

Mann Gulch 75th Anniversary Memorial Tribute

President of the National Smokejumper Association, Mike Bina, gave remarks at the Mann Gulch 75th Anniversary Memorial Tribute at the Montana State Capital, August 5, 2024. After his remarks and a keynote address by noted author John Maclean, a flyover tribute by *Miss Montana*—the DC-3 that dropped the Mann Gulch smokejumpers—was scheduled to coincide with the exact minute of the fatal burn-over 75 years ago that claimed the lives of 12 smokejumpers and one fireguard, a former smokejumper. However, the flyover was delayed until later so a moment of silence was observed instead.



I'm honored to represent the NSA's 1,400 members, and the 6,000 men and women who have been trained as smokejumpers since 1939, including the 13 Mann Gulch smokejumpers whose memory we honor today exactly 75 years to the hour of their untimely and unfortunate death.

Mann Gulch was a tragedy that shocked our nation, their families, and our firefighting community. It would be another tragedy if these 13 men, who averaged only 22 years of age, were forgotten. While their lives ended so short, clearly, their stories didn't. Let us guarantee that they remain more than just 13 names etched on a granite memorial.

Heidi Powell, Eldon Diettert's niece, sobbed as she shared with me the story of her grandmother on the telephone, crying as she sat on the family kitchen stool, hearing the news that her son Eldon, on his 19th birthday, died at Mann Gulch.

John Maclean will also highlight this story to illustrate that three-quarters of a century has failed to heal the wounds or erase the families' pain.

These 13 were more than just smokejumpers. They were loving sons, brothers, uncles, cousins, valued friends, and for two, wonderful husbands.

Let us remember them as they are described: "All-American" boys—adventurous, smart, outdoorsman, hard-working, fun loving, kind, poets, pranksters,

and very patriotic. Ten were decorated World War II veterans. Two were army airborne paratroopers. Two were awarded Purple Hearts and one, a Medal of Valor.

The three who didn't enlist were too young to do so but undoubtedly would have if they weren't still in high school. The ten veterans returned safely home from the war protecting our nation's freedoms, much to the relief of their families, and then continued to serve our country as smokejumpers protecting our nation's natural resources. They deservedly qualify in Tom Brokaw's book as "Heroic Members of the Greatest Generation." Indeed, heroes.

Smokejumpers and Mann Gulch family members will be visiting their final resting places this month at six cemeteries in Montana, two in California, and one each in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

Bronze memorial smokejumper medallions, as I am holding, have been installed on their headstones, and American Legion or VFW color guards will honor the veterans.

Mike Bina, NSA President



Mike Bina (Missoula '68) giving keynote address.



The Miss Montana
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