was better than good, but I didn't know he was a legend in the helicopter world.

"Robert E. Trimble was an outstanding pioneer in the development of safer and more

effective techniques of flying helicopters at high altitudes and/or in mountainous terrain. He saved many lives in helicopter operations and during rescue flights. An annual award, 'The Salute to Excellence,' the Robert E. Trimble Award, is given at the Heli-Expo, honoring a distinguished pilot in mountain flying."

Bob was a pilot in the Army Air Forces in World War II. He initially flew fixed-wing aircraft as an instructor and crop duster and then became intensely interested in helicopters when he became a pilot for Hiller Helicopters in Palo Alto, CA. Bob was gifted at flying helicopters and soon became prominent for his techniques in mountain helicopter flying. Pilots came from all over the world for his instruction.

There is more to the story. Bob Trimble, who at 37 had "lived life up to the hilt," was killed Aug. 4, 1961, when his Alouette copter crashed on the north side of Kidder Creek (Klamath NF). The tail rotor of the helicopter failed in flight. He was able to autorotate to the ground safely. Landing in a steep canyon, the helicopter flipped, killing both him and his passenger. Newspaper reports:

*He has accomplished outstanding feats of almost unbelievable bravery flying his copter under most hazardous conditions, saving the lives of literally hundreds because of his technical ability, his flying skill, and his ability to extract*

*maximum performance from his equipment. He has had rescue missions throughout the United States, Canada, and even Mexico.*

From the Helicopter Association International:

*While mountain flying is usually associated with some of the most remarkable and secluded landscapes in the world, it is also one of the most demanding on both the aircraft and the pilot, requiring an immense amount of skill, knowledge, and experience. Countless communities rely on these pilots to assist in regions that are inaccessible by any other means. The 'Salute to Excellence' Robert E. Trimble Memorial Award, presented yearly at Heli-Expo, honors a pilot distinguished in mountain flying. The award was established 42 years ago in memory of an extraordinary high-altitude mountain pilot. It is presented to a pilot who has displayed exceptional ability and good judgment in high-altitude flying, has provided outstanding service to others, contributed to high standards of safety, and brought credit and recognition to the helicopter industry. These demanding criteria mirror the skills and professionalism practiced by Robert E. Trimble throughout his career.*

Bob died just a few months after he had lifted many of us out of the Gila. By then, I was back at CJ making nine more fire jumps—the endless season. In many ways, 1961 was a great year—we all loved fire jumps. But, as I look back, there were some downtimes. I remember sitting under the wing of a TBM in New Mexico at about 1100 one day,

playing cards with the pilot. Later that afternoon, pilot Verde Beede was dead after hitting a tree on a retardant drop. I remember that Verde was a redhead with a large mustache. We just went on.

Then later that season, I read an article in the *Sacramento Bee*. Bernard Charles Evart died in an airplane crash near the Sacramento Airport. Jeez, Barney was our DC-3 pilot at Silver City. He was good, really good. Barney always wanted our cargo to be a few feet away from us. I remember Tom Uphill (MSO-56) telling him to come up a few feet to allow the cargo chutes to open. From the *Sacramento Bee*:

*Evart, 43, who was flying a Grumman F7F from Siskiyou County, crashed into a field just south of the airport. A person who saw the accident said the aircraft was approaching the field with the right engine on fire.*

Barney was over a housing area at that time. Sheriff Deputy Al Hooker said, "The pilot definitely tried to avoid those homes." Barney dipped his wing and crashed into an open lot.

I think of the current "no risk" attitude when it comes to fighting wildfire. Different generations, different rules. We were very proud about saving our forests and putting out fires. I don't think we were reckless, but we did have the "can do" attitude. I do not apologize for that. I took that attitude into my teaching and coaching career. No risk, no gain!

Myson is a retired Deputy Sheriff. Thousands of law-enforcement officers hit the streets every shift to keep us safe and a manageable country. Try a traffic stop at 0300 and wonder who is behind those

shaded windows in that vehicle. Law enforcement is at risk every time they go to work.

Bottom line: We can continue the "risk averse" mantra. That will never cause any waves with the current USFS administration. Forget quick IA by smokejumpers and hotshots. Burn our forests—that is how we did it in the second century. After all, who wants to be in a "risky" situation?

I've visited many of the current smokejumper bases. What I see is a tremendous amount of talent. I admire and respect their abilities. But they are shackled by the current mantra. We could change the world if we would use a group with this talent and expertise more. These people are good, more than good! However, their talents and abilities are being harnessed by the current "too steep, too dangerous" policies of people who often spend their days in a chair with four wheels. Come on! Let smokejumpers put out fires as quickly as possible. That will eliminate "risk."

For all the higher-ups: You will still burn a couple million acres a year, add pollution to the local communities, and add burned acres as treated acres in the annual report.







# Notes from the Ranks



**Pat McGunagle**  
(West Yellowstone '19)

I think back to my first season in fire. I lived out of a 1991 Ford Aerostar van and on rainy evenings in June in Flathead Valley, MT, would drive up past Doris Creek on the Hungry Horse Reservoir and barbecue some brats and read and then sleep. One of these nights I woke up to a sloppy, dragging sound across the window. Without my contact lenses, all I saw was a big furry brown shape—*grizz bear!* I sat up, found my glasses, and with a waverley “HEY BEAR!” opened the side door of the van.

It wasn't a grizzly staring back at me but a cow elk, bewildered look on her face, chirping back at me in the moonlight. The sloppy sound continued, and out the opposite window I saw a calf elk, eyes damn near rolled back into her skull, continuing to lick the window, maybe for salt. Adorable. The elk both moved on eventually, and I reflect that this is not the last time in my government career that I worked around some window lickers.

Rent in Whitefish was expensive for a wildland firefighter who may

not be there at all most months. That Aerostar saved me thousands of dollars, as did a 1993 Silverado pickup with a camper shell, and eventually a 6x14 cargo trailer with a bed and kitchen built into it, which lived at the West Yellowstone Smokejumper Base for two years, sometimes with me in it.

These seasonal living situations were inventive, fun, uncomfortable sometimes, and luxurious at other times. A whimsical time: meeting other seasonal workers and finding out that they also lived in cars, the lot of you circling the wagons some night around a communal campfire. Feverish drives to some halfway point to Miss Park Service, one summer, or Miss Conservation Corps, the next, similar souls finding love in a serendipitous eddy on the river of seasonal life. Or, a similar fever, praying for a fire call so you can get to Arizona or Alaska and out of the wet dreary Montana rains. And the closure! There was something exciting about driving away from the base at the end of the season, with your whole life in tow.

The US Forest Service is out of money. I think federal agencies often claim this statement, about annually, but this time it's different. Morale is low, really low. Obscenely low. On a call last week, the forest supervisor advised each department to identify the “essential bucket of work” that may be accomplished with existing, permanent personnel, because outside of fire, there will be NO SEASONALS HIRED moving forward. What does no seasonals mean? That means bathrooms

don't get cleaned- they get locked. That means the Forest Service stock animals don't get fed- they get auctioned. That means trails don't get cleared, rivers don't get patrolled, weeds don't get sprayed, facilities don't get maintained, and relationships get ruined.

That fable about the kid with his finger in the dike, that one? That's about all I can think about my leadership at the forest and regional level now. I crave leadership, leadership I saw daily at the smokejumper program, transparent and objective. The “everything's fine, just identify the workers you don't need, please” messaging is not leading up, leading forward.

There are several employees that work on my forest that have been seasonal employees for 20+ years. Maybe they missed the cutoff to get a permanent position, maybe the seasonal lifestyle just worked well for them. Regardless, they won't be hired back next year. Thank you for your service, now get along!

How did the agency get to this point? That's not a million-dollar question, that's a multi-billion-dollar question. Out of the recent BIL money, meant as a singular cash stimulus, the USFS seems to have hired many, many GS++s in Washington, while failing to get the money to local units or hire the support roles at the bottom of those GS++ functional trees.

A bunch of pet projects from the Washington Office were funded, and yes, all regions received money as well, but instead of planning out how to logically pay for it all

sustainably- remember, those pesky GS employees get more expensive every year- the USFS spent to \$0 remaining and many thousands of deferred maintenance projects remain untouched. Out of that big project cash infusion, the USFS hired PEOPLE- which requires long term funding, which the USFS doesn't have. So, who bears the brunt of the budget issue? The bottom... and I don't just mean the seasonal workers, I also mean the public. Remember Pinchot's maxim, "For the greatest number, the greatest good, in the long run..."? Yeah, right.

Fire employees aren't immune from the budget problem. While seasonal life with no strings attached had its allure, the workforce is changing. The modernization act that so many people have put so much time and effort into is looking promising, even though the recent continuing resolution doesn't accelerate implementation. Seasonal firefighters will continue to be hired. I fear the permanent, year-round conversion of previously permanent seasonal (18/8 or 13/13) positions will be used to fill gaps in the workforce.

Some regions are requiring fire employees to lay off at their term of duty, e.g. 18 pay periods for the 18/8s and 13 for the 13/13s. The "bonus work" for those wishing to log extra winter hours beyond their tours of duty may be a thing of the past. I do not know if this is affecting the smokejumpers and the winter hours sewing opportunities. And of course, if you can find a fire or all-hazard code to charge to, you can work as long as you want. Hurricane relief, anyone?

There's something else that I worry about. With a formalized

job series comes the formalized workload. We used to laugh about the "collateral duties as assigned" bullet point in our old job descriptions. This was fun! How many days did firefighters spend helping with fencing projects, trail reroutes, culvert cleanouts, campground maintenance, lookout carpentry jobs, etc.? I fear the "not my job" virus that comes with formalized job descriptions. Some departments get siloed either by their own design or general specialization: the smokejumpers or rappellers are a classic case. How many days do smokejumpers spend on fencing projects anymore? Probably zero. That's fine as it's a specialized mission and two-minute readiness requirement. And second load still is available for project work at several bases. But I wonder, what happened to the old USFS?

I wish I had a more positive article to write. This was a killer fire season for the smokejumpers. The nation went to PLS twice! The utility of smokejumpers was proven

again and again, first in Alaska, and then as the season progressed, all over the West. Several fires had multiple loads of jumpers on them thanks to limited capabilities in the rappel program as well as proactive regional fire managers working to get boots on the ground ASAP. Also, several fires in the wilderness were let to their own creeping devices, and the results look phenomenal. Those calls by modern fire managers, backed up by agency administrators and stronger than ever computer models, are tough calls to make, but the results are exciting.

I returned yesterday from a fun single-resource task force assignment out in Idaho, where it was my distinct pleasure to work with several Alaska and Boise smokejumpers filling out the middle management of divisions, heavy equipment, and task forces. Great stuff, fall colors, elk bugling and hiking around with guys that like to hike. The best people!

Onward...

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# ODDS AND ENDS



Congratulations and thanks to **Dave Rosgen** (MYC-61) and **David Zuares** (RDD-91), our latest Life Members.

**Mike Pepion** (MSO-82) on Rudy Yellowtail (MSO-87), whose obit is in this issue: I jumped a two-manner with him in his rookie year, out of RAC on the Willamette, big ponderosa, good jump spot, good deal, except for the cargo. Cargo got capped on a big 150-foot tree. Guess who's going up the tree.

Since he was a rookie, we went over everything a good climber does. "Rudy, this letdown rope ties off to the *CARGO STRAP, NOT THE PARACHUTE!*" Rudy puts on the spurs, ready's up the rope, moves right on up the tree, and hits about the 50-60 ft mark. There are no limbs yet, and his knees get a little wobbly nervous. Coach Pepion gives him lots of pointers and encouragement, the basics.

Rudy gets to the cargo eventually, ties the end of the letdown rope to the parachute, cuts the Kevlar cargo box strap, and down comes the box...wham! We could use the broken Pulaskis, pick through scattered blasted-apart food, gulp down what water was left, enough to scrape line and mop up our small smoldering needle burn. Good deal, fire!

**Pat Cole** (MSO-73): When I first met **Floyd Whitaker** (RDD-65) in '73, he looked rough to me. Big rugged men, both he and Lloyd. By and large, by the time I completed training, all the class of '73 came to realize they were princes of men but without the finery. The first time I jumped with Floyd we both were injured. The second time I jumped with Floyd, we were injured again. The third time I jumped with Floyd, we were hooking up to the static line when he looked at me through his facemask, and a shit-eating grin crossed his face. "Hell no!" he said. "Whaddye mean," I managed weakly.

"I ain't going out the door with you again. Just unhook and sit down!"

"Uh, uh, uh," I stammered. He sounded as serious as a heart attack.

A rumble of laughter passed through the Doug as he said over his shoulder, "race ya to the hospital, Shit Head." I loved that Giant.

**John Blackwell** (MYC-64): Chuck, the Harry A. Merlo Foundation will direct a charitable contribution of \$5,000.00 to the National Smokejumper Association. Your admirable educational work documenting smokejumper history and the efficacy of initial attack and immediate suppression, along with healthy forest management, reinforces our Merlo Foundation conservation area of giving. Keep up the good work!

**Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77): I made an error or was not clear in my picture collage (Oct. 2024 Smokejumper). General Gavin and others in the army did study the smokejumper program but it was Major Lee who visited the smokejumpers in Montana. My error. Please print my error in the next issue along with my sincere apology.

**Ron Thoreson** (CJ-60): Chuck and KG-Just a long overdue note to thank you for 25 years of Smokejumper magazine. Many of us live our lives in disconnected segments, losing track of friends and neighbors along the way. In my case I've lost most contacts with Marine Corps buddies, college friends, first marriage friends and neighbors, and most work associates. The only segment of my life which endures is smokejumping, largely because of your administrative support of the NSA, reunions and the smokejumper magazine. A heartfelt thank you for all you've done and continue to do to keep jumping such a treasured part of life for myself and many others.

**Swede Troedsson** (MSO-59) has written and printed Smokejumper Vol 2-More Stories. If you are interested in adding another good smokejumper-written book to your collection, contact Swede at [swede\\_axolotl@yahoo.com](mailto:swede_axolotl@yahoo.com).

The Oregon Geographic Names Board recently changed the name of Negro Creek in Douglas County to Triple Nickles Creek. Federal maps will be updated. **Malvin Brown** (PNOR-45) was killed 8/6/45 while making a letdown on a fire on the Umpqua N.F. **Dr. Bob Zybach** (Assoc.) was a key person in getting this name change through the process. Thanks Bob for all your work.



# 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.*

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### **John G. "Jack" Benton** (Missoula '59)

Jack was born June 6, 1939, in Washington D.C., grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, and graduated from Montgomery Blair H.S. in 1957. Jack earned his degree from the University of Montana in 1963 and an MBA from the Univ. of Oregon in 1974. He began working with the USFS on Blister Rust Control 1957-58 and jumped at Missoula 1959-61.

Jack had a 26-year career with the U.S. Army, retiring as a Colonel. After his retirement from the Army, Jack did Deployment Systems design and implementation for DOD from 1990 to 92; deputy and Project Chief, Faheel, Kuwait, Explosive Ordnance, battlefield war debris removal, 92 to 94; and Florida Dept. of Transportation, Facility and Security Services MGT, 1995 to 2004. He retired to Tampa, Florida, in 2004.

*"Smokejumping was the greatest job ever! That isn't a cliché; it is a fact. It is, invariably, what so many of us ex-smokejumpers conclude after a life of competitive challenges and*

*experience. The risks, the excitement, the continual changing of work locations and fire experiences, and, foremost, the extraordinary bonding with fellow jumpers in a challenging job were the key ingredients that would serve me well throughout my work years. Smokejumping was not cut-throat competitive striving seen in nearly every other organization one can name; we simply trusted and depended upon one another to get the job done professionally.*

*"Leaving home at 17, the USFS, and smokejumping earnings, in particular, not only paid every dime for my university education, but it also provided me a fantastic work ethic and teamwork experience that served me in every subsequent work-life experience I have had."*

### **Don M. "Mike" Cramer** (Cave Junction '59)

Mike was born March 21, 1937, in Eugene, Oregon. He graduated from Grants Pass H.S. in 1955 and joined the Navy, where he served until 1959 when he was assigned to submarine duty. After his discharge, he rookied at Cave Junction, where he jumped the 1959 season before going to Fairbanks for the 1960-61 seasons. Mike was a consulting forester for Mason Bruce/Girard 1961-68. He then joined the DeLong Corp. as a Forest Inventory /Supervisor, working for over 18 years in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Siberia, and Liberia. In 1989, he purchased the Metro Saw Repair business in Hillsboro, Oregon, where he

worked until 2000. After cruising timber for the State of Oregon, Mike retired at age 72.

Mike received a Letter of Commendation from the Commonwealth of Australia while working overseas. While doing forest inventory work in New Guinea, he discovered the wreckage of a plane that crashed in the New Guinea highlands in 1945 at an elevation of 12,500 feet. He assisted in the recovery of the remains of 27 MIAs from the wreckage. Mike and his wife, Terressa, live in Myrtle Creek, Oregon.

### **Jay L. Sevy** (McCall '59)

Jay was born September 3, 1938, in Cedar City, Utah. His father was a district ranger at Austin, Nevada, and he grew up all over Region 4. Jay followed in his father's footsteps, attending Utah State University and graduating in 1961 with a degree in range management and a forest management minor. He was in college with some McCall jumpers who were friends, and they suggested that he should apply. He did, was accepted, and jumped in 1959-60.

Jay's parents introduced him to skiing at an early age, and while at Utah State, he competed on the ski team. However, his real interest developed into deep snow /powder skiing. He spent many days at the Utah ski resorts: Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Sun Valley, Idaho. He also helicopter skied in British Columbia.



His professional career began with the Forest Service, where he worked as a forester on the Wasatch NF on an insect control project that included some prescribed burning. During the summer, he was on a fire control overhead team that would be dispatched to project fires in R-4. Jay had expressed interest in having a district with winter sports or wilderness responsibilities. The Forest Service sent him to The National Avalanche School while he was still on the Bridger, and later, he became a ranger in the Jackson District, Teton NF. Teton Village Ski Resort was under construction, and ski area administration was a significant part of the district's recreation workload.

After the USFS, he and his brother started a whitewater rafting business in Sun Valley, Idaho. During the off-season on the rivers, he ran the Sun Valley Ski Patrol and their helicopter skiing program.

Later, a real estate broker friend knew of Jay's ranch management experience and was trying to find someone to manage a large ranch property in the Wood River for a client who had just purchased the ranch. The new owner said the job would only last about five years. Twenty-four years later, at the age of 75, Jay retired from this position.

#### **G. Lynn Sprague (McCall '59)**

Lynn was born July 12, 1939, in Pocatello, ID, and got his start in a Forest Service fire two weeks later, Thunderbolt Lookout in Boise, NF. He spent that summer with his parents, looking for fires. Lynn was raised in three Ranger Districts on the old Boise NF, traveling with his District Ranger Dad when doing fieldwork, including fireline work, at a young age. It was during these

growing-up years that he became acquainted with smokejumpers who had jumped fires in those Districts, and the itch to be one of them was born.

Lynn graduated from high school in 1957, attended Boise Junior College, received a B.S. in Forestry from Oregon State U. in 1963, and earned an M.S. in Forestry from Colorado State U. in 1979. While in college, he worked two summers on the Boise NF on brush crews, timber marking, and fire control on some 20 fires. In 1959, he was accepted in the jumpers at McCall, ID, where he jumped for four years, including two on the Silver City NM crew on the Gila NF, and ended with 68 jumps (53 of which were fire jumps).

Lynn then had a 35-year career in the F.S. as a Forester, a District Ranger on three Districts in Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah, as a Regional Office Staff in Ogden, UT, Forest Supervisor on the Modoc NF in California, a Staff Director job in Washington, DC, as Deputy Regional Forester in Alaska, back to D.C. in another Staff Director role, and finished as Regional Forester in San Francisco.

After retirement, he worked for a large engineering and environmental consulting firm and independently did some forestry and natural resource consulting. He has been a member of the Board of Directors for the National Museum of Forest Service History for 25 years. He has been actively engaged for the past 15 years in the planning, development, and fundraising efforts, culminating in groundbreaking in the summer of 2025. Lynn has also been active in the National Association of Forest Service Retirees as a Board member

and retiree at the local level, in NSA and local smokejumper activities, and in his church. He is still an avid skier and enjoys time 4-wheeling in the Owyhee Mts south of Boise.

Lynn says there are no successes in his life and career that he can't attribute in some way to first his parents and second to his four years of smokejumper experiences. Hard work, camaraderie, lifelong friendships, fun, and especially teamwork and knowing that, no matter what, someone had your back. Smokejumping set me up for what was to come.

Lynn and his wife, Mary K., were married for 52 years before her passing in 2018, and they have two sons, seven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. He resides in Eagle, Idaho.

#### **Dave Blakely (Missoula '57)**

Dave was born in Smackover, Arkansas, in April 1937, grew up near Magnolia, Arkansas, and graduated from Magnolia HS in 1955. He earned a bachelor's and master's in Forestry from the University of Montana. Dave earned his private pilot's license in 1959 through the ROTC program. After jumping at Missoula 1957-58, he was an Aerial Observer for Glacier N.P. in 1960 before beginning a five-year commitment with the USAF. After receiving basic Nav and advanced navigation training, he flew the Pacific to and from SE Asia for 20 months, flying "old shaky" C-124s in 1962.

In the spring of 1967, Dave began his career as a Research Forester at the Northern Forest Fire Lab in Missoula, MT. He retired in 1994 and joined the Montana Civil Air Patrol, where he piloted Cessna 182s on SAR missions until 2011.

*"I'm Still living in Missoula. Enjoy and exercise managing a family tree ranch about an hour's drive west of town. Four times so far, I have had four ex-jumpers' work for food' helping me repair and build 2-1/2 miles of fence around the place and designing and constructing a new fancy outdoor privy. I am trying to reschedule one of them back to paint the inside and outside of the new one-holler with a smokejumper motif!"*

*"I credit my smokejumper experience with teaching me more self-confidence and a good work ethic-thanks much to 'Good Deal Fred Brauer!'"*

**Donald D. "Don" Morfield** (North Cascades '57)

Don was born January 29, 1938, in Ellensburg, Washington, and grew up in Ellensburg (W.A.). He graduated from Ellensburg H.S. in 1955. Don attended Central Washington College and Washington State College. Don

returned to college in 1968-69. "I took enough refresher engineering courses to allow me to take & pass the Washington State Engineer-in-Training exam and the Professional Engineering exam. I am licensed as a Progressional Engineer in Washington State & as a Civil Engineer in Alaska." He spent six months in the Army on active duty and five and half years in the active reserve.

Work Career: Washington Dept Highways, Engineer Tech, 1957-1963, Yakima Washington District. Alaska Dept. Transportation, Jr. Highway Engineer to Director Maintenance & Operations, 1963-1990, Valdez & Anchorage Districts. VEI Consultants, Project Manager Co, 1993-1997, Anchorage, AK.

Retirement: Retired from Alaska Dept Transportation 1990 & VEI Consultants 1997. "I currently split time between Anchorage and Phoenix, AZ."

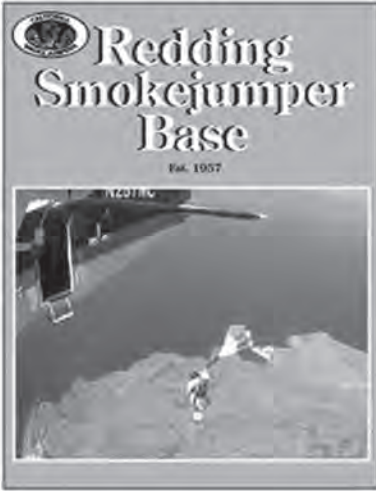
**Michael "Mike" Penfold** (Missoula '58)

Mike was born in Philadelphia, Ohio, on February 8, 1938, and grew up in Wheatridge, Colorado. He graduated from Colorado State University with a degree in Forestry.

Mike had a long and varied career with the USFS and BLM:

Recreation, Black Hills NF; Ranger Aspen, Colorado, White River NF; Chief Recreation, Arapaho NF; Chief of Recreation New Mexico and Arizona, Region 3, Albuquerque NM; Forest Supervisor Jefferson NF, Roanoke, VA, Region 8; White House Washington, DC; BLM State Director MT, SD, ND; BLM State Director Alaska; Assistant Director BLM Washington DC.

Retired in 1995 and living in Billings, MT. Mike jumped at Missoula 1958-59.



**Redding  
Smokejumper  
Base**  
Est. 1957

History of the  
**Redding  
Smokejumper Base**

A history of the Redding base from its establishment in 1957 through 2023. Hightlighted with periods under Base Managers; two organized Jump Lists recording all who served; stories from Jumpers; period photos; and, Crew Pictures.

8.5"x11" format  
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## 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.*

### **Walter Sheldon “Walt” Congleton (Cave Junction ’68)**

Walt died September 16, 2024. He was born on April 6th, 1948, in Paulina, Oregon. His Grandfather homesteaded the ranch where Walt grew up. Walt was in the middle of two brothers, Dwayne, the oldest, and Greg, the youngest. Walt graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in Engineering. He jumped at Cave Junction 1968-81.

From **Gary Buck (CJ-66)**: “Walt was always in top physical condition, having wrestled and played football in high school and college. He was an outstanding smokejumper, squad leader, and spotter. In 1972, I had the privilege of being Walt’s jump partner on every fire. This was an amazing experience. You can’t help but learn so much from him.

“After Walt and I jumped a fire, we returned to another base. We were one and two on the list. After getting our gear ready for the next fire call, Walt walked around the base and the outside, including the ramp. They only had a Twin Beech available for us. Walt approached me and said that this plane had a blown jug. I asked Walt, ‘What is a blown jug?’ We walked over to the engine, and he showed me oil leaking from one cylinder. We went to the office and notified management and were told the plane was OK and to be ready for the next fire call. Walt said, ‘No!’

“Finally, an A&P mechanic was called to put Walt in his place. The pilot and mechanic showed up and shut the plane down. Walt’s good judgment and unwillingness to back down probably averted an accident and saved lives. Ten minutes later, management announced that Walt and I would board a 172 and return to the Gobi. They didn’t want us there anymore.

“After jumping, Walt pursued a new career with a partnership in music. He then worked for Krauss Drafts as a design engineer. Once, I talked to the owner of the company, Kurt Krauss. He told me that the success of their company was Walt’s superior design work and follow-through. Products manufactured by the

company were sold all over the world.” (Thanks to Gary Buck for this information on Walt. ~Ed.)

### **D. Ross Parry (Missoula ’58)**

Ross died on September 2, 2024. He was born July 26, 1934, in Payson, Utah, and lived in Pioche, Nevada, from 1936-41. Ross was seven when his father died, and the family moved back to Payson, where he graduated from high school.

“In 1950, I was picking tomatoes when a fellow worker said he had to start football practice at Payson H.S. I thought I’d rather play football than pick tomatoes, so I told the coach I wanted to play football. Since I was relatively small, the coach grimaced and told me to find some gear. In my junior year, I was the only junior to play the entire game on the varsity team. I was team captain in my senior year and received state recognition in the Salt Lake newspapers. I was also selected to play in the Shriner’s All-Star game at the Univ. of Utah stadium in Salt Lake City.

“I was drafted into the Army in 1955 after attending Snow College, Webber College, and BYU for a few semesters. After the Army, I graduated from Utah State University with a degree in Mathematics.

“After being drafted in 1955, I was selected as the best trainee in basic training. The best two weeks I had in the Army were spent in the field hospital in the backwoods of Louisiana after a brawl in a Cagin Bar.

“When I was 16 years old, I lied about my age and worked for the USFS for a season. After graduating from Utah State in 1960, I was selected to teach Math at Logan Jr. H.S. in Logan, Utah. It was a tremendous experience but way too stressful for me. So, when I reported to the smokejumpers in 1961, they offered me a full-time position, which I accepted.” Ross jumped 1958-63.

“In 1963, I was transferred to the Region-1 office, and in 1965, I transferred to the R-4 office in Ogden. In 1969, I was selected to go to Washington, DC, to coordinate contractors in developing a National USFS

payment system. In 1970 I transferred to Ft. Collins, Colorado, to be a liaison between the USFS and the USDA center in Ft. Collins. In 1979, I was selected as a computer group leader at the Intermountain Research Center and retired in 1988.

### **William C. “Billy” Bennett (West Yellowstone ’98)**

Billy died, August 28, 2024, after battling a long illness. He was recently retired from the US Forest Service. Billy graduated from Haywood Tech, with a degree in Forestry. He served as a forester for the majority of his life, most recently as a West Yellowstone Smokejumper for nearly twenty years before becoming the tanker base manager at West for his last years Billy, also a South Carolina State Constable, spent the five months of his off season with his wife in Union, SC tending his Christmas tree farm, managing timber stands as a consultant, providing support to the local drug task force, and spreading his love throughout the Union community. He was always laughing, even during the saddest times, bringing a special light to all of those who had the pleasure of being in his company. Billy jumped at West Yellowstone 1998, 2002-15, and 2021.

### **Robert D. Krout (Missoula ’55)**

Bob, 88, died on August 27, 2024, at his home in Victor, Montana. He was born February 18, 1936, in Hamilton, Montana, and grew up in the Bitterroot Valley. Bob graduated from Stevensville H.S. in 1955 and rookied at Missoula that year and jumped the 1955 season. Bob enlisted in the USAF and completed his enlistment in 1960. He then moved to Missoula, where he worked for Wright Lumber Company, Solar Gas, and Liquid Air. He saw a need for welding equipment repair, so he started his own business on the side, Bob’s Welding and Apparatus Repair, working out of his garage while working full-time until retirement. In 1971, Bob and his family moved to Florence, MT, where he continued working at Liquid Air, Bob’s Welding & Apparatus Repair, and learned about the school bus system. Bob was also passionately dedicated to the Florence Volunteer Fire Department for many years and retired as the fire chief.

### **Victor W. Nicholas (Fairbanks ’69)**

Victor, 79, died August 15, 2024. He was born August 14, 1945, in Galena, Alaska, and grew up in

Kaltag. After high school, Victor went to Chicago for two years, earning a heavy diesel mechanic certificate. He followed that with an associate’s degree in Aviation from Sheldon Jackson College, which, in turn, led him to get an instrument rating from a flight school in Seattle.

Victor became a commercial pilot for Harold’s Air Service and the Galena Air Service before establishing an air taxi service in Nulato. Victor was more than a pilot; he was a community pillar and a savvy entrepreneur. His general stores in Nulato and Kaltag were proof of his sharp business acumen and deep understanding of local needs. These establishments became vital hubs in their respective communities, providing essential goods and services. Summers found Victor on the Yukon River, showcasing his versatility as a commercial fisherman.

Victor’s dedication to service was unwavering. He held leadership positions in several organizations, including Gana-A’Yoo, Doyon, Limited, and the Tanana Chiefs Conference. As the chief and mayor of Nulato, Victor’s tenure was defined by his ability to listen, his impartiality, and his talent for uniting people. His unique achievement of being the first person to serve on the governing bodies of Doyon, Limited and the Tanana Chiefs Conference simultaneously is a testament to the trust and respect he earned throughout his life. Victor jumped at Fairbanks 1969-72.

### **Baynard Stanley Buzzard (North Cascades ’65)**

Baynard died July 29, 2024, at his home in Wasilla, Alaska. He was born August 30, 1944, in Omak, Washington. He grew up on the family ranch 10 miles west of Okanogan and graduated from Okanogan H.S. Baynard attended Big Bend Community College and Central Washington University. He joined the United States Navy in 1966.

“My Navy tour was from 1966 to Aug. 1970. I went to NAS Lakehurst, N.J., for riggers school. I graduated first of 39 with the highest final score since the school’s inception in the 1920s. I was discharged from the Navy on my birthday, Aug. 30, 1970.”

Prior to his Navy tour, he was hired by USFS Winthrop R.D. in March of 1963. “In March 1965, I was notified I’d been hired as a rookie for the 1965 season. In 1965, I had seven fire jumps and 17 total jumps for the season. I jumped the 1966 season and got 12 fire jumps.” Between 1965 and 1979, Baynard jumped for 11 years, making 253 jumps, including 87 fires. Baynard was a Supervisory Smokejumper/Spotter and Parachute Loft Foreman responsible for



several smokejumper equipment-related innovations and program improvements during his tenure. After his smokejumper career, Baynard was the Fire Management Officer in the Chelan Ranger District, Wenatchee National Forest.

“On January 72, I returned to college at CWSC Ellensburg, Washington. I graduated from college with a bachelor’s in outdoor recreation in 1973.

“On July 21, I was aboard the BLM DC-3 when Gene Hobbs (IDC-61) was jerked out the door, and his backpack spotter’s chute came open. I was about 8 feet from him when it occurred. It happened so fast no one had time to say or do anything. In 1974, all NCSB overhead helped train the Canadian smokejumpers, and I was selected as loft foreman.

“In 1975, I helped with Canadian jumper training. I had five fire jumps and a total of 31 jumps in 1975. That was when hiring for the USFS started going downhill and has gotten steadily worse. I quit the USFS and went to work for myself. That’s when my real career started, ‘excavating,’ and it lasted 40 years. I learned a lot, and my three sons have learned a lot. The youngest is now running the business. In the 40 years, we excavated between 700 and 800 foundations, mostly in the Methow Valley.” Baynard jumped at NSCB 1965-66 and 1971-79.

### **Robert Francis Chrismer (Missoula ’52)**

Robert, 92, died June 19, 2024, in Easley, South Carolina. He was born October 16, 1931, on a farm in Adams County, Pennsylvania. Robert held degrees from Penn State and North Carolina State Universities. While in college, he worked three summers for the U.S. Forest Service in Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. He had fond memories of those adventurous times as a smokejumper and firefighter out West. Robert was then employed for 38 years in various quality engineering positions with Singer and Ryobi companies in Pickens, South Carolina, before retiring in 1994. He jumped at Missoula in 1952 and 1954.

### **William Herbert “Bill” Demmons (Missoula ’51)**

Bill died July 16, 2024, in Tucson, Arizona. He was born August 1, 1932, in Missoula, Montana, and grew up in Bonner, Montana. Bill graduated from Missoula HS in 1950. He got his first job with the USFS at age 16 and worked three seasons until he rookied at Missoula in 1951. Bill graduated from the University of Montana

in 1954, earning college expenses by working nights at the Bonner sawmill and jumping in the summer. After graduation, he entered the Army as a 2nd Lt. and served in Germany until 1957.

After his tour in the Army, Bill was recruited by the CIA and was first involved in the Tibet program. He participated in many other projects throughout the world and retired in 1979. After retiring from government service, Bill transitioned to a successful career as a land and ranch realtor with Lambros Real Estate in Missoula, Montana. Bill jumped at Missoula 1951-54 and 1958-59.

### **Robert V. “Bob” Gorsuch (Missoula ’47)**

Bob, 97, died on July 6, 2024. He was born in Kamiah, Idaho, October 11, 1926. Bob served in the US Army in 1945, stationed in Korea. He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Forestry from the University of Idaho in 1951. Bob started working for the USFS as a lookout in 1943-44 before going into the Army in 1945-46. He jumped 1947-52. In 1951, he opened the smokejumper base at West Yellowstone, Montana. As a permanent employee of the National Park Service, he was a crew leader with four jumpers. Bob retired from the US Forest Service in 1983 after a thirty-five-year career. He then worked part-time for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, assisting with more than fifty disasters in the US and US territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. He fully retired in 2012 at age 85. He enjoyed travel with many cruises and two trips to Africa. At age 86, he was zip-lining with his granddaughters in Swaziland. Bob was a Life Member of the NSA.

### **Floyd E. Whitaker (Redding ’65)**

Floyd, 82, died June 2024. Floyd and his twin brother, Lloyd, were born at Carmel-by-the-Sea in Monterey County in August 1942. They lived in Monterey, California, and graduated from Monterey HS in 1960. In 1961 they began working as permanent, year-long employees for the USFS on the Los Padres NF. Floyd jumped at Redding 1965-69 and transferred to Missoula, where he jumped 1970-86.

He was part of the “retread smokejumper program” that started in 1963 at the Redding, California, Smokejumper Base. After Floyd began smokejumping at Redding in 1965, Lloyd followed in 1966. They took their smokejumper training in the spring, returning to the Los Padres NF to their regular positions as Engine

Operators until they were needed for smokejumping assignments during the summer at Redding. (The Retread Program ended in 1974.) After Floyd quit jumping, he continued with the USFS Engine Manufacturing operation in Missoula until retirement.

### **Robert James “Mac” McDonald (Missoula ’52)**

Mac, 95, died on April 7, 2024, in Kalispell, Montana. He was born in Oct. 1938 in Chicago, Illinois. Mac graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with a degree in forestry, followed by a career in fire suppression with the USFS. His career began as a seasonal firefighter on a hotshot crew and culminated as the Director of Aviation and Fire Management in the Pacific Northwest Region. It included positions as both a smokejumper and smokejumper foreman in Missoula, MT, as well as the Redding, CA, Smokejumper Base Manager.

During Mac’s career with the Forest Service, he was involved in many important fire suppression developments, which included the use of aerial attack and the Incident Command System in the state of California, which integrated the response, command, and communication of federal, state, and local fire suppression agencies. After retiring from the Forest Service, Mac continued a career in fire suppression with the United Nations Food Agricultural Organization and then the Division of Emergency Management for the state of Arizona. Mac served in the Korean War in the U.S. Army’s 2nd Division, where he received the Bronze Star and ascended to the rank of sergeant. He jumped at Missoula 1952-53, 1955-58, and at Redding 1962.

### **Arnold William “Bill” Fritz (Grangeville ’52)**

Bill, 92, died on April 11, 2024, in Carlyle, Illinois. He was born January 1, 1932, in Wesley, Iowa. After graduating from Iowa State University with a degree in Biology, Bill worked as a fishery biologist for the Illinois Department of Conservation, where he maintained Carlyle Lake, Lake Shelbyville, and Rend Lake Reservoirs. He was recognized by the state of Illinois for his contributions and research on the Illinois waterways. After retirement, Bill earned his real estate license and worked as an agent.

Bill was a respected member of the Carlyle community and served as a treasurer and trustee for the Carlyle Fire Department for 25 years. His work with the department was instrumental in bringing ambulance

service to Carlyle. He was a member of the Carlyle Jaycees and was recognized by the Carlyle Rotary Club for his service and dedication to the community. He served in the United States Army during the Korean War. Bill jumped at Grangeville in 1952 and is the brother of Jim Fritz (CJ-59).

### **Henry L. “Hank” Jones (Missoula ’53)**

Hank, 89, died on March 13, 2024. He was born January 29, 1935, in Kendrick, Idaho. Hank received his bachelor’s degree from Eastern Washington University in 1962. Prior to that, he jumped at Missoula during the 1953 season, was in the USAF as a Survival Instructor from 1954-58, and attended EWU from 1955-1962.

Hank then started a 30-year career with the National Park Service with positions at Tonto National Monument (62-66), Rocky Mt. NP (66-68), Grand Teton NP (68-71), Ozark National Scenic Riverways (71-73), Glen Canyon National Rec. Area (73-76), Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks (76-80), and Sunset Crater Nat. Monuments as Superintendent (80-87), after which he retired. Hank jumped at Missoula during the 1953 season.

### **Donald Dean Isbell (Missoula ’52)**

Don, 85, died on April 26, 2016, in Kealahou, Hawaii. He was born in Montier, Missouri, on August 11, 1930. Don was a retired high school music teacher, musician, and Army veteran. He taught band as well as psychology at Pahoa and Kona High Schools. Don was a substitute teacher at Kealahou Intermediate and High schools. He was a music teacher, musician, Boy Scout leader, artist, and a member of the West Hawaii County Band, Kona Symphony Orchestra. Don jumped at Missoula in 1952.

### **James “Jim” Van Vleck (Missoula ’61)**

Jim, 86, died on August 29, 2023. He was born in Charlotte, Michigan, August 12, 1937. He graduated from Charlotte HS in 1955 and enrolled in Central Michigan University. While at CMU, Jim participated in Track and field and was a competitive pole vaulter. He was the first pole vaulter in CMU history to vault over 14 feet. During breaks from college, Jim jumped at Missoula during the 1961 season. He graduated from CMU in 1962 with a Bachelor of Science in Education and was commissioned into the US Army as an Infantry Officer. He would serve in the US Army for over 26 years.



The Army sent Jim to flight school in 1963, where he became an Army Aviator. He served two tours of duty in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot, flying the UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra helicopters. During his time in Vietnam, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, a Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, and the Army Commendation Medal with V (For Valor).

After retiring from the Army in 1988, Jim worked for the Boeing Corporation in Renton, WA, until his retirement in 2003.

### **Elmer I. Hagloch (Missoula '52)**

Elmer, 92, died July 6, 2023, in Harrisville, Utah. He was born May 5, 1931, in Northmark, Alberta, Canada. In 1947, Elmer graduated from Dover H.S. in Dover, Ohio, and then from Agricultural College of Utah in 1954. He enlisted in the USAF after graduation.

Elmer was a USAF Command Pilot, Senior Missile Officer, and software engineer for the space shuttle programs at Thiokol Corporation. Elmer served 12 years in the Strategic Air Command, flying the B-47 for seven years. Command pilots are those who have flown for 15 years and have logged at least 3,000 hours. During the Vietnam War, he flew 342 combat missions and terminated his USAF career over dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war. Elmer jumped at Missoula during the 1952 season.

### **John Richard Lindlan (Cave Junction '52)**

John, 90, died on May 8, 2020, in New Brighton, Minnesota. He was born in March 1930. John jumped at Cave Junction 1952-54 while he was in dental school at the University of Minnesota. He practiced dentistry in North Dakota while waiting to enter the Army and was stationed in Texas and Colorado, attaining the rank of Major. John practiced in Portland, Oregon, before beginning a tour with the Public Health Service in Guam. He returned to Minnesota in 1968 and practiced there until his retirement in 1996. John has done volunteer work in Brazil and Honduras.

### **James Blair Barron (McCall '53)**

Jim, 88, died on March 31, 2021, in Castleford, Idaho. He was born January 14, 1933, in Twin Falls, Idaho. Jim went to school and graduated from Buhl schools, then attended the University of Idaho and later received his master's degree at the University of Virginia. He enlisted in the U.S. Army, working in logistics for 28 years. Jim was never without a job. He ran a trap line in high school,

setting mouse traps for Buhl businesses. He "wrangled" horses for dudes near Stanley, Idaho in college. Jim surveyed the canal system across the canyon west of Sinking Canyon and other jobs such as farm work, door-to-door salesman, tending bars, and even selling toasted cheese sandwiches during study hour from his room in the ATO house in Moscow, Idaho. Jim jumped at McCall 1954-54 and Idaho City 1955.

### **Richard Jeremiah Hensel (Idaho City '53)**

Richard, 93, a 67-year resident of Alaska, died on February 5, 2023. He was born in Weatherly, Pennsylvania, on January 2, 1930. After high school, he enlisted in the US Army, serving in Heidelberg, Germany. An early interest in wildlife led to a degree in wildlife management from Utah State University. Richard's career took a significant turn when he moved to Anchorage in 1970. His dedication to community service was evident in his work with Alaska Native village residents on the Land Claim Settlement. His subsequent roles with the National Park Service and the State of Alaska involved crucial tasks such as designating Wilderness lands, conducting polar bear studies, assessing oil spill damage in Prince William Sound, and studying the impacts of rocket launches on Kodiak Island. His service extended to the Alaska Board of Game.

Richard was an avid reader and lifelong learner. He had a particular interest in American Indian history; Chief Seattle and his daughter Angeline were among his many heroes. Richard was passionate about service and volunteerism. He contributed many years of leadership to the Boy Scouts of America. He was a founding member of the Quiet Rights Coalition and a member of many environmental conservation organizations.

### **Warren Frank "Pat" Pattison (North Cascades '53)**

Pat, 79, died on January 26, 2012. He was born in November 1932 and raised in Aberdeen, Washington. Pat graduated from Weatherwax High School, where he played football and was student body President. After high school, Pat attended Oregon State University, where he graduated with a degree in Forestry. He joined the USAF and received his wings in 1956 after flying F-34s, T-28s, T-33s, B-25s, and C-119s throughout Europe and Africa.

Pat went into teaching after the Air Force. While teaching in the Shoreline District and supporting his

family, Pat pursued his Master's degree in Counseling at Seattle University. At the high school where Pat was a teacher and counselor, he was credited with caring for students and never giving up on anyone. Pat would somehow find a way to reach the students on a level where he became their friend and trusted advisor. Pat jumped at NCSB in 1953.

### **Richard L. Verbeck (North Cascades '53)**

Richard, 84, died on February 24, 2019, in Wenatchee, Washington. He was born on January 1, 1935, in Tonasket, Washington, where he grew up. He jumped at North Cascades 1953-54.

### **Rudolph Kenneth "Rudy" Yellowtail (Missoula '87)**

Rudy died December 18, 2006, at the Crow-Northern Cheyenne Indian Health Service Hospital, Crow Agency, Montana. Rudy was one of very few Crow tribal members who received a liver transplant (Los Angeles) and survived for one year and two months. He was born in Los Angeles, California, April 15, 1958. Child of the Sun Dance "Iishkishee Bakada" was raised by his grandparents and was keenly aware of the Sun Dance way. He observed the teachings of the

renowned Shoshone Sun Dance Chief John Trujillo. He was a member of the Whistling Water Clan and a Child of the Big Lodge Clan.

Rudy received his education at Wyola and St. Labre schools. He later took classes at Little Big Horn College, Fort Belknap Community College, and Glendale Community College, where he completed his certificate as a substance abuse counselor. He worked in this field until moving back to Montana. Rudy jumped at Missoula in 1987-88 and 1990.

### **John Howard Heckman (Missoula '49)**

John died on August 10, 2005. He was born January 9, 1929, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and grew up in Arlington, Virginia. He graduated from Montana State University in 1953 with a degree in Forestry. That year, the US Army deployed him to Korea. He stayed in the Army Reserve and retired as a lieutenant colonel in the 1980s.

John worked as a Forester with the state of Montana from 1955-57, Assistant District Ranger USFS, Warland, Montana, 1957-64, and Assistant District Ranger USFS, Bozeman, Montana, 1965- mid-80s. Gypo Sawyer mid-80s-mid-90s. John jumped at Missoula 1949-51.

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**Contributions since the previous publication of donors April 2024  
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**Mail your contributions to:  
Brent Russ, 516 W. Kent Avenue, Missoula, MT 59801**

**PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO NSA. Put donation info on MEMO line.**



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# Chasing Trains

by Roger Cox (Missoula '69)

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Conditioning is a significant part of the smokejumper's daily routine. The job requires jumpers to be physically fit, not only to withstand work stress but also to practice pride in daily life. Springtime always included preparation for the physical fitness test we would take each season. But after the test, training did not stop. Every jumper had his own training elements: lifting weights, riding bikes, swimming, etc. But all included running in their daily routine.



**Roger Cox**

The training was not limited to the time spent at the home base. Assignments other than fire would include time set aside for running. It was an easy way to train. No equipment was required—just running shoes and a desire to run. It was easy to fit into project work assignments.

The 1982 season would be my 11th year of jumping. The season started slowly, and soon, project work dominated the jumpers season. I was sent to Coeur d'Alene, where a small contingent of jumpers was stationed to cover the Idaho Panhandle area. An absence of fire activity soon resulted in practical work assignments for jumpers in the local districts. For a few weeks, I ended up with several other jumpers in Sandpoint, Idaho.

Sandpoint was a great place to vacation, and we rose to the occasion. The daily routine sent us into the forest for eight hours or so each day. That also put us back in town early in the afternoon. We quickly took advantage of the area and found many opportunities to run along the lakefront. I usually ran with **Walt Currie (MSO-75)**. Walt was an experienced jumper with the additional background of coaching high school football in the off-season. Couldn't ask for a better partner.

One afternoon, as we changed into our running shoes and shorts, Walt suggested we run along the railroad tracks that passed through Sandpoint. That route was uninterrupted, with no side streets or stoplights. So off we went.

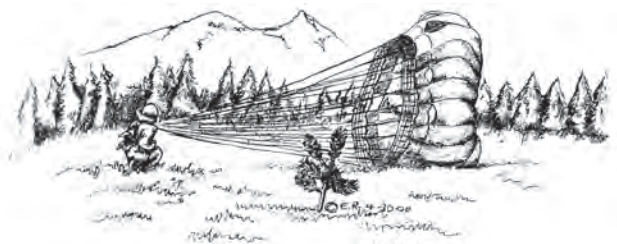
Traveling south on the tracks, you come to a bridge crossing the lake. This was not a small bridge—it might have been more than a mile long. A pedestrian route was built beside the tracks. It looked like a great running surface. Not to cut our run short, running across the lake some 30 feet or so above the water looked like a new adventure. What could possibly go wrong?

As Walt and I continued our run across the lake, we gave no thought to the possibility that we

might be sharing our route with a train. The running surface was great, and we pushed our pace, thinking what a great workout this would be.

We were working hard as we approached the bridge's other end. Then we heard the whistle, quickly followed by the appearance of a train coming toward us. At a glance, we knew there was not enough room for us and the train on the bridge, and we could not run toward the train and beat it to the end of the bridge.

That left two choices: swim or beat the train to the bridge's other end. If we thought we ran fast before, it was nothing compared to our pace now. We ran like something was chasing us, and it was! Of course, the train encouraged us to pick up the pace. The engineers noticed us and laid on the whistle. That helped. Walt later said that it was the fastest mile he ever ran. Although I did not look back, I could tell we were losing the race from the whistle. I don't know how close the train was when we jumped off the tracks onto the grass at the end of the bridge. The engineers laughed at us as they passed by seconds after we jumped. It was one race we couldn't lose. I suppose there was a lesson, but we probably didn't learn it. 🦋



# Important Reunion Announcement

## June 20-22, 2025, Missoula, MT

Commemorating 84 years of smokejumping, the **National Smokejumper Reunion** will be held at the **University of Montana in Missoula, June 20-22, 2025**. Activities will include:

- **June 20**—Barbecue Friday afternoon
- **June 21**—Activities during the day and a Banquet Saturday evening
- **June 22**—Memorial Service Sunday morning

**IT IS IMPERATIVE YOU BOOK A HOTEL ROOM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!!!** If you find later that you cannot attend, reservations may be cancelled!

Group room rates at two hotels have been obtained that are significantly below market value. However, these rooms are not held in a block specifically for our group; they will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis to all comers at a considerably higher rate for others.

Hotel accommodations will be at a premium during the reunion. It is the beginning of summer, Missoula is between Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks and often hosts big-name concerts. Should that happen, it will be difficult to find any hotel room in town!

[www.smokejumpers.com](http://www.smokejumpers.com)

### HOTEL INFORMATION



#### **Marriott Residence Inn Missoula Downtown**

125 North Pattee Street, Missoula, Montana  
(\$199.00 USD per night) Book by May 20, 2025



- **Booking Link:** <https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1727213245067&key=GRP&guestreslink2=true>
- **Reservations by phone:** Please call **406-218-7108**

#### **Holiday Inn Downtown Missoula**

200 South Pattee, Missoula, Montana  
(Room Rate \$234 per night plus tax)

- **Group Name:** Smokejumpers' Reunion IH 2025
- **Booking Link:** [https://www.ihg.com/holidayinn/hotels/us/en/missoula/msumt/hoteldetail?fromRedirect=true&qSrt=sBR&qIta=99801505&icdv=99801505&qSIH=MSUMT&qGrpCd=SMK&setPMCookies=true&qSHBrC=HI&qDest=200%20South%20Pattee%2C%20Missoula%2C%20MT%2C%20US&srb\\_u=1](https://www.ihg.com/holidayinn/hotels/us/en/missoula/msumt/hoteldetail?fromRedirect=true&qSrt=sBR&qIta=99801505&icdv=99801505&qSIH=MSUMT&qGrpCd=SMK&setPMCookies=true&qSHBrC=HI&qDest=200%20South%20Pattee%2C%20Missoula%2C%20MT%2C%20US&srb_u=1)
- **Reservation Dates:** 6/19/25-6/23/25
- **Group Booking Code:** SMK
- **Reservations by phone:** Please call **406-721-8550**. When contacting the front desk, please have the following information available:
  - **Group Name:** Smokejumpers' Reunion IH 2025
  - **Booking Code:** SMK