

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
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SMOKEJUMPER



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Front cover

*Jumping from Beechcraft, Cave Junction,
1960 (NSA files)*

RECEIVE SMOKEJUMPER ONE MONTH EARLIER

Many NSA members are switching to the digital version of *Smokejumper* delivered by email instead of the printed edition. It is sent as a PDF identical to the hard copy issue. Advantages include early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings.

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

To request email delivery, please contact Editor Chuck Sheley
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Please contact Chuck if we need to update your email. His contact information is on this page.

IF YOU MOVE OR ARE "TEMPORARILY AWAY"

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

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



Message from the President



THE MORE THINGS change, the more they stay the same. We all have constants in our lives. Center posts. Anchors. And while it's hard to imagine smokejumpers having security blankets, we all do. Family. Faith. Membership in Lions clubs, the American Legion, or the NSA. Some constants are positive addictions. Hunting, fishing, or skiing for some. For others painting, music, writing, walking, or running. These all help us recreate and enrich ourselves. They add value continuing to make us better.

The world around us changes but we hold on to, need and benefit by these constants. They keep us grounded and fresh.

Bob Dylan's song, "The Times They Are A-Changin'," makes the point, and Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr added, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Jon Bon Jovi used Karr's quote in a song he wrote and recorded:

The more things change the more they stay the same. The new improved tomorrow isn't what it used to be. Yesterday keeps comin' 'round, it's just reality. It's the same damn song with a different melody. Tattered jeans are back in fashion. Even though this world is reeling, you're still you and I'm still me. The same sunrise, it's just another day. If you hang in long enough, they say you're comin' back. Just take a look, we're living proof. You're either runnin' round in circles or you're runnin' out of time. Everybody is somewhere either 12, 3, 6 or 9. The times they are a-changin'. We're here to turn the page. It's the same old story but it's told a different way. The same sunrise, it's just another day. Never and forever just keep comin' back again. Don't hold out for tomorrow or hold onto yesterday. And if you're waitin' on a happy ending. We're gonna hit the hook one more time.

Smokejumping has stood the test of time. The more it has changed the more it has stayed the same. Even though most of us jumped long ago— and many for only a few years— it is still a constant in our lives. It is something we look back on and feel a distinct sense of pride.



by Mike Bina
(Missoula '68)

Rod Dow (MYC-68), who is good for our brain cells, provided an interesting insight saying, "The things in smokejumping that have not changed in 85 years are the campfire conversations, the snags, Pulaski work, mop-up, incredible scenery, the nerves and excitement in the door, and laughing at your buddies' misfortunes." He seems to contradict himself continuing, "The things that have changed in 85 years are the campfire conversations, parachutes, line gear, packout bags, and beaters."

Wait Rod, you said that the campfire conversations have not changed, but in your next breath you say that campfire conversations have?

Reflecting on this, both statements are true. The campfire camaraderie and the conversations are a constant. True. But also true is that the topics around the campfire have evolved mirroring the changes and realities in the world at large and the firefighting landscape in particular. The fires are bigger. The intense ones are more frequent with increased risk. Jumpers are away from their families for longer periods. There are other challenges. No longer is the fire season June to September; now it is a time-expanded fire year. There is no break in the prolonged action to recover and regroup. The campfires and camaraderie are exactly the same, but the topics discussed, in part are not. The campfire subject matter has become more serious reflecting society's more complicated stresses. But the good news is that smokejumper camaraderie is a reassuring seat belt protecting us flying through today's bumpy turbulence.

Rod was recently interviewed by **Mike Hill** (WYS-95) on his podcast focused on smokejumper camaraderie. Mike introduced Rod as an "expert on camaraderie." Rod smiled and squirmed a bit humbly deflecting the compliment— but he probably chuckled to himself— "I have been called worse."

Got me thinking. Exactly what is this thing called "camaraderie," a word I can't spell without spell-check. No doubt there is a connection and bond between smokejumpers. It doesn't make any difference where or in what generation the other person you are talking to

rookied. “It makes no matter” if the BLM or the USFS signed your paycheck, whether you jumped rounds or squares, or ate C-rations or MREs. Talking with a current or former jumper, the conversation is always highly interesting, entertaining, and insightful. One’s spirits are lifted. The time just flies. My wife leaves the room knowing that I will be on the phone unavailable for the next hour totally absorbed in smokejumper “chitter chatter,” something that is impossible to squelch.

The camaraderie comes from sharing a very unique common experience. And from that comes a common language and understanding. Each person regardless of rookie base or the year they jumped have all similarly “been there, done that.” If someone tried to fake that they were a smokejumper and weren’t, our B.S. meters would soon detect the imposter. The folklore and the stories told are the glue that continually bonds us together ensuring that we stay well connected. Smokejumpers are inseparable. The stories are the embers that keep the camaraderie ignited. Everyone has had a challenging hang up or a story how the chute was retrieved (or wasn’t). Or a tale about a challenging landing spot on a boulder or in a lake. One constant is that jumps are like snowflakes and fingerprints— no two were ever the same. Just when you think you have heard it all, another twist or variation on a theme is told with humor and, in some cases, a confession!

Smokejumping was unpredictable requiring a special adaptability, grit, and determination to prevail over any curve ball thrown at us. No one ever got bored jumping or saw it as a repetitive boring factory job. The adventure and uncertainty of what lied ahead kept us on high alert and always reaching down for more— discovering “stuff” we didn’t know we had. Our well was always deeper than we knew.

Smokejumping gave us a unique viewpoint to experience the wonders of nature. We were dropped on virgin ground. Our boots touched down on a small square of land that no one had ever stepped on before. And far into eternity no one ever make a footprint on that exact spot on our vast planet. We can confidently say “Kilroy was NOT here.” We have seen incredible impossible-to-describe mountain, river, and tundra sights from our boots-on-the-ground viewpoint that no other human eyes have or will ever see. We got to see what the bear and moose in the wild see. A friend who grew up in Alaska was shocked to hear that in the two years I boasted to Alaska that I had been to Noatak and other inaccessible remote spots north of the Arctic Circle she had never been to or means to get there.

At the core of camaraderie is intense deep pride. Proud that we all passed rookie training, had our first jump, and after retrieving cargo (well that’s another story) did solid hard work as a team. A team that we nicely “fit into” and was accepted. We fought against Mother Nature’s lighting strikes, steep and rough terrain, highly combustible tinder-dry accumulated-fuels and weather that only made matters worse. We experienced esprit de corps knowing that the BLM and USFS, like the Marines, were very selectively only “looking for a few good men and women,” and we made the cut. Not everyone is cut out for smokejumping’s adventure, dangers, challenges, and the working conditions. Not everyone could have done it: 99.9% of our population would have no desire to do so. Their loss. Our gain.

Camaraderie is a culture of trust, friendship, loyalty to the mission and every colleague. It is a spirit of friendship and community as in the Cheers sitcom where everyone knows your name. Norm and Cliff. You feel the warmth and related kinship, belonging, and acceptance of extended family. And today in our fear filled and anxious times, it is a sense of security. We are confident that others— back then and now— have our back. One hundred percent unconditionally. Camaraderie is referred to as a “sensitivity of empathy.” Big words. This phrase is at the heart and core of smokejumping and the NSA, whose mission is to serve smokejumpers and their families. This is done primarily through the very impactful member-focused Good Samaritan Fund and Scholarships and Grants programs. The NSA is sensitive to the needs of those in our close-knit circle, understands, and quietly responds when needs arise. Other words capturing the bond are unselfish goodwill and caring for each other. A good case in point is the recent outpouring of support to **Steve Baker** (NCSB-88) who had a very debilitating stroke. Through his determination, skilled rehabilitation professionals, the family and friend support, and the encouraging camaraderie of jumpers he is making steady progress.

Camaraderie is difficult to define: when you experience it, you know exactly what it is and recognize its value. Smokejumper camaraderie is a candle that never burns out. It is one of those comforting constants in our lives. I look forward to the NSA reunion in Missoula this June. The main agenda topic for reunions is camaraderie and storytelling. We need and benefit from this feeling of belonging and connectedness. Good thing that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Wally Dobbins/CIA/Smokejumper

Smokejumper History

by Pete Dobbins

Published in the January 2016 issue of Smokejumper, this is an excellent summary of the start of the Smokejumper/CIA connection (Ed.)



SOME OF WHAT I RECALL MY FATHER, **Wallace “Wally” Dobbins** (MSO-47), elaborating on his experiences and work for the CIA, I describe below. It was challenging to depict the content and timeline of his work for the “agency” since he shared just bits and pieces of his total experience with the agency because his work for them was intermittent. I left out the names of most individuals he worked with in the “agency” as I am not sure if they would want to be identified.

Recruitment and Initial Training

Wally was recruited to work for the agency in 1952. Like other smokejumpers, he was hired as a “kicker” to provide parachute delivery of cargo and personnel wherever needed.

My dad described how someone from the agency showed up at the smokejumper base in Missoula and asked if he would be interested in working overseas. He was not told the nature of the work but accepted the offer anyway. He traveled to Washington, D.C., for his initial agency training within a week.

When Wally arrived in D.C., he was told to rent an apartment and wait for someone to contact him. He waited a month before being contacted and later realized the waiting period was part of his training to see how he would handle idle time.

While training in Virginia, he learned about escape/evasion and working with explosives. He learned surveillance and spycraft techniques in Washington, D.C. This orientation was the introductory training all agency-recruited jumpers received. I think it lasted three months.

Wally was married to my mother before his recruitment into the CIA, and their relationship would occasionally factor into my father’s work. Something Wally had never learned was how to use a typewriter.

He struggled with this during his training when he was required to generate daily typewritten reports.

Wally said he worked well into the morning to type reports and wasn’t getting much sleep. My mother was an expert typist, so it didn’t take long for my dad to put two and two together and have her travel to D.C. to stay with him.

Wally related how he created a hidden compartment in his jacket and brought his handwritten notes from the CIA’s training facility back to his apartment at night, where my mother would type the papers. In the morning, Wally would return to the facility with beautifully typed reports, which he smuggled back in with his jacket. My mother told me years later that Dad’s agency instructor in D.C. commented on how miraculously his typing had improved.

Indonesia

When his agency training concluded, Wally was assigned to travel to Indonesia with another recruited jumper, **William “Bill” Wood** (MSO-43). Bill was to establish a parachute loft, and my dad was to organize jump and cargo training for the Indonesians. For whatever reason, the mission was canceled.

Formosa (Taiwan)

Wally returned to Montana with my mother briefly before the agency assigned him to work in Formosa in support of Chiang Kai-shek. My father traveled to Formosa before the end of ‘52, and my mother traveled with him a few months later.

Wally joined other agency-recruited smokejumpers on Formosa to train Nationalist Chinese agents how to jump and use radio equipment. The jumpers’ cover story for being on Formosa was that they were employees of Western Enterprises International (WEI), an import/export company.

WEI was a cover for many CIA employees working on Formosa and employed a handful of former smokejumpers. WEI carried out various covert



Taiwan Group (early 1950s). L-R: Marian Dobbins, Wally Dobbins (MSO-47), Jack Wall (MSO-48), Lyle Grenager (MSO-48), and Herman Ball (MSO-50). (Courtesy Pete Dobbins).

activities and was also the logistics arm for the agency's operations on the island.

When Wally arrived in Formosa, he was in charge of leasing residences/safe houses for agency personnel and supervised the agency's warehouse. The agency eventually leased about 200 homes and safe houses on Formosa. Most agency employees were allowed to bring their spouses and children to live with them, so my mother followed Wally to Formosa about six months after he had arrived on the island.

They both described the excellent living conditions; they had a cook, a driver, a gardener, and a nice residence. My dad didn't speak much about his involvement in activities outside of Formosa but did mention overflights into China to drop Nationalist agents, in which I think he participated.

He did describe an interesting method of inserting and recovering agents from China (this occurred after the agency ceased its overflights of the Chinese mainland).

The agency acquired junk fishing boats and modified the stern of the boats to accommodate Evinrude motors that could be dropped into the water through a panel just above the boat's waterline. During the day, the

junks would masquerade as fishing boats in the straits of Formosa, then at night drop their motors into the water and power to the shore of the mainland to drop off or recover Nationalist agents. In the morning, the junks would be once again fishing in the straits, with the communist Chinese none the wiser about what was going on. I believe Wally participated in some of these trips.

My father's other agency duties mostly kept him on Formosa. He consistently dealt with theft and graft among the Nationalist Chinese, which sometimes interfered with agency operations. Much of that involved Nationalist soldiers stealing supplies and equipment that the U.S. brought to Formosa to sell or barter on Formosa's black market.

My dad mentioned a time when Chiang Kai-shek rounded up islanders who were dealing items on the black market and transported them to a racetrack near Taipei, where they were executed. He said the islanders referred to this as "Black Thursday," the day of the executions.

Wally had a Nationalist Chinese Army colonel assigned him as an interpreter to help him with his duties around the island. He and the interpreter once

attended a basketball game in Taipei, where the Harlem Globetrotters played against the Nationalist Chinese basketball team. The Globetrotters displayed their usual gamesmanship during the first half of the game, embarrassing the Chinese team and angering the Chinese crowd.

During halftime, as the Globetrotters were leaving the court, a few spectators threw Coke bottles at them. Shortly afterward, an announcement was made in Chinese to the crowd. My father asked his interpreter what the announcer had said, and the colonel replied that anyone caught throwing bottles would be taken to the "racetrack."

While in Formosa, my father also worked with Civil Air Transport (CAT) personnel. As you probably know, CAT provided aircraft and crews for many CIA operations. Wally remained friends with some CAT pilots over the years, including Bob Rousselot and Connie Siegrist.

I met both Rousselot and Siegrist and was impressed with how subtle they were about their agency careers. Siegrist later flew for Intermountain Aviation.

My father's assignment in Formosa concluded in 1954, and he and my mother traveled back to Montana. My father took coaching jobs in Thompson Falls and Arlee and completed a master's degree in education administration at the University of Montana in 1958. My dad served as a smokejumper for a final season in 1957.

Guam

Wally returned to work for the agency in 1960 and was sent to Guam. His covert work there included recruiting Guamanians to work for the CIA and processing agency personnel for assignments in Asia.

He had previously completed a degree in physical education from the University of Montana and this would become part of his cover while working on the island. He obtained a job coaching track and working in the local middle school library.

Guam served as a staging point for some of the agency's personnel who were headed to assignments in the Far East. The agency would hold employees in Guam long enough to establish a cover identity and determine if they were being followed.

Wally generated new identities for these agency personnel and arranged their housing in Guam. My mother (and by now, their two sons) again accompanied my father overseas, and she worked for the commander of Guam Naval Base.

While living in Guam, my dad spent the summer of 1961 based out of Takhli, Thailand, working with the Hmong in Laos. My mother and two brothers remained in Guam. During this time, he mentioned staying at a camp in Laos to provide jump and explosives training to the Hmong.

He also worked out of Takhli, flying missions as a kicker in support of Hmong activities; some missions he flew included photographing the North Vietnamese movement into Laos. On one such mission, my dad said he was supposed to fly as the photographer but didn't because he was ill. He said the aircraft never returned, and the crew was reported killed.

On the humorous side of things, Wally liked to tell the story of how some of the agency's smokejumpers were housed with Air Force personnel in a two-story barracks at Takhli. When the jumpers moved in, they were told they would have to reside upstairs (where it was hot at night and hard to sleep). The jumpers relocated a few baby cobras from the jungle to the lower level of the barracks, prompting the Air Force personnel to demand to move upstairs.

Intermountain Aviation

Wally's work for the agency in Guam ended in 1962, and he traveled back to the U.S. to interview for a position at a college in California. My mother and brothers remained in Guam while my dad looked for employment. During this time, he was asked if he would be interested in relocating to Arizona to continue working for the CIA.

His work overseas had been as a contract employee, and one of Wally's conditions for returning to work for the agency was that they would have to hire him as a regular government employee, which they did. So, in the summer of '62, my dad and family moved to Marana Air Park – about 15 miles north of Tucson – where he started work for Intermountain Aviation. The agency had also looked at a location in Brownsville, Texas, to house Intermountain but chose Marana instead.

Marana Air Park, a World War II pilot training base, had been mostly closed since the conclusion of the war. My dad's initial duties at the base were to make the airpark's sewer, water, and power and the hangers, runway, housing, and restaurant operable. Our family and about six other families resided in Marana during this time. Intermountain eventually remodeled several barracks into apartments at the airpark and built approximately eight homes for Intermountain personnel to live in.

Once the airpark's infrastructure was usable, Wally shifted to supporting the Intermountain training program and deploying on temporary assignments.

My dad didn't speak much about activities in which he participated off-base, but I believe he spent time in South America, and I know he made at least one trip to Alaska – although I don't know why.

He did mention working on preparations for a rescue mission of a CIA pilot who had been captured in Laos. The plan was to use Intermountain B-17 and the Fulton Skyhook System to extract the pilot from a prison. Intermountain employees built a mockup of part of the prison at Marana and practiced a few extractions. The B-17 was then flown to the Philippines to stage for the rescue.

The intent was to bribe some of the pilot's captors to smuggle a Skyhook ground apparatus into the prison. The captured pilot would then set up the equipment and await a nighttime extraction from the B-17.

The mission was never carried out. I believe Wally said the pilot was moved from the prison shortly before the planned extraction, ending any chance of recovery.

Wally approached the Forest Service about establishing a training facility at Marana to help with the Intermountain cover story. I'm not sure what year the Forest Service set up training at Marana, which eventually developed into the National Advanced Resource Training Center (NARTC). I know the CIA rotated smokejumpers who were employed by the agency through Marana, using NARTC as a cover.

Intermountain activities centered on developing cargo and personnel delivery methods in support of agency operations worldwide. They also provided pilot training and aircraft modification to foreign countries.

Some of the developments that came out of Marana included attempts to land and take off a Pilatus Porter on floats from straw aircraft, the development of remote-controlled parachutes and remotely piloted cargo drop systems, and, of course, the development of the Skyhook

Intermountain also trained U.S. Military aviation units over the years. I remember a National Guard PBY air unit coming to Marana to train for low-level cargo drops. Wally said they would practice with Intermountain personnel at night in the desert surrounding Marana.

I recall when my older brothers and some of the other kids living at the airpark entered one of the PBYs parked on the ramp and got into some crates of guns

and grenades stored on the aircraft. I'm not sure what happened next, but my brothers and other kids stayed away from the flight line after that.

Intermountain was involved with activities in South America, although I heard very little about those operations. I remember my dad mentioning that the agency considered sending him to Africa, but the political environment there at the time was too volatile, so he never went. Intermountain had a supplemental-type certificate from the FAA to modify aircraft, and I remember hearing about how they modified their C-46s, DC-7s, and Pilatus Porters for low-level parachute delivery of personnel and cargo.

I also heard rumors over the years about Intermountain adding weapons systems to aircraft, but my father said, "he never heard about that."

Wally continued to manage Marana Air Park's facilities, provide training, and go out on agency assignments until he left the agency in 1970. One story he shared was how he participated in training Cuban helicopter pilots to drop personnel and cargo from helicopters on the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico.

Intermountain came up with a cover story that the Cubans were Mexican pilots from the Mexican Division of Forestry who were in the United States to learn mountain flying from Forest Service personnel. During the training, one of the Cubans hovered his helicopter over a prison near Santa Fe. Wally said a parade of law enforcement personnel quickly showed up at the airport, wanting to talk to the pilot.

For their cover, Wally donned a Forest Service uniform and told the story that the "Mexican" pilot had become disoriented and accidentally overflowed the prison. The authorities bought the story, and my dad said that the Intermountain folks and the Cubans packed up the operation and returned to Marana the next morning.

Intermountain ceased operations in 1973. At the time, the company was testing a remotely piloted Cessna 337, and on a flight, it flew beyond the control of ground personnel and crash-landed on a golf course in north Tucson.

Suspicion about the aircraft arose when firefighters and police who responded to the crash found no pilot. The publicity from this event and previous media stories that had emerged about Intermountain prompted the agency to pull the plug on the Marana operation.

Hoot Owl Biology and the US Government

by Dr. Bob Zybach (Associate)

IN CHARLES DARWIN'S 1859 *Origin of Species*, he describes "race" as members of the same species that typically develop different characteristics when separated geographically over time. Human races were the common focus and "scientific" discussions reflected the bigoted prejudices of that time.

In 1942 a German ornithologist, Ernst Mayr, defined animal species as "genetically distinct populations of individuals" capable of mating with one another and producing viable offspring.

These were the definitions my classmates and I were taught in public grade schools in the 1950s, and in public high schools and colleges in the 1960s.

When the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was adopted in 1973, 36 birds, 22 fish, 14 mammals, six reptiles, and six amphibians were initially listed: 84 animals in all, and each a distinct species. Today there are more than 1,770 designated ESA species listed as threatened or endangered in the US, and more than 635 foreign species: 2,400 total!

Of these totals, only 57 species that have been considered "recovered" and 11 considered "extinct" were delisted in the past 51 years. This is a success rate of less than 3%; and an average of listing more than 47 new ESA species a year, while removing only one. The cost to taxpayers can be measured in the billions or trillions of dollars, depending on accounting method.

The barred owl is the most common brown-eyed owl in North America and has been popularly known as a "hoot owl" for many generations. Sometime by the 1950s these birds began expanding their range into the Pacific Northwest and breeding with native spotted owls, producing viable young called "sparred owls."

The spotted owl had been listed by the ESA as endangered in 1990 and the supposed cause of its low population numbers was claimed to be logging. This determination resulted in dozens of successful



Bob Zybach (NSA file)

"environmental" lawsuits being filed from that time to the present with the specific focus of stopping the sale and harvesting of commercial timber, and particularly on public forestlands.

In 2007 US Fish & Wildlife hunters began systematically killing barred owls and sparred owls on an "experimental" basis. The sole purpose was to control the breeding process to maintain genetic purity. Only these were wild owls, not domestic plants or animals, and ethical concerns were raised immediately. And then ignored.

A little over 10 years ago I wrote about this problem in a lengthy article that I also posted to a national blog of (mostly) retired US Forest Service professionals for discussion. I then presented this perspective in two lectures to graduate students, staff, and professors at the College of Forestry and then the Department of Fish & Wildlife at Oregon State University.

These efforts resulted in some meaningful discussions in the public forums, but immediate and adversarial claims of being a racist during my university lectures. Which was my whole point.

I had used polar opposites of the human species—a Pygmy and a Swede—to compare their differences in physiology, vocalizations, diet, coloration, appearance, and preferred habitat with those of spotted owls and barred owls. I was challenging current scientific theory and government policies with documentation, but my work could be safely ignored because someone called me a name.

The cost to US society for the purpose of keeping these brown-eyed cousins from having sex has simply been too great for too many years. The massive economic damage from spotted owl lawsuits—almost entirely funded by taxpayers—is generally well recognized: tens of thousands of lost jobs in the forest industry and US

Forest Service; hundreds of sawmill closures; billions of dollars in lost revenues to the US Treasury, states, counties, and schools; and the resulting degradation of our rural communities, roads, parks, and services.

And, as predicted, millions of acres of so-called “spotted owl critical habitat” have gone up in flames, killing millions of wildlife and polluting the air with deadly smoke.

My thought remains that we need to stop playing God with hoot owls and let nature take its course. As Darwin pointed out, nature favors the “survival of the fittest,” and in this instance that seems to be sparred owls.

Gary “Gramps” Johnson The Early Years

by Kris Kristofors (Redding '64)

I ONLY KNEW **Gary Johnson** (RDD-69) by his nickname, “Gramps.” When the 1972 movie with Robert Redford came out about Jeremiah Johnson, many of the jumpers began referring to Gramps as Jeremiah Johnson, a rugged mountain man who lived in the Western Wilderness. I first met Gramps after I came back to jumping after two fire seasons on the Mendocino NF and a tour in Vietnam. Gramps came out of the Six Rivers area and either had or was completing his degree in forestry. Back then, the only avenue to higher positions with the USFS was entering the service as a Junior Forester (JF) and working one’s way up the ranks. Other degrees were not recognized. The problem was that the universities were putting out more graduates in forestry than there were JF positions to fill. This probably determined the career path for Gramps in fire management.

Gramps was a highly competitive person. I remember his constant competition with **Ed Smith** (RDD-68) and other jumpers on the morning run. I could never get the best of them. Ed left sometime afterward to work for the California Dept. of Forestry. We jumped many fires together, studied, and passed the FAA quiz to get our riggers licenses. **Dave Nani** (RDD-63) once told me he liked using me in initial attack situations, but that Gramps was better at overall fire management. I never discussed this with Gramps as it was an unneeded area for competition.

The early 1970s was an active time for the Redding Smokejumper Base, with regular jumpers and retreads coming in and out and the occasional jumper ground pounder. I remember flying into Palm Springs around midnight when the temperature was about 100 degrees.

The next morning, Gramps led us on a hike up the side of Mount San Jacinto to fight a fire near the top.

A couple of incidents come to mind. One season, we received a dispatch to Alaska to jump fires in the tundra. Gramps missed the trip as he was out of town. Those of us who went had an enjoyable experience. When we came back, we went to work with our Alaska T-shirts. That unleashed a barrage of cuss words from Gramps. He never forgave us for that display.

The second incident was the Redding Airport Rabbit Hunt. I awoke late one night in the barracks to the sounds of shootings and screeching tires near the runway. I don’t remember if Gramps was involved, but he certainly knew about it. **Jim Klump** (RDD-64) may have been the instigator. I remember **Dick Tracy** (MSO-53) being as mad as ever I saw him the next morning. I put the hungover crew through a heavy workout that morning. Klump weaseled out of the workout as he reported late to work.

After leaving the jumpers, I saw Gramps on several fires over the years, once at a fire camp in Pasadena and later on the Sequoia, where I worked my fire crew out of Kernville with jumpers who Gramps led. On another fire on the Shasta-T, I had the Hobart Hotshots. Gramps flew in with a big helicopter and broke out his shaving kit to get cleaned up. I told him we had a fire to fight and no time for shaving. He did not take my comment too kindly.

I last saw Gramps when we ran the Napa Valley Marathon in the early '80s. Gramps finished ahead of me. He went on to important fire management assignments in Redding, Redmond, and elsewhere. These are my recollections of my early days with Gramps.

My Dear Friend—Jan McLaren

by Dick Rath (Missoula '73)

IT WAS MIDAFTERNOON on September 23, 1976, when the siren went off. **Dick Shaw** (MSO-74) and I were on top of the jump list and soon boarded a DC-3 heading north out of Missoula. Our destination was the Spotted Bear Ranger District on the north end of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Our spotter was a close friend **Jan McLaren** (MSO-71). The flight went by quickly. The fire was located just south of Outfitter Roost near Slide Rock Mountain. Jan, a very able spotter, dropped us in a meadow just north of the fire. The fire was small, and the packout was one we both remembered.



Jan McLaren

This was my last fire jump, but not my last encounter with my friend Jan. In 1977, we both left the Smokejumper organization. Earlier, Jan passed the test as a CPA exam and began a career path that would take him from private industry back to a long career with the Forest Service.

Jan passed away last week (October 2024) after the parts of his body ganged up on him, and he drew his last breath. His passing brought back an avalanche of memories.

In the fall of 1973, Jan, **CR Holder** (MSO-70), my brother **Tom Rath** (MSO-71), and I took a fall detail to the Superior Ranger District on the Lolo NF. Our supervisor was a young forester named **Arnie Brosten** (MSO-66).

Jan was an avid bow hunter. Each evening, he would be looking for an elk. On one evening, Jan had bulged in a Bull, but his arrow had gone just over the Bull's back. As he recounted the story, we could tell he was just a good Elk hunter who did not always need to bring an animal home. Yes, he was a real sportsman.

In 1967, Jan joined the Marines and served in Vietnam. In 1968, he finished his service commitment

and returned to his family farm in Iowa working with his father. The following summer Jan found himself working as a seasonal for the Fortine Ranger District on the Kootenai. One of the highlights of that summer was the time he spent as the last lookout on Stahl Peak along the Canadian border.

After the Aerial Fire Depot (AFD), Jan's career with the USFS included assignment to the Beaverhead/Deer Lodge. During his time on the Beaverhead/Deer Lodge, he accepted a short detail back to the AFD. I believe it was 1986, a long, protracted fire season in R-1. Later, he told me that he had made some fire

jumps but realized how much he had aged and was glad to go back home. After that, Jan took an assignment to Gresham, Oregon, for the Willamette NF and the USFS Albuquerque Resource Center.

Jan, Cheri, and the Boys moved back to Missoula. Jan was one of the budget analyses for the Region, a position that he was mighty good at. One of his colleagues recently told me that Jan would not break any rules, which gained him great respect within the Region.

While he was in the Regional Office and I happened to have business there, I often stopped by his desk, and the two of us would have lunch together. At these lunches, he was always interested in what was happening in the Fire Management world. At these times, I could tell that he missed the world of wildland fire and those close relationships that he had made at the AFD.

Jan is survived by his devoted wife Cheri and three sons, David, John, Grayson, and Gavin. Jan was a devoted father, a loving husband, and, from my end, a very dear friend. Rest in Peace, My Friend

Treasures in the Cargo Chute Bin

by Tony Pastro (Fairbanks '77)

FOR THE LAST THREE SUMMERS, I have helped at the Fairbanks jump base by repairing and rigging cargo chutes. It's good work. Now that my only job is cargo chutes, I can pay more attention to the canopies I am working with. Some real treasures have turned up, as well as many reminders of people and events from the past.

It starts with nosebag art. Jumpers, bored waiting for the demob helicopter or sitting in the rain at McGrath, would pull out a sharpie and doodle on the white canvas container of a nosebag cargo chute, a nice medium for graffiti and words of wisdom. Sometimes specific events were memorialized—like when a load of particularly hungover jumpers was sent out early in the morning after the big flip the night before. Or the picture commemorating the Pig Party with two suited-up jumpers carrying a pig between them on a pole. Mainly, philosophical jumpers would record thoughts that came to them in the middle of the Alaskan wilderness. “On the sixth day, God created man, and then man returned the favor.” One jumper would put his signature dog head profile on containers, his version of “Kilroy Was Here.”

Repairs on these old canopies can be interesting. When large paracargo operations were in full swing, getting damaged cargo chutes back on the shelf was often more important than a pretty patch. Sail tape patches were the norm, but masking tape worked just fine in a pinch. One masking tape patch discovered in 2022 was dated 1988 with the initials D.M. Over 30 years of service and more than likely done by **Dave “Waldo” Mellin** (RAC-66). Another patch, more recent and conventional, was signed by **Ron Lund** (FBX-64) along with the words, “Remember, any dummy can be a dumb ass—in order to be a smart ass, you first have to be smart and to be a wise-ass, you actually have to be wise.”



Tony Pastro

Other finds are the canopies themselves. The stamp panels on the oldest canopies show the variety of manufacturers making parachutes during the war, when our country was the arsenal of democracy: National Automotive Fibers, Inc., Fashion Frock, Inc., etc.

Most of the cargo chutes in Alaska are former personnel parachutes, most of them from the military, but many are old smokejumper parachutes. Old FS-10s and

FS-5As are common. During the last couple of years, FS-1s and FS-2s have been identified. This season, an example of each was found in pretty good condition, although the tails have been cut off the FS-2.

Military 28-footers built to the same specifications as the canopies that our paratroopers jumped at Normandy, in Holland, and on the Rhine show up occasionally. Perhaps this type of parachute was converted with Derry slots for the CPS smokejumpers during the war. The oldest canopy found so far is a 28-foot flat circular built in 1931 by Switlic for an army contract. With over 90 years of service, the taxpayers have gotten their money's worth out of that one!



Pig Party

The loft has retired these oldest canopies. They have a personal interest for many of us and perhaps even historical value. What might be done with them has not been decided, but it would certainly be fun to have them available for young jumpers to inspect and old farts to see again at reunions—a piece of our history that can be seen and touched. It makes me wonder what other old smokejumper gear might be out there at other bases or in someone's garage.

Link to more photographs on Google Photo:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1HJjrNY7Ez2xRuD2A>

Link to documents relating to old mains on Google Drive:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1grrsyH2SZ51Lg11b_ETA5kvZHkT9-Lf3/view?usp=sharing



Clem Pope Brings Experience and Dedication to Oregon Clinic and Community

by Chaela Carlson

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT **Clem Pope** (GAC-03) is an outstanding member of Oakridge, the Oregon community he calls home. But he can't be stuck with a single label. Pope is a man with an extensive background in many diverse areas. Currently, he works at the Orchid Health Clinic as a Physician Assistant and is the board chair of the Oakridge School District's school board.

At 19, Pope began working as a firefighter for the Moose Creek Ranger District in the Nez Perce N.F. He later joined a hotshot crew.

"My dad worked for the Forest Service, so a lot of my summers were spent living at backcountry guard stations," Pope explained. He got much of his sense of adventure from his father and growing up around firefighters.

In 2003, Clem began smokejumping in Grangeville, ID. "I was in Grangeville until 2008, spending summers there and most winters in the Air Guard," says Pope.

In 2004, Pope met his wife, **Sarah** (MSO-01), while training together in Missoula, MT. They began dating in 2006 after working together as smokejumpers in Silver City, NM. They were married two years later. Sarah Altimus Pope grew up in Oakridge where her family still has its roots.

While working for the Forest Service, Pope received training as a paramedic. Pope got his first experience with major emergencies, dealing with everything from car accidents to parachuting mishaps, as well as people drinking contaminated water.

Most winters, he served in the Air National Guard, from 2005 to 2011. During this time, he earned his pilot's license and served in a Tactical Air Control Party unit.

A Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) is a group of specially trained Air Force Special Warfare airmen who call in air strikes and direct firepower during combat.

"It was our job to direct close air support to support frontline Army units," Pope states.

From mid-2009 to mid-2010, he was deployed into combat in Iraq. It was during this time that he was awarded an Army Commendation Medal for meritorious service in integrating close air support with ground combat operations.

Many of Pope's missions were to improve security by stopping weapons from moving in and out of Iraq. In addition to working security, his unit was also involved in projects like building schools and a hospital.

After leaving the Air National Guard, Pope and his wife and children settled in Oakridge, where he began working for a short time as a paramedic.

"As a paramedic, I saw the need for more primary care services, especially in rural areas, so people didn't have to go to the hospital or urgent care as much," Pope explained.

With that philosophy in mind, he went back to college, receiving his Bachelor of Science degree from Oregon State University and his Master of Physician Assistant Studies from Oregon Health & Science University in 2020.

Oakridge is one of the top ten places in Oregon that have unmet healthcare needs, inspiring two business students from the University of Oregon to open the Orchid Health Clinic in 2014 as their Oregon Social Business Challenge healthcare project.

Pope began working as a Physician Assistant at Orchid Health Clinic in Oakridge a little over two-

and-a-half years ago after working in the emergency department at Mercy Medical Center in Roseburg, OR.

"In school, part of my focus was rural medicine, and I knew I wanted to work in a rural area," says Pope. "I chose Oakridge because of everything the community and area has to offer. It has been a good place to raise our kids, and we are close to the mountains and rivers where we like to play. I also have other opportunities, like being able to serve on the school board, that are harder in a bigger town."

These days, his wife, Sarah, is the Executive Director of the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative in Oakridge. She is also a lawyer and does some law work doing mostly estate planning.

Together they have three children, ages 20, 16, and 9. He and his family love to ski, camp, hike, ride bikes, go on hunting trips, and travel. Pope says simply, "We like to be outside."

Pondering on his life's work, Pope explains, "I have also been trying to think of specific stories of why I have

gone the direction I have. I don't really have any one or two good stories. I think I have ended up where I have because of many of the experiences I have had. When you're making decisions that affect someone else's life and their family, [it] gives you the bigger picture."

A theme in all his work is that he's always part of a team.

"I didn't get to where I'm at on my own. I had lots of help from others, so it's important for me to give back in the same way," Pope says.

One of his biggest values is community service. That is what has led him to Oakridge and his life's work.

Pope considers himself "loyal, calm, and adventurous," and his life certainly proves his self-assessment. The Oakridge community greatly values his contributions to improving its residents' health and quality of life.

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This article originally appeared online in the Highway 58 Herald on November 13, 2024.

Track and Field Organization Honors Bob Hooper (Cave Junction '67)

TRACK & FIELD, the national body overseeing the sport of track and field. The meeting took place December 5-8 in Orlando.

Hooper, who has served as a certified USATF official for nearly three decades, received the National Officials Committee 2024 Chair Award, traditionally given in recognition of outstanding effort and achievement over the past year. The large plaque he received commends his "tremendous support toward the USATF National Officials Committee and all their various programs."

Hooper was told the honor was also related to his actions aboard a flight bound for Denver last April.

Bob had just officiated at the Rocky Mountain Annual Athletic Conference Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Grand Junction, Colorado. About 15 minutes into the flight, he reports, crew informed passengers of a medical emergency onboard. When no doctors came forward, Hooper—an Army-trained



Bob Hooper

nurse and physician's assistant—volunteered to help. At the scene, he found a young man in extreme distress—sweating profusely, unable to speak, and having trouble breathing.

"I did what my training taught me for shock," Hooper relates. "I was able to stabilize the young man and get a history. Meanwhile, the pilot radioed [the airport in Denver] for medical assistance upon landing. A medical team

[boarded] the plane after landing in Denver."

Hooper learned afterwards that the man was a combat medic who'd engaged in active duty.

Hooper is also the recipient of the 2024 George Newton Special Recognition Award for Track, bestowed upon him earlier this year by USATF Pacific, USATF's West Coast association. According to the USATF Pacific website, the George Newton award "is primarily for achievement in the area of Track event officiating."

An Old Jumper Reminisces

NCSB 1957-1989

by Bill Moody (NCSB '57)

"Da ya remember those World War II rats—lima beans, pound cake and Lucky Strike cigarettes, yah, and those fish net dinners we had in the '70s.

I remember jumping a 28 on a hot day, boy, did I smoke in. Before the D-bag, if I had bad position, I ended up with abrasions on my clavicle and a sore neck—on a calm morning you could hear those 28s open at the Bear Creek training jump spot four miles away."

When getting together with old jumper friends the conversation quickly gravitates to "the good ole days—remember when ... " A bit of embellishment made the story a tad bit better, and perhaps, a bit more unbelievable.

After a recent "old jumper conversation" I sat down and began to reminisce about jumping in the 50s and 80s—and all that changed—crew composition, hiring and firing practices, jump related equipment, parachutes, fire packs, aircraft, fire suppression operations, pay and other aspects of the program. I assume that you also experienced significant program changes during your career.

Each decade of the jump program saw significant changes, and the program continues to change. This piece spans the mid '50s through the 1989, a period that saw significant program changes. For the most part, these were "the good ole days."



The Jumpers: Who They Were

THE WW II AND KOREAN WAR vets, and the CPS jumpers of the late '40s and early '50s were gradually replaced by more college bound rookies putting themselves through four years of college—jump four years, get a degree and get "a real job." Recruits in the '50s-'60s were often seasoned farm boys with one or two seasons of fire experience—but they were hard workers with practical woods and mechanical equipment skills.



Bill Moody (NCSB 57)

In the '70s there was a transition to recruits with extensive fire experience, many with college degrees. Jumper tenure was much longer, facilitated by ending of the draft in 1973 and longer term WAE appointments. After the fire season some worked on projects taking advantage of jumper climbing or prescribed burning skills—some hunting, skiing and worldly travels.

Francis B. Lufkin (NCSB-40): Francis was the Aerial Project Officer (APO) of the

Okanogan Aerial Project, renamed North Cascades Smokejumper Base in 1967. The APO pretty much had control of the hiring and firing. Francis gained fame as one of the original 1939 experimental pioneers, a man bred during the 1920-30s Great Depression. Both feared, and admired, his expectations were high. Francis had an uncanny ability "to size up his jumpers." If you didn't measure up, or if you screwed up "you could be sent down the road "kicking horse turds." If you were "salvageable" you were given another chance to prove your worth.

Francis often counseled a wayward jumper, using the analogy of a bad bear. "When you have a bad bear in camp it is sometimes necessary to shoot it to get rid of it." Or as he "counseled" rookie Gino after a night of partying: "Gino, you're spittin in the wind." Gino survived, his partner in crime, with previous offenses, didn't. No HR in those days!

Jumper Salary

The 1957 pay for the GS-5 rookie was \$1.79/hr. with overtime paid at the same rate. On days off, if there was a T-storm in progress, and anticipating "jumper fires," we were expected to standby without pay. Once a jumper request was made, we went on "pay status," at straight pay.

By the time messhall and bunkhouse deductions were calculated you might clear \$2,500 for the fire season. The prestige of being a smokejumper, the experiences you had and the guys you worked with primed you for another season.

Thanks to efforts by the Missoula jumper's union in the late '60s, time and a half was initiated along with Hazard Pay, Sunday Differential, and other employee benefits. The age 40 policy restriction was lifted, and jumpers could jump until mandatory retirement, providing they could pass the PT test adopted in 1969.

Standard attire in the '50s was either Levi or Frisco jeans, tagged! If the jumper did not tag his new pants, the crew would do the honors for him. The work shirt was a standard long sleeved work shirt. Whites were the jump boot of choice. You broke them in by wading in the irrigation ditch running through the base and wearing the boots all day or until they felt dry.

PPE: By the mid 1960s the orange fire resistant shirt was standard. A yellow shirt, more distinguishable from fire flames, soon replaced the orange shirt. Fiberglass hard hats replaced metal hard hats. By the early '70s the Frisco/Levi jeans were replaced with standard fire Nomex pants. Thus, introduction of the smokejumper "black leg syndrome." The 3.5-pound fire shelter was adopted as a standard "must carry."

Jump Training

Rookie training was 4-4.5 weeks, with seven training jumps. Refresher training was usually 3-5 days with two refresher jumps. After a couple of weeks without a fire jump, we got a refresher jump. Throughout the season we did PT twice a day, including running the 1.5 mile around the airport in our Whites. By the '70s running shoes were permitted.

THE TORTURE RACK: Its value was questionable. Some old timers attribute their "back problems" to the torture rack. By 1970, the torture rack was gone without anyone coming to its defense.

Jumper Related Gear

The Jump Suit: In 1960 the 1950s cotton canvas fabric jump suit was replaced with nylon fabric with high density foam padding. After a few years the combustibility of the nylon suit was recognized and its use terminated. Nomex, and later Kevlar, materials replaced nylon.

Jump Helmets: In the late '50s and early '60s we had a mix of old classic leather football and plastic football

helmets. By the 70s the Bell motorcycle type helmet replaced the football helmets.

Jumper Communications: The yellow signal streamers, later dayglo pink, were the primary communications with the jumper or observation aircraft and forest headquarters. Radios were at a premium. The 5-Watt and 10-Watt radios weighed several pounds and were dropped on a 10-12 ft. chute—more weight and bulk to packout. The radio's channel was the Forest's primary channel or an Air Net frequency. The compact 9600 Channel King personal portable radio introduced in the '70s greatly improved the communications between the jumper, jump plane, and forest headquarters. The signal streamer continued to be a secondary means of communications—you still put out an "L" to indicate a safe landing.

The Fire Pack

The Fire Pack and Chainsaws: The basic contents of the fire pack, hand tools and subsistence items, except for food, changed little from the '50s to '80s. The primary jumper tools were the Pulaski and fire shovel.

In the 1950s, chainsaws were a luxury tool with only two chainsaws in our inventory in 1957. The standard "falling tool" was still the Pulaski or cross-cut saw. Gradually, each year, we added more chainsaws. By the mid 70s we had a chainsaw for every jumper.

From the WW II "C-rats," consisting of Lima Beans, SPAM, a small fruit pound cake and a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes, the fire pack food gradually improved. We experimented with different innovative food packs. Through the years we were introduced to post 1958 "upgraded" rations, the "fishnet" breakfasts and dinners, requiring boiling, Vietnam era MREs, and different freeze-dry foods.

Climbing Gear

Multi-purpose Gear: During the '50s and '60s the climbing gear consisted of a length of rope cut from the letdown rope, the main parachute tray belt with D-rings, and a tree branch. The section of letdown rope, depending on the circumference of the tree, was tied to the D-ring on the tray belt. A slim smooth tree branch was inserted into the tubular nylon jump rope and the end of the rope was attached to the other D-ring on the tray belt. The inserted branch formed a rigid semi-hoop and would serve to advance the rope up on the backside of the tree. This innovative use of jump rope, tray belt and a branch did not instill much confidence in the tree climbing operation. The standard "professional

climbing equipment” introduced in the 70s greatly improved our confidence tree climbing.

Parachutes—Before the D-bag and AIN

Pre-D-bag Era: The chutes were the Derry slotted FS-2 candy striped (or white) 28-footer, or for the heavy weights, the 32-foot FS-5A canopy. The canopy was accordion folded on the tray and covered with a bungee cover. The apex of the chute was attached to the end of the static line with a 120 lb. break-cord. The deployment sequence resulted in relatively hard opening shock. Poor body position, on your side, or head down position, would result in harness burns on the clavicles, occasional loss of helmet, riser or shroud line neck abrasions, and one hell of a sore neck. On one occasion, on a fire jump the opening knocked the jumper out for about 60 seconds, waking just before impact.

Line-overs were common, and there was an occasional perfect “May West.” By 1962 the D-bag was adopted and by 1965 the 28-footer was phased out. The D-bag greatly reduced both the opening shock and malfunctions. In about 1978 the addition of the AIN (anti inversion netting) almost completely eliminated malfunctions.

Remembering Those 28s: I remember those 28s for two reasons—the hard openings and hard landings. At 180 lbs., on a hot day, on the Unity District of the Wallowa-Whitman, I numbed the bottom of my feet and popped the shoelaces on my Whites.

The Toggle Guideline: In the early ’70s the two guidelines attached to the rear riser were shortened. Wooden toggles were added to the end of the guideline. A small pouch on the riser stowed the toggle until opening. The toggle allowed for better guideline access and control of maneuvering during the descent.

The FS-10 and FS-12 Chutes: In 1970, we began the transition from the Derry slotted 28s and 32s to the parabolic FS-10 (T-10) with deployment bag. AIN was added in 1977. Modelled after the Soviet Forester smokejumper chute design, in 1980 the Forest Service adopted the 32-foot multi-porosity steerable FS-12 with a deployment bag.

Aircraft

From Recips to Turbines: The Noorduyn—that old 600 horsepower beast could be heard 30 plus miles away, lumbering along at 138 mph. The jump door was on the right side. In 1957, NCSB’s primary jump plane was a Noorduyn Norseman with a “back up” contract

Twin Beech, contracted primarily for the La Grande spike operations.

In 1958, NCSB upgraded to a USFS Twin Beech. On June 23, 1958, N164Z crashed on 8 Mile Ridge, killing the pilot **Bob Cavanaugh**, supervisory smokejumper **Keith Hendrickson** (NCSB-47), and jumpers **Gerald Helmer** (NCSB-53) and **Robert Carlman** (NCSB-57) a jump qualified forester.

Eventually, NCSB upgraded to a Forest Service DC-3, N168Z. In the ’70s, a Beech 99A replaced the Twin Beech. An Aero Commander “general utility” backup platform was used at NCSB in the ’70s and ’80s. In the 1980s NCSB had a contract Beech 99A and later, contract Twin Otters.

Fire Operations

Aggressive initial attack began with Lufkin’s 7-minute “wheels up” policy. The suit-up procedure was speeded up when **Titus (Bill) Nelson** (NCSB-66) developed a “speed rack” with pre-connected gear—simply slip-in to the gear mounted on the rack, attach the three harness straps, secure the reserve, and proceed to the spotter checkout.

During periods of moderate and high fire danger the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests employed an “automatic jumper dispatch” policy. As soon as a fire was reported jumpers were launched. The program was successful but abandoned when the newer fire staffing guidelines were adopted. Jumper patrols were standard operations after lightning storms and during periods of high fire danger. When NCSB flew Forest Service aircraft it was standard practice to “fly off” the daily two-hour Working Capital Fund time on evening standby.

1970 Fire Season

NCSB Record Year: 1970 was almost a continuous fire bust with endless mini and mega lightning storms from early June to late September. For a 10-day period NCSB exceeded Spokane International in terms of takeoffs and landings—325 daily. During the July bust 176 jumpers worked out of NCSB. It was a 24-hour operation, serving over 800 meals a day out of the messhall. We ended the season with 1066 jumps on 212 fires out of NCSB and 213 jumps on 64 fires out of our satellite base at La Grande.

Aggressive Fire Containment

Quick Containment Objective: Once on the ground the standard game plan was to fight the fire aggressively until achieving containment, sometimes

doing an “all-nighter,” taking advantage of the cooler temperatures and higher relative humidity. The aggressive initial attack containment objective resulted in preventing “jumper fires” from becoming major incidents—a novel concept!

Packing Out The Gear

From Packboards to Packout Bags: The standard jumper pack in the 1950s, early '60s, was a WWII military pack board, two seamless Bemis grain sacks to stuff your gear in, and innertube rubber bands to secure the Bemis sacks on to the backboard. Later, from Lufkin's military surplus source, we modified military canvas bags (the Elephant Bag) by adding shoulder straps. By the '80s, we manufactured well designed packout bags from lighter materials, with adjustable load straps.

Program Survival

Predictions of Phase Out: With increased helicopter use and the introduction of helitack and helijumpers in the '50s, and rappelling in the '70s, the question was, and continues to be, what's the future of the jump program? Rumor had it that helitack would take over, and jumpers would be obsolete in the late 60s. With the introduction of rappelling in 1973 a similar prediction was made, and the jump program days were numbered.

NCSB Base Studies: NCSB has been the victim of a half dozen plus studies to determine if it should remain a permanent base, a seasonal base, or an occasionally used spike base. After a national base study in 1978, the national and regional office targeted NCSB to become a Region 6 satellite or spike base.

In the early '80s, the Regional Office all but terminated the NCSB program.

Stripped of Chutes and Sewing Machines: NCSB could no longer rig chutes or manufacture jump related equipment at NCSB. All the sewing machines were transferred to Redmond, except for a couple we “rat holed.” After chutes were jumped, they had to be sent to Redmond for repacking and repairs.

NCSB Staffing: In 1981, staffing was reduced to 11 jumpers, counting the Base Manager. With support from the Forest Supervisor, NCSB implemented a “mini-retread program,” adding six call when needed jumpers, five of which were ex-NCSB jumpers working on the Okanogan and Gifford Pinchot National Forests. The sixth, was an ex-jumper working locally. The six “retreads” averaged five fire jumps while the “regulars” averaged 10.4 fire jumps. In 1982 four “blue

chip,” fully qualified volunteers (paid for training and when assigned to a fire) were added to the crew. They were great jumpers and became “regulars” when NCSB permanent base status was reinstated.

RAC Spike Base at Wenatchee: The Region set up a spike jumper operation out of Wenatchee, 65 airline miles from NCSB. Jumper dispatches for fires in the North Cascades, even within sight of NCSB, were dispatched from Wenatchee. Okanogan Dispatch dispatched NCSB to some “Okanogan fires.”

Saved From Extinction: During this dark period Forest Supervisor **Bill McLaughlin** (MSO-58), along with Washington senators, representatives, state and local politicians rallied on NCSB's behalf to maintain NCSB as a permanent base. Supported by a comprehensive 1984 Region 6 smokejumper program study, headed up by **Ken Snell** (MSO-67) Region 6 Fire Management, the decision was made to maintain NCSB as a permanent base with 21 jump personnel. Parachutes, along with “rigging privileges” and sewing machines were returned and normal operations resumed.

NCSB's Future: The 2015 base study appeared to support keeping NCSB as a permanent base with upgraded facilities and 30 jumpers. As of this writing there has been no progress on upgrading the facilities. What does the future hold for NCSB, and for the national smokejumper program?

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Bill jumped at NCSB 1957-89 and was Base Manager 1972-89.

Still Looking for Your Biography

The response has been good for bio requests. 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:** Extra information—go for it!

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

A Soft Landing

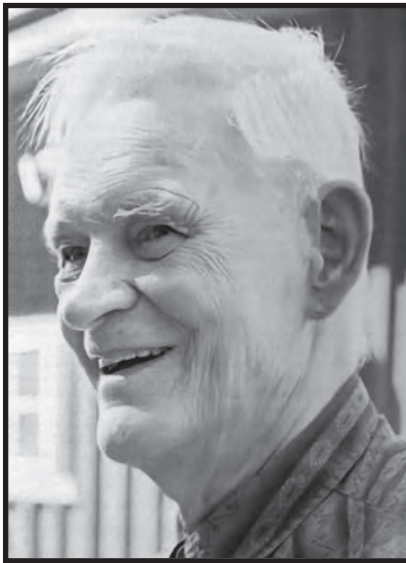
by Alan Weltzien (Professor of English Emeritus, University of Montana Western)

FRANK FOWLER HAD PASSED his 92nd birthday (May 5, 2024) hunched over, left hand cradling his forehead, trying to dull the pain in his gut. Hard to celebrate a birthday for a hitherto extremely active man increasingly debilitated by COPD and other nuisances. He'd wanted to die for many seasons, but I kept telling him, "You are too fit, Frank." I'd remind him, "Your body isn't ready to let you go." Frank had been tethered to his portable oxygen line for years which snaked between his bedroom, living room, and kitchen. Sometimes they'd inevitably get caught and pinched on a corner. He often stepped on the line, disliked the encumbrance and his dependency.

He'd played basketball at the college gym until age 80. He had a gym key for years and routinely opened the place at 6:00 a.m., arriving before anyone else. The guys didn't press him hard on defense and he didn't play full-court press. According to Ron Loge—close mutual friend and our former doctor—in Frank's offensive strategy, he'd stand unnoticed along the three-point perimeter, take a pass, then swish it using his 1950s-style, two-handed shot. Most of the others were half his age.

Frank, a widower for four-and-a-half years, had adjusted to solitude and quiet, but he repeated a refrain, "I just want to hold her hand and walk into the sunset." His quiet wife, Alicejane, had died of congestive heart failure. He described his COPD as a slippery slope, not steep but relentless. He gasped more stertorously walking from his bedroom to his living room chair, or from the chair to the kitchen and back, wheezing and waiting for breath. I waited for his labor to quiet. This felt like a particularly cruel punishment for a former smokejumper and Forest Service ranger who's logged hundreds of miles in the woods over many decades.

How to summarize or define a life well lived but perhaps lived too long? How describe those steep



Frank Fowler
(courtesy A. Weltzien)

seasons of silence, with infrequent social interruption, for a garrulous man?

A week after his birthday, during our Sunday afternoon visit—our old dog, an Aussie shepherd tricolor named Sadie, and I visited Frank at least once a week for several years—Frank acted subdued, wracked by pain in his stomach. He'd started down the road of macular degeneration, occasionally getting a shot in Butte to stave it off. He also suffered from your usual old man problems with urination as well as chronic diarrhea and wore adult Depends. He told me, "Check out these products before you need them. Some work better

than others."

One indignity after another. He'd say, "If I could just get control of one problem, but another jumps in. I just can't get clear of all this. I'm sick of it all." Like many in extreme old age, he was sick of being sick. And sick of talking about his problems even as he couldn't avoid doing so. Frank talked about lots of things, but he circled back to his aches and pains. And he'd talk about dying and criticize our stereotypical avoidance of such talk.

That gnaw in his stomach seemed the final betrayal. Always rail thin, he could no longer enjoy eating. When I closed his front door that afternoon, an uneasy feeling gnawed me. I knew Frank should not be by himself. His daughter and son-in-law, Jody and Ed, checked in regularly but weren't in Dillon that weekend. And Ron Loge, friend of over forty years, was in Salt Lake City getting his semi-monthly apheresis treatment for his ongoing heart condition.

My phone rang about 7:55 a.m. the following morning (May 13th). Frank could barely talk. I asked, "Do you want me to come over now?" then answered my own question, hopping in our old truck. Once I settled in the rocking chair a few feet away from Frank, where I usually sat during our visits, he mumbled, "I need a quarterback." Always a lousy athlete, I avoided

high school football though I was a stocky, not to say, overweight big kid. But I grabbed the metaphor, speaking loudly and clearly. It was time, or past time, for Frank to receive palliative care. I called Ron to review best options in our rural town. He said, "Get him to Barrett Hospital. He'll get what he needs there." Ron later told me he called Frank's doctor, Sandra MacIntyre, as well as his daughter (my current doctor), Anna Loge, so Barrett's was prepared for his check-in.

I escorted Frank to our old '86 Mazda B2000. He fingered his older smokejumper cap, then took the newer one off the rack, and munched a banana during our quick ride—his last food, it turns out. He spoke little, shading his brow with his left hand. I knew where this ride would take us, yet I didn't quite know.

The youngest of a large brood, raised in Washington DC, at age 18 Frank scraped some money together and rode all the way to Missoula, MT, for college. He already knew he wanted admission in its famed College of Forestry: he knew he wanted to work in the woods.

During his undergraduate years in the early 1950s, Frank also became a smokejumper. The first summer he jumped (1952), he was 20 and the smokejumpers were only 13 years old and, more importantly, the disastrous Mann Gulch Fire had burned only three years earlier. As a young recruit, Frank was subject to the new safety rules. He jumped twenty-eight times over two years, primarily, and never forgot details.

Turns out his mother kept every letter he sent home, and eventually these letters inspired Frank to write and publish the first of his two books, *High Mountain Two-manner: A Montana Smokejumper Recalls Hitting the Oil and the Books in His College Years* (2006). After finishing his Bachelor's degree and before entering the Forest Service, Frank was drafted and spent most of his two-year Army stint (1955-57) in the South and in Germany. Frank possessed an acute memory, which enabled him to write and publish a second memoir, *Relative Humility* (2009). This memoir details his satiric strategy for coping with sundry stupidities and indignities characteristic, in his view, of the post-Korean War peacetime Army.

Besides basketball, Frank liked to cut and split wood, pick huckleberries, garden, sing, do genealogical research. And write. He did the work of revision and shared drafts with me, among others. Frank stayed active in the Smokejumper Association, occasionally contributing short pieces (his final short essay, a recollection of a survey pack trip in the Powell Ranger

District in the Idaho Panhandle in 1963, was published months before his death). He eagerly shared with me some of the responses he'd received after the launch of *High Mountain Two-Manner*, which was warmly received. Clearly, Frank spoke for many mid-century smokejumpers.

His sharp memory recalled specific jumps from his smokejumper seasons. I loved the details of terrain. His hands still touched his old ripcords and chute. He told me about steering, rolling, avoiding standing trees and snags above all. "I was lucky most of the time. I'd drop and roll, get my feet, start rolling up the chute. Tuck and roll." He never bruised an arm, sprained an ankle. Some fellow jumpers were less lucky, dangling 40' up from a limb or two, or landing on an outcropping, wincing from a fracture. He remembered some terrible landings. The ideal landing, of course, is soft. The hard work begins after packing your chute. And ultimately, the long trek out to a road.

A gregarious man generous with his time, Frank's face could assume an impish cast, perhaps aided by his ski-jump nose and jug ears. He used to chuckle about the latter, telling me—concluding his genealogical research into the Fowler clan—"You can tell us by our ears." His easy grin widened as he erupted in one of his telltale laughs.

He'd quit smoking decades ago, but his lungs bore the scars. In his early 50s, he was diagnosed with COPD and two decades later, his nose remained tethered to a long, slinky oxygen line. Frank was adept at transferring his house line to a small portable tank and line secured in a rucksack. He never gave up his drivers license.

At 71, he skied into Upper Miner Lake with Ron Loge and another friend for an overnight winter camp, puffing but intrepid, his oxygen line coiled around his face. As the disease progressed, particularly after his wife's death, Frank worried about what would happen when the time comes. His former doctor and close friend, Ron Loge, assured him, "You'll have a soft landing, Frank. You don't need to worry about that. We'll take care of you."

Frank's end rests upon a chance quarterback who's never parachuted.

We pull up to the emergency entrance and I escort Frank inside as he's registered. Though not a family member, I'm allowed inside and sit in the curtained off cubicle as he settles into the hospital bed. This conversation feels strained, different from those I'd had with him for decades and particularly, during his last years alone. We're a long ways from his living room.

Frank's wife, an introvert, would greet me at the front door of their split-level house, her left hand on the railing, when I knocked. A soft-voiced cellist, she and I exchanged pleasantries for a minute or two, then she retreated upstairs, and I descended the half dozen steps to Frank's domain. A big wood-burning stove squats just right of the television, and he'd watch whatever ball games were aired. If it were after October, he'd have that stove purring and waves of heat pummeled me. I'd quickly shed a layer or two.

Immediately outside that wall, Frank had built a large, fenced bin for split wood, and a trap door and gravity enabled an easy, constant supply. He fed that bin from a rented woodlot just outside town. A couple of times, I accompanied Frank and helped him fell and split and load his trailer. He was always careful in loading and weighting that trailer and securing the load. I never felt too old to learn details from him. For years, Frank sawed and stacked firewood for friends too infirm or unable to do so.

After Alicejane's death, Frank moved upstairs, so I ascended rather than descended steps to visit, usually calling out my greetings before coming into view. I got in the habit of calling before driving or walking to his house, as he preferred a warning. That gave him time to unlock the front door and recover from his breathlessness in his easy chair. After a few months, instead of leaving our dog in my old truck, I figured out it would do Frank good to pet her, so our visits included Sadie, who eagerly nosed Frank's hands because he had a half dozen dog treats locked within his grip. Frank laughed at her as her wet nose furrowed his hands, sniffing noisily.

We all know what petting a dog's soft coat does, never mind the dog. Frank, like many, wasn't touched much, except by Jody. Occasionally I'd gently clap him on the shoulder.

Sooner or later, Frank said, "Are you thirsty? Let's get a beer." He kept a supply of Coors cans in his refrigerator, and I'd pop a top, pour half in a glass for him, and keep the other half for me. I'd sworn off such lightweight beer decades ago, yet that half Coors with Frank always tasted good. I tried not to guzzle. Jody later told me, Frank often said, "Make sure there's Coors in the refrigerator. Alan is coming over."

Years ago, I learned to quiet myself in our talks and grant him the lead. I'd try and follow wherever he led. We'd talk politics sometimes, and though I usually avoid talking politics with anyone because I get too angry too fast, I'd roll with Frank. He was a lifelong Methodist

and a lifelong Democrat, and age hadn't softened his opinions. Given the sorry state of U.S. politics in the past decade and more, Frank shook his head. He'd say, "Democrats don't know how to fight back against the crazies. They need to kick hard," and I knew it wasn't entirely metaphor.

He harbored dark views about the near future of our political institutions and parties. I was reminded of Mark Twain's *On The Damned Human Race*. Hard to disagree with him.

More often I walked with him down a trail of reminiscences. Frank, a master huckleberry picker, knew many treasured spots in Montana's Cabinet Mountains. Ron says, "to really know Frank, you had to pick berries with him." On one occasion Frank showed me a pair of small basket-scoops he'd designed, to rake in berries faster. In a good rhythm with his scooper, he'd grunt, "hunh, hunh" loudly and rhythmically, according to Ron. When in a good patch with huckleberries the size of cranberries, he'd shout "Big red, big red!" Maybe that warned off foraging bears.

I always regret never going huckleberry picking with a master. I can still taste his thin huckleberry roll-ups, dried in his dehydrator.

Sometimes that trail took us back to specific backpacking trips we'd shared. My first few years in southwest Montana, I was obsessed with Norman Maclean's two books, particularly *Young Men and Fire*. (1992) Frank indulged me but provided a corrective voice, at times, relying upon his own smokejumping experience as well as his friendship with the late **Robert (Bob) Sallee**, one of the three Mann Gulch Fire smokejumpers to have survived the inferno (Frank spoke at Sallee's funeral).

We took a one-way backpack trip in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area, starting at Refrigerator Canyon, camping at Bear Prairie high up, then descending the length of Meriwether Canyon to the Missouri, catching the Gates tour boat back to Hilger Landing, where we'd left a vehicle. Meriwether Canyon is one canyon south of the much shorter Mann Gulch, and I've walked over into the Gulch from there.

Maclean's "other" novella, *USFS 1919: The Ranger, The Cook, and a Hole in the Sky* (1976), spoke personally to Frank, as Elk Summit, Idaho was part of the Powell Ranger District, where he'd been posted 1963-69. He fondly reminisced about those Powell years, during which winding Highway 12 was finally paved. His sharp memory made me hear horses, gaze over outbuildings and gear, smell the woods. My skin sensed the chill they held away from against summer sun.

In this novella the arrogant and naive protagonist (“Mac”), based on Maclean himself, defies all odds and walks east 28 miles in one day, from Elk Summit, ID to Hamilton, MT, just beyond the wide V of Blodgett Canyon’s mouth. So, we backpacked the length of Blodgett Canyon, longest in Montana’s Bitterroots, to Blodgett Lake where alpine larch, one of my favorite trees, fringes the lake. That’s at least 14 trail miles. The next morning, we side hiked up to Blodgett Pass where Frank found an old USFS trail marker he carried out. We pretended to follow headstrong Mac, walking the second half of his epic hike though, contrary to him, we drank plenty of water. Back in Hamilton we found a place that serves ice cream sodas like the dehydrated Mac, but with less harmful consequences.

Frank and I also backpacked into Torrey Lake, in the heart of Montana’s East Pioneers Mountains, closer to our Dillon home. Frank was in his early 70s during these trips. I think about that now, as I, a young septuagenarian, continue to backpack, following his lead and walking uphill in old age. He’s a role model, and he still loved getting out there in western Montana backcountry.

Frank often taught me, whether intentionally or not. An ardent backpacker and peak bagger and conservationist, I’d spout off about what’s needed in Montana’s national forests regarding more designated wilderness areas. A professional forester and sometime timber cruiser, he corrected my views with ground-level expertise. Frank was certainly on board with maximizing recreational uses of the forests. A silviculturist, he lived through—and beyond—the agency’s philosophy of maximizing the cut, advocating always for balanced uses including wilderness preservation. He narrated stories of some Forest Service politics at the district ranger level. He passed up opportunities for promotion to maintain his independence. He wasn’t about to kiss ass to scramble up a ladder.

We used to ski and day hike together. Frank would pull out a bag of elk jerky or huckleberry strips and I never refused. He used to hunt antelope and elk every autumn and dehydrated thin flakes of meat, thinner than what you buy in the store. Less work for your jaws. I still taste his jerky.

After working at Powell, Frank spent a few years at the Flathead N. F., during which time he played a central role in laying out the trail system in the Jewel Basin—as popular a hiking destination as any in the Flathead. He showed me folders of newspaper clippings: “I spoke

at more public meetings than you can imagine. It got really hard and tiring, trying to find the compromises that advanced what I thought best.”

Frank served on Dillon’s tree board for years, often in the form of volunteer labor. After we planted four Patmore Ash trees on our curb strip, he advised me about limbing up the trunk to foster higher growth and a shapelier canopy. I followed his advice.

In warm months, he drove the town’s Eastside streets slowly in his white pickup and, if I was working in our gardens, he’d slow to a stop, and we’d talk. He’d ask, “how are the sprinklers running? Have you needed to replace any of those Rainbirds yet?”

Frank had developed a reputation as a sprinkler system installer, having taken care of the Methodist Church’s system and the residences of several friends year in and year out. At least twenty years ago, after my wife and I decided we needed a system, he took on the job, repeatedly walking our yard and devising a plan that includes nine stations distributed between two boxes. He drew color maps of the arcs of each sprinkler which remain taped on a wall next to our controls. Plenty of overlap. I gophered and we dug and spliced at every intersection, once the lines had been buried.

He taught me how to adjust and replace heads as necessary, what to check for when turning the system on in May, how to blow out the lines in October. He wouldn’t accept a cent for his two weeks’ work, only charging us for materials and itemizing costs to the penny.

There was a time, as Alicejane’s heart condition grew worse, when I failed to knock on their door regularly, as if I were too busy. Shame piled up, then I wrote him an apology and re-entered his weekly life.

Frank, possessed of a natural tenor voice, had married a cellist and loved classical music, particularly chamber music. He and Alicejane attended Dillon Community Concert Association concerts, as well as the Summer Music Festival series at St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church (Georgetown Lake, MT), for decades. During one season, Frank lead fundraising efforts to repair and restore UMW’s Steinway, and became personal friends with performers like pianist Frederick Chiu, as well as jazz singer, Jeni Fleming. Sometimes he tired of being what he thought a minority voice or taste.

He sang in the college’s choir, which included community members. Frank’s speaking voice revealed his tenor range. He used to rehearse at home, studying his part until he had it nailed. He sang tenor in a quartet

based at the Methodist Church for years, deriving great joy from that.

In that temporary ER admission room, when Dr. MacIntyre appeared—I've known her and her husband for years—she kindly asked me to step away for a few minutes. When I re-appeared, Frank grinned, which he hadn't done for weeks. The doctor had authorized some morphine that quickly cut the stomach pain and prepared him for dying.

We had talked about his death for many seasons, and he wanted to be gone. So, I knew what was coming yet does a friend ever know until it's happening? Always emotional, tears pool in my eyes as Frank's face brightens. He's happy because death arrives soon. He rides in a gurney to the elevator and one flight up, to a hospital room on the west side, as I tag along. I call Jody and Ed, who hurry on their way. I also call **Bill Kolar** (GAC-59), Frank's close Forest Service buddy and fellow smokejumper who's been a widower for longer than Frank, and who Frank had helped steady for years before Frank joined the widower club. And I call Ron again, my voice quavering and rising as I cry. His wife, Charlene, calls me back in a while. Frank had been an unofficial member of the Loge family for forty years, and they had supported him through thick and thin.

Frank's brighter eyes remind me of his robust satiric sense and his laugh. He wore his smile easily and often. You have friends, I hope, whose laugh invites you in like Frank's did. It stayed fairly high in his voice and beat quickly, steadily, ("he he he he he he") then he'd inhale a bit and keep going. Even as his breathing grew muddier and he gasped, he'd still laugh, his eyes squinting at you, and you couldn't help but follow suit, ride along his laugh. Even in his final weeks, one absurdity after another tickled his fancy and he'd let loose. I loved his laughter and loved joining with my lower pitch. When Frank laughed, you drew closer. Isn't it always that way?

Even in his 80s and early 90s, a child occasionally emerged from inside. He harbored a prankish, puckish side that saw him through his Army stint and Forest Service career where things didn't always shake out as he wanted. Frank kept this glee, evident in his laugh, that even his old body couldn't entirely hide.

But no one is laughing in this sunny hospital room, mid-morning on a Monday. When Bill Kolar arrives in the room, he asks, "Well Frank, are you ready for your last jump?" Dr. MacIntyre briefly appears, clutches Frank's right shoulder, comforts with a few words, kisses him on the forehead. In the 11:00 hour four of us

are gathered around his hospital bed. Jody stays above Frank's right shoulder, her hand stroking his face. She puts calls through to her son and daughter so they can say goodbye to their Grandpa. Hard to listen. At one point she doffs his smokejumper cap, carefully combs his white hair into a small wave in front. She gently removes his breathing tube from his nostrils, says "You don't need this anymore, Dad." Ed stands or sits behind her. I stand above Frank's left shoulder opposite Jody, my hand gentling his shoulder. Later Bill mutters "shit," "damn" under his breath. What can any of us say during the minutes of dying?

I try and control my tears and Frank, by noon, breathes increasingly shallowly, his body at rest. He keeps his eyes on me and I'm holding one of his hands, Jody the other. Gradually his windows close. He keeps looking at me, his novice quarterback, as his eye slits close. Now he's walked into that sunset he pictured since Alicejane's death, and maybe he feels her hand in welcome. It's 12:08 but the nurse will register his time of death as two minutes later. Jody places his smokejumper cap on his chest. Frank landed softly on the ground after all.

After a few minutes we gather ourselves, clear our voices, wipe our faces, descend the stairs, exit to our vehicles, try to come back to regular life. I drive home in the old truck, shattered by the speed of Frank's death after the, for him, interminable seasons of waiting and weakening. I hug my wife, younger son and daughter-in-law, who are visiting from out-of-state, and lurch back into the quotidian. How do we jump from end of life back into life? From a friend's dying to lunch or next week or current anxieties and joys?

It feels strange to no longer park in front of his house, our old Sadie dog bounding to the front door. But when I close my eyes, I hear his laughter echoing across recent decades. You modeled a good final jump, Frank. I miss you.

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O. Alan Weltzien, a retired English professor in southwestern Montana, has published five chapbooks and eleven books. These include a memoir, A Father and an Island, and three full-length poetry collections, most recently On The Beach: Poems 2016-2021. He has another poetry chapbook and prose chapbook being published now. Weltzien still scrambles peaks in summer and skies in winter, and he and his wife, Lynn, travel extensively.

From Burnout to Balance

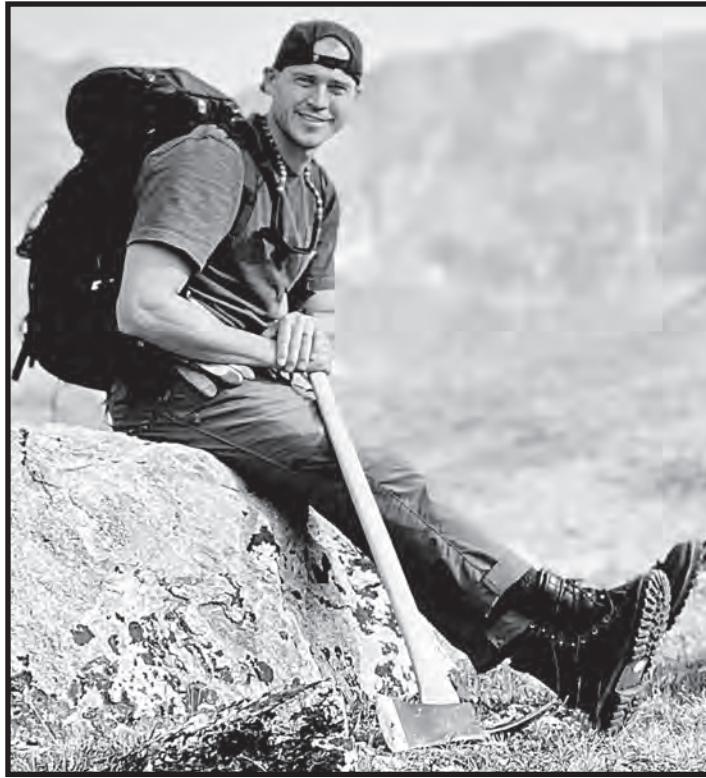
A 24-Year Firefighter's Insights on Mental Health, Addiction, and Community

by Matt Mahe (Missoula '05)

I WORK AS A SMOKEJUMPER in Missoula, Montana. While I am a smokejumper, that title sometimes feels limiting, because there are so many more aspects to my life. From a professional standpoint, I am a firefighter and have been so for 24 years. I have worked in numerous aspects of fire, including an engine crew, hotshot crew, helitack/rappel crew, and as a smokejumper. I have been fortunate to have other experiences in fire as well. I have worked as a Regional Coordinator (Crew Desk, Assistant Aircraft Desk, Assistant Equipment Desk) and as an IA dispatcher.

I recently had the chance to participate in a Leadership Program within the Forest Service called the "Roundtable" program. The Roundtable consists of several staff rides, exercises, and discussions based on leadership, culture, and most importantly self-development. As part of that program, we analyze various events, with the help of instructors from both the Forest Service and the Military. It is a program meant to challenge individuals to lean into the difficult truths of what it means to be an authentic leader.

As I sought to participate in this program, I looked hard at some common issues in the fire community and want to share my perspective on them. These issues are difficult to discuss but have a deep impact on our community. My experience has given me a broad perspective



Matt Mahe (*courtesy M. Mahe*)

on fire allowing me to understand similarities and subtle differences between all the various positions and roles within the fire community. As part of that perspective, I have come to understand common challenges for firefighters and am aware of the self-defeating cultural constructs that are devastating to individuals and to the fire community as a whole.

If I have learned anything over the course of my career, it is that people are

people. You meet the same folks in a dispatch center as you do on any fireline. As humans, we all think that we are special and unique and, while that is true in certain respects, it is untrue in others. We are all the same and we all share the same common goal. We all work hard and do our best, and we give whatever we can give to the team and to the mission.

I have learned that the most important thing in fire is to take care of your people. Recently, I also learned that individuals need to make sure that they are putting themselves first, too. This is a newer concept to me. Up until recently, I have always thought that the team and the mission came first. However, I have learned that, without the individual, the team and mission will fail. There is also a misconception that to put oneself first is a weakness and selfish. I have been humbled in learning that putting oneself first is not a weakness or selfish, but necessary to be strong enough to give all you can to the

team. You can't offer others much help, at least not in a sustainable manner, if you haven't worked through your own problems first.

I would like to offer the fire community my story as a firefighter and the lessons that I have learned throughout my career. I am very grateful and lucky to work for the Forest Service. It has been a place where I have found value and purpose, but I recognize that there are also many blind spots.

Within the fire community, I believe there is a lack of recognition regarding the importance of mental health and community, as well as a minimization of the destructive nature of unrecognized issues of addiction and alcohol use. There is also a misconception within fire culture that it is a weakness to recognize and to act regarding your own mental health.

There is no doubt that there is a strong community that is present on a crew during fire season. However, we grow and strengthen our community by emphasizing to crewmembers the importance of building their own communities and support structures outside of the fire season. Humans need people around them to maintain healthy connections at different levels throughout their lifetime. It doesn't matter whether you are an introvert or not. People need positive relationships at appropriate levels that match their personality traits.

When it comes to alcohol, I have seen it used to build crew bonds and to recover from stress after long assignments. It is used as a tool to speed up the "reset process." It also gives people permission to talk on deeper emotional levels, without judgment. Example "I love You Man" conversations. I realize you can't cure deep rooted societal issues all at once, but what we can do is to ask the question to individuals. Do you rely on drinking too much? Do you rely on drinking to feel like yourself? Does drinking affect your sleep? Does drinking affect your relationships? Has your drinking increased over time or is it slowing down? I think these questions are important to pose to our people, as we try and tackle larger issues such as mental health.

I believe mental health is at the core of many issues we have in our culture, as it is viewed as a sign of weakness. In reality, it takes the strongest people to ask for help when they need it. In my own experience, I happened to get help because I was running out of options. During the summer of 2023, I was diagnosed with ADHD and depression. These were things I thought only happened to other people, not to me. Getting help was the best thing I could have ever done. I am 44 years old and am

in the best shape of my life, body mind, and soul now that I have confronted my mental health.

Part of my mental health journey has been to address my addiction issues. I chose to quit drinking almost four years ago. I know that for some there is a time and place for drinking. And I know it creates strong bonds with people who find it difficult to express themselves or share emotional thoughts with buddies unless they are "buzzed." I also know that drinking allows a person to decompress rapidly before they are off to the next fire assignment, which is very effective when the only word you know is "Go." However, I have also realized the destructive nature of drinking and the toll it takes on relationships and the ability to process emotions.

I have found that working through mental health challenges and addiction issues in healthy ways makes it easier to create emotional bonds, allowing for deeper relationships. Additionally, there are many healthier methods to decompress, including meditation, working out, eating healthy, music, books, breath work, consistent sleep, etc. These are learned skills and can be a challenge for people to seek and/or share.

When it comes to building communities in the off season, I believe it has improved my overall health. Recognizing the importance of community and striving to make positive contact with people and things I care about has created a deeper sense of meaning and helps me feel more connected.

I believe that addressing the combination of all three issue—mental health, community, and addiction—can have many benefits across our fire community. These issues have increased the suicide rates in our fire community, as well as depression rates, divorce rates, and overall burnout. I also think these things impact our community in ways we have not even fully recognized. On their own, these things are very harmful to an individual's life and, built up upon one another, these things have the potential to create dangerous situations for other people, and for the fire community.

I feel compelled to keep sharing this with other people, because it was a very powerful realization for my own life. It allowed me to be able to start living the life that I wanted to live. Talking about these issues can have untold benefits down the line. We each have the opportunity to invoke real change for ourselves and the fire community. The answers may be different for each of us, but we are the only ones that can find them for ourselves. And we can only find those answers if we ask the hard questions.

Feedback

- **Demand for wood products by United States:** According to the World Bank, the US imports over \$40 billion in wood products from Canada, China, and Brazil.

- **Use of Fire Boss Aircraft (SEATS) for Quick I.A.:** Washington State used 10 during 2024 season. Idaho used four. State agencies are concerned about quick Initial Attack on wildfires.

- **Tim Sheehy**, founder and CEO of aerial firefighting company, Bridger Aerospace, has accused wildland firefighters of dragging their feet to put out blazes and “milking” fires for overtime pay. “There’s a very real dynamic in wildfire that a lot of those people don’t want to put the fire out,” he said at the event, according to a recording obtained by *HuffPost*. “It’s called ‘let it burn.’”

- Today (10/31), **Randy Erwin, National President of the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE)** issued the following statement: “Sheehy’s comments are not only unfounded and disrespectful of wildland firefighters across the country, but they also show a severe lack of understanding of the essential

and dangerous work these brave men and women do to defend our country from devastating fires, especially communities in Montana.”

- A team of researchers from the **USC Viterbi of School of Engineering** have tested several wildfire suppressants, estimating in a paper in *Environmental Science and Technology Letters*, that these materials have released approximately 850,000 pounds of toxic metals into the environment in the Western United States from 2009-2021.

Previously, researchers in the field found increased concentrations of heavy metals in the local waterways following wildfires. The new paper by the researchers at USC Viterbi, might explain why. The USC research team believes this to be the first paper to quantify environmental metal toxicity from fire suppression products.

Materials used to address wildfires including fire retardants, water enhancers and foams, all have to be approved by the U.S. Forest Service.

NSA Members lunch at Jim Klumps, Forbestown, CA (Oct. 2024)



L-R: Murry Taylor (RDD-65), Jim Klump (RDD-64), Don Will (ex-Mendocino Hotshot Sup), Chuck Sheley (CJ-59), Larry Boggs (RDD-63), Gary Glotfelty (ex-Hotshot sup), and Bill Bowles (RDD-57).

American Professor in Thailand Preserves the History of Laos and the Secret War Through Videos

by Marc Yablonka (courtesy *Hmong Daily News*)

The following article is reprinted with permission from the *Hmong Daily News* (11/1/24) and written by Marc Yablonka. Dr. Paul Carter has done some excellent work that would be of interest to readers of this magazine. Go to YouTube and see: “Smokejumpers: CIA Clandestine Weapon in Americas Secret Wars.” Paul has also done videos on **Lee Gossett’s** (RDD-57) work as a pilot in the Secret War and **Gene Hamner’s** (MSO-67) work as a pilot in USAF Ravens operation. The reprint is shorten to fit page space. (Ed.)



Paul Carter in front of a North Vietnamese Army tunnel at Phou Keng, Laos, site of vicious fighting between Thai soldiers and NVA. (Courtesy Paul Carter)

Like many who travel to the region and are completely engulfed by its history, people, physicality, and more, Carter is no exception.

He was once giving a lecture at the Siam Society in Bangkok, and Dr. Lia Genovese, who has conducted groundbreaking academic research on the Plain of Jars in Laos, introduced him by saying, “We wonder if Dr. Carter found the topic, or the topic found him.”

His many videos concerning the secret war have required Carter to travel back and forth frequently from his home in

PROFESSOR PAUL T. CARTER, US Army veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and former analyst with Defense Intelligence Agency, is today a world away from his recent military past, seeking to preserve the history of Laos and its connection to what he termed “the Second Indochina War.” He has transported himself from the “Sandbox” to the jungles of Laos 50 years after the conflict there ended and has produced a series of extremely informative videos for his YouTube channel.

How the professor arrived at Laos as the subject of his endeavors is a fascinating story in its own right.

“In 2014, after 10 years at the DIA, I moved to Thailand to pursue Masters and Doctorate degrees at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Because all I had known my entire professional life was military affairs, I naturally gravitated towards the Second Indochina War in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia as a subject to study. I fell in socially with retired CIA, military, State Department, Air America, and USAID professionals who participated in the Second Indochina War,” Carter told the *Hmong Daily News*.

Chiang Mai, Thailand in pursuit of his video projects. As such, he is keenly aware not to ruffle any feathers.

“I’ve traveled to Laos approaching 30 times as a tourist, and I stay under the radar, going on my own free will and talking to no one of authority. I do nothing any other tourist would not do, travel and take pictures. As a former intelligence analyst, I learned that weather and terrain shape battles more than any other factors. So being on location provides me insights that I otherwise would not have.”

And his work covers practically every facet of the secret war. Two of the videos from Carter’s YouTube channel, *Vang Pao: The Untold Stories* and *General Vang Pao’s Victory at Skyline Ridge*, help viewers understand why the General is revered in the Hmong community to this day.

Carter told the *Hmong Daily News* why he holds the late General and the Hmong in very high regard:

“In Post-World War II Laos, there was no fence-sitting. One either had to take a stand or be bulldozed over.” Carter said, noting that today, Laos is on the verge of economic collapse.

“Ultimately, Vang Pao got many of his people to the most prosperous nation on earth, and while I know the Hmong in America have had a tough time, as any immigrant population would, they have succeeded and made America greater than it was.” He added, “I have no doubt Vang Pao would have made a fine officer in any military in the [free] world.” Carter’s admiration for Vang Pao extends to all Hmong.

“The Hmong are smart, driven people wherever they live. As your readers well know, the Hmong in Southeast Asia are treated as second-class citizens, so they don’t independently have a voice, identity, or speak out. They are just part of the population trying to integrate as seamlessly as possible,” Carter believes.

“My greatest interaction is with Hmong in the US, and there are some great Hmong who are leaders in preserving Hmong history. I rely upon them as sources and to fact-check my data. None of my videos publish without independent review,” Carter stated.

Carter’s historical videography of Laos extends beyond coverage of the indigenous personnel, to Americans who served there during the secret war. CIA agents, USAID volunteers, pilots and ground crews who flew for the noted Air America and CASI (**Lee Gossett**) (Continental Air Service, Inc.), are the subjects of his videos. As is an equally special group of US Air Force pilots known as Ravens.

The Ravens (**Gene Hamner**) were a volunteer squadron of FAC’s (Forward Air Controllers) USAF pilots, all of whom had flown in Vietnam. Their job was to scout the terrain looking for Viet Cong cadres and matériel. Then directing the jets and bombers above the coordinates whereby rockets and bombs could be unleashed upon the enemy below.

Another of Carter’s video projects concerns perhaps one of the most colorful aviators in the history of the First Indochina War: American James B. McGovern, more famously known as “Earthquake McGoon”

McGoon, was a World War II pilot in the Pacific with several shoot downs. After the war, HE began flying for CAT (Civil Air Transport— forerunner to Air America). He was a legend in Asia due to his personality and flying exploits. At one point, he was captured by the communists in China and later released. CAT was actively flying dangerous resupply

missions for the French over Dien Bien Phu, a series of fortresses in North Vietnam, which turned out to be the last stand for French Indochina.

One of Carter’s most fascinating videos—*The Constellation: War Hotel*—concerns a Vientiane hotel which flourished during the secret war in Laos.

“Few people know about this phenomenon called ‘War Hotels.’ When a country is in armed conflict, one hotel in the capital city for some strange reason serves as what journalists have dubbed ‘the War Hotel.’ It is the location where the journalists, war profiteers, spies, diplomats, mercenaries, pilots, and others congregate to drink, stay, and shake the menace of war,” Carter said.

In the process of researching for the video, Carter found more info on the hotels in the writings of other journalists and others. “The Constellation was such a hotel of intrigue; the famous British novelist John le Carré used it as a setting for his novel *The Honourable Schoolboy*.”

Today, Professor Paul T. Carter carries out two honorable missions. He mentors graduate students who are working on theses and dissertations on the Second Indochina War at two Thai universities and one in London. And he teaches the world through his videos how the secret war in Laos unfolded so many years ago.

“I have no goal other than to tell the best stories in the best way that I can, improving upon my storytelling craft. One blessing of having this channel is that people come out of the woodwork from all over the world to contact me with stories, leads, and as sources of information. The more my channel grows, the more opportunities I find.”



Carter on the Ho Chi Minh Trail with a remote villager. (Courtesy Paul Carter)

A CPS Smokejumper's Seven Training Jumps

81 Years Ago in Smokejumper History

by Gregg Phifer (Missoula '44)

During World War II, many objected to taking human life, even in war. Alternative service was an option for these men, referred to as Conscientious Objectors. The jobs were not easy and often were dangerous. These alternatives took place under the Civilian Public Service (CPS) Program. Smokejumping was one of the CPS service alternatives, and the stories of these pioneers are all part of the history of Smokejumping. The CPS-103 Smokejumper Unit existed three seasons, 1943-45. (Ed.)



*"T'ain't the pilot nor the spotter but
it's me, oh Lord"*

A WIRE CABLE RAN just above the open door of the Johnson Flying Service's Ford Tri-Motor. I stood in the door, holding the cable in a death grip, and chewed hard on my Wrigley's gum as I stared at the light brown panels curving above the door. I gave a less than reassuring glance at my securely locked static line and sensed, rather than saw, Nashville's **Harry Burks** (MSO-43) kneeling in the door with one foot on the step. Spotter **Karl Schmidt** (MSO-44) had his head out the window; his left hand "wigwagging" directions to the pilot.

Suddenly the motors cut, and Karl slapped Harry on the left shoulder. For an instant, the door gaped wide in Harry's departure. A fraction of a second later, my foot touched the step, and I hopped off into space. I had no sense of either time or falling before a giant hand seized me by the shoulders. "I did it," I said to myself as



Gregg Phifer 1945 and 1999

(Photos courtesy G. Phifer)

I looked down at the fields below, while simultaneously feeling jubilant and weak.

I waited a long time for that first jump. It was over a year since I talked with three aspiring smokejumpers leaving Buck Creek Camp (CPS-19) for Seeley Lake, deep in the Montana wilderness. It was nearly six months since I filled out my application and told Wes Huss, director of CPS-37 in Coleville, California, that smokejumping was my special service ambition for the summer of '44. It

was almost two months since I first introduced myself at Regional Fire Control in the Federal Building in Missoula.

I began jumper training with **Jack Heintzelman's** (CJ-43) second unit of "B" squad. Unfortunately, on my third day of training, I severely bruised my right shoulder while practicing the prescribed landing roll. My shoulder was not ready for jumping the following Monday, so Jack pushed me off to "C" squad. With it healing slowly, I soon dropped off "C" squad and onto "D" squad.

"D" squad completed the Selective Service/USFS quota for CPS smokejumpers, and it came as a lifesaver for **Charles Chapman** (MSO-44) and me. Chuck hurt his ankle on the third of seven jumps and so he too was worked into "D" squad. After a week's ground training, we expected to jump the following Monday, June 26. I did not sleep well Sunday night and made many jumps in my dreams, with varying success and difficulty. On Monday morning we learned that we would be delayed so that men injured in earlier training could complete

their seven training jumps with us. On Tuesday it rained, and we studied first aid in the morning and spent a miserable afternoon cutting and splitting firewood.

Wednesday morning dawned, and it was wet and gloomy. A heavy layer of mist blanketed the landing field some four miles from camp. We knew there could be no morning jumps, and no previous squad had jumped in the afternoon. At lunchtime, we sat down to a bountiful meal of chicken and gravy, complete with chocolate pie for dessert. I had loaded my plate with second helpings of chicken and gravy when **Jim Waite** (MSO-40) stood up and rapped his cup for attention. "After lunch, "D" squad will go to the loft, collect their equipment, and we'll go to the airport to see how it is." Strangely, my appetite vanished. We had heard many stories about airsickness, and I had seen its results; on his first jump **Tex Weldy** (MYC-44) lost his breakfast immediately upon landing. As we left the dining hall, Harry Burks helped soothe our feelings by dropping his index finger swiftly to the tune of a mounting "E-e-e-e-e! You're going to have company," he continued. "Even old, corroded Burks is going to jump."

At the airfield we emptied our seamless sacks containing our jumping equipment on the ground: backpack and emergency chutes, retrieving equipment, yellow streamers, and the other impedimenta of the smokejumper business. I was to be in the last group of jumpers.

While we waited for our plane, "D" squad paused for a group picture, with squad leader Karl Schmidt clicking cameras for many squad members. Suddenly we heard a roar and almost immediately a big plane zoomed over the ridge at our back, banked sharply on its left wing, reversed just beyond the far end of the field and came in to land.

While the first group suited up, those in "D" squad who had never been in a plane before (or perhaps had had only a short ride long ago) went up for an introduction to our new means of transportation to fires. I sat on the floor toward the front of the plane, fascinated. I could not say that I really enjoyed the ride. Below us drifted the bright green of hayfield and meadow, the dark green of the forest, the thin brown ribbon of dirt road. As the plane banked, I spotted the buildings of Nine Mile Camp turning rapidly on an axis of which I was the center. On all sides new peaks jutted above surrounding hills.

The first jumping unit of "old men" and a few "D" squad men boarded the plane. Almost fearing to learn my number, I looked over Karl's shoulder and learned

that I was to be the second man out in the last load. **Jim Jackson** (MSO-44) spotted all the loads except ours. Karl helped us suit up and put on our chutes. Our load would carry only four jumpers, just half the Tri-Motor's capacity. Two men jumped at a pass, so Harry Burks would ride the step, and I'd follow him out the door. Chuck Chapman jumped third and **Herb Crocker** (MSO-43) fourth.

We boarded and scooted forward on the plane's bench seats for takeoff, then slid back along the cushioned bench as the nose of the plane tilted upward and we became airborne. The apparently lumbering Tri-Motor climbed with surprising speed. Burks smiled encouragingly and, as we circled for altitude, pointed out landmarks on the ground. He looked casually through the gaping doorway, calmly inspecting pygmy barns, roads, haystacks. I didn't want to look down and only half heard Harry's chatter. Perhaps he sensed my condition—he should have, since only a year earlier he had made his first jump. Anyway, he kidded me, asking whether I had my patented nose-scratcher handy. His nose itched and he couldn't reach it through the close mesh of his mask. "Do you know where your emergency chute's handle is? You won't have to use it, of course, but you should remember."

After a wide circle to gain altitude, we made a target run for Karl to throw out a drift chute to test both wind direction and altitude. The chute, like jumpers, fell about a thousand feet a minute. Karl inspected our harness and chutes, lifting the emergency chute to be sure all harness buckles were securely snapped, then motioned for us to hook up. Harry stepped forward, snapped his static line over the wire cable, carefully placed his right foot on the step just outside and below the door, and knelt on his left knee. I stood behind him, locked my static line over the cable and stood staring at the paneling above the door. Karl's palm dropped, the motors cut, and he slapped Harry's shoulder. Out he went and I stepped off into space a moment later.

There was no time for thought or sensation. On that first jump, I could no more have yelled than I could have climbed back into the plane. Afraid? Every jumper is consciously convinced before making his first training jump that chances of any injury are small and serious injury is remote. Perhaps the most difficult problem is the fear of being afraid and freezing, being unable to take that first step. Part of our training was designed to make that step out of the plane automatic.

After the first relief of the comforting tug on my shoulders, I should have looked up to inspect my chute,

as I did on later jumps, especially fire jumps. But I forgot and I looked down and all seemed strange. Fields and houses and haystacks and wooded hills formed no recognizable pattern. I pulled down hard on my left guideline. Nothing happened, so I pulled harder. Finally, my chute came around but I still saw nothing familiar. Where had they jumped us? In the next county?

Finally, I recognized the long rectangular pattern of our landing field. To the right stood the white tent with our stakeside truck close by. Quickly I turned toward them, pulling hard on my right guideline. Then I spotted a cluster of men two hundred yards down the field. Too late! I was too low to even turn around. I saw a fence ahead but could tell that I would fall safely short of it. Suddenly I hit, banging forward on my face, flat and hard. Nothing of a roll on jump one! Hardly breath of air stirred as my chute gently collapsed. I stood up, fumbled off my gloves and unbuckled my helmet. As I unsnapped my harness buckles, I could see a solitary figure jogging my way. I had removed my backboard when Jim Jackson came up to chain the lines of my parachute. He stuffed my chute in a retrieving bag and carried it back to the truck. My first jump was history. I knew then what veterans meant when they said that the time one feels most like jumping again is just after landing successfully.

On the trip back to camp, Harry Burks patted me on the back. “Do you realize it? You’re a Smokejumper!” “Not so fast,” I remonstrated. “You made this first one for me. I just followed you blindly out the plane.” We didn’t know when we would jump next. Preceding squads had alternated jumps with fire training. Arriving back at camp, we learned the good news from an office fink.

The end of the USFS fiscal year left a credit balance for our parachute unit. To spend money as rapidly as possible, Missoula’s waffle bottoms decided that we would jump daily. I slept well Wednesday night with no jumps in my sleep.

On Thursday morning we loaded our jumping equipment and left for the airport in our stakeside truck. Karl Schmidt led morning calisthenics. As the plane came in to land, we dressed in our padded canvas jacket and pants, abdominal brace, harness, helmet with face mask, gloves, our regular and emergency chutes, and inserted the let-down ropes and streamers in the rope pocket of our pants.

Several 1943 jumpers had refresher jumps with us, and they begged Jim Waite to let the plane go higher than the usual 2,000 feet so that they would have more

time to maneuver their chutes. Watching the first two loads jump, I could see that they were higher than the day before, but vertical distances are deceptive, and I could not guess how much higher.

Once in the air at jumping height, I could tell that ground landmarks were smaller than before. With five jumpers ahead of me, I sat on the floor, chewed gum, and watched Schmidt throw out his drift chute. Finally, he signaled the first stick of three to hook up, then sent them out the Tri-Motor’s door. We moved back along the narrow bench while Karl pulled in the static lines with backpack covers attached, unhooked them, and stuffed them in the plane’s rear compartment.

Karl then checked our harness and signaled with a wave of his hand for us to hook up. **Roy Anderson** (MSO-44), an ex-Marine discharged for stomach ulcers, knelt in the door. Behind him stood **Leland Miller** (MSO-44), a General Conference Mennonite from Belton, pool shark, and highest “salaried” CPS Smoke Jumper - \$5 a month from the Forest Service and \$10 from his local church. I stood behind them and a little to the side, my static line securely locked on the cable above the door. Again, the signals from the spotter, the drop of his arm, the cutting of the motors, the slap on Anderson’s shoulder, and out he went, followed quickly by Miller. Mechanically I moved forward, put my right foot on the step and left the plane. Again, I felt the welcome tug on my shoulder and again I forgot to check my chute. Because of a crosswind, Jim Waite warned us to hold back above the ridge facing away from our spot.

Five hundred feet up I realized that I would not make the field. Two hundred feet up I planed hard but still headed for my first tree landing. One moment I skimmed treetops; the next I crashed through small reproduction and hit the ground beside a small tree. I glanced thankfully at a large rock two yards away, and then did a double take. Only a few yards away, Anderson was getting up. Soon, earlier jumpers hurried toward us to help disentangle load lines and free our chutes without tearing them. On the field we learned that **Dick Flaharty** (MSO-44) had lightly sprained his ankle on this second jump.

On the third jump, Jim Jackson listed me as first jumper on the third load’s first pass. This time I had the dubious pleasure of sitting on the end of the long bench facing the open door, watching the drift chute head downward, hooking up my static line in response to the spotter’s order, and kneeling in the door. I reached the step OK, though the prop blast almost blew my

foot away. Once in position I leaned back on my left foot and watched the spotter direct the pilot. Before intercoms, the pilot had to look back over his shoulder during a jumping run for the spotter's directions. As the spotter raised his hand, palm down, I grasped the sides of the doorway firmly and leaned forward. For the first time I felt the slap on my shoulder, our "get out" signal. Instead of stepping off, I had the distinct impression of being blown off the step. Somewhat out of position, I found myself being swung in a wide arc by the opening chute.

On this third jump, I was spotted well and located the spot easily. I turned toward it, and about five hundred feet up saw that I would come close. Pulling down on my front risers, I increased my forward speed and swept over the road, onto the field, and rolled forward over my right shoulder. I stood up to find my chute draped across the target, a cross of orange streamers. Sensational! But of course, luck accounts for anything closer than a hundred feet. As I took off my mask, **Ed Nafziger** (MSO-43), formerly a professional photographer, raced up to take my picture. He had landed well himself, closest until I beat him. Chuck Chapman sprained his ankle on jump three and hobbled around doing office work, eventually making jump four as we did our seventh.

On our fourth jump we benefited from a loudspeaker system to coach beginning jumpers in guiding their chutes and warning them not to forget to hit and roll on landing. This was also my first jump from the Travelair.

Before we boarded our plane, **Frank Derry** (MSO-40) called us together to explain a new method of steering. On our Derry-slotted Irvin parachutes, two slots in the rear half of the canopy spill air and give us a forward speed. Pulling load line 4 or 25 closed the slot on either side; the rush of air from the open slot turned us around, but the turn was slow. Now we were to exert our pull on either line 5 or 26, the lines immediately ahead of the slot. The rush of air out these slots became complementary, and we could expect to turn more rapidly. I found this confusing, so went back to the old way for this jump. (By 1945 we had still another change in steering our chutes, one that enabled us to turn even more rapidly.)

I was the first man out and I held back too far over the ridge. Talking me down, Frank Derry warned that I was headed for a timber landing. Sure enough, I hit the side of a fifty-foot tree on the edge of the field. My chute caught and I was left dangling about ten feet off the ground. I hugged the trunk to see if my chute would

let go. It did, and I slipped further down. As observers watched me squirm, my chute let go once more and I stood on the ground, fourth jump complete. There was still no need for my letdown procedure!

Before my fifth jump we were told that the Forest Service wanted some movies of a timber landing, a gentle hint that we should head that way if we wanted to be movie stars. I tried, but again hit the side of a tall tree and landed gently on my feet. Excitement came when one man in the next planeload came out with a lineover. To him it felt as though he were smoking in fast, but in fact, he dropped only half again as fast as other jumpers. His emergency chute showed white, but at first fluttered down around his feet, then rose to cover his face. So much for the help of his emergency chute!

We made jump six on the Fourth of July and jumped from the Travelair using a static line. A static line is a twelve-foot long, inch and a half wide band of webbing attached to the cover of our backpack parachute. It pulls off the cover and extends the chute before the break cord snaps, separating the backpack cover and apex of the chute. I made no free fall jumps, but a few Smokejumpers made exhibition free-fall jumps for forest rangers that might have to make an emergency jump from a plane someday.

Jump seven was supposed to feature a fire camp, but the equipment had been shipped back to the Forest Service warehouse in Spokane. We had to be satisfied with Jim Waite's verbal description of a fire camp setup. That was it. We had completed our jumper training. Now we could only wait for the call of "Fire on the Mountain," the Smokejumper battle cry taking us into action.

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By 1944 when Gregg joined the CPS/USFS smokejumpers, he had earned his BA from Pacific and his MA from Iowa. After release from CPS and two years teaching at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, he returned to Iowa for his doctorate. He joined the faculty at Florida State University in 1949 and retired as Professor Emeritus in 1994. Gregg has written many stories for the magazine documenting the CPS-103 smokejumpers. Gregg passed away June 2, 2005, at age 87.



SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



by **Chuck Sheley**
(Cave Junction '59)
Managing Editor

What Can Be Done to Help Wildland Firefighters?

News articles continue to be written about the problems the USFS/BLM and other agencies have in hiring and keeping wildland firefighters. There are many issues besides pay to consider, and many are solvable. You don't hear much about OWCP in the press, if anything at all. But this has been a problem for many years. Many of us "old timers" can remember those of us injured on the job who were "kicked loose" to survive the winter months after the fire season ended. Fortunately, I always had health insurance through my teaching job. Many others were not so lucky. To enlighten many of our readers, I want to condense articles from Bill Gabbert (Wildfire Today) and BuzzFeed News. Kudos to them as a source of continuing education.

Gabbert: If you are a federal employee, hopefully, you don't know what "OWCP" stands for.

If you do, you could have been forced to deal with them, and your experience may or may not have been positive. Many federal workers have been pleased with the services provided by the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, but too many stories from others are truly sickening.

Buzzfeed News: "If a firefighter is injured while working or becomes ill on the job, OWCP is required to do everything they can to make them whole again, including covering medical and rehab expenses so they can get back to work without wiping out their bank accounts."

I will condense the BuzzFeed information and get right to the bottom line. BuzzFeed tells of firefighters seriously injured on the job who had significant medical bills, who were confronted by bill collectors, who had to resort to GoFundMe for help.

Let's get closer to home. Smokejumper Tim Hart (GAC-16) was fatally injured on a fire jump in 2021. The BuzzFeed article is three years old, but the information pertains to wildland firefighters in 2024 and relates events that happened to Tim's wife, Michelle Hart.

From BuzzFeed: "Today, she's still battling with federal agencies, trying to prove the facts around her husband's death to recoup money. It's been a maze of talking to case managers who send her to different departments, calling 1-800 numbers that lead nowhere, digging up records, and refile paperwork that apparently never went through. Some of the claims

can't be submitted until the Forest Service investigation into Tim's death is completed, and she has no idea when that will be. The Forest Service told BuzzFeed News that 'reviews of fatalities can be a lengthy process.' This month, she (Michelle) got an unexplained bill from the Department of Agriculture for \$1,030, due Dec. 9. She has no idea what it's for, and when she tried to find out, she said the agent could not talk to her because she was not Tim."

"Leadership in the Forest Service failed to do a damn thing to address our issues with OWCP despite us repeatedly asking and offering solutions," Buddy Byrd, a former safety and occupational health manager for the Forest Service's Region 6, which spans Oregon and Washington, told BuzzFeed News. "OWCP is a piece of a bigger systemic failure on behalf of the US Forest Service."

Our wildland firefighters are suffering in many areas. Low wages are the highest concern. But couldn't the USFS show more concern for their injured firefighters? Why not assign a human resource person to help each firefighter through the maze of bureaucracy that they have with OWCP? Reduce the obstacles thrown in their paths. Put them in contact with people who can solve a problem. Advocate for their employees.

This problem is solvable and would significantly affect the morale of the USFS/BLM employees. It can be done. Will it be done? What is the saying about zero and next to none?

NSA Supports Federal Wildland Firefighter Pay Adjustment

NSA President **Mike Bina** (MSO-68) recently sent (December 2024) the following letter to the House and Senate leaders:

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Dear Mr. Majority Leader, Mr. Minority Leader, Mr. Majority Speaker, and Mr. Minority Leader:

The National Smokejumper Association supports the bipartisan House and Senate Federal Wildland Firefighter pay adjustment in the next Continuing Resolution or Emergency Supplemental to eliminate a federal wildland firefighters pay cliff that will have extremely adverse effects on our nation's response to wildland fires and the financial security of those who protect our natural resources.

Today, 15,000 federal U.S. Forest Service (USDA) and Bureau of Land Management (DOI) wildland firefighters endure longer, and more dangerous wildfire seasons each year, with the loss of life and property increasing at a phenomenal rate. A major concern is the recruitment, retention, and support of these professional and highly trained wildland firefighters.

A temporary firefighter pay adjustment has expired, resulting in our federal wildland firefighters enduring a pay cut of up to 50% of base pay or \$20,000. The pending legislation is a permanent and essential solution to the pay cliff problem. The House and Senate Interior 2025 Appropriations Bills include a permanent pay solution supported by Democratic and Republican Committee and Subcommittee Chairs and Ranking Members. This legislation would

1. Permanently increase Federal wildland firefighter pay,
2. Establish a new WFF pay scale; and
3. Establish additional WFF pay supplements.

The Senate has shown its support voting for temporary pay increases by passing Continuing Resolutions since 2023 and in FY 2024 appropriations; however, the authority for these temporary pay increases will expire.

The National Smokejumper Association (NSA) is Montana-chartered 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization comprised of 1,400 current or former smokejumpers. Through a cadre of volunteers and partnerships, the NSA is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and rangeland resources, and responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families.

We appreciate your leadership getting the Senate to pass this legislation to adequately remunerate and support wildland fire fighters who are on the front lines protecting our nation's forests, rangelands, and adjacent properties. Our men and women wildland firefighters deserve your support for a permanent pay provision for the critical and often dangerous, high risk work they perform for our nation. Thank you for your support and leadership on behalf of our wildland fire fighters and their families.

Sincerely yours,
Michael J. Bina, President
National Smokejumper Association



RECOVERED WATCH

The Bozeman Watch Co. made watches that were sold to smokejumpers over 20 years ago. This watch was recovered from stolen items during the arrest of a career burglar.

If you have any knowledge of the owner of this watch, please contact **Sgt. Joshua Moore**, St. Paul, MN, Police Department.

(651-226-5656
joshua.moore@ci.stpaul.mm.us





Notes from the Ranks



Pat McGunagle
(West Yellowstone '19)

"Helmets, gloves, seatbelts! It's gonna be a bumpy ride." We're on short final for cargo drops to a lucky stick of bros on some two-manner somewhere out of Ely. I'm sitting in the third or fourth stick and staring out the window as the shadow of the plane gets closer and further and way closer and then further away again on the rolling juniper-encrusted landscape below. Quickly, a flash of two parachutes in a jumpspot at the exact second the spotter kicks the cargo; we hear the familiar snap-click-chunk of static lines against the plane and enter a banked climbing turn.

Or another vignette. Maybe it's several hours into a long detection flight around southern Utah, the ceremonial mid-monsoon water dog safari. Here's a brief visit to the Arizona strip, and there's your bumpy updrafts around the San Juans, and over there maybe the circumferential downdrafts around the hot basins near St. George. You're wondering where in the Pine Mountain Wilderness there's still something left to be struck by lightning and burn, much less if there'll be daylight enough to jump. The plane is bucking and randomly

dropping, what, forty feet at a time? It's dark outside between the towering, deep purple thunder cells. The saltiest guy on the load sits back and buckles his seatbelt. You trust his assessment without asking too many questions. Buckle up, sit back and take measured breaths through the bumps.

The concept is that the flight is going to be a bit bumpy for a while, sometimes by our own device and sometimes by bigger forces.

Amid the recent continuing resolution and potential furlough scramble, there was a brief glimmer that solidifying wildland firefighter pay and the new job series might be formalized into law. Alas, it was not, and the continuing resolution pushes off that debate until a new administration, in March. In the meanwhile, more wildland firefighters leave for other more economically satisfied lives.

Montana's newest Senator is going to personally bring the issue of the stagnant and bloated US wildland firefighting industry to a new government department devised to cut costs and needless spending. The Senator wants aggressive initial attack with a policy-mandated response time after a wildfire is detected. He also argues for privatizing most fire response as a cost effective way to reduce the obligated federal spending for fires that may not happen. These are not terrible aims, and by owning a wildfire tanker company, the Senator likely has a better idea of the data on response and total cost per acre on a wildfire than the government does. Or a better idea of how to profit from the wildfire industry. But the contracting world

is murky in its economics and mantle of duty when contractors are not public servants.

My last article mentioned that the USFS won't be hiring seasonal employees this coming year, but that fire seasonal positions were still funded. Well, in a nervous pattern, that's no longer the case: regions have quotas for the number of fire positions to cut or not rehire before next year. There's not enough money to send current employees to the trainings required for them to be eligible for the next higher pay grade or open a new taskbook. How do you staff your ten-person fire module when you have to cut two seasonal positions on your forest's fire staff? Well, maybe cut one seasonal from the engine, that's one, and let's see, okay let's cut out a lookout, that's two. There, we fixed it: another critical Forest Service structure turned over to packrats and another kid who never discovers a career in wildland fire, gets to see a hotshot crew in action or hang out with some smokejumpers. Bonkers! Buckle up, it's gonna get bumpy.

There was a mid-70s self-help book called "What color is your parachute?" You could reliably find several of them at the Salvation Army right next to "7 Habits of Highly Effective People." The content of these books is as canned as SPAM and corny as Corned Beef Hash, things that taste better when you're out in the woods. I think that as the big bureaucratic machine falls out of its sky, worrying about what color one's parachute is not the worst self-interested and self-preserving reaction. Stay relevant and stay in the woods. After all, there are no contract smokejumpers.... Yet.

When Millionaires Call the Shots

What Future of Public Lands?

by Lon Dale (Missoula '69)

I WAS INTRIGUED by Karl Brauneis (MSO-77) article in the July 2024 issue of Smokejumper. Karl is on to the bigger picture of the problems with management decisions concerning our public lands as it relates to the national political situation.

What Karl identifies as the shrinking middle class is very evident in Montana politics where the last election resulted in multi-millionaires as Montana's governor, and all four of its federal congressional delegation. Further two of the new congressional delegation only recently moved to Montana where because of Montana's low population, spending a few million in election ads can produce results unattainable in other venues.

My observation as an attorney is that the endangered species legislation, although well-intentioned and beneficial in many instances, has created a litigation environment where any forest management decision is automatically challenged and ultimately delayed by litigation because any technical flaw in the process can result in a win resulting in the award of attorney fees to the initiating entity.

Litigation groups are thus funded and encouraged to litigate based upon the "follow the money" motivation. Lack of timber harvesting not only inhibits proper management, but also has ancillary consequences such as limiting budgeting for forest service personnel thus compounding the problem by precluding staffing to provide the necessary details for environmental impact statements to counter the inevitable litigation attacking any forest management decision.



Pat Collins, facility manager at Museum of Mountain Flying talking to Lon Dale. (Courtesy Fred Cooper)

The open question is whether Montana's current multi-millionaire congressional delegation will advocate on behalf of proper forest management for the public good or perhaps instead seek privatization for their own exclusive group.

According to the most recent reliable information, there are 1,140 persons in Montana who reported annual adjusted gross income greater than one million dollars. The reported census population of Montana in 2023 was 1,132,812. So mathematically slightly more than one tenth of a percent of Montanans

have more than a million dollars of annual adjusted gross income. Yet these one tenth of one percent of Montana's population is now making all of Montana's federal decisions and the current multimillionaire governor has veto power. So where is the voice for the other 99.9 percent?

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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.

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.



Dale E. Graff (Missoula '60)

"I was born on October 15, 1936, in Beatrice, NE, and raised on the family farm. The Graffs were some of the first settlers under the Homestead Act of 1862, which was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln.

"I graduated from St. Joseph's High School in 1954. I enlisted in the U.S. Navy and completed boot camp at Naval Station Great Lakes. I was assigned to a photography squadron at Miramar Naval Air Station in San Diego. After a successful stint working in the photo lab, I was sent to Pensacola, FL, for more advanced training and completed both the land and aerial photography schools.

"While I was in Florida, our squadron transferred to Guam. I returned to the U.S. mainland in 1958 and was assigned to Gould Island in Narragansett Bay near Newport, RI, where I filmed aerial torpedo drops. My military service ended with an honorable discharge on December 29, 1958.

"I graduated from the University of Montana in 1962 with a degree

in wildlife technology. It was during the 1959-60 school year that I met my future wife, Graciela A. Rubio, who was an exchange student from Mexico living at the Alpha Phi Sorority; I was a brother at Delta Sigma Phi.

"In 1960, I landed my first job as a smokejumper. That summer, I also worked on various USFS wildlife projects at Bonita Ranger Station east of Missoula at Rock Creek.

"My second season jumping occurred during the infamous and very busy summer of 1961. In two and a half months, I earned \$2,500 with just straight time at about \$1.90 per hour. Good pay for the time. One of the fires I jumped on was called the Higgins Ridge Fire. Eight of us jumped out of a Ford Trimotor on a fire that had previously been extinguished but had started up again. A shift in the speed and direction of the wind caused the fire to blow up in intensity and quickly surround all of us. Our crew survived by getting into a pile of large rocks as the fire's intensity increased. It behaved like a tornado in the extremely dry conditions, the 102-degree heat, and the high winds.

"I worked as a smokejumper for a third season, but the summer of 1962 was slow, so the USFS assigned me to the Bonita Ranger Station to work on spraying trees for the spruce budworm infestation and other wildlife projects.

"In 1963, the Montana Department of Fish and Game gave me my first warden assignment.

After a stint in Billings, I got another assignment that took my wife and me to Baker, MT. We relocated in a 10' x 50' mobile home with our two young sons during a terrible Eastern Montana blizzard!

"I was eventually promoted to Warden Sergeant, based in Kalispell, MT, where I spent seven and a half wonderful years patrolling the numerous lakes and backcountry. In 1978, the renamed Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks made me an offer I couldn't refuse, offering me the position of Warden Captain at the Miles City office. My boys were in high school and not very happy about the idea of moving, but in the end, we all decided it was for the best. I spent an enjoyable and fulfilling five and a half years there, working with and mentoring mostly young game wardens just starting out.

"In 1984, I was promoted to Assistant Chief Game Warden, based in Helena. I retired ten years later after 31 years of game warden service. I can honestly say that I loved every minute of my job.

"During my retirement, I started a photography business and was fortunate to have achieved a fair amount of success in a very competitive market. Graciela and I feel extremely lucky that our sons, Eric and Gene, have wonderful families and jobs that they love. I have always told them "Get a job you love," and they both succeeded. We have three grandchildren, Benjamin and Evan in Eric's family and Erika in Gene's family."

William M. "Bill" Knight
(Cave Junction '60)

Bill was born April 7, 1941, in Boise, ID, and grew up in Pendleton, OR, where he graduated from St. Joseph's Academy in 1959. He earned a bachelor's in business administration from the University of Portland in 1963. Bill jumped at Cave Junction, 1960-63. Bill worked for General Electric, 1964-67, before becoming a naval aviator, 1967-78. He retired from the Reserves as a Lieutenant Commander in 1987.

Bill was a partner in a beer distributorship, 1978-84; the owner/operator of a helicopter aerial application business, 1984-90; and a field rep for a fruit-processing business, 1991-2000.

In retirement, he rode Goldwing motorcycles around the West and toured in a travel trailer. He plays the guitar with a group entertaining at wineries and retirement homes.

Bill is married to Donna and has three children. He has been living in Zillah, WA, since 1991.

Larry J. Loritz (Missoula '60)

Larry was born May 23, 1938, in Hebron, ND, where he grew up and, in 1956, graduated from Hebron High School. He graduated from the University of North Dakota in 1961 with a degree in mechanical engineering. Larry was in the USAF from 1962 to 1966, serving as an aircraft-maintenance officer with the rank of captain. After the military, Larry started Loritz Controls Inc., a company facilitating the monitoring of stack emissions in coal-fired power plants. He retired in 2012 and lives in Evergreen, CO (2021).

Larry jumped at Missoula, 1960-61.

Ron Lufkin (Cave Junction '60)

"July 27, 1939: My twin brother and I were born in what is now the Blue Sky Realty office in downtown Winthrop, WA, qualifying our father for the nickname 'Pappy.' Twenty-one years later to the day, I hung up in the top of a Douglas fir tree, halfway down a cliff in the Willamette NF. My first fire jump.

"Pappy supplemented his income trapping marten and mink and hunting cougar for the bounty. His friend **George Honey** (NCSB-40) had hounds, and they spent a lot of time chasing cats around the Methow.

"We lived six miles north of Winthrop in a one-room log cabin with a bathtub hanging on the front outside wall. My earliest memories were hearing and watching Pappy scraping and stretching pelts.

"After high school, I took a job with the USFS on the Winthrop district, going on to work two summers there. In 1958, a fire was reported on 8-Mile Ridge, and a decision was made to use it to train the NCSB rookies. I was asked to go to the airport and drive the rookies to the fire. At noon, the twin beech flew over and started dropping lunch. After the second pass, it didn't come back. Within minutes, a lookout reported another smoke very close to us. **Elmer Neufeld** (CJ-44), the training officer, took two of the rookies and me to what turned out to be a crash site. Four guys were on the plane, including the pilot and my former scout leader. All were deceased.

"I started at Washington State University, where I studied forest management. I would work a semester and a summer, saving every cent I could, and then attend

WSU for a semester. Eight years later, I was a forester. Easy-peasy!

"Minimum wage back then was \$1.10 an hour. Smokejumping paid \$2.09 an hour. Overtime was straight time for every hour, and packouts were two hours paid for every hour on the trail, according to one of the older guys on the crew. It was an easy decision to go for the big bucks. I was accepted at the Siskiyou base in 1960 and jumped through 1962.

"After graduation, I started working at the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. I worked two years at Belfair, two years at Colville, and five years at Forks. At Forks, the DNR needed to reduce mid-slope road construction in steep logging areas to reduce stream siltation. I was assigned to work with the famed Faye Stewart designing a logging unit for balloon logging. After the unit was sold, Faye offered me a job in Eugene working with him. I spent a year in Oregon working around his balloon and then went back to Forks to work for Marubeni, a Japanese company operating what was considered Washington state's first balloon logging system.

"The rest of my forestry career was spent purchasing saw logs for two sawmills, one in South Bend, WA, and one in Warrenton, OR.

"Since I retired from forestry, I've kept busy buying old derelict houses and rebuilding them to modern standards. I work to the beat of my own drum, and as I age, I've readjusted the hours. Four hours is a full day. Six hours, time and a half. Eight hours, a double shift.

"I was helped greatly a few years back when a doctor in Olympia jacked me up, dropped two new

knees under me, and made me an inch taller. Once I had adjusted to the oxygen levels at my new altitude, I was back in good shape, ready to keep on keeping on."

Ralph J. Mellin (Missoula '60)

Ralph was born on January 1, 1940, in Boise, ID, the first of two boys. He grew up on a local dairy farm, driving hay wagons at age five and mowing hay at age seven. Ralph started school at Maple Grove School and finished at Boise High School in 1957. He went to Boise Junior College and Idaho State College, taking civil engineering, and he graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Idaho in 1963.

In 1958, he worked for the USFS on a logging-road survey crew. Two years later, he rookied at Missoula in 1960. After two busy seasons and 30 fire jumps, Ralph worked on a survey crew in Eastern Idaho. He then was hired by Morrison Knudsen Company as a junior engineer for the construction of Minuteman Missile silos at Whiteman Air Force Base in Sedalia, MO. Upon the completion of that job in 1963, he was assigned to the Boise head office to do junior engineering work to prepare bids for large projects generally outside the U.S. Ralph later worked for Rogers Construction Company on interstate road construction. In 1967, he returned to Boise as an engineer in water resource planning for the Idaho Water Resource Board.

Ralph retired from the state in 2000 after 32 years. He currently farms 30 acres just outside Boise, with five other properties rented out.

Ralph jumped at Missoula in 1960 and Grangeville in 1961. He is an NSA Life Member.

Ben Mitchell (Grangeville '60)

"I was born September 10, 1936, and grew up in Texas and Louisiana. Schooled in Texas, I attended Sunset High School in Dallas and Panola College in Carthage. In February 1960, I graduated from Lamar State College of Technology in Beaumont with a degree in civil engineering.

"As a young man, I worked the oil fields and served on a road-survey crew in the Coeur d'Alene NF, where I took a permanent engineering job in May 1960.

"This was short-lived, however, as I soon received an offer to become a smokejumper out of Missoula. I resigned my new job, displeasing my bosses, but I had no choice: I had long dreamed of being a smokejumper.

"After training, I made two fire jumps out of Missoula with squad-leader **Delos M. Dutton** (MSO-51). Prior to my first practice jump, I had never flown in an airplane before. I made 18 fire jumps, including two jumps out of Redding.

"In the fall of 1960, I was reinstated as a civil engineer, this time in the Gallatin NF at Bozeman, MT. The forest engineer at the time took personal offence that I had previously resigned my position to be a smokejumper. Prior to this, I had no idea how petty and shallow USFS engineers could be.

"When I left the Missoula base, **Earl Cooley** enrolled me in the Career Development Program, which would allow me to take refresher training each spring and be called for jump duty as needed. But the Gallatin forest engineer would not cooperate. In 1961, I got pulled off the Sleeping Child Fire in the Bitterroot, where I was ground crew. I made one practice jump and two fire jumps on the Bitterroot

Divide, in part just to spite the forest engineer.

"In 1962, a supervisor at the Gallatin directed the forest engineer to release me for spring refresher training, but I got no fire jumps, as it was a very wet year. In 1963, I accepted a transfer as a project engineer on the construction of a highway up the West Fork.

"Three years later, I was promoted to assistant forest engineer on the Tongass NF at Ketchikan, AK. The next seven years were the best in my career—the four months I was a smokejumper notwithstanding.

"By 1980—after stints at the Lolo NF and in Juneau as a regional transportation planner—I was back on the Tongass, working on the land-management team out of Sitka, AK.

"But in 1982, a change in management led me to realize I'd had enough, and a year later I was in the private sector, working as an engineer for Greens Creek Mining Company on Admiralty Island. This was good duty, and I helped complete the mine complex in 1992.

"I retired back in Sitka, where I've enjoyed hunting, fishing, and gardening. I also spend time working on the family ranch in Idaho.

"I want to state here that most of the above never would have happened had it not been for the heroic actions of **Jeff Davis** (MSO-57), who prevented the impending crash of the C-46 carrying myself and four others assigned to drop cargo on the Shearer airstrip in August 1961. But that is another story for another time. Jeff recently passed away. I owe him my life, and so do the other four guys on board that plane."

Harold M. “Hal” Nelson
(Missoula ’60)

Hal was born May 5, 1941, in Big Timber, MT, and graduated from Stevensville High School in 1959. He earned a degree in business from Montana State University in Bozeman in 1963 and got an MBA from the University of Georgia in 1970. Hal served in the Army for 21 years, retiring in 1984. Hal has been an owner/partner in several businesses since then. One of the businesses was Big Sky Mobile Catering, which has provided mobile food service for wildland firefighters since 1986. Hal jumped at Missoula 1960 and 1962, and at Grangeville in 1961. He is a Life Member of the NSA and lives in Missoula.

Joe L. Primm
(North Cascades ’60)

Joe was born January 30, 1938, in Wallowa, OR, and graduated from Hermiston (OR) High School in 1956. After one year at Oregon State, Joe started a 26-year career with the USFS that included service in six national forests in Region Six. After retirement in 1987, he spent another 15 years in the private timber industry.

“I am proud to say **Francis Lufkin** (North Cascades-40) hired me in 1960, and I trained under his leadership. Some years later, I had the privilege to meet **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41), and he referred to me as one of Francis’s boys.” Joe has been married 61 years to Joanie and lives in Klamath Falls, OR.

Bruce R. Sievers (Missoula ’60)

Bruce was born May 26, 1941, in Albuquerque, NM, and grew up in Missoula, MT, where he graduated from high school in 1959. He earned

his bachelor’s in international relations from Stanford University in 1964. Bruce continued with a Fulbright Fellowship at the Free University of Berlin in 1969. He earned a master’s in political science from Stanford University in 1965 and his Ph.D. in political science from Stanford in 1973.

Work Career: Office of U.S. Senator Lee Metcalf, Legislative Intern, 1970; Montana Constitutional Convention, Research Analyst, 1971-72; Montana Committee for the Humanities, Executive Director, 1972-74; California Council for the Humanities, Executive Director, 1974-83; Walter and Elise Haas Fund, Executive Director, 1983-2002; The Skirball Foundation, Consulting Director, 2002-2015; Stanford University, Visiting Scholar and Lecturer, 2002-present.

Bruce lives in Tiburon, CA (2022). He jumped at Missoula, 1960-1962, as well as in 1964 and 1969.

John R. “Jack” Sisco
(Missoula ’60)

Jack was born March 25, 1939, and grew up in Fair Lawn, NJ, where he graduated from Fair Lawn High School in 1957. He furthered his education at Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, WV, and graduated from the University of Montana with a bachelor’s in history and political science in 1962. Jack served in the Navy, 1963-67 (Lieutenant, JG), on the USS Kennebec and USS Piedmont.

“I married my wife, Jean, after my discharge from the Navy, and we have been married for 55 years at this writing (2022). We have two sons and three grandchildren.”

The summers of 1958-59, he worked for the USFS on the Clearwater NF in Idaho. He jumped at Missoula, 1960-62. He was on the New Mexico crew in 1961 and extended the 1960 season at Redding. He made 48 jumps, of which 39 were fire jumps and nine were practice jumps

Jack worked for the Simpson Timber Company out of McCleary and Shelton, WA, from 1969 to 2000. He retired in 2000.

Jack lives in Olympia, WA, where he has resided for the past 52 years. He worked at H&R Block as an income tax preparer for 11 seasons after retiring.

Retirement: “After retiring, I worked on five trail projects with the NSA, mostly on the Bob Marshall and one on the Eagle Cap. I went through the scrambling course with the Olympia Branch around the time I retired. I started doing trail maintenance on the Olympic NF and introduced the Olympia Branch Mountaineers to cross-cut sawing to remove logs. I am currently a C-level buckner and will soon be an evaluator, qualified to train sawyers. I enjoy tackling complex buckner projects in this capacity.”

David L. “Dave” Sutton
(Missoula ’60)

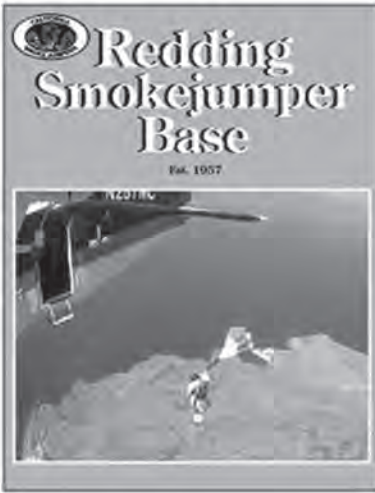
Dave was born November 9, 1939, in Staunton, VA, and grew up in Penn Laird, VA, where he graduated from Montevideo High School in 1958. He earned his bachelor’s in biology from Berea College in Kentucky in 1964 and his Ph.D. in plant physiology from Virginia Polytechnic in 1969. Dave taught and conducted research at the University of Florida for 35 years at the Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center. He jumped at

Missoula 1960-61 and in 1963, and at Grangeville in 1962. Dave is an NSA Life Member.

Bernard H. "Bernie" Weisgerber (Redding '60)

Bernie was hired on at age 18 and jumped 1960-74 at Redding. He started the successful California Retread Program, which grew to more than 100 retreads over 10 years. Bernie worked for the USFS for 38-plus years in three regions, seven national forests, and 12 ranger districts. He graduated from Humboldt State University with a degree in Forest Management. Bernie was a district ranger for 24 years, spending his last years on the Modoc NF. He is an NSA Life Member.

NEW



**Redding
Smokejumper
Base**
Est. 1957

History of the Redding Smokejumper Base

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

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135 pages
\$25, plus postage
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Clayton Gulch – Eight of the fifteen fallen firefighters lost their lives in this gulch

Men of the Blackwater

At approximately 3:30 PM on Saturday, August 21, 1937, an unknown and unpredicted dry cold front hit the Blackwater fire area. Winds shifted from a general southwest flow to the northwest as wind speeds increased to 30 miles per hour. The resulting firestorm trapped groups of firefighters in separate locations (Clayton Gulch and Post Point) along the fireline. Fifteen firefighters gave their lives in service and over 32 were injured. **Lest We Forget**

KB

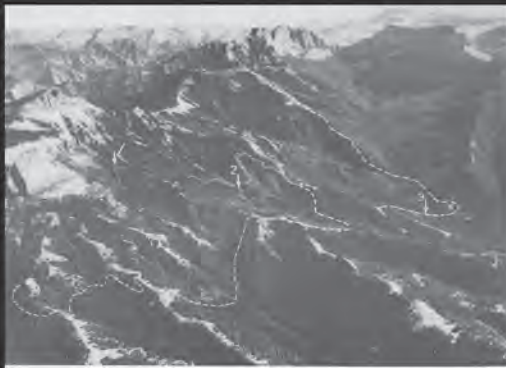


Blackwater Blow Up
Clayton Gulch is consumed at the center top of photograph. Post Point at left has been "hit" from the right. The two spots below will next "hit" from below and to the left.
Photograph by A.L. Gibson



Post: Clayton's last words to Senior Forest Ranger Post before the Blow Up". All communications were through written notes carried by runners.

We are on the ridge in back of you and I am going across to spot in the hole. It looks like it can carry on over ridge east and south of you. If you can send any men, please do since there are only 8 of us here.
Clayton



Oblique Aerial View of Blackwater Fire Area.

1. Only point where Ranger Post took refuge with his men
2. Point where Ranger Clayton, James Saban and Hale with 4 CCC firemen were trapped in gulch
3. Area where Clayton's men established a fire and station

Fire line being worked just before blowup.
Point control line of fire.
Starting point of fire.



CLAYTON



District Ranger and 1st Shift Fire Boss Charlie Fifield

Raised in Saskatchewan, few could keep up with him in the woods. As a boy he ran in snowshoes next to the sleigh on trips to town for supplies. His response time to the Blackwater fire on August 20, 1937, was phenomenal.

Photograph Courtesy the Fifield Family Collection

"History is Knowledge that can become Wisdom if applied in the Present Tense"

Karl Brauneis



James T. Saban
CCC Foreman - Blackwater Camp - 1937
(Formerly Forest Ranger at Redwood State and Sequoia National Forests)



Paul E. Tyrrell
Junior Forester
Bighorn National Forest



Rex A. Hale
Junior Forester
Bighorn National Forest

Forest Officers who gave their lives in service on August 21, 1937



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.

Robert “Bob” Mutch (Grangeville ’54)

Bob died December 18, 2024, at the Big Horn Rehabilitation and Care Center in Sheridan, Wyoming. He was born on March 5, 1934, in Cleveland, Ohio, and graduated from Orange HS in 1952. Bob then went to Albion College in Michigan, where he earned a B.A. in Biology and English and played football. Next, he enrolled at the University of Montana and earned an M.S. in Forestry in 1959.

Bob worked as Superintendent at the Priest River Experimental Forest in Idaho 1959-60 and joined the Northern Forest Fire Laboratory in Missoula. 1960-77. In 1970, Bob and colleagues launched a groundbreaking project to allow lightning-caused fires to play a natural role in wilderness ecosystems. Their study in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness led to the first USFS Wilderness Fire Management Plan, which was approved in 1972.

In 1977, Bob shifted from research to fire management at Lolo NF and in the early 1980s, he became Fire Use Specialist for the Northern Region. From 1986-91, he served as Program Manager for the Forest Service’s Disaster Assistance Support Program in Washington, D.C.

Bob returned to Montana as Technology Transfer Specialist at the Intermountain Forest Fire Laboratory in 1991, where he worked until retiring in 1994. In this role, he shared the latest fire research with agencies worldwide, including conducting workshops and field training in Brazil.

Bob jumped at Grangeville 1954-55.

Patrick E. “Pat” Harbine (Missoula ’51)

Pat died December 21, 2024. He was born December 15, 1931, in Plains, Montana, where he grew up and graduated from high school. Pat graduated from the University of Montana in 1956 and the Hermann School of Physical Therapy (Houston, TX) in 1958. Pat was a Platoon Sergeant in the Korean War and spent a 40-year career as Chief Therapist at Sacred Heart Medical Center. He was also a Kayak Instructor for 25

years. Pat retired in 1998 and was living in Spokane, Washington. He jumped at Missoula 1951-52 and 1954.

William Lewis “Bill” Harro (McCall ’68)

Bill, 77, died November 4, 2024, from complications following surgery. He was born February 25, 1947, in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. Bill grew up in Sandpoint, Idaho, and Helena, Montana and graduated from Helena H.S. in 1965. He worked for the USFS fighting fire in 1965 and rookied at McCall in 1968. He jumped at McCall 1968-69 and Fairbanks 1970-76. Bill then moved to Boise where he worked for Associated Dairies from 1977-78 before beginning house painting and doing home repairs.

Lloyd Albert “Chuck” Pickard (Missoula ’48)

Chuck, 99, died October 25 in Vero Beach, Florida. He was born in Brockton, Massachusetts, September 29, 1925. Chuck was married to his wife Lorraine for over 68 years and had one son, Chuck Pickard Jr. He had an incredibly interesting life. He was a U.S. Combat Marine in WWII, serving in the Pacific, a Forestry Major at Massachusetts State, Stockbridge, a U.S. Forest Service Smokejumper in Missoula, Montana, owned and operated a boy’s camp in Montana, served as a Ft. Lauderdale Police Detective Sgt., and was the owner of a Private Investigative Agency.

Chuck jumped at Missoula 1948-50.

Let’s learn more about Chuck with this information taken from a 2005 interview with *Smokejumper* magazine:

As a 17-year-old Marine who lost his sea bag during the invasion of the Mariana Islands in the South Pacific a friend, Charles Armstrong, gave him a spare combat jacket with the name “Chuck” stenciled on the back. He was Chuck from then on. He had quit high school in 1942 to join the Marines spending 27 months hopping from one Japanese-held island to the next. Saipan, Tarawa, Kwajalein, Eniwetok and Tinian. His anti-aircraft battery was regularly attached by Japanese

soldiers bypassed by the Marine assault forces. His best friend from high school was killed.

Chuck made squadleader his first year at Missoula. After he left jumping in 1950, he traveled to Florida to visit an aunt. Three weeks later, he was wearing the uniform of the Fort Lauderdale Police Dept. "Badge #25. Lots of gunplay." After six months he donned the plain clothes of a detective. Thirteen years later, he formed his own private detective agency, selling out in 1977.

James Edward Cook (North Cascades '60)

Jim, 84, of Charlottesville, VA, died October 5, 2024. He was born on November 30, 1939, in Wyoming County, West Virginia. He lived his early years with his parents and his Grandmother Cook. Jim earned a bachelor's degree in Forest Management from West Virginia University in 1967 after serving in the U.S. Army for three years as a Sergeant in the 82nd Airborne Division. In addition to his military experience, during college he worked various jobs as a forest manager, forest firefighter and smokejumper with the U.S. Forest Service. He began his 35-year career as a forester with the Virginia Department of Forestry in 1967, married in the same year, and settled into life in Southside Virginia. Jim served in every "operations" job in the Department during his career, concluding his service as Deputy State Forester. Jim jumped at NCSB during the 1960 season.

Jeffery R. "Jeff" Davis (Missoula '57)

Jeff, 87, died August 16, 2024, in Silver City, New Mexico. He was born April 12, 1937, in Duluth, Minnesota, where he grew up and graduated from high school in 1955. He went to the Univ. Minnesota Duluth for a year before moving to Thompson Falls, Montana, where he worked the 1956 season on a lookout. While in the lookout, he saw smokejumpers for the first time jumping a nearby fire. Watching the jumpers exiting the aircraft, he knew right away that was what he wanted to do.

Jeff rookied at Missoula, where he jumped 1957-66 and 1978. He was on the Silver City Crew for eight seasons. Jeff left the smokejumpers when he reached age 40 and was hired at the Missoula Equipment Development Center (MEDC).

Jeff continued jumping at MEDC until 1978, when he suffered a major back injury on a jump in Little

Stoney Creek, Montana. He retired in 1983 and moved to Silver City. Jeff made 180 USFS jumps, mostly fires, as only two practice jumps were the norm at that time.

"The jumping years were by far my best years, and I wish I could return." Jeff is an NSA Life Member and has written numerous articles for *Smokejumper* magazine.

Roland M. "Sam" Grotte (Missoula '55)

Sam, 91, died September 15, 2024. He was born March 22, 1933, in Northwood, North Dakota, where he grew up before moving to Hamilton, Montana, where he graduated from Hamilton H.S. in 1951. He graduated from the University of Montana in 1955 and started his USAF 20-year career as a pilot leaving as a Major. Sam then flew for American Airlines for 25 years before retiring in White Salmon, Washington. Sam jumped at Missoula in 1955.

Sam was active in music and played in the White Salmon Jazz Band, Portland Metro Band, and was the director of the Gorge Winds Concert Band. He authored a book about his life "A Life, or as much of it as I can factually recall."

John J. "Jack" Osborne (Missoula '46)

Jack, 99, died October 22, 2024, in Kalispell, Montana. He was born August 3, 1925, in Missoula, Montana. Jack graduated from Missoula County, H.S., and joined the Army Air Corps in WWII, where he qualified as a pilot at age 18. After the war, Jack rookied at Missoula, where he jumped 1946-47 seasons before graduating from the University of Montana. Jack worked as a photographer in Cut Bank, Montana, and then for Petrolane which took him to Billings and Long Beach, California.

After five years in Long Beach, he moved back to Cut Bank to partner in a business with a tire shop, motel, and gas station. At age 42, he became a certified public accountant and continued in that profession until he retired at age 75.

Gene L. "Geno" Bassette (Missoula '80)

Geno died October 16, 2024, after a long-fought battle with ALS. He was born in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, where he spent his youth. Geno graduated from Rice Lake HS in 1974 and obtained a job with the U.S. Forest Service. He spent the first few years as a Hotshot before obtaining a position with the Missoula Smokejumpers from 1980-1994. During that time Geno obtained a degree in Cartography from the University of Missoula

and eventually retired as a Cartographer for the Lolo National Forest in 2006. Geno met his wife Pam Brown in 2001 and eventually married in 2008. Geno and Pam bounced around for several years moving to SD, UT, MN, and eventually settled back in Missoula. During this time Geno pursued his hobbies as a woodworker, ultra trail runner, hunter, lover of nature, camper and hiker, and enjoyed surrounded himself with friends and family.

Mark Rivera (Associate)

From Jon Klingel (CJ-65): "Mark was a key part of our New Mexico NSA trail crew for years. He was a good sawyer and was always right there like magic with a peavey, wedges or spray cooking oil when they were needed."

On August 26th, 2024, Mark peacefully passed away in Taos, NM. He was born in Santa Fe, NM, in 1955. Mark graduated from Alamogordo H.S. in 1973 and earned his Bachelor of Science from NMSU in 1978. He was a city planner for many years. His career took him to various places in New Mexico such as Alamogordo, Las Cruces, Gallup, Albuquerque, and Angel Fire. He retired in 2017. During Marks retirement, he was part of a seven-man crew that would volunteer for several weeks each year to clear trails for horseback riders, ranchers, and hikers. Mark had a true passion for trail and forest conservation. He was a New Mexico enthusiast and loved his home state deeply.

Mark was an avid hiker, world traveler, skilled carpenter, artist, and a dedicated provider. In his early years, he loved skateboarding, rollerblading and had a passion for skiing and taught lessons for many years. Although he loved skiing, one of his favorite winter activities was snow shoeing through the mountains.

Charles D. "Doug" Howard (Missoula '64)

Doug died March 26, 2024. He was born February 15, 1942, in Ontario, Oregon. The family moved to Twin Falls, Idaho, a few years later, and he graduated from Twin Falls H.S. in 1960, followed by a degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Idaho. Doug jumped at Missoula in 1964 and Grangeville in 1965. He served in the USAF as a Flight Navigator stationed in Taiwan during the Vietnam War. Doug met his wife, Mary Lou, while in Taiwan. After his time in the Air Force, they moved to Twin Falls, where he was a founding member of the engineering firm Edwards, Howard, and Martens.

Doug was Twin Falls Highway Commissioner for several years and later served as Head Administrator for the South-Central District of the Department of Environmental Quality. He was a private pilot, ran his first marathon at age 66, and climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro at age 73.

Bruce A. Montgomery (Idaho City '65)

Bruce died September 15, 2024. He was born June 8, 1942. Bruce attended Idaho State College, Pocatello, and graduated from the College of Idaho, Caldwell, in 1968. He worked in banking for his whole career. Bruce started with the Idaho First National Bank in June 1969 and was later promoted to Vice President of the Bank of Idaho in 1975. From there, he moved to Bankcard in 1982 and to Discover Card in 1996. He was promoted to territory manager in Seattle in 1998. While there, he was on the Puget Sound Dive and Rescue team. He retired from the USAF Reserves in 1995 with 24 years of service. Bruce jumped at Idaho City 1965-67, had 34 jumps, and was an NSA Life Member.

Joseph William "Joe" Brennan (Redmond '86)

Joe died August 18, 2024. He was born September 20, 1956. He attended Wasatch Jr. H.S. and graduated from Skyland H.S. in Salt Lake City, Utah, before attending Utah State University. Joe worked on a USFS engine crew from 1977-80, helitack 1981-84, and rookied at Redmond in 1986, where he jumped 1986-90 and 1993-94. Joe married his wife, Nancy, in 1986 in Boise, Idaho. While his wife went to medical school, Joe returned to Utah. When Nancy was in residency in Tucson, Arizona, Joe entered Pima College and earned his certification as a Licensed Vocational Nurse. Brain surgery ended his smokejumping career at Redmond after the 1994 season, and he teamed with his wife and worked as an LVN in Bend, Oregon, until his death.

Gerald Paul "Jerry" Smith (Missoula '62)

Jerry, 81, died November 21, 2023. He was born in Tacoma, WA, January 27, 1942, and grew up on Maury Island and Bellingham. Jerry graduated from Western Washington State College with a degree in languages (French and Russian). He earned his education by working summers for the USFS, first on a ground crew and as a jumper. Jerry jumped at Missoula 1962-64, Grangeville 1965, 69, 70, West Yellowstone 1971-78, and Fairbanks 1979-81. He was in the US Army stationed in Germany for several years. Jerry was

trained as an electrician, appliance repairman, and auto mechanic. He retired in about 2009 and had heart valve issues, which were repaired.

Jerry was an avid reader, seldom fiction. He was interested in the natural world and people who had accomplished something. Jerry thought it was important to tread lightly on the earth. He rode his bicycle as long as he could, picked up litter when he walked, wrote to his government representatives regularly, and fought the social injustice he saw.

John David Rossheim (Missoula '49)

John, 96, died June 30, 2022. He was born June 14, 1926, in Teaneck, New Jersey. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II as an aerographer's mate and was recalled to active duty during the Korean War. When he returned, he rookied at Missoula and jumped the 1949 season.

John attended Colorado A&M (now Colorado State University), Fort Collins, Colo. and Oregon State University, Corvallis, Ore., where he studied Forestry. John spent most of his working life employed mainly by Government agencies in such diverse fields as forestry, mapping, and photo interpretation.

Ivan Eugene "Skip" Alderson (Pilot)

Date of Skip's passing has not been determined. He was born in Oregon January 9, 1938, and went to

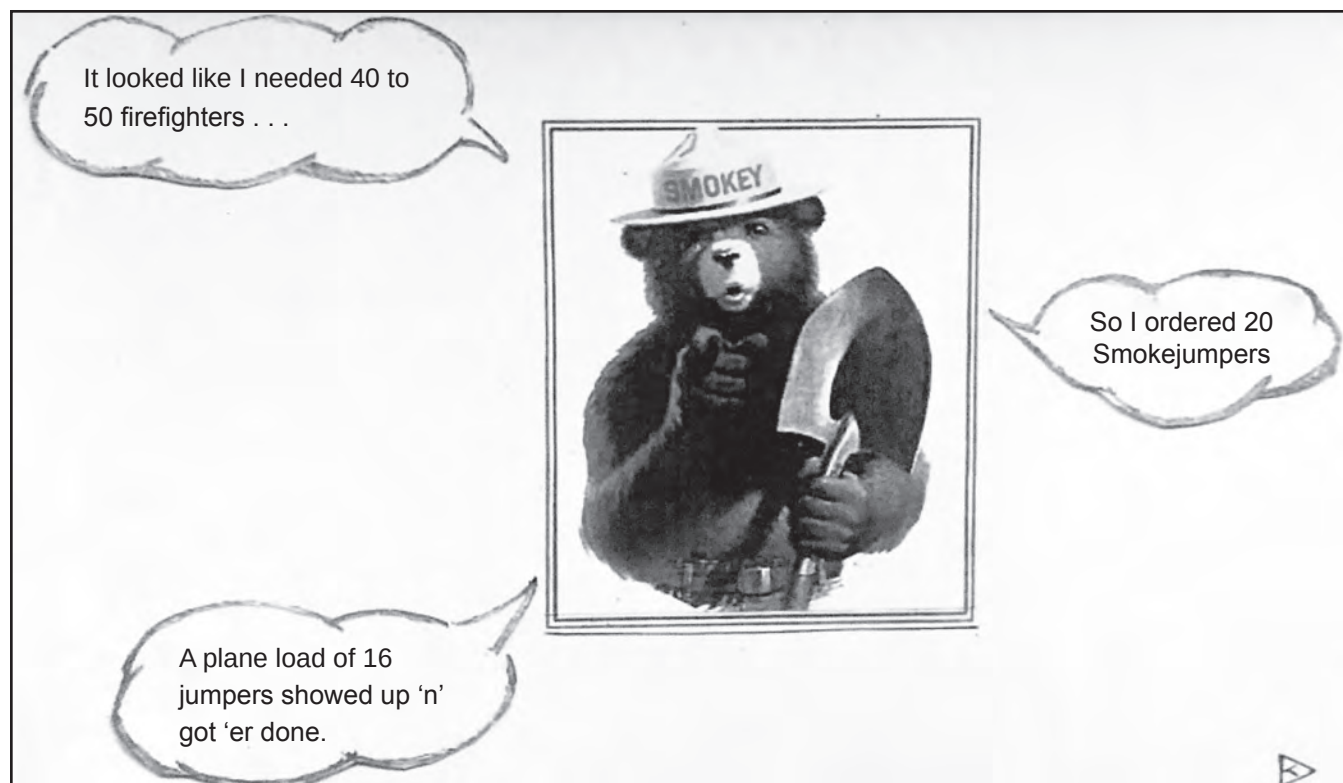
Grants Pass, High School. Skip married Sharon Watson in November 1971 in Missoula, Montana. He was the "Outstanding" Civil Air Patrol Cadet in July 1962. By 1967 Skip was a certified flight instructor in Missoula. He married Nancy Williams in 1973, and they had three boys-Matthew, Alan, and Craig.

On Skip's job resume he is listed as an Aircarrier Captain and Smokejumper pilot for Johnson Flying Service in Missoula.

A 1988 article in *The Oregonian* tells about a 1975 flight to West Africa while he was working for Evergreen Aviation. It was supposed to be a spraying mission to Niger, but when he got there, he found himself taking orders from US Embassy employees who worked for the CIA. It was a mission to rescue a French woman archaeologist who was held by anti-government forces in Chad. Nothing ever happened but Evergreen received \$250,000 of federal money.

A 2018 article in the *Missoulian* lists Skip as one of the pilots involved in a ground school learning about Miss Montana the DC-3 now located at the Museum of Mt. Flying. In a May 2019 article about the Miss Montana sendoff to Normandy, Skip is listed as being part of the ground crew that would join the plane when it reaches England.

The NSA Pilot's Index has Skip flying smokejumpers at Redmond, Missoula, and McCall in the 1960s, '70s, '80s, and '90s.



NSA Contributions Good Samaritan, Scholarship, History Preservation and/or General Operating Fund

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Total funds disbursed to Smokejumpers and families—\$361,500

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.

NEW Life Members Since April 2024

487	Tom Dolin	Grangeville	1959	492	Jeff Kinderman	Missoula	1975
488	Lawrence Gordon	Associate		493	Lee Bender	Grangeville	1957
489	Dave Rosgen	McCall	1961	494	Jack Sisco	Missoula	1960
490	David Zuarez	Redding	1991	495	Lynn Sprague	McCall	1959
491	Sarah Altemus-Pope	Missoula	2001	496	Mark Youmans	Redding	1981

NATIONAL REUNION

Commemorating 85 Years of Smokejumping

June 20-22, 2025, University of Montana, Missoula



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Pre Reunion

- Thursday, June 19: Saw certification (for NSA Trails Crew volunteers who need recertification)

Reunion

- Friday, June 20: Check in, Vendor Booths, Barbecue

- Saturday, June 21: Activities during the day, Bar & Banquet in the evening

- Sunday, June 22: Memorial, U.M.

Post Reunion

- Monday, June 23: Saw certification (for NSA Trails Crew volunteers who need recertification)

For detailed information about the program, go to
www.smokejumpers.com

!! IMPORTANT REGISTRATION ANNOUNCEMENT !!

REGISTRATION WILL BE ONLINE:

1. Go to the following link: **<https://www.xcdsystem.com/smokejumpers/attendee/index.cfm?ID=MhBiJhC>**
2. Create new profile, then update, continue to add registration items to your cart, and submit. If you are a smokejumper pilot and have not been given a registration code, contact **Bob McKean** (mckeanbob@gmail.com).

FOR THOSE WHO MAY HAVE TROUBLE REGISTERING ONLINE:

Please consider working with a family member or someone you trust who will assist you. If you need assistance from the website registrar, call the following phone number and ask for **Jessica (406-243-4113)**.

Hotels

The NSA has obtained reduced rates at two hotels.
See the NSA website for more details.

www.smokejumpers.com