

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2019

# SMOKEJUMPER

THE CAMP  
FIRE



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## Message from the President



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

YEARS AGO, **Bert Tanner** (MSO-68) caught my attention with the following question: "Does the man find smokejumping or does smokejumping find the man?" ("Woman" is interchangeable with "man" in this context since women have long since served with distinction.)

When I was 20, a crew of Missoula jumpers was detailed to do project work at the Seeley Lake R.D. where I worked. I still remember my reaction to those seemingly larger-than-life characters. They were so self-confident, so full of life, and – with their wry humor and obvious bonds of friendship – so amusing to be around.

Because of who they were and what they did, smokejumping was irresistible. I was hooked!

Smokejumping for 11 years was a privilege! The adventures in wild, remote places all over the West and Alaska were

amazing, though they are now but fond memories. However, the bonds of lifelong friendship developed with extraordinary people remain strong. One of them even introduced me to my wife.

Smokejumping taught me valuable life lessons. I learned I was capable of doing much more than I thought possible – and that, if it were true for me, it was true for others as well. I learned the powerful synergy of real teamwork.

I learned the importance of thinking independently while seeking the frank opinions of others. I learned the value of being decisive at key moments, then going for it with everything. I also learned to function with fear.

These and other lessons made a significant difference in who I became as a person and, subsequently, a professional in another career.

So in reflecting on Bert's question now some five decades later, for me the answer is simple: A very young man – age 21 – had the good fortune to find smokejumping, and smokejumping profoundly shaped the person he became.

It is a privilege to "give back" by serving as the president of the National Smokejumper Association. You have my commitment that I will do my best to serve the general membership and Board of

Directors to the best of my ability. In short, I will endeavor to dig my piece of the line and “bump-up.”

And, since the NSA is all of us, I encourage you to participate as well in helping the NSA thrive and achieve its mission:

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

There are many ways to participate. Here are just a few:

- Consider joining the NSA Trails program

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#### ***Smokejumper base abbreviations:***

|                        |                      |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Anchorage.....ANC      | Grangeville .....GAC | Redding.....RDD      |
| Boise.....NIFC         | Idaho City .....IDC  | Redmond.....RAC      |
| Cave Junction .....CJ  | La Grande.....LGD    | West Yellowstone WYS |
| Fairbanks.....FBX      | McCall.....MYC       | Whitehorse Yukon YXY |
| Fort St. John .....YXJ | Missoula .....MSO    | Winthrop.....NCSB    |

with the Trails Restoration and Maintenance Program Specialists (TRAMPS). For twenty-one years TRAMPS has been one way the NSA engaged in “... maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and rangeland resources ...” There were seventeen projects in six different states in 2018. These projects provide a real service and are simply a lot of fun. For more information, see the TRAMPS website <https://nsatrails.com/>.

- Another way to participate is to send updates and smokejumper-related information or stories to editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) for possible inclusion in *Smokejumper* magazine.
- The NSA has been active in helping smokejumpers and their families who have special needs through its Good Samaritan Fund. Consider making a contribution; it really matters. And, if you know of a member of the smokejumping community who needs our help, please contact us <http://smokejumpers.com/index.php/goodsamaritan-fund/get>.
- The NSA provides scholarships for smokejumpers and family members on a competitive basis. We awarded six scholarships in 2018; the NSA will be offering eight this year. Please consider contributing to the Scholarship Fund. If you know of someone who would like to apply for one of the scholarships, you will find the necessary information at <http://smokejumpers.com/index.php/scholarships/get>.
- If you are reading this magazine and have not become a NSA member, consider becoming one. You will find pertinent membership information at the following <http://smokejumpers.com/index.php/membership/getbecomeamembr>.

Finally, I want to thank **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) for his eight years of dedicated service as President. I have learned from Jim and will continue to seek his advice and council.

Again, it is my privilege to serve. 🙏



# The Camp Fire—The Future of America's Wildfires?

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

**T**his historic firestorm started on Thursday, November 8, 2018, in the early morning hours. By that evening it was within three miles of our home in Chico. It was contained 17 days later at over 150,000 acres. There were at least 86 fatalities and about 14,000 homes destroyed. Paradise, a town of 27,000, was wiped off the map in a period of hours.

In response to the number of NSA members inquiring about the safety of my wife and myself, I started sending out daily "blurbs." What follows is my view of the Camp Fire as it happened.

## Day 1—The Perfect Storm

The sky quickly became overcast and dark over Chico by 0730. The cloud engulfing the sky was black and moving rapidly. We turned on the TV. A wildfire had started in the Feather River Canyon, destroyed the small community of Concow within 30 minutes and was headed for Paradise.

I left for Redding where I was to help officiate the North Section Cross County Championships. About halfway through the meet, my replacement ankle was hurting me so much that I decided to call it a day and return home to Chico.

By the time I got to Red Bluff, 45 miles from Chico, the sky to the south was completely black. When I got home by 1500, it was necessary to drive with headlights on—the street lights also came on about that time. By 1700 it was close to nighttime dark.

Our 11-year-old grandson was staying with us. When we walked out to the driveway, I told him what he was seeing was something that we hope we will never see again. Even at that time, I had no idea of the enormity of the situation.

## Day 2—This Is Really Bad

The town of Paradise is 10 miles east of Chico at about 2,000 feet elevation. Above Paradise are the small towns of Magalia and Sterling City

(3,500 elevation). This area was the center of very large logging operations by the Diamond Match Co. in the 1930s and 40s. My Dad grew up in Sterling City, and I remember a photo of him working the log pond with a pike pole at age 14.

Paradise is located on a wide ridge between two deep canyons. It was threatened by fire in 2008 when about 9,000 were forced to evacuate due to the Humboldt Fire.

Many people work in Chico but live in Paradise. Besides being cheaper, the summer temps are 20 degrees cooler than the valley heat. It was a beautiful town and an area with many retirees from Southern Calif. and the Bay Area. Reading the Paradise obits, one can see retired law enforcement, fire chiefs, and ranking military types.

Thousands of people have poured into Chico as they escaped down the Skyway, the main road to Chico. Some people in eastern Chico are under evacuation orders and others are evacuating without an order—panic.

## Day 3—52,000 Acres

After two days, most of which have actually been in near darkness, smoke is grey and now lifting. I think it is being blown in another direction. The fire is burning deeper into the communities above Paradise—Magalia and Sterling City. Nine dead found so far.

One reporter said he walked by a line of 90+ cars that had been abandoned as people tried to get out of Paradise. All roads up there are two lanes and only get to four lanes once you get on the Chico side of the town. Officials turned all four lanes in the "out" direction, but the bottle-necks were terrific. There will be more bodies found as many of these roads were in the "woods."

The main hospital and high school did not burn. Eight other schools burned. All schools in the county closed until after Thanksgiving. Then—what do you do with 3,000 students?

Even though the HS did not burn, the students' homes probably did.

Reported that Butte Co. Sheriff's staff lost 20 of their homes—how long can they stay on the job? I don't know if we have seen conditions like this before.

The bulk mailer for *Smokejumper* magazine lost his business and home. All of our mailing supplies are gone. Little compared to the loss suffered by this gentleman.

California Professional Firefighters President Brian Rice called Pres. Trump's threat to withhold federal aid "ill-informed, ill-timed and demeaning."

## Day 4—Social Media Bad

110,000 acres 20% controlled, 14 additional bodies found yesterday bringing total to 23 dead. There are still hundreds of burned-out cars on the back roads to be checked. Saw video of a burned-out school bus along side of the road—obviously the kids got away.

There are 4,000 personnel on the fire—440 engines. We actually have sun in Chico today as smoke is blowing SE. Fire is moving higher up into the mountains above Paradise—about all that is left to burn.

Many family members are trying to get connected. Kids are being evacuated from their school and taken to one area (Oroville) and parents working in Chico or escaping from Paradise—many in the nick of time. Others not. There are six ex-jumpers and families with Paradise addresses. We have already helped **Keith Lockwood's** (CJ-64) daughter with GSF aid as she lost everything—her escape story is chilling. Have contacted **Bob Hooper** (CJ-67) and hope to have lunch with him this week. The others—will wait to sort out later.

The area is still closed, which is creating a lot of problems—residents want to get back in to see what's left, law enforcement has to keep them out. Tempers are high at the blockades. Glad my son is a retired Deputy, as he had to do the same thing a couple years back in 2008 fire.

This could go on until we get some rain—52,000 people evacuated. I can't imagine how all the Paradise area people are going to get by, but they will. Amazing attitudes from those inter-

viewed. However, like we saw in John Culbertson's story in *Smokejumper* magazine about the Thomas Fire, the next step is depression. Social media still continues to be a big problem as rumors and inaccurate information flows faster than you can digest it. Early on, it created an evacuation panic among many in Chico.

## Day 5—Still Going

Many of the streets in Paradise are cul-de-sacs that lead into single-lane roads. A lot of these cul-de-sacs were stacked with mobile home type dwellings. Many retirees, a number without cars, depend upon senior transportation.

There was a heartbreaking video on TV showing an older man wandering alongside a house that was completely consumed in fire. He was in a daze. People were trying to get him into a car and out of there. He kept wondering what was going to happen to his car—you could see that he was in another world.

As you move up the hill from Paradise to Magalia, you are at about 2,400 elevation. Magalia has a good number of people who live in the woods and don't want to be disturbed—a lot of people with a ton of firearms. My son always hated the "domestic problems" calls in that area. He never had to use his firearm and was never shot at, but was within a hair on several occasions. Who knows how many didn't make it out of the woods?

During the 80s/90s when I was running the Type II Crew Program on the Mendocino N.F., I had a roster of about 12 fire-bus drivers. I had every driver attend the classroom fire training and then required them to take the 24-hour field training. They drove the trainees to Alder Springs and experienced smoke and fire.

This morning I read about a Paradise school bus driver who had a mini-bus with a special-needs child. The radio system went down and this bus was MIA. Well, with Ponderosa Elementary School burning, ex-fire bus driver Angie Van Blaricom drove her bus to the Save Mart parking lot where she had a safe space. Did her fire training of 20+ years ago kick in? Who knows, but I feel good.

When I read about the Southern Calif. fires and celebs losing their million-dollar homes, I do

not have a lick of sympathy. They need to drive up this way and spend a week in a tent in the Walmart parking lot.

## Understanding The Roads

I would like to explain the road situation in Paradise, as that led to some of the fatalities. There are better answers to evacuating from an advancing, uncontrolled wildfire, and this will be dealt with in future issues of *Smokejumper*.

There is a four-lane road going from Chico to Paradise called the Skyway. However, when it enters Paradise, it turns into a normal two-lane road. As it runs up the hill toward Magalia, it gets into the twists and turns of a mountain road even though it is considered inside the town of Paradise.

Off the Skyway, there are numerous two-lane roads leading to other parts of the town and numerous cul-de-sacs with mobile homes and houses. Picture 20,000 people trying to get onto the Skyway. It's not a situation where a good person will let you come in from a side lane. Everyone is in a panic mode, and the people on the side streets stand no chance of getting in. It is every person for themselves!

After the 2008 Humboldt Fire, a wise congressman got \$20 million in federal funds to improve a road out the top end of Paradise. Good thinking. Today the local newspaper touted the success of that road in getting people out of the area when the fire got to Magalia, above Paradise.

Maybe this is correct, but I am a skeptic. The number of people above Paradise is a small fraction of those caught on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>. They had plenty of warning and were plenty scared by that time. I'm guessing that many got out before the evacuation notice.

Biggest question—could this have worked for Paradise? I doubt it. If anyone attempted to drive up the Skyway, they would have been met by cars coming down that road in both lanes and passing on the dirt whenever possible. It was a pure panic situation—get out of my way! Would this \$20 million have been better spent improving the Skyway in Paradise?

Bottom line is that the primary goal of the people in Paradise should have been to reach a “safe zone” or “shelter in place.” The problem

is that very few people understand wildfire—as evidenced by the recent tweets from D.C.

If people are going to live in the wildland Urban Interface, they will have to understand what is “defensible space.” This is not going to happen. People rely on the government agencies to take care of them—personal responsibility is a thing of the past.

Houses can be defended, but it takes work. If you are going to live in the woods and enjoy the shade of the big trees, you are going to have to do your part in defending your home. But, people are not going to do that. It is too much work.

Many of the residents of Paradise are older and retired. They count on Cal Fire to save them, even though they live in a hazard area. We have become dependent upon others to do what we should be doing ourselves. We are asking our fire people to do the impossible. The fire of 2008 is not the fire of 2018.

We need a major fuel reduction program in the western U.S. It is going to cost money. Maybe people are going to come to the realization that a dollar spent is \$10 saved in heartache. I don't think so. Look to the January issue of *Smokejumper* magazine for some great articles on fuel reduction. You need to add that term to your vocabulary if you live in the Western United States. Don't look to D.C. to solve your problems—they have little or no understanding of wildfire in the west.

## Day 6—This is Impossible—Wrong!

The death toll went from 29 yesterday to 42 last night. You have to take a step back and look at what we are dealing with here. There are close to 7,000 homes burned to the ground. There were a large number of retirees and aging people living in Paradise. The escape roads became impassible. The young could get out and walk or run. People in their 80s can't do that.

With the number of homes destroyed, think of the tremendous job of searching for remains. The figure in missing people has been reported to be over 200. The burned homes will have to be sifted for any remains.

The Sheriff is bringing in additional personnel and cadaver dogs. I don't know how Sheriff Kory



## Camp Fire — An American Disaster

*Photos From Chico Airport Courtesy Air Spray Air Tankers*



**Air Tankers Under Smoke Cloud**



**Town of Paradise Under Camp Fire**



**One of Three Fire Boss Air Tankers  
Waiting For the Call That Never Came**



**Town of Paradise No Longer Exists**

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



Honea is standing up. He and his staff are small compared to all of the other resources, but their job is tremendous. Body recovery and identification rise to the top. Everyone wants to know whose bones were found in the rubble.

People are getting more irritated and disturbed that they can't get back into the area where their homes were or are still standing. The hazard trees are almost uncountable. Everyone who has been on the fireline knows that these burned trees could fall at any time. There are thousands of them. Still, the Sheriff has to deal with irate people wanting to get back in.

Listening to the media continues to be a challenge for anyone experienced in fire. I know those stupid questions have to be answered whenever there is a news conference. My wife tells me that yelling at the TV is not productive.

I keep hoping that Cal Fire will not use this event to lobby for more people and equipment. They have a strong union and I know that is going to come up. My real hope is that we start talking about serious fuel reduction plans.

**Fred Rohrbach** (MSO-65), who owns A-America furniture in Seattle, has made an offer of a semi load of furniture. This will take time, as I have not yet located smokejumper families in the area to find out their future plans. Just another example of a tight-knit group standing tall.

The Day 7 report is very predictable at this time: More bodies found, acreage burn slowed, containment increased—two good, one bad.

## Day 7—Let's Have Some Good News

The Paradise H.S. football team was set to start the post-season playoffs when the fire hit. They were to play Red Bluff in the first round and Red Bluff even offered to let them automatically advance. Of course playing again this season was impossible—most lost their homes and football was the last thing on their minds.

Enter the San Francisco 49ers who gave them 68 tickets for the Monday Night game against the N.Y. Giants. The Chico School District provided buses for the trip to the Bay Area and the game. 49er strength coach, Shane Wallen, grew up in Paradise and his father's house was lost in the fire.

Chico native and Green Bay Packer quarterback Aaron Rodgers talked about the fire in his postgame news conference after leading the Packers past the Miami Dolphins. Rodgers lived in Magalia at one time and his folks still live in Chico.

**Tom Boatner** (FBX-80) forwarded this info about **Deb Yoder** (RDD-00): "Deb Yoder, former USFS and BLM jumper, lost her home in Paradise. She is currently doing volunteer medical work in the Marshall Islands, but normally works at the Paradise Hospital."

I met with **Bob Hooper** (CJ-67) today for lunch, and he is doing fine. As I was driving back from lunch with Bob, I kept noticing the amount of fire personnel around town. My thoughts—are we getting to the point where this fire is over-staffed? The resources on hand are tremendous.

On another personal basis—each day I wake up and think this might be a dream. Fire has always been an adrenalin rush for me. I loved smokejumping and felt good at stopping a fire in its infancy. This is different. A town of 27,000 wiped off the map. Untold numbers still missing. When you read about an earthquake that kills thousands in a foreign country, it is just another day. Close to home is different.

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*Fire has always been an adrenalin rush for me. I loved smokejumping and felt good at stopping a fire in its infancy. This is different. A town of 27,000 wiped off the map.*

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I watched the Cal Fire briefing this morning and I continue to marvel at this organization. Hot spots within the last six hours were shown on a map—many of them were from burnout operations done last night. Cal Fire works at night when wind and other conditions are better—take note USFS.

At last night's news briefing, Sheriff Honea continued to field questions in his calm and precise manner. One reporter started the questioning as to why people did not receive evacuation notices in time. The question had a tone that



sounded like the Sheriff had dropped the ball. Let's see, this fire advanced 6.7 miles the first hour and 19.7 miles in the first 17 hours.

Sheriff Honea handled the Oroville Dam crisis last year when he ordered the evacuation of 80,000+ people as the tallest dam in the U.S. started to fail. He made a call while Water Resources people walked in a confused circle. One of the potentially largest disasters in the history of the U.S. did not happen, but it was close. A couple hundred thousand people lived downstream from the dam.

From personal knowledge I know that, due to budget limitations, there are only a couple Deputies on duty at some times for the whole county. The evacuation of 27,000 in a matter of hours is impossible. I sure wouldn't be able to stand and take questions like that and hold my cool. The Sheriff is something else—he doesn't pass the buck and he takes the lead.

Downside—Sierra Nevada Brewery, one of the largest in the nation, is serving free meals to the evacuees in their exclusive restaurant. In the article about this, it was mentioned that first responders were spotted heading into the restaurant. I have a problem with this as all personnel on the fire are well fed at the fire center at the fairgrounds or the restaurants in town. They don't need to compete for places at the table with the evacuees.

## Day 8—Athletes Are Great

Just listened to the morning briefing and things are slowing to the common grind of wildland firefighting. We're at 140,000 acres and 40% contained. Humidity has increased to the point where it is hampering nighttime firing efforts.

There are about 1,000 people camped out in the Walmart parking lot and many more on open spaces around town. Rain predicted for next Tuesday—good for fire control—will be horrible for all the people camped out. It's getting into the low 30s at night, and the smoke cover is holding down daytime temps.

We are in the final stages of the fall sports playoffs that lead teams to the Nor-Cal and potentially the state playoffs. A couple heart-warming stories from that venue:

A very small private school in Paradise made it by the first round in the girl's volleyball and was

set for the next set of games when the fire hit. They did round up enough players but had no uniforms and gear. State CIF gave them the OK to play in t-shirts and shorts. When they arrived for the game down in Auburn, the host school had purchased uniforms with the correct numbers for each of the Paradise girls. Add to that, they gave each of the girls \$300 gift cards. What a class act!

When I was working the Cross Country Championships on the day the fire started, some of the Paradise High runners were able to make it via parents. One of their top young men was among the runners that did not make it. He evacuated to Oroville in the nick of time.

The state gave him permission to run the course on another day and try to get a qualifying time. Hard to do when there is no competition and you are running solo. Cross Country is a lot different than Track.

When he arrived at the course, the Chico H.S. team was there. The Chico #1 runner was the section champ, winning by over 40 seconds.

Well, here's the rest of the story. The Chico #1 knew exactly the time the Paradise runner would have to run in order to make it to the state meet. He led the pack that included the CHS boys team. The young man from Paradise made the cutoff time by 30 seconds.

There is a lot of discussion with people saying they were not warned. This is going to be a big topic for months/years. How many of these people opted out of the system when they were asked to sign up? There have been enough interviews of people on TV who, when asked, ignored the evacuation warnings. There are people who, due to age and health, could not have made it out in any case.

With the tremendous rate of spread and the spotting, would it have helped if everyone in Paradise had gotten a warning in the first hour? I doubt it. Go back to the description of the road system. It was jammed to the point of no movement in most places. Unless you could physically run for a couple miles, you could not even get out of the feeder roads. And, then where would you be?

We will have to discuss "shelter in place" at some time, but that is a future topic for *Smoke-*

## Day 9—Finger Pointing

We now have 63 dead. People are saying they weren't warned, no one told them, and on and on. "We weren't notified, my cell phone wasn't working." Someone has to be responsible. After all, personal responsibility is not popular today. Let's shift the blame on someone so I don't have to face up to my own failures.

They list Paradise at about 27,000, but there are many more communities scattered in the woods. The amount of people and the evacuation routes makes this an impossible situation. I don't think that a four-lane freeway all the way up to Magalia would have worked. Don't blame the Sheriff. There are over 50,000 people down here in Chico now. Looks like something worked!

Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said evacuation orders were issued through 5,227 emails, 25,643 phone calls and 5,445 texts, in addition to social media and the use of loudspeakers. As cellphone service went down, authorities went into neighborhoods with bullhorns to tell people to leave, and that saved some lives.

This fire advanced 6.7 miles in the first hour. Have you ever heard of anything like that? I guess the Sheriff will be the punching bag for months to come. Is this what comes with the job?

I've stopped watching the Cal Fire morning briefings. They have the monster in a cage and are closing the loop. It's all about people now.

We have over 50,000 additional people in town. We're a town with 16,000 university students, and we are 25 miles away from the Oroville Dam repair project that has been going on for over a year now at a cost of over a billion dollars. Housing is not available.

They are starting to close down the tent cities that have sprung up around the city. Lucky people have relatives in other towns. What about the people who work in the area but have no housing? Add to that, rain coming next week—the smoke cover is already making the temps go to the mid-30s at night.

My wife and I try not to leave the house and add to the traffic jams around town. She did leave this morning to get groceries at 0600. I went to

the post office yesterday, looked at the lines and went home.

Concow is a small community of about 700 that was hit hard. A good number of the fatalities are from that area. There was a piece in our local newspaper telling about a family that protected their structures and "sheltered in place." Now, they are running out of supplies. No one is allowed in or out of the area. Somehow there must be a way to allow residents to leave, get supplies and return. We have National Guard here—these people could be escorted in and out.

One of those residents during the morning news said, "If we're going to live out there, we're going to have to take care of ourselves." That's my type of thinking.

There is a reservoir in Concow. Some people fled into the water when the fire hit. Remember, the fire started at about 0630, it got to Concow by 0710. Forget evacuation plans. Residents were helping others out of the water—some suffering from, ironically, hypothermia.

The fire drove a man out of the hills near Berry Creek yesterday. Long criminal background, been in prison, and a suspect in a double homicide. Once a person gets back into the hills, they can hide for years. After a shootout, this guy is no longer a problem.

I looked at the list of the missing—now at 631. There were people I graduated with from Chico H.S. Back then, Paradise did not have a high school and those students were bused down to Chico. I saw one of my basketball officials from the days when I was an assigner of officials. He was a fast running back for Chico State football in his college days. However, you don't run fast at age 78.

The chilling part of the list is seeing four people with same last names in a row. These aren't older people—my guess families. Let's hope they are just "missing."

## Day 10—Rains Coming

Heard about a gentleman who built his home up one of the canyons surrounding Chico. He was knowledgeable about fire and built the proper systems and defenses. Harold is still in business. His wife is a vegetarian—Harold isn't. Downside—he's down to the veggie pizzas and wants some meat.

Lynn lives in the foothills SE of Chico. For some reason, a neighbor gave her a pump for a nearby stream and showed her how to use it. Must have had a vision as this was before the fire started. Years ago Lynn was one of the top female Javelin throwers in the U.S. and represented the U.S. in international competition. Age and health problems have happened but she saved her house. Lynn also went through my wildland fire training years ago. Hope that knowledge played some part in this story.

**Larry Boggs** (RDD-63) sent me a newspaper article from 1992. He and a professor from Chico State were presenting a seminar about creating “Defensible Space.” A video was shown about the Powerline Fire that had come close to the community. Quoting from the article: “Another factor, what Boggs called ‘our greatest problem,’ is wind.”

Three things stand out in Larry’s presentation: Powerline, defensible space, wind. Oh, where was this seminar held? Paradise.

Sheriff Honea now has over 500 personnel looking for remains. The Sherriff continues to show his leadership. I think it is unusual to have a Sheriff with a law degree. He will be in congress in years to come.

Nine burn patients are in the hospital, ranging from critical to fair.

Significant rain coming next week—will be a miserable Thanksgiving for the people in tents and sleeping in their cars.

After the 49er game last week, the Paradise H.S. football team, who were the guests of the 49ers, went down to the playing field and ran some plays in Levi Stadium. Hall of Fame quarterback Steve Young, now an announcer, came down to find out who they were. After finding out, he spent 30 minutes with those kids.

In an interview, I looked at Rick, the Paradise football coach. He is one of the most successful in Northern California. I remembered that young face when he was an assistant coach at Chico Jr. H.S., learning the game from our head football coach. We all age, but the look on his face reflected more than age—stress.

Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers continues to show class. After the Seattle game the other night, he showed up at the press conference wearing a “Butte Strong” sweatshirt. Reminder—he

went to high school in Chico and played for our local Butte Community College before he hit the big time.

## Day 11 Camp Fire— Found Two

I have five jumpers living in Paradise who I should find and see if they need any help from the NSA. **Brian Kopka** (MSO-95) called yesterday in answer to an email request I sent out. Brian was one of the 20-plus people from my Type II Crews that went on to become smokejumpers.

Brian was able to get his family out early and is staying at his stepson’s house in Chico. He owns and operates Sierra Tree Care. Just about every piece of equipment and his home are gone. He was able to save one of his large loading trucks, a piece of equipment that will allow him to continue with his business. Brian’s son will enroll in high school in Chico when classes resume.

Previously, I mentioned a \$20 million project in 2008 to pave the road that runs out of the top end of Paradise. Many have wondered if this road was used and to what extent? Brian said that his folks, who lived in Magalia above Paradise, headed down the main road toward Chico. Fortunately, some law enforcement person started turning the line around and sent them out the top end of the town. Another mile and they would have been caught in the road jam that was overrun by fire.

I’ve got three jumpers to go. **Joel Wilkinson** (MSO-80) was another person from my Type II crews. He also runs a tree service in Paradise. Brian said he would try to help me find Joel. My last person is a CJ-46 jumper who has to be in his 90s if he is still alive. Ed was WWII Airborne and it has been 10 years since I’ve heard from him.

Got an email from Sandy Martinez and **Jim Klump** (RDD-64), and they are OK up in Forestown.

That was quick. Joel Wilkinson just checked in. Being in the same business and smokejumpers, he was in contact with Brian Kopka. Joel and family made it down to Chico where he has relatives. He lost his home and a rental and all of his tree business equipment and gear. Like he says, “I’m at

ground zero.” Joel said his needs are being taken care of at this time. Told him the NSA Good Sam Fund is within a mile of him and waiting to help.

Just got another name to check on—have two to go.

I’m keeping **Fred Rohrbach’s** (MSO-65) offer of a semi-truck load of furniture in the wings. This will be something we will deal with down the line—could be 4-5 months. Fred has said he could possibly bring other companies into the plan. This is great. Fred always gets to the bottom line quickly—he’s all business. Would not work well in any government organization.

The continual showing of air tanker drops on fires by the media has created a situation in the public’s mind that you must have an air tanker show in order to fight wildfire. Locals are starting to ask why there weren’t air tanker operations early on, as if it would have stopped this monster fire. First, the winds were reaching 50 mph and drops would have been useless. However, helicopters were used on useful water drops in an attempt to keep the evacuation routes open.

Chico Air Spray manager, Ravi Saip, made an offer of three of their Fire Boss water-scooping aircraft to Cal Fire. I know Ravi well as I was one of his Jr. H.S. teachers and his Cross Country Coach in high school. Air Spray is a Canadian air tanker company operating out of the old Aero Union facility at the Chico Airport.

For some reason, Cal Fire turned down the offer. Probably valid reasons, but unknown to me. I was bothered by a statement from a Cal Fire air attack person: “We tend to shy away from single engine tankers. Fire Bosses are good in places with large water sources.”

With Lake Oroville, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest reservoir in California, adjacent to the fire, it would seem like this would be a perfect tool to help keep the escape routes open. The turnaround time would have been short. I need to call Ravi and find out turnaround times and other factors.

The Fire Boss is a modification of the single engine Air Tractor and has an 800-gallon capacity. It can scoop from local water sources in minutes and return to the fire. The next day a 747 super tanker flying from Sacramento, 90 miles away, dropped three loads on the fire—expense—who knows? Is bigger always better?

The strength coach for the S.F. 49ers and his father visited the father’s home in Paradise—completely destroyed. With all the restrictions, I wondered how they were able to access that area. Apparently they were granted VIP access. I have a problem with that, as there are people who “sheltered in place” and need to get out to get supplies. Would like to hear some more details on this one.

## Day 12—A Resource Turned Down

We’re at 65% containment with rain coming. 150,000 acres, 10,364 homes destroyed and 77 fatalities. The amount of resources seems overwhelming to me: 597 engines, 65 water tenders, 28 helicopters, 100 hand crews, 83 dozers and 5,332 personnel. It’s a mini D-Day.

There are numerous smaller towns in the hills—Paradise was just the largest. I’ve already talked about the roads being blocked—we still have over 1,000 missing. I think many have just left the area and kept on going.

After listening to more people, I can equate the escape from Paradise to some of those tragic building fires where hundreds of people are disoriented by smoke, jam the exits, thereby limiting the ability to get out. As much as it was an “every man for himself” situation, there are examples of the opposite.

A garbage truck driver doing his early morning route higher on the ridge turned around and went back to one of his customers. The lady was 93 years old and standing on her front yard. This gentleman put her in the big green truck and saved her.

Yesterday, I had lunch with a friend from the Reno area who came down to check on his cousin. The cousin has ALS and is confined to a wheel chair. The cousin’s caregiver headed up the ridge when the fire hit. The caregiver came across a roadblock created by an older lady whose car was crossways and blocking the road.

The lady was confused and overwhelmed by the situation. The caregiver got out of his car, moved the older lady’s car off the road, and put her into another vehicle. Then this gentleman proceeded up the road, loaded up the man with



ALS and his heavy wheelchair, and started the escape. The road down the hill (Skyway) was jammed and cars were being overrun by the fire. Fortunately, he knows some of the older, dirt fire roads out of the area, and caregiver and cousin made it to Chico.

I mentioned yesterday that I was concerned about Air Spray's offer of three of their Fire Boss aircraft early on—Cal Fire turned down the offer. I called General Manager Ravi Saip first thing this morning to get some more detail.

Being in the air tanker contracting business, Ravi is normally hesitant to speak out whenever things like this happen. However, he lived in Paradise along with several of his employees.

Here's what I found out: At 0830 he offered Cal Fire three Sky Boss firefighting aircraft ready to go. They could have been off the Chico Airport and over the fire in minutes. Realistically, they would have had little effect on the flame front that was advancing at about one football field a second. However, this was still about 2.5 hours before the fire got to Clark Rd. and the Skyway, two main evacuation routes for the town.

The Sky Boss aircraft are not large air tankers, but are an excellent tool. They are a scooper-type aircraft and can drop 800 gallons of water and can fly low and slow—great accuracy. Lake Oroville is adjacent to the fire. This aircraft can reload in less than a minute while skimming the surface at 80 mph.

Three of these aircraft would operate in tandem following each other—drop, scoop, drop, etc. The reload time from fire to Lake Oroville would have been a few minutes, and they could have operated over the fire for 3.5 hours before having to refuel. Refueling would not be a long process at the Chico Airport, and they would have been back on the fire. In 3.5 hours Ravi estimated that EACH aircraft would have been able to drop 40,000 gallons of water.

The Cal Fire helicopters, with a lesser load, were operating along the Skyway from what I saw on TV. Could three Fire Boss aircraft have operated along the escape routes and reduced the loss of life in trapped cars? Who knows? But, the big question—why weren't they allowed to try? I have a feeling that the large air tanker industry has some sort of an inside track.

## Day 13—Was It Even Possible to Evacuate?

Forty-eight hours before the fire, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) sent out warnings of possible power shutdowns to residents in nine counties. Predicted wind speed and other conditions had met their shutdown criteria.

After last year's devastating fires in the Napa area, PG&E set up protocols to conduct public safety power shutoffs in the event of "extreme fire weather danger." Two hours before the fire, a weather station at Jarbo Gap recorded sustained winds of 32 mph with gusts up to 52 mph. PG&E **did not** shut down any power. It is almost certain that one of their lines started the fire.

I asked Larry Boggs (RDD-63) if the start area was on either of the two surrounding national forests. Larry worked the Plumas for quite some time. His reply: "Pulga is Cal Fire, surrounding area FS, then the fire moved NW onto the Plumas NF, and then quickly onto the Lassen NF, and finally on to State Responsible Area land."

I met my son to talk about evacuation. He is now retired from the Sheriff's Dept. He said that they had to evacuate areas of Paradise during the 2008 fire. At that time, each Deputy had a grid area to cover where they had to personally knock on each door and notify the residents to evacuate. They then wrapped the mailbox with a colored tape to show that resident or house had been contacted. Ten years later, with all the technology that we now have, that seems like something out of the covered wagon days.

After the 2008 fire, the area was divided into evacuation zones that were supposed to lead to an orderly notification and evacuation. The key problem still remained: There is really only one main road down the hill and that is called the Skyway. However, it does not get to four lanes until you get on the Chico side of Paradise. Feeding into the Skyway are hundreds of very small roads.

Even though Paradise is only 27,000, there are numerous other small communities and a lot of people who just live in the woods—over 50,000 evacuees made it to Chico.

The spread of this fire is almost unheard of—a brief timeline:

**0630**—Fire started—engines there and have visual at about 0645, but it is across the canyon. It is already 10 acres by 0651—21 minutes.

First evacuation order went out **0723** less than an hour after start.

Reports have fire moving football field per second. Winds at 50 mph in the canyon.

**0800**—Fire reaches Paradise and evacuation order issued.

**1045**—Fire had engulfed many of the feeder roads and was within half mile of the Skyway—was 20,000 acres in just 2.5 hours after start. A spot fire a mile ahead of the front was burning on both sides of Clark Road, another main roadway. Any orderly evacuation had broken down, roads jammed and being burned over, people driving into each other, cars being abandoned, etc.

The fire also had spotted a couple miles ahead on the other side of the Skyway and was burning in that canyon starting another large number of people trying to get down the Stilson Canyon Road.

**1800**—The fire was 55,000 acres. All resources were in a saving people mode. I don't know if any plan would have worked.

I sent a "Letter to the Editor" yesterday about Cal Fire not using the Fire Boss aircraft that were sitting and waiting at the Chico Airport. Just want to explain that there are many tools in the box and that "very large air tankers" from Sacramento aren't always the answer.

## Day 14 Camp Fire— Is PTSD Spreading?

Here comes the soapbox—fire—people—where have we gone?

In the news tonight, they interviewed a lady who experienced the Camp Fire. She made it out and didn't look the worse for the wear on TV. In comes the PTSD—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Now, when she smells smoke she suffers from PTSD.

I look back on my career where my mentors were WWII veterans. The leaders in the California State Athletic Directors Association were men who came out of the war and used the G.I. Bill to get their education—many were the first in their families to go to college. It would be hard to

imagine the mental burdens they brought home.

*With The Old Breed* (Peleliu and Okinawa) by Eugene Sledge should be required reading by everyone in the U.S. Was there ever a battle in WWII that was fought foot by foot, face to face with such intensity and killing as Peleliu?

Did Sledge come home with PTSD? Of course, he certainly had memories. When he enrolled at the Auburn University and was asked by an interviewer what he was good at, he replied, "Killing Japs." However, he never picked up a gun and went hunting again. Sledge ended up with a PhD and retired as a Professor at Alabama College in 1990. He got up and moved on.

My point—we are lucky. We have never experienced what Europe and other parts of the world did during WWII. Every city in some countries looked like, or worse than Paradise.

I really like those who, when interviewed, tell how they are going to get back on their feet and move on. PTSD is on the back porch for them. Even though it has been 73 years, they have the same mindset of the vets of WWII.

A Sergeant in the Paradise Police Dept., and ex-student of mine, said that 17 of 30 staff lost homes, but everyone is on duty.

The rain arrives at 0600 this morning—gentle at this time but predicted to drop 4-6 inches before it is over. The good thing—heaviest rains are predicted for east side and the most difficult part of the fire to access.

From a person working on the fire yesterday: "Made good progress. The steep canyon walls are tough and hazardous to our firefighters."

Had coffee this morning with a good friend, who is retired from Office of Emergency Services (OES). He wanted me to remind all readers that the majority of the engines on these fires come from towns, counties and cities, not Cal Fire. I mentioned what I see as an overload of resources in the community. Having been responsible for handling many of these resources in the past, he said, "This is when you need to start getting people on the road home. Idle hands create problems with crews doing 24 hours on and 24 hours off."

I mentioned that I am really bothered by well-fed fire personnel taking advantage of the free meals offered by restaurants. To me those meals should go to evacuees who have no homes or

kitchens. He responded that he always told crews not to eat on the dime of the good people in the community. They are well paid and the restaurants operate on a thin profit margin to begin with.

Eighty-one dead and over 600 missing—this is not going to be a good Thanksgiving down here.

## Day 15—The Governor Returns

During the morning briefing yesterday, a person stepped onto the stage and, without any introduction, immediately received a round of applause from the assembled firefighters. Ex-governor Arnold “I’ll be Back” Schwarzenegger came back.

The “Governator” gave an impromptu talk to the group. A Republican governor in a totally “Blue” state, he was (is?) popular with the working class. He grew up in a middle-class home in Austria and, through total drive and determination, won the Mr. Universe title at age 20. The rest is history if you go to movies and follow politics.

In 1986 he married Maria Shriver, a niece of John F. Kennedy, adding to his potential political presence. He served as governor of California from 2003-2011. “Arnie” was popular—if an 18-wheeler needed to be moved, he climbed in and moved it. Since his messy divorce from Shriver in 2011, he has dropped off the political map. He screwed himself right out of politics.

Arnold was pretty impressive yesterday, completely talking offhand. He immediately bonded with the firefighters countering the earlier message from D.C. about their “forest management skills.” He told them that they needed the latest in helicopters and firefighting tools—not rakes for the forest. I felt fired up just listening to him. It was like a coach giving a pep talk.

Went to my dentist yesterday. He told me the fire people wanted the dental records for all his Paradise patients.

During the past 20 years, I’ve been going to the post office with smokejumper mailing so much that I know the clerks by their first names. I’ve been trying to stay away since all the Paradise mail has been forwarded to Chico. It has been a mad house at the two local post offices.

Today, I needed to get the Jan. issue of *Smokejumper* magazine off to our four foreign members.

The lines were long and tempers were short.

We are in a national disaster situation here in Chico. With lines running out the door and people getting frustrated, they only had three of the five windows open. If I were postmaster, I would have all windows open, all the time, and increase the number of hours the facility is open. Meet the needs of the customers for cry’in out loud. Where is the leadership that adapts to the situation? Snow, rain, nor gloom of the night—how about adding fire!

It’s Thanksgiving Day. I’ll sure have a deeper feeling of thanks as we sit down with family today. Count your blessings.

There will be 830 people going through the ruins today still looking for the 533 on the missing list. Four out of the most recent victims found ranged 72-82, which gives you an idea of things to come as these people work on—a reminder of the amount of retirees who lived on the ridge.

The rain has almost been coming down at a perfect rate—easy and steady—about an inch in the fire area. Containment is now at 90%. The fire started two weeks ago today almost to the minute as I write this.

## Day 16—Aaron Rodgers—A Class Act

Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers is the pride of Chico. If he had a protective line like Tom Brady, the Packers would be in the Super Bowl on a regular basis.

Yesterday, Rodgers donated a million dollars toward helping the victims of the Camp Fire. But that is not the reason I consider him a class act. I don’t know Rodgers, as he attended our rival high school on the other side of town. I know him through events related to me by close friends.

I worked and taught with Ric Pit for many years at Chico Jr. H.S. First met Ric when he banged on the locker room door one summer. He was a Vietnam Marine who came home, went to Chico State and received his teaching credential. Well, I hired him—indirectly, as that is something the administration does, but they always asked me whom I wanted to hire, as I was Dept. Chair and Athletic Director.

Years later Ric transferred to our rival high

school where he coached Aaron Rodgers at the Jr. Varsity football level. They developed a lasting relationship from that experience.

I continued to coach track for almost 20 years after my retirement. One of my goals was to team up with Ric again and have him come back to our program. That never happened. Rick died of brain cancer before he retired—I feel, a victim of Agent Orange.

Later when Ric's youngest daughter was married, Aaron Rodgers stood in for his old coach and friend. That is why I consider Aaron Rodgers to be a class act.

Yesterday, I mentioned that ex-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger received a warm welcome as he stepped onto the stage at the morning briefing. **Dick Rath** (MSO-73) sent along a story about Schwarzenegger that will help you to understand his popularity among the firefighters.

From Dick: "I often heard from my friend Rocky Opliger, who was the IC on one of the south zone's Type 1 teams, that it was rare for Arnold not to show up at the Incident that they were managing. Rocky has a great sense of humor and told me the following story.

"He was the Deputy I.C. and assigned to an incident in the south zone. Arnold was the new governor and arrived at the ICP. Upon beginning their introductions, Rocky shook hands with Arnold and then said, 'Oh, by the way, our I.C. thinks that he can take you!' Arnold grunted and said something like, 'Oh really.' Of course the I.C. turned all colors and glared at Rocky."

They are starting to let people back into areas that have been closed since the start of the fire. As previously mentioned, there are many "mountain people" who live outside the local communities. Some had supplies and did not evacuate. However, when supplies like gas for their generators was used up, it was necessary for them to get resupplied. The problem is that if you leave the area, they won't let you back.

I've heard a few stories where these folks, who know the "unknown" mountain roads, have been able to get in and out—reminds me of the blockade runners of the civil war. People will make do.

Eight out of the nine schools in Paradise are gone. The high school was the only survivor. I'm sure that many students will be enrolling in other

area high schools to finish out the school year.

But there is an unusual assembly scheduled for next week. In another example of generosity, a gentleman from way down in San Diego will give each student (980) and each employee (105) a check for \$1,000. He's obviously a person with money, but he looked back at his high school time and said, "It was the last carefree time in my life."

As I watched the local news this morning, I saw young people working in the ruins with the "CCC" logo on the back of their shirts. They are the California Conservation Corps, a program signed into law in 1976 and modeled after the CCC program of the 30s. Governor Jerry Brown envisioned the program as "a combination of Jesuit seminary, Israeli kibbutz, and Marine Corps boot camp."

The California CC program is for young men and women ages 18-25 and involves work on "environment conservation, fire protection and emergency response to natural disasters." They are paid minimum wage. There are close to 2,000 people involved.

## Day 17—Sierra Nevada Brewery

You might think this is a strange way to open today's update. There is more to this story than my love for Sierra Nevada Torpedo IPA.

All during the Camp Fire, the Sierra Nevada Tap Room has been serving free meals to evacuees. The brewery, Tap Room and Big Room (live-music venue) are primary stops for many visitors to Chico.

The Sierra Nevada story is a success with a dual meaning described in Ken Grossman's book *Beyond the Pale*. Founded by Grossman in 1979 in a rented warehouse, he pieced together discarded dairy equipment and scrapyard metal to create the 7<sup>th</sup> largest brewing company in the U.S., brewing over 1.25 million barrels annually.

Solar panels cover the parking lot, biodiesel for its delivery trucks is made from used cooking oil from the restaurant, ethanol is made from discarded yeast, and spent grain goes to local cattle ranchers. It is said that over 99% of the brewery's solid waste is diverted from the landfill.

Grossman learned needed skills—refrigeration,



electricity, welding—at our local community college. He recently donated a million dollars to the school to provide free tuition to new students.

This is more than a story of a man who went from having almost nothing to being listed in 2015 as a billionaire.

The Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. has announced that they will brew “Resilience Butte County Proud IPA” and give 100% of the proceeds to Camp Fire relief. Grossman, very influential in the craft beer industry in the U.S., has sent out letters to other brewers inviting them to join and donate 100%.

More than 1000 breweries across the nation responded. Kudos to the craft beer industry in the U.S. When the “Resilience IPA” hits the shelves, here is a chance to do double duty—help the Camp Fire victims and enjoy a fine beer.

Today’s incident report shows almost 1,300 personnel on the fire. “The fireline that remains uncontained is located in steep and rugged terrain where it is unsafe for firefighters to access due to the heavy rains.” My guess is that the firefighting end of the Camp Fire is done.

Now comes the aftermath—where do 3,000 kids go to school? People who worked in Paradise have lost their jobs; people who worked in Chico and lived in Paradise have lost their homes.

## **Day 18—Fire Is Out But It Is Not The End**

The fire is done but the effects of this fire are going to go on for years and, in some cases, a lifetime. What has been learned, what will change?

I know that Cal Fire will use this event to get more firefighters and equipment. They are among the best, but more is not the answer. We need to prevent the disease (fuel reduction) rather than concentrate on treating the disease (fight fire).

Although not related to this fire, the USFS will probably continue their policy of slow initial attack and letting fires burn in the wilderness. Is actually letting fires burn and continually putting more smoke into the atmosphere the best science we have? Besides the millions spent managing these fires, do they ever factor in the future human health costs and the jobs lost in the affected communities?

The Camp Fire had nothing to do with slow

Initial Attack. There were resources on site in a short amount of time. It was just the “Perfect Storm.”

Somewhere along the line we will have to revert to having people take personal responsibility. Not everyone has the knowledge and ability to “shelter in place,” but that is going to have to be added to the equation

Today I’ve received 7-8 envelopes with Good Sam Fund contributions. We have looked out for our brothers and sisters for about ten years since Jim Cherry (MSO-57) came up with the idea.

As previously stated, I’ve found two jumpers who made it out with their families. They lost everything. One jumper is working out of the country, and I will have to determine her need in months to come. There are still two on my list that I have not been able to make contact with. All this will filter out as time goes by. You can be assured that your GSF is going right to the persons in need.

On the morning of Nov. 8, I headed out to work a Cross Country meet near Redding. When I got back to Chico at 1500 that afternoon, it was dark and the streetlights were on. I knew it would be bad but never envisioned a single community of 27,000 being wiped out.

The Camp Fire has fallen off the national news cycle. If we are going to come out with a positive from this fire, maybe our state and national government will see that wildfire is going to be a continual problem. And, we need to change our philosophy to prevention vs. treatment.

## **Day 19—An Escape From A Firestorm**

I had an amazing meeting yesterday with a smokejumper at the local McDonalds. It had been some time since I had seen Joel. Way back in the late ’70s, he was on one of my Type II Crews out of the Mendocino N.F. The thing I remember the most about Joel is that, every time we took a break on the fireline, he was sharpening his Pulaski. It had a razor edge.

Joel went from my crew system to the Missoula Smokejumpers in 1980. A person coming from a Type II Crew to jumpers is unusual—the jumpers normally like to hire individuals from the Type I

Hotshot Crews. However, we had a reputation for producing good people—23 of them went on to become smokejumpers. Joel jumped at Missoula and West Yellowstone for eight years.

I was finally able to sit down with Joel. I've been hesitant to do so, as people are still in a daze and shock from the devastation.

For almost an hour, I listened to Joel's story. After his years as a smokejumper, he used his smokejumper training and is a contract climber for tree service companies. For those who don't know, climbing and using a chainsaw in a tree requires a tremendous amount of skill and mistakes are unforgiving. I couldn't believe that he is still climbing at his age. He said he loves it—probably will die in a tree eight stories above the ground.

On Nov. 8 Joel went to work in Chico at about 0630—the time the Camp Fire started. He got a call from his wife at 0700 telling him he needed to come home as a fire had started in Pulga. In his mind, Joel thought Pulga is a long ways away—do I really need to come home? He did.

He and his wife, Cheryl, loaded her car and his truck with what they considered important. How does one determine what is important after 23 years worth of building a home? Joel is a woodworker, Cheryl a quilter—years of crafted work and tools had to be left behind.

Joel hooked up his travel trailer to the back of his work truck. By this time it was 0900 and the fire had already gotten to their area. How could something move that fast? They needed to move quickly. Cheryl took one road and Joel, trailer in tow, took the other. Cheryl took the road that wasn't jammed and made a good exit towards Chico.

Joel took another road, one that he thought would be a good way out with the trailer in tow. He soon hit the jammed roads as smaller feeder roads fed into one of the three exits down the hill to Chico.

Soon the fire was burning on both sides of the road and people were leaving their cars and running down the road. Joel was yelling at them to stay in their cars, as that was the best way to survive a situation where fire overruns the road. It was useless, as total panic had set in. The people who abandoned their vehicles added to the traffic jam, as they did not move them off the road.

Joel was trapped by two abandoned cars—one on each side of the road. He forced his way between them. He was moving “one foot at a time.” A young man pounded on his window, “Hey Dude, your trailer is on fire.” Moving between the abandoned cars had started the fire.

He knew he had to get rid of the trailer. The slope on the side of the road caused a jam in the release mechanism—Joel said he actually was very calm at this time. All the time there were propane tanks exploding around him from the houses that were being consumed by fire.

The electric jack on the trailer worked and Joel was able to get rid of the trailer and his propane tanks. He also took his 5-gallon gas cans, which he used for his tree work, out of his truck. Didn't need another explosion.

After hours and many blocked roads, he made it to Chico. Cheryl hadn't heard from him for hours and thought he might be dead.

I listened to Joel's story. This could be a piece in a magazine—there are hundreds with similar stories. **John Maclean** (Assoc.) could write about the Camp Fire for his next book.

After about 90 minutes, I had to break in. Told Joel that the National Smokejumper Association does not forget Smokejumpers. When I moved a check from the Good Samaritan Fund across the table, all the pent up emotion and stress came out. Tears happened.

That's what the NSA is all about. We are there to help our brothers and sisters in need. Thanks to all of you for making this possible.

## Finale

It has been five weeks since the start of the Camp Fire. I was able to sit down with **Deb Yoder** (RDD-00) today. She is the last jumper on the list to be contacted. Deb lost her home and everything in it. Today, she was working with her car insurance to see if she could buy her car back.

As she drove into the parking lot, I knew who was behind the wheel. The back window was sprayed with a large orange “X.” I'm guessing that was done by people searching cars for bodies.

Deb was in Micronesia working on a medical project at the time of the fire. Even though her house was “fire wise,” it burned. She plans to rebuild. I gave her a check from the Good Sam

Fund and told her I would stay in contact for as long as it takes.

We have to remember that this whole process for the three jumpers who lost everything will take months, maybe a couple years. Whatever the case, the NSA will be there.

We, the NSA, have taken care of immediate financial needs. In months to come, when furniture will be needed, Fred Rohrbach has that covered.

**Lee Lipscomb** (MSO-58) has offered legal help if that would ever be needed. Lee is a partner in a

large legal firm in Los Angeles and his son, Steve, would represent our jumpers. People who jumped during their college years and went on to successfully establish themselves in the different aspects of our society are the thread that makes the NSA so strong.

The Camp Fire will be repeated if we don't come up with a new way to deal with wildfire. We can only hope that this event was a learning situation. 🙏

## Ex-Missoula Smokejumpers Barely Escape California's Most Destructive Fire

by **Kim Briggeman**, *Missoulian*—Nov. 2018 (Missoula, Mont.)

**T**hey've seen fire. Even jumped on it in their younger days.

But two California men, who "rookied" at the Missoula smokejumper base 15 years apart, never experienced anything like the flames that laid low their hometown of Paradise, Calif., on a ridge in the Sierra Nevada foothills earlier this month.

Few in this world have.

**Joel Wilkinson** (MSO-80) and **Brian Kopka** (MSO-95) were part of the mass exodus from Paradise on Nov. 8 as the incredibly fast-moving flames roared in across the Feather River Canyon.

They drove through flames and survived massive traffic gridlock to make it out alive with their families.

"That fire was just insanely aggressive, I'll put it that way," Wilkinson told the *Missoulian* this week. "You couldn't believe

... In all my years of firefighting experience, I had never seen a fire like that."

"Once we started seeing embers dropping in the front yard, that's when we really started hustling," Kopka said.

The Camp Fire claimed 88 lives in Paradise, a town of 27,000, and in the nearby towns of Concow and Magalia.

The active search for human remains ended this week after volunteers and emergency workers combed through nearly 14,000 homes and another 5,000 structures. Nearly 200 people remain unaccounted for.

By Sunday, when the fire was fully controlled, more than 150,000 acres had been burned. It was the deadliest and most damaging wildland fire in California history.

Wilkinson and Kopka survived, but in the course of a few hours that Thursday morning, they lost their homes and much

more.

"It's just so hard to have your entire life wiped away from you," Wilkinson said, his voice cracking. "Literally, my life has completely changed in the last three weeks. I don't have a home. I don't have a possession to my name."

**Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) has kept track of "his" smokejumpers. The longtime managing editor of the National Smokejumper Association's quarterly *Smokejumper Magazine*, Sheley lives in nearby Chico and maintains a database of former and current jumpers.

**Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62), an ex-jumper who lives in Missoula, saw a Day 19 email update Sheley posted this week that told Wilkinson's story and sent it to the *Missoulian*. Sheley also talked to Kopka and provided the newspaper with contacts for both former Missoula jumpers. 🙏

“Brian’s wife had a lot of their stuff pre-packed from prior evacuations,” Sheley said. “He was on the west side of the Skyway, the major escape route getting out of there, and the fire didn’t get to him as quick. Joel was on the east side and he barely made it.”

After Wilkinson’s smoke-jumping years in Missoula and West Yellowstone from 1980 to 1986, he became a glass artist, woodcarver, and an arborist who, at age 62, still climbs trees every day for a living.

He said winds were blowing 60-70 mph the morning of Nov. 8 and the fire covered the 20 miles from its origin point to Paradise in just a couple of hours. After hurriedly throwing as much as they could in their 21-foot travel trailer, Wilkinson and his wife, Cheryl, set out in different vehicles. They quickly got separated. Cheryl reached Chico hours before he did.

“I was stuck on a small two-lane road going across to another road that went south,” he said. “I got probably a quarter mile before I was impacted by traffic. Then the fire engulfed the entire road on both sides, and it got worse and worse as we got farther down the road. It was insane.”

In the smoky chaos, others were forsaking their cars and trying to flee.

“I was screaming, ‘No, get back in your car! That’s the safest place to be!’ ” he said.

The abandoned cars and trucks clogged up the road. Wilkinson got stuck between two burning vehicles. When he finally wedged his truck and

trailer between them, the trailer caught fire. Wilkinson jumped out and quelled the flames, or so he thought.

“I got up another quarter mile or so and a guy came out of the truck behind me and banged on the window,” Wilkinson recalled. “He said, ‘Dude, your trailer’s on fire.’ ”

He found a place to pull over and, after a struggle as propane tanks from homes exploded around him, got the trailer unhitched.

“The biggest bummer was we’d used that to shove most of the stuff out of the house into,” Wilkinson said. “My wife’s a devoted quilter and we had probably 20 or 30 quilts in the back of the trailer that she had spent months and months on.”

At least by then, he’d cleared the worst of the flames. But the traffic snarls only increased.

“Literally from that point on, it took another four hours to get out of Paradise. Every single road you went down had been overrun by fire. It was a fricking nightmare to get out of there,” Wilkinson said.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kopka, 49, is in the tree-service business as well. He owns Sierra Tree Care in Paradise and, like Wilkinson, he cites his smokejumper experience in the mountains of the Northwest as a catalyst for his chosen livelihood.

He spent three years in Missoula before transferring to Grangeville, Idaho, and Kopka became adept at tree climbing.

When the fire came, Kopka

already had his RV trailer half-packed. He and a brother-in-law from Chicago were getting ready for a cross-country trip to Georgia to help with cleanup from Hurricane Michael.

As the embers started falling, Kopka, his wife, Anna, their 16-year-old son, Owen, and his brother-in-law, Jimmy, started throwing photographs, records, and a few other essentials into her Honda CRV. Kopka hooked the RV up to his Dodge dually truck. Anna drove the Honda towing three small dirt bikes on a trailer Brian bought in Missoula all those years ago. Their first destination was their tree service shop on the northwest side of town to rendezvous with Kopka’s parents.

The elder Kopkas were fleeing Magalia, a small town just north of Paradise, in a couple of vehicles. They never showed up at the shop.

The Skyway – the main road to Chico – was “complete gridlock,” said Kopka, who later learned his parents had been forced to turn around and take a roundabout way to safety through the mountains to the north.

All eventually made it out, but their grim nightmare was realized the next day. Both homes were gone, as was Kopka’s shop. With the latter went two brush chippers, chip trucks, dump trailers, a portable man lift, and all the chainsaws and rigging equipment for the tree business. The saving grace: the Kenworth semi “grapple truck” that Kopka bought recently was being worked on in Oroville.



"That's my big moneymaker piece of equipment," said Kopka, whose family has a place to stay at a son-in-law's home in Chico.

The Wilkinsons also stayed with relatives in Chico for a couple of weeks, then moved last weekend into a rented motor home in Live Oak, 40 miles to the south. They won't rebuild in Paradise, said Wilkinson, who grew up in Chico. Even before the fire, they were thinking about moving to Oregon, where their daughter, Chloe, is going to college in the Portland area.

Kopka was asked where he and his family will be a year from now.

"I think we'll still be here," he said.

Son Owen has a year and a half to go at Paradise High School, and wants to graduate from there, even if the building itself isn't standing.

"I hope to be helping clean

up Paradise, working with the grapple truck around here," Kopka said. "We'll be subs for hauling and moving brush and debris. There's going to be a lot of work in Paradise."

Kopka has been contacted by the Missoula smokejumpers, who sent a "nice check." Some of his former colleagues offered to come to Paradise to help, but Kopka told them there's not much they can do.

"That's what I miss about (smokejumping) – that camaraderie with those guys," Kopka said. "They're probably the best friends I'll ever have."

Sheley helped both Wilkinson and Kopka get into the smokejumper program. He's seen to it that both men received checks from the National Smokejumpers Association's Good Samaritan Fund. The fund was established 10 years ago, and has provided more than \$160,000 to aid smoke-

jumpers and their families in times of need.

At Sheley's suggestion, Wilkinson met with him at a McDonald's in Chico last weekend.

"Joel was just as sturdy as they come in telling his story until I slipped the (Good Samaritan Fund) check across the table," Sheley said. "Then all the pent-up stress and emotion came out and you could see his eyes well up."

"I've never accepted handouts and now I'm having to do that. I'm having to reach out to people for help," Wilkinson said. "We've had so many people call and express their good wishes and everything else, and that's fantastic. But I literally go to sleep at night and I just can't shut it off."

"I still see every moment when I was trying to get out of Paradise. I'm just completely grateful to be alive." 🕯

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## FEEDBACK FROM CAMP FIRE DAILY UPDATES

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I appreciated you commending your Sheriff on the job he's doing under the most difficult of circumstances. I don't know anything about him, but I know that the people who have to make the difficult decisions, especially in a tragedy, get an awful lot of criticism from all sides and very little love.

I worked several disasters, including the Loma Prieta earthquake. One day a young man came in and was abusive to one of my staff. I knew it was wrong to punch people, but I was going to make an exception for him. Another of my staff sensed this, put his hand on my arm and said, "Don't do it. He lost his house, his wife and his job." So I went in and got the counseling I thought that I

didn't need until then.

The Sheriff is having to keep people from going back to their property because of the real possibility of them finding dead bodies. What an awful responsibility he has. Thanks for giving him a little love.

**Ron Thoreson (CJ-60)**

I can't imagine the horror these folks are going through and glad that you always trained those bus drivers in fire stuff. They had an interesting weather analysis on the news relating to the Camp Fire. A low coming down from the Northwest (clockwise winds) and a low coming up from the CA coast (counterclockwise winds), with both

leading edges meeting in the junction over the Camp Fire. They feel that turmoil turned the fire into a demon of wind and gases and heat factors.

**Tom Boatner (FBX-80)**

Chuck—Pretty incredible the scene you're describing. I bet you were thinking strategy & tactics. I saw some photos on the Weather Channel and couldn't imagine witnessing what you saw. It's hard to grasp how fast it moved and just how many people had to flee. I remember being on the Malibu Fire in 1993 and that pales in comparison to the fires today.

**Paige Houston (FBX-95)**

Hey Chuck, great reports you are generating. Just another good task you are taking on to represent the value of the NSA. Could you add my good buddy Bob Rasmussen to your cc list. He was born and raised in Magalia, graduated from Paradise High, and still has friends and family there. He was a jumper in Alaska in years long past, like us.

Bravo to the NSA who jumped into action to help the Camp Fire jumpers (who lost homes and businesses). Initial attack still works for the NSA.

**John Manley (CJ-62)**

You are so right about the Sheriff and, of course, your family is in law enforcement. You can take pride in that. I started thinking about ten years ago that sheriffs had become firefighters. They carry a huge part of the load now and many agencies are getting good at it. I think too, it has changed the perception of law enforcement in many people's eyes. Officers have rarely received the kind of public recognition that firefighters take for granted. I think that is changing with law enforcement playing such a key roll in these rapidly spreading fires. The very people who were criticized for taking rapid decisive action in law enforcement situations are now looked to for leadership when the chips are down at rapidly spreading fires.

**John Culbertson (FBX-69)**

Much appreciate your reporting and it's hard to comprehend the massive destruction and suf-

fering the folks in Paradise are going through. Please keep the news reports coming.

A lot of finger pointing will be going on all winter as to what could have been done and was not. Unfortunately, the runaway fires we have had in Oregon and California are the "elephant in the room" and few, if any, high level folks in the Government want to address the problem.

I did give a copy of the last issue of the *Smoke-jumper* magazine to my congressman, Greg Walden, at a meeting, and he got back to me and said he read it on his flight out of Medford, but no comment. I think seasoned politicians have learned to "pick their battles" wisely that they can win, and few, if any, are willing to tackle a solution or suggestion as to the massive forest fires we are having.

**Lee Gossett (RDD-57)**

A couple comments: While fuels reduction is an important part of preparation, I am surprised there is no talk of constructing fire shelters (fire bunkers, as the Australians call them). They may be a lot more practical than building super highways to all mountain towns and could have other uses, such as meeting halls. How many people set up sprinkler systems at the start of the fire season to protect structures? I suspect almost no one.

**Jon Klingel (CJ-65)**

Thanks for doing these daily updates—very insightful. You should have been a journalist—I guess you are actually. The one about the high school athletes was particularly touching. Heart-warming and encouraging—I got choked up reading it to Regina. I also forwarded it to our family, which includes two volleyball coaches, a volleyball player (going to play at Linfield next year), an AD, and former athletes.

**Dale Gardner (CJ-67)**

Thank you for providing an insider's perspective on the Paradise and vicinity wildfire. A whole different view from what the press provides and TV chooses to show. You personalized and humanized it all

I can't image the terror, fear and panic that so many faced as the fire rushed at them. So many

acts of heroism, by some that survived and some that did not. Makes a person wonder what they might have done or felt in their place. But, that just makes it sadder still.

**Mark Corbet (LGD-74)**

Thank you so much for the daily updates. For those of us who live far away, it is really helpful to have your input about the many factors at play in the lives of many regular people who are facing great odds and few solutions.

**John Packard (RAC-65)**

Chuck, I've learned a lot from your email updates. Thanks! The recovery will take a long time and many issues will be debated as well. What is so good about your updates is the mix of local perspective with your in-depth knowledge of fire policy, fire prevention, fire fighting and forest management. Have you thought about carrying on your good work for an extended period of time and aiming at a broader audience? Maybe a blog or some other vehicle?

**Jim Roberts (CJ-62)**

Your updates are so much better than any of the other news feeds. Please keep them coming. Very much appreciated.

**John Berry (RAC-70)**

That tragedies occur despite the best efforts of State and Local fire and law enforcement agencies is tough. And when fire occurs apart from these winds, these agencies do a good job of IA and extended attack. But when tragedy and loss occur due to Federal failure to act, it is beyond understanding. This is happening in California.

The press tends to confuse all these situations. Academia wrings its hands about climate change and its love affair with fire. Governments howl about lack of funding—while planning vacations in the office behind the computer. Fire crews play hacky-sack while fuel reduction projects sit on the back burner. Place holders throughout the system shine shoes, comb hair, maintain the status quo and reap lifetime profit from others loss.

For me the answer is simple: Fire prevention, fuels reduction, putting responsibility for fire clearance and building back on the home owner,

removing State guaranteed insurance, IA and extended attack.

Yes, it is a tougher game with a dry and warming environment. But that is not a reason to turn away from action. Adaptation is the hallmark of survival. Gaining something is better than doing nothing. Smokey was right—Put the fire out!

**John Culbertson (FBX-69)**

Hi Chuck—I hope this finds you both well. I've returned from the Camp Fire and thought of calling you as you were so close. Found I was so crazy busy and simply didn't get to it.

I was deployed as a volunteer paramedic to the large shelter in Oroville (Nazarene Church), where there were hundreds of displaced people, many disabled, many elderly. I was with a small, wonderful medical team that provided care. We were busy! On top of it all, there was a bad outbreak of Norovirus, so we had to place people in isolation and on IV's. We were able to accomplish much, and it was wonderful to see the resilience of the effected people. I was eventually relieved by State and Federal teams. I've read some harrowing accounts of former jumpers that lived in the Paradise area.

**Davis Perkins (NCSB-72)**

A blessed Thanksgiving to you, yours, and the people of your area. Your last two posts are heartfelt and very much related to the traditional stories of our holiday season of Thanksgiving and Christmas. Stepping forward, lending a helping hand, working for the common good, keeping the faith, long-term work coming to bear years later, asking forgiveness when there is no time for permission, and following getting knocked down – standing up, dusting off, and moving forward again. You might have a limp, but your community is in good company.

As you say, there is a long living chain of these works both in fire, war, and depression that we have inherited. This is the big story. And the working people on the ground, past and present, know this is the truth. We here in the Thomas Fire Area can only bow our heads in a sense of shared perseverance and purpose we know your community will maintain.

**John Culbertson (FBX-69)** 🧑🏻

# After Losing Home, Fire Survivor And Former Jumper To Guide Low-Vision Runner In Race

by Sammy Caiola, Capital Public Radio (Sacramento, Calif.)

When California's deadliest wild-fire blazed through the small Butte County town of Paradise, resident **Deb Yoder** (RDD-00) was in Micronesia with just a few belongings. Fortunately, she'd packed her running shoes.

The marathoner worked part-time as a nurse at Adventist Health Feather River Hospital, which suffered extensive damage in the fire according to the *Chico Enterprise-Record*. She was serving as a medical volunteer on the island of Pohnpei when she learned that her Paradise home was destroyed in the blaze.

She returned to California in mid-November, both to reunite with family and to prepare for the Dec. 2 California International Marathon in Sacramento, one of the state's biggest running events. Before tragedy struck her small town, Yoder had signed up to guide Deborah Groeber, a vision and hearing impaired athlete, through the race.

She said she's sticking to the plan despite the recent turmoil.

"It has ultimately helped me keep moving forward," she said. "The last three weeks have been difficult to put one foot in front of the other and get out there and run. And knowing that her success is dependent on my showing up, helped me do that."

It was Yoder's third time guiding a visually impaired runner at the CIM.

It's a *guide's job* to make sure marathoners with vision or hearing problems can run the route safely. They might use a tether, voice commands, or other means of communication to help their

partner dodge hazards in the environment, or other runners.

There were 48 visually impaired runners signed up for the race.

Yoder previously helped guide a team of cyclers in finishing a major distance bike race event called the *Race Across America*. She said the guide-runner relationship depends heavily on trust, and she

didn't want her CIM athlete to have to find a new partner at the last minute.

She said being around athletes who've faced their own challenges is healing and inspiring.

"It's become a community that has been a solid place to land," she said.

Like many in Paradise, Yoder, 42, said she's leaning on the spirit of the tightly knit community to recover emotionally from the loss of people and places. When it comes to rebuilding financially, she said it's hard for her, and many of her neighbors, to accept help.

Though Yoder travels often, Paradise is her birthplace and her home. She said she's holding on to memories of sitting on her porch, where she often looked out at the canyon below.

With the hospital's fate in flux, she's working as a flight nurse for an emergency air transport service.



Phillip Ashley and Deb Yoder 2017 (Courtesy of Shawna Brayley)



# Achieving Resilient Forests Through Effective Biomass Uses: Part II

by Michael Rains (Associate)

*As was stated in Part I, the real brass ring we should be searching for is effective fire management resulting from aggressive forest management. Biomass uses is a critical part of an aggressive forest management campaign.*

## Biomass Uses

Most are aware that traditional timber harvesting, thinning, and salvage of dead and dying trees, as examples, represent biomass removed and then used; my shorthand is *biomass uses*.

Recently, biomass uses have turned to more innovative solutions that offer opportunities for high-volume, high-value markets for lower-quality wood. This is a key point in terms of forest restoration, thus healthy forests. The greater the amount of hazardous fuels that can be economically removed, the more efficient the forest-management campaign becomes.

It is estimated that a strong, well-established program in cost-effective biomass uses could create high-value markets from low-value wood – i.e., hazardous fuels – that could reasonably help restore about 20 million forested acres annually. About one-half of the nation's 885 million acres of forestland currently requires some type of restorative action.

This pace and scale of restoration could reduce future fire-suppression costs in the range of 12-15 percent; some say as high as 23 percent. In terms of what the 2018 fire suppression expenditures are projected to be, this represents a savings of about \$1 billion! These are funds that could be redirected for forest management uses, which will in turn help reduce unwanted fires.

Simply put, it makes good economic sense to aggressively invest in biomass uses to help achieve more resilient forests throughout the rural to urban land gradient.

## Wood-Based Nanotechnology

*Nanotechnology is the understanding and*

control of matter at dimensions between approximately 1 and 100 nanometers. A human hair, for comparison, is approximately 80,000 to 100,000 nanometers wide. Unique material properties enable novel, high-performance applications. The overall concept is not new. However, wood-based nanotechnology is relatively new.

Nanocellulose is derived from wood fibers and has exceptional strength. The basic concept is cellulose nanomaterials are produced mechanically or chemically and then added to other products – e.g., cement for concrete – to increase strength and reduce weight of that product.

Wood-based nanotechnology, a biomass use example, offers a revolutionary technology to create new jobs and improve America's forest-based economy through industrial development and expansion, as well as providing means to enable forests to remain healthy and sustainable through accelerated restoration.

Wood-based nanotechnology applications include packaging barrier coatings, printing paper coatings, structural composite panels for construction, flexible electronic displays, printed electronics, lightweight structural and non-structural panels and parts for aerospace, automotive applications, and a host of industrial tools and consumer products.

Major companies and organizations have voiced interest in using wood-based nanomaterials in their product lines.

Most of the work by the Forest Service in wood-based nanotechnology – the production of cellulose nanomaterials – is done through the Forest Products Laboratory (FPL), located in Madison, Wis. I was the director of the FPL from 2013 to 2016.

The FPL is incredibly unusual. From new technology in building construction to bat safety in Major League Baseball to the glue on "Forever" postage stamps, the FPL serves the world in so



*Michael Rains (Courtesy M. Rains)*

many ways. The venture into wood-based nanotechnology expands this service.

Again, the key point from a forest maintenance viewpoint is that wood-based nanotechnology offers the opportunity for economically viable markets for low-value wood – hazardous fuels. And, it helps reasonably restore as much as 12 million acres of forestland across the country, annually. This restoration reduces the impacts of large, high-intensity wildfires.

In terms of economic impact, it is projected that cellulosic nanomaterial utilization could have a market penetration as high as 3-4 percent across target markets, building to more than 24 million tons of demand. This potential 24 million tons of demand could drive as many as 224,000 jobs and a potential gross domestic product (GDP) final product value of over \$100 billion in the United States, as projected by the National Nanotechnology Initiative and National Science Foundation study.

## **The Yreka Project**

*In 2014, the “Yreka Project” in California began. Part of this project was the promise of making and using cellulose nanomaterials from hazardous fuels, with a potential to build an on-site facility.*

*While important work has been accom-*

*plished, the overall project has moved much more slowly than originally planned. The primary reason was the lack of resources. The Yreka Project was intended to be a pilot effort to show how, for example, cement with cellulose nanomaterials added could improve concrete. When you add nanocellulose materials to cement, it makes concrete about 20 percent stronger. And, of course, since America uses lots of concrete, that could be a huge ready-made market.*

*Part of the overall strategy was to place a scientist and a marketing specialist on the Klamath National Forest to help kick-start the overall project. Lack of funding made this impossible. I estimate this would have been about 16 minutes of firefighting time.*

*It is a paradox that more than \$1 million per hour can be spent on fire suppression, yet the programs that actually help the overall forest management strategy – and thus help with the fire management effort – are reduced.*

*We seem at times to be working at cross purposes. Two shifts of firefighting time would provide a very effective elixir for a comprehensive program in wood-based nanotechnology and other innovative biomass uses. The Yreka Project has incredible promise to highlight biomass uses and become a benchmark for others to follow.*

### **The Bottom Line**

*Wood-based nanotechnology is a dynamic program opportunity that needs adequate resources to fulfill its promise. Basically, when you add cellulose nanomaterials to products – e.g., Kevlar, car parts, computer parts, cement, drywall, medical equipment, and advanced wood composites for construction materials – it makes these products “stronger and lighter.” Imagine the vital benefits of significantly improved body armor for soldiers because cellulose nanomaterials have been added during production.*

*The basic science for developing cellulose nanomaterials is pretty much available. Additional funding for large-scale production and technology transfer can make wood-based nanotechnology a reality and an effective tool for using low-value wood.*

*By creating high-value, high-volume markets – like concrete laced with cellulose nanomaterials – we can develop cost-effective ways to en-*

able enough hazardous fuels to be removed from America's forests so wildfires remain smaller and less destructive.

## Green Building Construction

While perhaps not as dramatic as the impacts of wood-based nanotechnology, it is expected that the economic impacts of other biomass uses that create high-value markets from low-value wood will also help drive accelerated forest restoration efforts – assuming adequate investments are provided for, specifically in technology transfer.

Green building construction, for example, through advanced composites using low-value wood, offers an opportunity to revolutionize some aspects of commercial building construction. In addition to being structurally sound, various studies also show that wood outperforms steel and concrete building materials in terms of less energy use, greenhouse gases, air pollution, solid waste and ecological resource impacts.

Investments in green building science and applications can increase annual wood used in constructing low-rise nonresidential buildings by 7 billion board feet. This would require about 16 million dry tons per year of material.

Wood has documented advantages as a green building material, but the market share for wood in commercial buildings, such as schools and strip malls, has been small compared to that of other materials.

Today, a growing awareness of environmental sustainability and a desire on the part of consumers for high-quality building materials at competitive prices could boost markets for wood products. To capitalize on this growing awareness and demand, investments are needed in:

- Research and development to provide life cycle impact information for wood construction products;
- Technology transfer efforts on carbon mitigation and other environmental benefits of using wood in nonresidential building, targeted for design and building professionals;
- Technology transfer in the form of specific demonstration products in coordination with industry; and
- Development, application and technology trans-

fer of cross laminated timber (CLT) for use in nonresidential building construction.

There is a very high likelihood that wood demand to construct nonresidential buildings will increase in the near term. This wood could come from any forest landowner source.

Using estimated wood-removal rates per acre for forest restoration treatments on the National Forests in the West, for example, demand for 16 million dry tons of wood would require treatment of about 2 million acres annually. With investments in nanotechnology and green building construction, it would be reasonable to expect forest restoration treatments of 10 to 14 million acres per year.

## Biomass For Energy

In order to attain the most value from acres treated to provide wood for construction and nanomaterials investments, wood energy users are also needed to support demand for biomass from forest restoration treatments.

The three emerging and/or rapidly developing technologies that will consume the bulk of the available woody biomass feedstocks are liquid transportation fuels, pelletization (including torrefaction) and co-firing to generate electricity. The total acres providing adequate biomass for green building construction, nanomaterials and wood for energy could reasonably equate to about 20 million acres of restorative actions per year, a pace and scale required to make a real difference in achieving effective fire management.

Using torrefied wood for energy clearly represents an opportunity for forest restoration if high-volume markets can be established – the same fundamental concern that exists with the wood-based nanotechnology and green building construction innovations.

The torrefied biomass industry is in its infancy stage in America. Existing coal-fired power plants should be interested in investment-free coal replacement. Predictable supply chains for torrefied pellets will need to be established.

## Conclusions

A more cohesive, comprehensive investment strategy that advances higher value biomass uses as

a means to help create more resilient forests across our country is critical to reducing the impacts of wildfires. There are three basic goals to this investment strategy:

Address critical forest restoration needs to protect lives and property from major disturbances across the country;

Ensure America's forest ecosystems along a complex rural to urban land gradient remain healthy, sustainable, and more resilient to disturbances; and Diversify America's economy with targeted investments through a wide-range of commercial products.

To begin to meet these goals, the Forest Service will require a minimum additional investment of more than \$33 million per year through 2023. This added investment should be matched by other partners interested in "... aggressive forest management to ensure effective fire management."

A major emphasis in market expansion and development is critical to the success of aggressive forest management, and thus effective fire management. The Forest Service will need to significantly improve its skill-set in this marketing area. The additional investment figure of more than \$33 million per year easily allows for this to happen.

Achieving resilient forests through effective biomass uses calls for a true public-private partnership to share investments, leadership and governance. A well-coordinated partnership that shares resources and avoids duplication will ensure a successful campaign that improves our forests and the economy and protects lives and property from wildfire.

A successful campaign in aggressive forest management to ensure effective fire management – through the use of traditional means and new innovations – will take time, resources and patience.

U.S. taxpayers are losing \$70 to \$350 billion a year in wildfire-related damages to infrastructure, public health and natural resources.

Wildfires are a major cause of losses to the forest-products industry. In addition, an estimated 120 million people in more than 46 million homes are at risk due to wildfire; 72,000 communities are directly in harm's way.

Thousands of heroic firefighters have died

protecting people and property. How many more reasons does it take before we can begin to improve America's forests so that fire can be used as a conservation tool and no longer feared? Clearly, now is the time for a forest fix. New innovations in biomass uses can show the way. 🌲

*References for this article available upon request.*

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## **NSA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM EXPANDED - TAKE ADVANTAGE!**

**A**t the October 2018 Board of Directors meeting in Seattle, some major changes were made to the NSA Scholarship Program. The addition of grandchildren to the eligibility list now opens the opportunity for at least 90 percent of our members to participate in this program. Up to this time, due to the aging of our membership, very few of the members who make up this organization and contribute 100 percent of the funding were able to participate in the Scholarship Program as their children were beyond college age.

There is an excellent scoring matrix that awards points for NSA membership (only seven of the twenty-seven past winners have been NSA members), serious scholars, and expanded evaluation of the essay.

With the increasing expenses of getting an education, the NSA has increased the available scholarships to eight \$2,500 awards.

Application packages are due by June 15, 2019.

None of the 2018 award winners will be eligible for the 2019 scholarships. There will be eight new winners this year. The NSA membership of a parent or grandparent will suffice for the membership points in the scoring matrix.

The complete scholarship document is online at the NSA website [www.smokejumpers.com](http://www.smokejumpers.com) under "Outreach." 🌲

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# Grateful Jumper Says NSA's Generosity Big Key To His Success

by Lee Boyle (McCall '15)

*Editor's note – The author is a student at Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine at New Mexico State University. He was a recent recipient of a National Smokejumper Association Scholarship.*

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for such a generous scholarship. It is extremely humbling to be awarded anything by a group of salty smokejumpers.

The funds are amazingly generous and helpful; however, the recognition and confidence placed in me by the NSA is of equal value. I am not only representing myself in medical school, but am representing past and present smokejumpers and the wildland fire community. This is a responsibility I will never forget.

I would not be in medical school without smokejumping. The traits I've either learned or polished in my four years of jumping have been fundamental to my success. Jumping forcibly taught me to perform and endure. I was accepted into medical school on my third attempt, a decade-long process that I would've given up on if rookie training hadn't taught me to simply make it to lunch, then make it to dinner—then do it all again the next day – for years, if necessary.

The funds awarded to me originated on the fireline, potentially earned more than 70 years ago in denim jeans under an Eagle chute. That trace, that energy expended for that hard-earned money makes this scholarship unique.

I think I understand where these funds come from because I've done the same work, felt the elation of “cracking silk over God-knows-where” – in the words of **Matt Ingram**, MYC-09.

I received the news of my award via email in the back of a Forest Service truck, demobilizing a four-manner in central Utah. I corresponded with NSA president **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) while taxiing in the Twin Otter to “jump dirty” over northern Nevada. This award means so much due to the link between

me and the donors.

I plan to jump out of McCall next summer for a final season. I hope to help out the bros with my medical knowledge and have fun out in the woods with my best friends. I've come to realize I will never have more fun at work than leaping over the Salmon River breaks, working a good deal, then hopping on a jet boat out to Vinegar Creek.

Jumping has been one of the most formative experiences of my life and has prepared me for my next step in medicine. As a physician, I hope to continue to serve the people of the rural West as I have in my 11 years in the fire service. I haven't locked into a specialty yet, but plan on training in emergency medicine, surgery, or ophthalmology.

Maybe I can be a “jack of all trades,” like any good smokejumper, and be proficient in all three fields. The very generous scholarship and vote of confidence from the NSA will help make it possible, and I am extremely humbled and grateful. 🙏



John Berry and Fred Cooper at USFS National Reunion Sept. 2018 (Courtesy J. Berry)



# SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

I HAD A completely different outline for this issue back in November, as I usually work two issues in the future with my outlines and planning.

The Camp Fire, which started November 8, 2018, changed things completely. Being so close to one of the largest wildland fire disasters in modern U.S. history changed the outline for this issue.

So many of you called and emailed, inquiring about my wife and myself, that I started to do daily email blurbs. These updates were just thoughts and observations. I tried to give insights that I saw “on the ground” vs what was seen on the evening news.

I went to our database and found the names of seven jumpers who lived in the Paradise area. After a week or so, I was able to personally contact three and get assurances that one more was taken care of. Yes-

terday, Dec. 17, I sat down with **Deb Yoder** (RDD-00), the last jumper on my list.

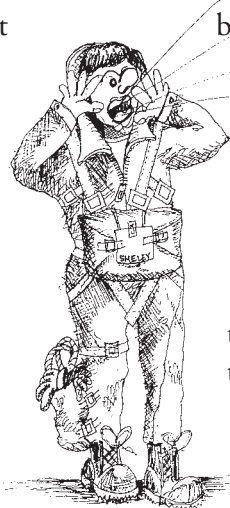
Ten years ago **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) suggested that we establish a Good Samaritan Fund (GSF). As a Lutheran Minister, that suggestion fit Jim. The purpose of the GSF would be to

aid smokejumpers and their families in times of need. We were in a tight budget at that point in the organization, and I had my doubts about establishing a GSF.

I’m more than happy to say that I was wrong in my doubts. In the last ten years, the NSA has given out over \$160,000 in GSF aid and scholarships. At first, I was bothered that most of the aid went to jumpers who did not belong to the NSA. I’ve always felt that if you “don’t help grow the grain, you don’t get to eat the bread.”

I’ve matured, with the help of Jim, and evolved to a way of thinking that reflects the attitude of the “Good Samaritan.” He/she did not question the race, tribe or clan, but focused on the need.

It still bothers me that jumpers apply for scholarships and join the NSA at the last minute in order to get the extra mem-



bership points in our matrix. That is playing the system, and I guess I’ll have to live with that.

When it comes to the GSF, that is a different story. During this fire, checks started coming in for the GSF to aid our fellow jumpers in time of need. The need is still there. At least three jumpers lost everything—their houses, work equipment, and years of their lives invested in their property. I personally sat down with these individuals and passed along GSF aid.

This is a process that will take months to play out. How does a person who has lost everything and is at “ground zero” determine what their need is? Just finding a place to live is a major problem. Where does your child go to school when eight out of nine schools in Paradise burned to the ground? How do you go to work each day when all of your equipment was lost?

This is a situation that I will stay with for the next year. I really get emotional when checks come in for the GSF. Look at the donation page in this issue to see what has happened.

I had a member of the California Firefighters Assoc. visit the other day. That group was handing out money to people at the local center where various aid groups were set up. This association is very well funded

due to its size and appeal to the public. They are big time. What bothered me was the lack of verification of need before funds were passed out. My friend said that there is a certain amount of “graft” that is figured in when doing something like this disaster.

I can assure you that the NSA GSF goes directly to those in need and that need has been verified and is real. Thanks to all

of you in the NSA. What a great organization!

The effects of the Camp Fire will play down for years to come. Out of a disaster that wiped a town of 27,000 off the map in a matter of a few hours, maybe there will be a positive. We need to concentrate on defending our own country. The “Perfect Storm” happened here on November 8<sup>th</sup>. Will we, as citizens, be able to make a

change? The Camp Fire should be a wakeup to all of us who live in the Western U.S.

As Youmus B. Chitenbee said in the January issue of *Smokejumper*: “I’m from Washington D.C. and I don’t know much about wildfire.”

The “Perfect Storm” will be coming to your community in the future. Are you ready, as we said at Cave Junction, to “Prepare to Prepare?” 🦋

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## FEEDBACK FROM THE READERS ON OCT. & JAN. ISSUES

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**Bill Derr** (Associate)—It appears that the U.S. Forest Service is using managed fires to do what otherwise would be a prescribed fire. Since they lack the funds and are faced with numerous restrictions to conduct a prescribed fire, a managed fire becomes a doable option because firefighting funds can be used and there are literally no restrictions. I suspect this has been a quiet, unwritten USFS policy for some time.

The outcomes of this unwritten policy have often been escapes and/or strategy and tactical decisions, all of which have resulted in vastly increased (1) burned acres, (2) resource and property damage, (3) risks to firefighters and the public, (4) adverse smoke impacts, (5) economic losses to local communities, and (6) suppression costs.

The claimed ecological benefits are seldom verified.

An unplanned fire that becomes a managed fire doesn’t allow for the pre-planning and approval with pre-positioned firefighting resource and control lines that a prescribed fire does. Hence, the USFS is often behind the curve in maintaining control of the fire.

Furthermore, the fire danger conditions are not conducive to allowing a fire to burn without unacceptable risk of escape, and often do not meet the standards and criteria for a prescribed fire. As more fires are allowed to burn (managed

fire), firefighting resources become insufficient for new starts and for those managed fires that escape expected perimeters.

The recent rekindle of the Klondike Fire in Oregon is a reminder of what less-than-full suppression decisions can result in. There are dozens of managed fires in recent years that have escaped expected perimeters.

“The above points were discussed with Utah Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox recently, when he initiated many of them during our talk about the Pole Creek and Bald Mountain fires. Immediate and aggressive direct air and ground attack on wildfires during fire season, designed to control them as soon as possible, provide the greatest probability of reducing the full range of adverse impacts.

Extensive use of prescribed fire and removal of the full range of forest products provide the best method of hazardous fuel reduction and forest management.

**Gary Shade** (MSO-69)—This past summer, it really sucked to live in southern Oregon, and I mean that literally. Smoke from forest fires filled the Rogue Valley airshed, and lasted for almost six weeks.

A dry thunder-and-lightning storm hit southern Oregon about early July and some of those fires were still burning in September. The tourist and recreation sector took a big hit, while



kids couldn't play outdoor sports. This smoke-in was the worst ever for the valley, and I have some thoughts on the issue.

Quite startling, within the last 10 years, there has been a rapid acceleration of multiple fire starts and multiple large fires by dry lightning storms on the Prospect and Butte Falls districts, and throughout the region to the coast. The trend in large forest fires is steep and seems yet to hit its peak.

What has changed to cause this abrupt increase in significant wildfire activity? The answer is a chronic downward trend in "fuel moisture" in the dead, woody debris scattered about on the forest floor and in snags.

In my work at Union Creek, I was able to review older documents and photos of Union Creek back in the late 1930s, 40s and 50s. And one of the consistent themes was the extraordinary snow levels that the site experienced every winter. Four to five feet of snow on the ground most of the winter was the norm. But that began to change in the late 60s and 70s.

The trend in snowpack quality has been on a decline for the last 40 years. Poor snowpack leads to less fuel moisture in dead, woody material during the summers. We have to plan on fire seasons getting worse – and permanently worse!

There is finger pointing, division, and politics as how to protect the communities of southern Oregon from wildfire smoke. Given all that has been discussed, the answer comes in what we actually have control over under the present circumstances.

One answer is to become increasingly aggressive in our initial attack on forest-fire starts. And in southern Oregon, we can make a significant increase in our initial attack efforts by reopening the U.S. Forest Service's Siskiyou Smokejumper Base in Cave Junction, Ore. The base was shut down in the early 1980s. Cave Junction lies about halfway between Medford and the coast. To jumpers, this base is simply called "CJ."

Of their own volition, the USFS will not re-active CJ. Yes, it will cost millions to open CJ, but in the recent past the large project fires coming out of what was once CJ's area of operations cost a million dollars a day to fight.

So, what is needed now is a grassroots effort

by local politicians and community/business leaders to insist in the activation of the jumper base at Cave Junction. (The base is currently a smokejumper museum, but the jumper operations infrastructure requirements are still there.)

To the community leaders and activists who read this blog, this is a standard, or mantel, that is to be carried forth by you. The metrics are there to support the reopening of CJ, and there are people and resources that would join in the action.

The smoke this year in the Rogue Valley airshed was disastrous to the economy and quality of life. And, though I hate these words, "Welcome to the New Normal," activating the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base would be an excellent strong signal to the people of the region that the "deciders" are thinking about them.

**Dave Bennett (MSO-61)**—Congratulations on the recent SJ Magazine issue. You have very large cajones considering the fed and state agencies' marriage to their current doctrine of fire suppression. While I'm not intimately familiar with California's fire issues, I've observed the same situation in the Pacific Northwest that is described in the SJ Mag's articles.

**Murry Taylor (Redding '65)**—As far as the 10 a.m. rule goes, I've advocated it here on the Klamath National Forest for a couple years now. The U.S. Forest Service here has a black eye on its past dealings with fires. While Cal Fire is seen as the good guy, the USFS is seen as weak and too fearful, as in "too steep and too rough" driven.

I've told the Klamath that the quickest way to recover some public respect in dealing with their fires (in late June, July, and August) would be to return to the 10 a.m. rule.

That would also excite their crews and fire personnel by giving them a new and special feeling of job satisfaction. It would also help to restore the "can do" attitude and confidence in their capabilities working fire.

If a fire can't be staffed by 10 a.m. the following day, then send in some smokejumpers. I've suggested this be tried for five years and observe what effect it has. Don't think it will happen anytime soon but still trying to make the point.

**Karl Brauneis (MSO-77)**—"Lend an Ear" about this "theme" of the 10 AM Policy. When I was a



kid, every boy's dad was a hero—a WWII hero. I was trained by the WWII men. Fire was the enemy, still is. We accomplished a lot in managing fires and prescribed burning, but I am telling you, and I taught this to all my firefighters, fire will find a way. You can never let your guard down. I had my most gut wrenching, zero-sleep days and nights on prescribed burns and management fires.

California reader: I cannot describe to you how angry my constituents are. The agency is compromising their long term health and economic viability. All this because some uninformed

official has determined how to use the mantra of returning fire to the land as their excuse for personal ineptitude.

Colorado reader: There is a way to address this issue. It demands leadership that can express a corporate will to “right the ship.” We’ve all been in this business and know what needs to happen. We know how to build the relationships to help make things happen. I’ve been on a property here in Granby this past week where the owners have aggressively and “actively” addressed the forest health issues, while their neighbor, the US Forest Service, has done nothing. 🍷

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## ALL GLORY IS FLEETING

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*I've gotten so much positive feedback on the Oct. issue of "Smokejumper" that I have to include this from John. Over 100 extra copies have been sent to members who want to contact their state legislators and governors. A real example of a grass roots effort. Are we, the NSA, stirring a pot that will eventually change the way we manage wildfire? John Culbertson is an ex-jumper and friend with an endless amount of energy. John took the Oct. issue of "Smokejumper" to his congressman. I had to include this in the magazine for a couple reasons. First, John is one of the best writers to contribute to the magazine—he turned a "pissing in the wind" situation into a good read. Second, John shows there are very few in the citizenship of the United States that even have a clue about wildfire. After reading this, you can laugh at John's humor but cry when you see the depth of ignorance by the congressman who is our representative. (Ed.)*

**by John Culbertson** (Fairbanks '69)

So there I was in the congressman's office, pitching my case. *Hands across the aisle ... conservation ethic ... clear fire policy ... initial attack ... hiring in the hands of supervisors:* “There are good people in our federal fire agencies. They just need to be free of bureaucracy.”

And I was thinking, *This is going well!* Went for a swim in the ocean. Nerves calm. Brushed my teeth. Put on my best pants and shirt.

I had gotten through the phone calls, emails, screenings, and mysterious inner workings of a federal office. Learned the names of the aides, interns and all-important legislative assistant. Convinced them I was not a crank, or worse, and now was

communicating with the congressman. The aides took notes.

The congressman said, “Could I have another copy of your magazine for a congressman I am working with?” He looked knowingly at his aide as she continued to rapidly write in shorthand.

“No problem.” I pulled out another copy.

“And the key articles we should consider?” indicating my Post-It notes marking the editorial by **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) and my piece on no-fault zones. The congressman peruses the pages.

Ever promoting the cause, I point out other features – **Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77) as ranger with horse – you can't go wrong with that. And, of course, the all-time best-selling author of *Jumping Fire*, **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65).

Foresters and fire managers with meaningful things to say. This is a magazine of substance.

The congressman, apparently a speed-reader, is now skimming my article and starts to ask me a question, then redirects his attention to the photo of **Rich Grandalski** (RDD-64) smirking at **Leas Dickey** (RDD-61) with a COORS BEER BOTTLE in his hand. The congressman looks confused. The legislative assistant shifts in her seat. Both study the picture.

“Rappelling training for smokejumpers.” He nods. “Good.”

The assistant says, “Rappellers,” as she makes some note on her steno pad.

I think to myself, *What the f—?*

And, of course, they were all very nice and proper as I left. And I went out and had a beer. 🍷

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# LETTER FROM SOUTHERN OREGON RESIDENT TO CONGRESSMAN

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*Editor's note: Below is a letter from Takilma, Ore., resident Robert Hirning to his congressional representative, Peter DeFazio.*

*Takilma is in the southern part of the state, approximately 10 miles south of Cave Junction, the site of the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base from 1943 until 1981.*

DESPITE THE CONTINUING B.S. from the Forest Service, I keep wondering why it took literally days to respond to the lightning strikes of this last July 15. The lightning storm that struck that Sunday was at 8:30 in the morning, leaving ample opportunity to mobilize that same day. Yet the three major fires that bedeviled Southern Oregon for the entire summer, all caused by this lightning outbreak, were allowed to burn on unattended for 30 hours or more.

In fact, for unknown reasons, the incident reports for Taylor Creek, Natchez and Klondike fires all misrepresented the start times as 2 p.m., 6:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. – a long time to keep burning before the Fire Management even knew about them.

Does this mean that the Forest Service has become so incompetent as to not even look for fires after a lightning bust?

If lightning strikes can be pinpointed on our home computers, and aircraft fitted with infrared imaging supposedly flew over the area, why didn't the Forest Service rush to the blazes while they were still small and easy to contain? Why did they let them get away into what became conflagrations of hundreds of thousands of acres, costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars?

Who makes these decisions and what are their real motives? At stake was a ruined tourist economy worth over \$200 million to Southern Oregon, the compromised health of tens of thousands of citizens, and untold lost value of future timber reserves. So who profited from this disaster?

These fires were not started by climate change or a buildup of forest fuels, although such environmental factors may have exacerbated the spread. They were caused by natural lightning strikes which could have been stopped by early detection and aggressive action, just as they were 40 years ago. 🔥

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## Concerned Citizen Meets The Dark Side

by Youmus B. Chitenbee (Citizen)

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**H**ere I am again getting a chance to write down my experiences after moving west from D.C. As I previously said, they don't know much about wildfire back there, but I'm sure learning a lot since I moved out here.

You remember that I had a great experience in meeting Wilford E. (call me Smoke) Baer as I was enjoying my super-loaded caffeine drink at a local Starbucks. What a guy, this Smoke E. Baer.

Well, let me tell you about an even greater experience. I was eating at the local Black Bear Diner and in walks this guy who looks identical

to Smoke E., but there were some differences. Instead of that pickle-colored suit and the trooper-type hat, he had a black cowboy hat and a black bandana around his neck. His complexion was a lot darker than Smoke. He didn't have a smile and was rather intimidating.

"Sir," I said. "You sure look a lot like a person I met last month. I'm Youmus B. Chitenbee."

"Howdy, I'm Milford E. Baer. You must have met my identical twin, Smoke. He's Wilford—I'm Milford"

"Yes Sir. He is a unique individual. This is

amazing—an identical twin.”

“Both of us have been around for a long time even though Smoke only became well-known in the last 70 years. We have actually been around for eons.”

“You must be—how can that be, an identical twin? Give me some background. Do I call you Milford?”

“Heck no. I’m Booger Bear. My brother is Smoke E. and he’s the fire-preventin’ bear. I’m the other side of the gene pool, even though we are twins. I’m the fire-startin’ bear. You know the Cain and Abel story? My name is not Cain and I don’t do homicide, but I’m totally opposed to this Smoke E. stuff. The family keeps calling me the black sheep of the family, but I’m a bear, not a sheep.”

“Jee wiz, how did all of this come about? You guys have been around for more years than we can count.”

“Well, partner, it’s a long story, but I think that you, even if you are from D.C., can understand it. Ever heard of Venus, the goddess of love?”

“I think so, but remember I’m from D.C. and don’t have much knowledge of the world outside that area.”

“Well, way back along the way, Venus was involved in a soiree with the big shots in the God World. Enter in ‘Big Ernie.’ This guy, Hephaestus, was making a play for Venus. Hep was actually a poor imitation of a Fire God—blacksmiths and volcanoes.

“Well, as the night played on and many Sierra Nevada Torpedo IPAs were consumed, Big Ernie kicked Hephaestus into the star world and out of the soiree. Big Ernie took his place as ‘Fire God’ and you know the rest—Smoke and Booger.”

“Wow Booger, what a story. Have you been on the dark side since birth?”

“You betch’um, Little Beaver. I’ve been the fire start’in bear ever since. I’ve even had parts in the ‘Walking Dead.’ ”

“The Walking Dead! I don’t remember seeing you.”

“I was a ‘walker.’ Got killed over 700 times but lasted through eight years. Us bears are plenty tough. Sure beats those 30-second jobs Smoke E. was doing.

“When I wasn’t filming, I used to sit on the steps of the barracks and drink beer with smoke-

jumpers and do the lightning dance—actually cheered at each strike. Each strike was a potential fire jump.”

“Shame on you, Booger. I bet you had a real problem with those smokejumpers putting out fires when they were small.”

“Well, partner, times have changed. I used to be in favor of wildfire and the destruction it caused. I’ve had a bit of a change in my thinking. Maybe this wildfire situation has gone too far.”

“Wow, Booger, are you still on the dark side?”

“Jeez, partner, see where we’re eating—The Black Bear Diner! Get the emphasis on ‘black?’”

“Sorry, Booger—where did that name come from anyway?”

“Ask anyone who has ever been on the fireline if they know anything about fire boogers.”

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*They used to do quick initial attack and put fires out quickly. Now they have to have a safety meeting and planning before any IA.*

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“Gross. We have to clean this up if we want to be in *Smokejumper* magazine. Smokejumpers want it clean, no swear words, and no mention of beer or soirees.

“Wow, I can see why you didn’t become the face of the Forest Service. Smoke E. certainly presents a better image than Booger—the fire start’in bear.”

“Hey, partner, I’ve changed. This wildfire situation has gotten completely out of control. They used to do quick initial attack and put fires out quickly. Now they have to have a safety meeting and planning before any IA. However, they have to hold these meetings in areas where they don’t interfere with Cal Fire doing IA.

“It isn’t like it used to be. People are getting killed. I want to come over from the dark side. Problem is, when I come over from the Dark Side, do I see any difference from the Dark Side?”

“Well, Booger, you have some good points. But, what do I know about wildfire, I’m from D.C?” 🐻

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# Sometimes It Takes a Thump Along The Side Of Your Head To Catch the Obvious –The 1976 Fire Season As Seen From My Eyes—Part II

by Dick Rath (Missoula '73)

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*Part II picks up after Dick's return to Missoula after an assignment in Grand Junction, Colorado, in July 1976—Smokejumper July 2018.*

A short time later, an assignment for a DC-3 load came in from Region 4. A large fire was burning south of Spanish Forks, Utah. Three Doug loads were requested. One was sent from McCall, a second from Boise, and the third, the one I was on, from Missoula. It took a long time to travel from Missoula to the fire. It is probably the longest time that I had ever spent in my jump gear.

Upon arriving at the fire, the winds were too strong to jump. We landed at the airfield and, along with the other smokejumpers, were bused to the fire. I was pretty relieved that we didn't jump the fire. The fire was on a westerly aspect, and the winds had the smoke screaming along the ground.

During the next few days, our group of jumpers was assigned to put in some tough line and burn out some very steep country. On the third day, we completed the assignment with an early morning burnout that stopped the fire.

The following days found us working across the slopes mopping up. On the fourth or fifth day, **Dennis Friestad** (MSO-65) and I were working across a steep slope that looked like a horse's face.

Dennis and I were in the same rotation on the assignment earlier to Grand Junction, and I had gotten to know and really like him. Dennis was a Wrestling Coach and High School teacher in Valley City, North Dakota. He trained in 1965 and was built like a bull and had inherited that North Dakota hardworking ethic and was a steady work partner.

Dennis loved jumping, but his stomach cared

little for flying. Once in an aircraft, he kept a barf bag within arms reach. Still it never stopped him doing what he loved.

One other thing that I enjoyed about Dennis was his ability to play poker. There was always a game going on, and he was generally in it. I quickly learned that I was not a poker player and moved from player to bystander. I remember a number of occasions where some of the other jumpers, who thought highly of their card playing skills, would be in a game with Dennis. Dennis consistently won.

Dennis became a highly respected educator in North Dakota where he taught and coached for forty years. After leaving the smokejumper world, he received a number of awards for his work with a vast number of students over a forty-year career.

On this particular day, Dennis was working above me. At one point, he told me that he was crossing over a scree slope and that I needed to find some cover in case a rock slide started.

I took cover in what I thought was a safe group of Douglas fir. As he made his way across the slope, a shower of rocks came down by me. For the most part, I was protected. Then a rock hit the brim of my hard hat where it met my left ear.

From that point my recollections are clouded. What I do remember is waking up in an examination room in a hospital in Nephi, Utah. Nephi, being a Mormon Community, had a small hospital. The attending Doctor was very thorough. I remember looking at him and thinking that he must have been between 80-90 years old. After the exam and X-rays, I found myself on a chair in a shower. There a nurse tried as hard as she could to scrub off the last weeks of ash and dirt from the pores in my skin. This was not an easy task,





2001 Northern Rockies—Type II Team L-R: Larry Svalberg, George Weldon, Dennis Milburn, Dick Rath, Byron Bonney. (Courtesy D. Rath)

but she was bent on turning my old hide into that of a child.

Soon I was taken to a room where I fell into a deep sleep. When I woke around 6 p.m., a small group of nurses assembled in my room. I learned that I was the only patient in the hospital, and they were curious about firefighters and smoke-jumpers coming from Missoula, Montana, to work a fire in Utah. I was starting to feel better when one of them asked me if there was anything I would like? I smiled and said, “I could sure use a beer.” A nurse that worked in the maternity ward said that they had some beer in the refrigerator for the new mothers. Off she went to get one.

About that time I heard one of the hospital doors slam and someone coming down the corridor. Soon Dennis entered the room. One can only imagine the relief on his face when he saw me sitting up on a bed with a beer in my hand surrounded by four nurses. Throughout the entire day, he had thought that I was seriously injured. I was released the next day. Our crew worked the fire for the next couple of days, then we flew commercially back to Missoula. Back in Missoula, I took some sick leave while the concussion dissipated. I was later cleared by a doctor to resume work.

Upon returning to the jump list, **Larry Nelsen** (MS-56), the operation foreman, called me into his office and gave me a lecture about rocks, rockslides, and the peril associated with both. I listened quietly. I agreed that I should have taken cover in a better spot. I figured it was best to put this one behind me, but I don’t believe that Dennis ever forgot that he was the one who started it all.

August found most of the jumpers taking

assignments in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, as an extended drought and the associated large number of wildland fires taxed their fire suppression forces.

## Grand Junction Again

Back in Missoula, I was soon assigned to return to Grand Junction where the fire season was beginning to wind down. Just before I arrived, Ed Jinx, a B-26 pilot assigned to Grand Junction, was killed when his aircraft crashed while dropping on a fire. Ed was a very nice man. He spent many hours with our initial group in early July. Ed had just opened a restaurant in Billings, Montana, and was studying to become a chef.

Soon Denny Lynch, from Lynch Flying Services in Billings, Montana, flew down a replacement B-26 and a replacement pilot.

The replacement pilot was Dick Potter, an old veteran of Johnson Air Service and a skilled smokejumper delivery pilot. During the next week, we watched as Denny worked at getting Dick comfortable with a new aircraft. It became obvious to us that Dick’s comfort level with the B-26 was borderline. It came as a relief that he was not called on any assignments before we closed down the operation in early September. In June 1977, Dick was killed while landing his TBM spray plane in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia. He was a good pilot and a better man.

## Back To Missoula

Returning to MSO, I was soon at the top of the jump list and found myself and **Dick Shaw** (MSO-74) jumping a two-manner in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The fire was small, and **Jan McLaren** (MSO-71) spotted us in a large meadow north of the fire. Late one night, we were wakened to hear a clattering noise that we figured was from some animal crossing a rockslide near our fire. We did not think too much about it, and I put it in the back of my mind. The next day we began our packout that was not going to be too long. The tough part was getting through a huge patch of Pacific Yew wood. That Yew wood made the trip pretty miserable. When we finally hit the forest trail along the South Fork of the Flathead River, we were both tired men. At Outfitters Roost, the Dispatcher from the Spotted Bear District picked

us up. While we were loading our gear, he told us that the night before, several people in Glacier Park had been attacked and killed by a Grizzly Bear. This caused Dick and me to look at each other and remember that clattering noise from

the night before that was pretty darn close to our fire. Later that day we were picked up by a small aircraft and flown back to Missoula.

Later in the month found my brother and myself on a crew action fire to the Grasslands in

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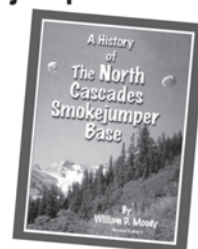
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North Dakota. It was short lived, but an interesting trip.

In late October I was part of two smokejumper crews assigned to a fire on the east side of Glacier Park. The fire was on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation. Glacier Park and the prairie ecosystem were absolutely beautiful. Since it was late in the fall, the fire only became active for a few hours in the afternoon. It was pretty darn cold at night and, as the fire grew, more crews were assigned. Soon there were several hundred firefighters sleeping on the ground in an old, lodgepole pine clearcut.

After being there for a number of days, our foreman told us to get ready for a change in the weather. The next day some of the overhead stayed in camp and put up several wall tents for us to sleep in. That night, when we got back to camp and ate, we noticed some snow beginning to fall. Once in our tents, we were pretty snug. Sometime around 0200 the next morning, we were told to get our gear together and get on our bus.

Once up, we realized that snowstorm had turned into a blizzard, and the fire team needed our bus to begin shuttling crews to a Catholic School gymnasium in Browning. As we walked through the clearcut, where the other firefighters were trying to sleep, one could make out small mounds that reminded me of graves at a cemetery.

Back in Browning, we quickly warmed up and, later in the day, we were on our way back to MSO. Little did I know that this was to be my last fire assignment with the smokejumper organization.

As the fire season came to an end, I found myself thinking of the experiences this fire season had given me and just how fortunate I was not to have been severely injured. My main concern was not the injury, but what I would have done, career-wise, had I really gotten hurt. These thoughts continued to play out in my mind.

In 1976 I was 26. Newly married, we had just purchased a new home in Missoula. I knew that I wanted to stay in fire management, but the one thing that I did not have was a college degree in resource management. Many of the smokejumper cadre had degrees in forestry, geology, range science, or a related resource management field.

Earlier I had watched **Dave Boyd** (MSO-69)

and **Gary Elmore** (MSO-71) apply for and offered positions on the Flathead and Kootenai N.F. That seemed to me to be a good route to pursue. At the same time, my brother, Tom, was beginning to think about his next move. I have always looked up to him, and he had always given me good advice.

In the mid-'70s, one of Tom's engineering professors from South Dakota State University had taken a position on the Lolo N.F. When he discovered that Tom was working at the jump center, he arranged for him to work on several project at the Aerial Fire Depot that needed engineering expertise. This work pretty well set the stage for where Tom's career was headed. I believe that set the stage for both of us.

## Epilogue

When the fire season ended in October, Tom returned to the Northern Regional Office Soil Lab. He spent the previous winter working in their soil testing facility.

During the 1976 fire season, Tom and I were rarely together. He was on the early Silver City Crew and, once they returned to MSO in July, he spent a large share of the time on fires in Minnesota.

In the fall of 1977, Tom would be offered a professional engineering position on the Idaho Panhandle N.F. that provided the avenue for a great career in the engineering arm of the USFS. Tom retired in 2002 as the Zone Engineer for the northern half of the Black Hill N.F. At the time of his retirement, Tom was working for the Black Hills N.F. Forest Supervisor **John Twiss** (RAC-67).

In the fall of 1976, I was working back at MEDC. One day in early November, Tom told me that he had found a vacancy for an Assistant Fire Management position on the Fortine Ranger District on the Kootenai N.F. I had made the decision that I needed to begin applying for any jobs that I could qualify for.

Two months later, I was offered the job and moved to the Kootenai N.F. I was never sure how long the certification was for the job and never asked. I suspect that I may have been both on the top and the bottom of it.

Our father, the farmer and trainman, passed



away in March 2007, at age 87. He had led a good life and at age 87, the only thing that was not worn out on him was his sense of humor.

During the last few years of his life, he had become close friends with his pastor, **Al Goldammer** (MSO-64). Al conducted the memorial service for our father and as he began the service, he addressed dad's friends and family and said, "I guess all of you know that Don's sons, Tom and Dick, are old smokejumpers. What you might not know is that my brother Steve (MSO-66) and I are also old smokejumpers.

"Folks, do you know how screwed up a family has to be to have two sons in that line of work?"

This brought out a great deal of laughter and set the tone to say farewell to our father. I did not look at my mother, but suspect that she was nodding in agreement.

From 1977 though 2003, I continued working in fire management on several National Forests. I retired in 2004. My last position was with the fire group in the Northern Regions office in Missoula.

When looking back, I really did not have a career. It was a "real adventure" that started in 1969 on the Clarkia Ranger District of the St. Joe N.F. I enjoyed each of the jobs I was given, but the one that I truly loved was that of a GS-6 smoke-jumper. It is the one that I look back on with love and fondness.

I believe that those of you that are reading this story have your own life story of jumping and making that transition into your career. I have been writing this and other stories for my children and grandchildren. I did not intend to have them published, but my family encouraged me to submit this and one other to Chuck, who was kind enough to put them into our *Smokejumper* magazine. I would encourage you to do something similar. Putting one's memories to paper brings out new memories that have not surfaced for me in over forty years.

After leaving the jump organization in 1977, I found that I was fortunate to work with a group of very talented old smokejumpers. Like me, they had left the "jumpers" to pursue a different part of the Forest Service fire organization.

I later realized that these veteran smokejumpers were at the hub of management of the very successful Fire and Aviation program for the

Northern Rockies Region. In addition to those who continued on in fire management, there was another group of smokejumpers who moved into

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*I enjoyed each of the jobs I was given, but the one that I truly loved was that of a GS-6 smokejumper.*

---

other disciplines and made great contributions in a variety of roles in the Northern Rockies

This group included **Tom Kovalicky** (MSO-61), **Brad McBratney** (GAC-62), **Norm Kamrud** (MSO-64), **Dave Poncin** (MSO-58), **Barry Hicks** (MSO-64), **Ron Curtiss** (GAC-61), **George Weldon** (MSO-75), **Jack Kirkendal** (MSO-74), **Byron Bonney** (RAC-71), **Gary Elmore** (MSO-71), **Jay Adams** (MSO-69), **Dave Hart** (MSO-80), **Jerry Williams** (RAC-72), **Dave Boyd** (MSO-69), **Bob Mutch** (GAC-54), **Roger Steerman** (MSO-75), **Ed Leritz** (MSO-70), **Fred Jones** (MSO-84), **Grant Godbolt** (MSO-71), **Ron Hvizdak** (MYC-78), **Kurt Werst** (LGD-74), **Mark Romey** (MSO-75), **Curt McChesney** (MSO-75), **Randy Herzberg** (MSO-74), **Jan McLaren** (MSO-71), **Al Kyles** (MSO-71), **Frank Grover** (MSO-63), **Tim Aldrich** (MSO-62), **Larry Steele** (BOI-71), **Laird Robinson** (MSO-62), **Dave Sisk** (MSO-75), **Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77), **Arnie Brosten** (MSO-66), **George Jackson** (MSO-74), **Ted Putman** (MSO-66), **Mike Plattes** (MSO-73), **Dale Dague** (MSO-73), **Bob Dettman** (MSO-73), **Les Holsapple** (MSO-73), **Gale Everett** (MSO-68) and **(Sherm Sollid** MSO-65). I know that the list above is not totally inclusive, so if I have overlooked your name, I apologize.

These individuals cast a large shadow over the Northern Region and provided the leadership that changed how the Forest Service looked at many years of fire suppression and adapted the use of natural fire on the landscape.

I retired in 2004. I look back at those wonderful years and opportunities. I probably need to call Dennis Friestad. Thank you, Dennis, for kicking the rock loose that caused the "thump on the head." An enlightened moment, it sparked my colorful adventure with the U.S. Forest Service. 🙏



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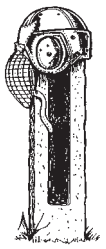
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**Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:**  
**Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico CA 95926**



## 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:

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### **James T. Manion** (Missoula '54)

Jim died June 3, 2018, at his home in Colville, WA. He enlisted in the USAF after his high school graduation and served 1949-53. Jim enrolled in the Univ. of Montana after his discharge and graduated with a degree in education in 1956. He taught high school in Montana and Washington from 1961-63.

In 1963 Jim went to work as a contracting officer for the USFS and retired in 1984. Jim jumped at Missoula 1954-56 and West Yellowstone 1957-60.

### **B. Fred "Fritz" Wolfrum** (Missoula '53)

Fritz, 85, died October 9, 2018. Originally from Wisconsin, he was one of the many who saw the movie "Red Skies of Montana" and later became a smokejumper. Fritz attended the University of Montana, where he majored in business, before joining the Air Force and being stationed in Alaska. He continued to work for the Air National Guard and USFS throughout his career. In 1973, while living in Spokane, he bought property outside of Spangle, WA, where he lived through his retirement. Fritz jumped at Missoula 1953-57, '61 and '62.

### **David P. Oswalt** (Cave Junction '68)

David died April 3, 2018, in Portland, Oregon, from complications of a home accident the previous year. He started his firefighting career in high school before being drafted into the Army, where he served three tours in Vietnam.

Upon release from the Army, he rookied at Cave Junction in 1967, where he jumped for 13 years until the base was closed after the 1981 season. He had 366 jumps and was admired for his tenacity in keeping his patented feet-knees-hands-nose landing style in the midst of all efforts

to change it.

David was on the first jumper detail to the Eastern U.S. at Wise, Virginia, in 1971. He began working for the Alaska Fire Service in 1984 and retired from the AFS in 1996 before moving to Portland.

### **Leo J. Wolfe** (Missoula '46)

Leo, 97, died October 28, 2018. He served in the CCC program prior to enlisting in the Army in WWII, where he served in the South Pacific. After his discharge, he went to the University of Montana, graduating with a degree in Forestry in 1950. Leo worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs for his full career, retiring in 1977. He was an avid bicyclist, riding over 1400 miles in 1985 to attend his high school reunion. In 2002 he moved to Spokane, Washington. Leo jumped the 1946-47 seasons.

### **Donald C. Hansen** (Grangeville '57)

Don died July 10, 2014, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He retired from the USAF in 1982 as a Major with almost 22 years of service, mostly as a KC-135 refueling navigator and later an RC-135 reconnaissance navigator. Don jumped at Grangeville in 1957-58 and Fairbanks in 1959.

### **Richard "Dick" M. Wilson** (Missoula '48)

Dick, 91, died October 10, 2018, in Sitka, Alaska. He joined the Marine Corps in 1945 at age 17 and was discharged a year later after WWII ended. He later graduated from Colorado State with a degree in Forestry. Dick was one of the jumpers who went on fire calls early on August 5, 1949. His was a dry run and he returned just in time to see the Doug take off with the Mann Gulch jumpers. Dick worked on the remains recovery crew later that week.

Dick worked his way up through the Forest Service and ended his career as Chatham Area Supervisor of the Tongass N.F. He retired in Sitka in 1982. In his words: "Despite being a Marine and a Smokejumper, I was a gentle man who valued peace."

### **Margarita K. Phillips** (Missoula '88)

Margarita, 62, died October 29, 2018. She was among the first female jumpers at Missoula and had a long career jumping from 1988 to 2010. Margarita grew up in St. Ignatius, MT., and got a degree in forestry from Salish Kootenai College. She worked with the Lolo NF Hotshots before jumping at Missoula.

Margarita was an accomplished runner and ran in events up to the 100-mile ultra marathons. She even hiked 14 miles just a few days before her death.

### **Stephen A. Clairmont** (Missoula '62)

Steve died December 6, 2018, from complications due to pancreatic cancer and diabetes. He grew up in Dixon, MT, at the Tribal Agency and was a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Steve started fighting fire in Southern California with the Los Prietos Hotshots and rookied at Missoula in 1962. He jumped 1962-86, and 1990-93, retiring in 1994 with 504 career jumps.

Steve traveled many miles throughout Montana, Idaho, and the Dakotas recruiting youth in small towns and reservations for careers in smoke-jumping. After retiring from the Forest Service, Steve moved to the Flathead Indian Reservation at St. Ignatius.

### **Darrel J. "Pete" Peterson** (Missoula '50)

Pete, 90, died December 20, 2018. He graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in education and began his teaching career at Superior in 1950. Pete moved back to Missoula in 1952, got his master's degree, and began a 42-year career with the Missoula School District. This included 15 years at Hawthorne as a teacher and coach and the remaining years as a Principal at four schools.

Pete had a dual career with the USFS that included dispatcher at the Aerial Fire Depot. When

he retired from the USFS in 1994, he drove trucks for the fire cache until age 88. Pete jumped at Missoula 1950-51 and 1961-67.

### **David E. Poncin** (Missoula '58)

Dave, 81, died December 23, 2018, of congestive heart failure. Dave started working with the Forest Service in 1955 in blister rust control before entering the University of Montana and becoming a jumper in 1958. His first job with the USFS was in Lincoln, Montana. He moved frequently, ending up in Grangeville in 1983 where he lived until his retirement.

Dave headed up a Type I Incident Management Team from 1981 through 1988 and received the USDA Award for Superior Service. He was active in the NSA Trails Program and started the slogan "TRAMPS Will Work for Food."

### **Edward W. Lynn** (Missoula '95)

Ed, 56, died December 26, 2018, of brain cancer. After he graduated from high school, he joined his father's logging company in Idaho where he learned skills he was able to pass on to the hundreds of firefighters he trained. Ed earned a master's degree in school counseling, was a middle school teacher, coach, and had a passion for excellence.

Ed jumped at Missoula 1995-97, 2007-12, 2014-18, Grangeville 1998-00, and McCall 2004-06.

### **William N. Hale** (Missoula '53)

Bill died December 8, 2018, at his home in Spokane, Washington. After graduating from high school in 1948, he attended Clark College where he played baseball. Bill enlisted in the Army and was a member of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne during the Korean War where he received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

After his enlistment, Bill enrolled at the University of Montana and graduated with a degree in Geology. He jumped at Missoula 1953-57 while attending the university.

Bill worked for the Bureau of Mines from 1961 until his retirement in 1994. He commuted to work throughout his career and twice biked from Spokane to Beach, North Dakota, where he was born. 🏠

# Tribute To Margarita

by Deanne Shulman (McCall '81)

For those of us in the first wave of women entering the smokejumper ranks, our sights were aimed at passing rookie training and becoming competent, respected smokejumpers. Achieving this goal was challenge enough, and many of us were well satisfied with this accomplishment.

Margarita Phillips (MSO-88) was part of the second wave of women to join the smokejumper ranks. And after passing rookie training and proving herself a competent jumper, she set her sights on a whole new level of challenge: changing the work culture.

She developed a passion for each rookie's success, women and men, and became a champion for equality of opportunity. Instilled with a strong sense of fairness, she counseled and trained aspiring smokejumpers and established a formal mentoring system for rookies, thereby ensuring everyone had access to this advantage.

This system leveled the playing field and increased the odds of success for any individual rookie. Her programs embodied an innovative perspective—that individual success leads to collective success and, therefore, a stronger overall program.

Margarita was her own strong, unique person and did not succumb to pressure to conform to some type of “smokejumper” image. She had the

courage to be true to herself. As a role model, this helped other women navigate their way and place amongst the smokejumper ranks.

A few days after hearing of Margarita's passing, I happened to meet a young woman who had recently attended a women's firefighting “boot camp” hosted by the Prescott National Forest. The two-week program was organized and taught by experienced women firefighters.

As this young woman enthusiastically described the pro-

gram and all she had learned, I saw spirit and intense determination in her face. She was totally energized, with a huge smile and a sparkle to her eye.

Margarita's presence in that encounter was quite vivid, and I thought to myself, *the spirit of Margarita lives on!* She lives on in all the fired-up young women and men who will pursue jobs or careers in wildland fire.

Margarita was much beloved in the smokejumper community. We all feel her loss deeply.

Jumper away... 🌲

## NEW NSA LIFE MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 2018

*Thanks for your support!*

|     |             |             |               |      |
|-----|-------------|-------------|---------------|------|
| 347 | TROEGER     | MIKE        | MCCALL        | 1981 |
| 348 | HESSEL      | KEN         | MCCALL        | 1958 |
| 349 | STEELE      | GEORGE      | NCSB          | 1972 |
| 350 | STENBERG    | DON         | BOISE         | 1974 |
| 351 | CHRISTENSEN | DAVID       | MCCALL        | 1952 |
| 352 | PETTIGREW   | TOM         | CAVE JUNCTION | 1962 |
| 353 | SHAVER      | ROB         | MCCALL        | 1967 |
| 354 | JOYCE       | CHRISTOPHER | REDDING       | 2001 |
| 355 | HIPKE       | ERIC        | NCSB          | 1990 |
| 356 | RASMUSSEN   | BOB         | FAIRBANKS     | 1966 |
| 357 | BROWN       | WES         | CAVE JUNCTION | 1966 |
| 358 | PALMER      | CHRIS       | REDDING       | 1975 |
| 359 | HATCH       | CHARLES     | GRANGEVILLE   | 1963 |
| 360 | STOOPS      | RON         | MISSOULA      | 1957 |
| 361 | BENAVIDEZ   | GARY        | MCCALL        | 1972 |
| 362 | WHIPPLE     | GREG        | MISSOULA      | 1959 |
| 363 | DERR        | BILL        | ASSOCIATE     |      |
| 364 | MARLEY      | RONALD      | ASSOCIATE     |      |
| 365 | MCIVER      | ROD         | MISSOULA      | 1964 |
| 366 | BUCK        | GARY        | CAVE JUNCTION | 1966 |
| 367 | MARSHALL    | BRUCE       | BOISE         | 1971 |
| 368 | KNIGHT      | BILL        | CAVE JUNCTION | 1960 |
| 369 | HARPOLE     | GEORGE      | MISSOULA      | 1949 |
| 370 | MARKER      | RON         | MCCALL        | 1952 |
| 371 | CONLEY      | JOHN        | W YELLOWSTONE | 1988 |





# ODDS AND ENDS



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to **John Conley** (WYS-88), **Ron Marker** (MYC-52), **George Harpole** (MSO-49), **Bill Knight** (CJ-60), **Bruce Marshall** (BOI-71), **Gary Buck** (CJ-66), **Rod McIver** (MSO-64), **Ronald Marley** (Assoc.), **Bill Derr** (Assoc.), **Greg Whipple** (MSO-59), **Gary Benavidez** (MYC-72), **Chris Joyce** (RDD-01), **Bob Rasmussen** (FBX-66), **Wes Brown** (CJ-66), **Chris Palmer** (RDD-75), **Chuck Hatch** (GAC-63), **Ron Stoops** (MSO-57), and **Eric Hipke** (NCSB-90) who just became our latest Life Members.

For an interesting video poem by **Mark Walmsley** (Assoc) with some great photos from the Redmond Smokejumpers, go online to *copper cross studio* and click on "The Smoke jumper Nine."

**John Culbertson** (FBX-69) commenting on the devastating Camp Fire near Chico: "I think it is important to remind people that there are many different types of fire situations and fire suppression actions. A wind-driven wildfire in an urban landscape or forest town is a far different fire management situation then a lightning-caused fire in a remote wilderness. Our current fire situation is a case of the former and in no way should be confused with the ongoing and appropriate debate about lack of fire prevention, delayed attack, and confused fire policy that is now coming in to the public view.

"All these fires were aggressively attacked by state and local fire agencies including CalFire, Los Angeles County, Ventura County, Los Angeles City and their associated mutual aid agencies as is their standard operating procedure at all times—**this following extensive fire prevention and mitigation planning within their jurisdictions.** These State and local agencies are faced with catastrophic circumstances and are acting



in the highest tradition of the fire service. We should support these efforts and encourage their wider application to Federal land management."

In a news release from BLM Boise: On November 9, the BLM Great Basin Smokejumpers honored **Ernest "Ernie" Hunter** (IDC-68), a U.S. Navy member, Purple Heart Medal Recipient, and Smokejumper, during a Veterans Day ceremony held at the Great Basin Smokejumper base.

Ernie joined the U.S. Navy as a Lieutenant and volunteered for two tours of duty in Vietnam. During his second tour serving on the River Patrols, he was wounded and received the Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. After his military service, Ernie returned to smokejumping.

The BLM Smokejumpers wanted to honor Ernie as a veteran and as a smokejumper. As **Todd Jinkins** (NIFC-98), BLM Great Basin Base Manager, said, "Ernie showed us that veterans and wildland firefighting mesh together, which provides an example for future veterans and for anyone interested in becoming a wildland firefighter."

Overheard from Eugene, Oregon, evening news weather report: "We're having thunderstorms but, thank goodness, no lightning."

**Steve Smith** (Producer "Firefighters From The Sky"): "Just finished reading the article by Michael Rains and the story about the Miss Montana C-47. You are doing some fine journalism my friend.

"Given that I have three Emmys, an Iris and four Telly Awards, I know good journalism when I see it and I saw it today in *Smokejumper* magazine. I know its hard work, but there are a bunch of us out here learning a lot, thanks to your hard work."

Congratulations to Cal Fire's **John Hawkins** who retired last Christmas after 55 fire seasons. Wow!

Lee Gossett (RDD-57): “Karen Moen (Ed’s wife in 1971) called last night, and Ed Weissenback (RAC-64) has been positively, DNA identified, as have George Ritter, Roy Townley (Pilot/Co-pilot). (*Air America C-123 #293 was shot down Dec. 27, 1971 over Northern Laos-Ed.*)

“It’s been 46 years, 360 days since #293 went down. Karen gave me permission to pass on the news. We had a near hour phone conversation last night and recounted our time together in Laos, which in some ways seems like yesterday. I had the sad duty to inform Karen of #293 being missing, as Ed and Karen were our neighbors.

“At this point, I think Karen will have Ed’s remains [minimal] put to rest at the National Cemetery in Eagle Point, Oregon where we

had a ceremony for Ed about 10 years ago. Our Bro is coming home to us and will advise as to the date.”

Grants Pass *Daily Courier* (Dec.): “The Josephine County Board of Commissioners approved the sale of the nine buildings that make up the historic site (of the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum).

“The museum is on the National Register of Historic Places. The purchase price was \$281,000. The source of the purchase capital was not divulged.

“Commissioner Simon Hare added that he believes the museum is important because the public is forgetting about the cost-effectiveness of the smokejumper base—a timely subject today more than ever.” 🐕

## One Last Drop For Mann Gulch Plane—75th Anniversary of D-Day

by Kim Maynard (Missoula ’82)

There she was and this is no shit. N24320, the big, beautiful C-47A/DC-3, that dropped the jumpers over Mann Gulch in 1949, was just sitting on some forgotten tarmac somewhere in eastern Arkansas. Dick Komberec, co-founder of the Museum of Mountain Flying and former Johnson Flying Service pilot, stared at her like a favorite teddy bear at the bottom of a box filled with other toys. Surely, N24320 was *that* plane! A bit of research and Dick was proved right. Some enthusiasm from the Museum of Mountain Flying and paperwork involving \$125,000, and in 2001, N24320 was released from obscurity. Dick flew her back to Missoula, Montana, circling Mann Gulch on her last and what was thought to be her final flight.



(L-R): Al Charters, Kim Maynard (MSO-82), Keith Wolferman (MSO-95), Bryan Morgan, Sarah Morgan, Shawn Modula, Skip Alderon (pilot) (Courtesy Shanna Swanson)

Never turning a prop again, she has been a beautiful but grounded centerpiece at the Museum of

Mountain Flying ever since—that is, until recently.

N24320 has been selected to

drop jumpers yet one more time—this time in Normandy, France, for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. This requires quite the makeover. Beautiful as she was, her flying capacity needed some upgrading. And boy, is she loving the attention!

Neptune Aviation has dedicated the outstanding expertise of aviation mechanic Randy Schone-  
mann to her complete overhaul. Volunteers under Randy's masterful eye meet on Fridays and Sundays to scrape gunk (and you can imagine what *that* is!) from her underbelly, scrub wheel wells, clean wiring in the cockpit, scour corrosion, and ready her for her jump-capable, trans-Atlantic trip.

Both engines and props are getting an overhaul, a static line cable will be re-mounted, the entire cockpit and avionics upgraded, and new jumper seats installed by March 2019 when she will be ready for her resurrection maintenance test flights. Given a passing grade, she will be one of 40+ planes from around the world, flying in formation over Normandy on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. She has been christened "*Miss Montana*," reincarnating the nose art originally on a B-25 flown by decorated Montana WWII aviator, Malcolm Enman, Komberec's father-in-

law—only this time she is waving a pair of smokejumper wings!

That gal has seen some territory and lived multiple lives. Born May 3, 1944, a month before D-Day and towards the end of the war, she never saw combat. Instead, after the war, she joined Johnson Flying Service as one of three DC-3s flying smokejumpers, among others. She was the plane that fateful day of August 5, 1949, that dropped 15 smokejumpers on the Mann Gulch Fire, 12 of whom did not return. One of the victims, David Navon (MSO-49), had been a paratrooper in Normandy in 1944.

At one point in her career in December 1954, she ran out of fuel while flying army soldiers on holiday leave from Germany and took a swim in the Monongahela River near Pittsburgh. The pilot made a Sully-esque, intact ditching landing at night near the shore. While all passengers and crew climbed onto the wings uninjured, unfortunately, ten succumbed to drowning and hypothermia before they could be rescued. Three days later, they pulled her out to start yet another phase of her life, including spraying locusts in Africa in the mid-seventies.

In 1974, Johnson sold her to Evergreen, where she flew cargo

and passengers for many years. Basler owned her for a short while until selling her to McNealy Charter Service in Arkansas where, on that fateful and lucky day, Dick Komberec spotted her. And now she begins yet another chapter in her life: her first flight in the theater of war for which she was born.

As for her human cargo—right now, there are ten jumpers, with twelve, in reserve signed up with "Daks Over Normandy," the British organizing outfit, to leap out of *Miss Montana* on June 5, 2019, the day before the remembrance ceremonies. The nine include smokejumpers **Keith "Skid" Wolferman** (MSO-91), **Kim Maynard** (MSO-82), **Jonathan Fuentes** (RDD-16), **Jason Jones** (GAC-04) and **Amanda Holt** (MSO-06). All of the reserve jumpers are former smokejumpers. In true credit to her history, the other five jumpers are former military. Skid has the great honor of being both. Al Charters is the lead aerial coordinator (and spotter/jumper), ensuring all parachute-related elements of the *Miss Montana* jump are in order. More on the jump itself next issue! To get more info, follow, donate, or volunteer with *Miss Montana*, contact [missmontanatonormandy@gmail.com](mailto:missmontanatonormandy@gmail.com). 🔦

## Why I'm Proud To Be An NSA Member

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

**I**t's November 2018 and you won't be reading this until April 2019, but it is something that I need to say. We have just experienced one

of the most disastrous wildfires in the history of this nation.

I've documented this in the current issue with a reprint of the daily updates that I sent

out during this event.

We've gone from chaos to panic, to semi-control, to control of the beast. How a town is completely wiped off



the map is hard to fathom at this time.

The response from you, the NSA membership, has been unbelievable. I just opened up six envelopes that came in the mail today with over \$7,000 in Camp Fire relief funds to be added to our Good Samaritan Fund.

I am thankful and proud to be a member of an organization that steps up in Spades for our fellow jumpers in time of need. Thanks to you all!

Below is an email that I got from Keith Lockwood (CJ-64). I jumped with Keith at Cave Junction and, later, in Alaska. His daughter and granddaughter lost everything. Granddaughter, Brittany, almost lost her life. Thanks to the NSA GSF, we were immediately able to give financial aid to the family. Below is an email that I got from Keith a few weeks later. Penny is Keith's daughter and Brittany is his granddaughter.

*This is heartfelt thanks to you and all the Smokejumpers for your humanity and contribution to the beginning of the recovery of family members among thousands who are victims of the Camp Fire in Paradise.*

*Penny, Brittany, Dylan and Shawn are all in recovery mode here with us in Chico. Everyone is doing well in the adaptation to the changes in their surroundings and the loss of so many possessions.*

*Brittany called Penny on her cell phone as Penny was on her way home from Oroville. Brittany was leaving their home and*

*as she drove down the street surrounded by fire, she was crying and said to Penny, 'I don't want to burn to death.'*

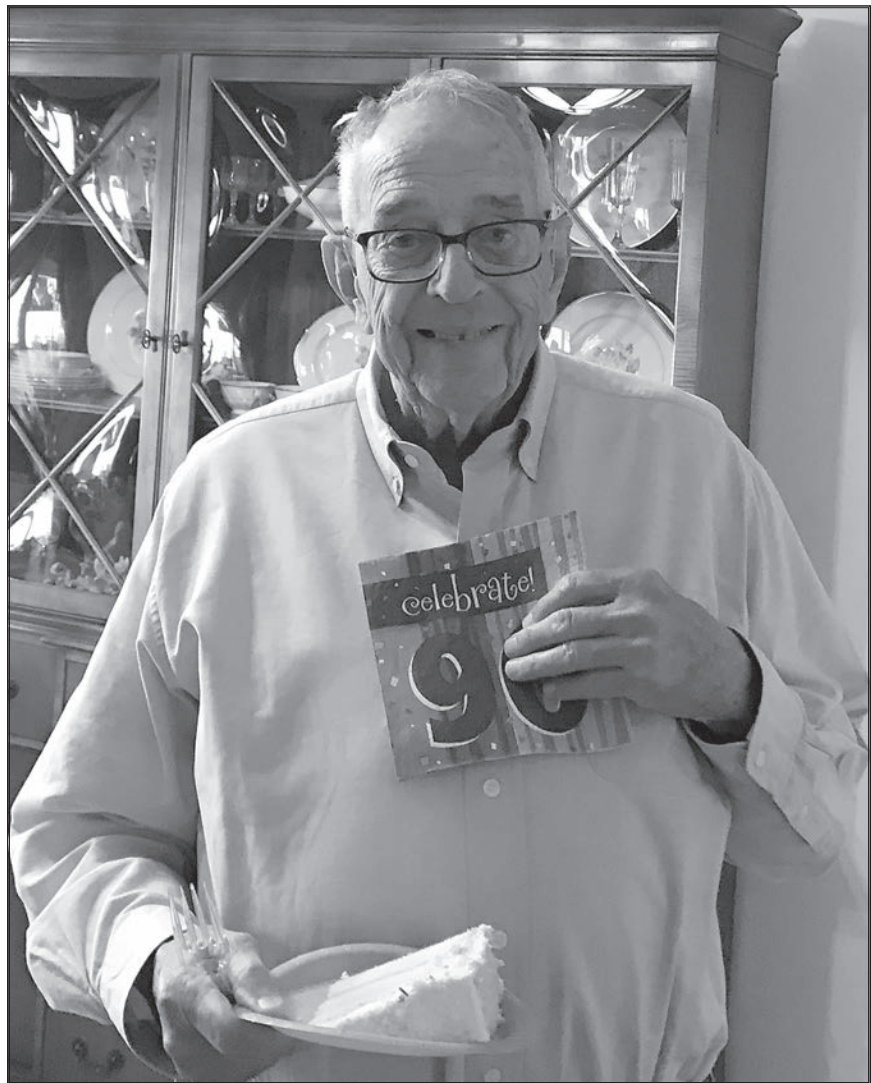
*There is heavy silence when Penny tells that story and the largest part of the weight is borne by Brittany. She is still having some periods of anxiety over the memory of that experience, but seems to go longer between those feelings each time she has them.*

*Please convey to all the Smokejumpers that their contribution is making an important contribution to recover from the Camp Fire in Paradise, California*

*I hope all is well with all of you, your family and friends, and we will forever be indebted to all of you for your timely contribution to the economic survival of some very important people. 🙏*

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## Happy birthday, Al



Al Boucher (CJ-49) celebrates his 90th birthday (Courtesy Jerry John)

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