

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

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SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



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

IT IS EARLY January and snow is on the nearby mountains. Portlanders go crazy when there's even a rumor of snow, and it is predicted in the next day or so. It only takes an inch or two to bring the city to a standstill. I find it amusing after having lived in Montana for 30 years. In fairness, the roads in Portland often become dangerously icy during these storms.

January also brought the story of Australia which is experiencing its most destructive fire season in history. *Newsweek* ran a great story about **Michelle Moore** (MSO-99) who missed her son's birthday due to the need for her to answer the call to engage her skills as a lead plane pilot in Australia.

I have no idea how many other individuals and crews have been dispatched to assist in Australia during this crisis, but I am sure there are many. And, of course, this is not the

first time the US and Australia have exchanged crews during difficult fire years. I'm sure many of you saw video footage of a crew of California fire-fighters being cheered as they disembarked at the airport in Sydney on their way to the firelines.

The magnitude of the situation is daunting. The statistics are overwhelming: 26 million acres burned, 5,900 buildings destroyed, 29 people and one billion animals killed, and smoke pollution across the most populated regions of the country.

An edition of “Science Friday” on PBS devoted about 20 minutes to a discussion of the fires in Australia (January 10, 2020). Toward the end of the program, moderator Ira Flatow asked a fire scientist from University of Idaho, Dr. Crystal Kolden, the following question:

“Is Australia the canary in the coal mine for the rest of the world?”

Dr. Kolden's response: “It is! Australia is very much showing us what will happen elsewhere... For those of us in the US, we feel like in the last few years we've seen some pretty big fires in California that have been really destructive. But, when we look at Australia now, for those of us in fire science, a lot of us see this is the future for the US, as well. And not just in California, but in

a lot of other parts of the US. Even in places that have not necessarily seen a lot of fire because as it gets hotter and drier, we have these types of really unique events—really hot, dry conditions or even drought—and it will facilitate fire in places we have not necessarily seen a lot in the past.

...No doubt these fires are connected to climate change and burning under conditions that are unprecedented...”

This past fall, I engaged in some informal research about wildfires currently being experienced, factors affecting them, and what might be done to improve the situation. I did this, in part, because as your president, I wanted to broaden my own understanding of the topic. My journey included direct discussions with three fire scientists: John Bailey, PhD, Oregon State University; Tania Schoennagel, PhD, University of Colorado; and Carl Seielstad (MYC-93), PhD, University of Montana. I also visited with four former forest supervisors and several other individuals whose

careers were in fire management. What follows is my take on the salient points of discussion during those exchanges:

1. Climate change

There was a clear consensus among experts with whom I visited that climate change is a significant factor affecting the current and future wildfire situation. While I do not specifically remember the topic coming up, though it probably did, most raised the issue immediately. Former forest supervisors, career wildfire fighters, fire scientists all talked about climate change as affecting the length of the fire season, the moisture content of fuels, and intensity of fires. I also did a brief review of literature. It was easy to find articles from reputable scientists and scientific organizations that supported this view. All three of the fire scientists with whom I visited expressed, without prompting, that the changing climate was the driving factor of the wildfire situation as it is currently evolving. At least two specifically raised the issue of extreme weather events associated with changing climate as contributing factors to extreme fire behavior.

2. Managing Hazard Fuels/Managing Forests

There was also discussion about managing hazard fuels and/or forests with most of the individuals. And, it is a central topic in the work of Michael Rains (*Smokejumper*, Jan. 2019, April 2019, July 2019) and the NAFSR Workforce Capacity report that I reviewed in conjunction with my research. Most former forest supervisors were concerned about how to reduce hazard fuels in forests and, with one exception, believed that active management in some form (a combination of thinning, prescribed burns, control burns, and/or logging) should be increased to reduce the incidence and/or intensity of wildfires. One former forest supervisor did not take this position. He suggested the situation would best be resolved by natural means. At least that was my take on what he said. He further expressed skepticism that when commercial interests were involved with “forest management,” the result would always be a healthier, more fire-resistant forests.

The fire scientists were concerned about hazard fuels management as well, but I’m not certain I sufficiently understood each of their perspectives as well as I should have. Certainly, all three were

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Cave JunctionCJ	La Grande.....LGD	West Yellowstone WYS
FairbanksFBX	McCall.....MYC	Whitehorse Yukon YXY
Fort St. JohnYXJ	MissoulaMSO	Winthrop.....NCSB

concerned about and advocated for hazard fuels management in addition to other measures in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). One pointed specifically to the area believed most at risk and needing the most resources (in one form or another), the forests of California (and, perhaps, southern Oregon?). At least two, if not all three, pointed to the fact that many, if not most wildfires, were not on timbered (at least harvestable timbered) lands. Large swaths of the Great Basin, the southwest, and Alaska crept into conversations. None were opposed to forest management, per se, but at least two seemed skeptical that widespread “forest management” would be effective or sufficient in curbing the trend in fires, given the magnitude of the forests, varied landscapes where fires occur, and climate change.

3. Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)

There was considerable concern about the WUI from most professionals. The devastating impacts of the Camp Fire frequently crept into these conversations. There were many references to the dangers posed to people and property in the WUI. There was much discussion about what could and/or should be done to reduce the danger. I also reviewed a video done by Dr. Shoennagel that concluded that efforts needed to be made to “Build Better, Thin Better, Burn Better.” That said, opinions from others who viewed the video varied about how “Build Better, Thin Better, Burn Better” ought to look with respect to different landscapes and localities. At least two of the three fire scientists referred to how people were already beginning to adapt pointing to insurance companies becoming more reluctant to insure homes in the WUI, albeit with a lack of willingness thus far to be discriminating in their approach.

One former forest supervisor provided a plan for cooperation between public and private entities that he hoped to implement in his locality. He further hoped it might provide a model for others since the WUI everywhere involves multiple public and private entities that will have to cooperate for a WUI to be more “fire resilient.” Further, a fire expert from Southern California discussed with me at length how localities in some of the most at-risk areas he was aware of had already been working to develop plans to address risks in their areas. He also commented that smokejump-

ers were fighting fires in the WUI all the time and were a vital resource for doing so. That said, it seemed to me there was no disagreement that considerably more will have to be done.

4. Initial Attack, Wildfires as a Management Tool, etc.

These are complex, interrelated issues, and my limited exploration did not probe in these areas deeply. My hope was to engage in further exploration later and in a somewhat different manner.

That said, initial attack and wildfires as management tools, etc. were topics of concern among some of the fire/forest professionals I visited with. In brief, the concern was that current protocols for when, when not, how to engage in initial attack need to be reviewed and (*in editorializing*), perhaps, updated and/or streamlined. For example, it is my perception there seems significant concern that the idea of wildfire used as a “management tool” has too often led to unintended consequences: i.e., mega fires that destroy hundreds of thousands of acres of natural resources, destroy property, propagate lengthy exposure by communities to unhealthy smoke, cost millions upon millions of dollars, endanger fire fighters, and, all too often, lead to loss of life.

Needless to say, the fires in Australia this year and the informal research I conducted this past fall caused me to do considerable reflecting. As I have done so, one question has emerged foremost in my mind: Will we be ready? 🧐

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Fighting Fire In Tasmania

by Michael Scott Hill (West Yellowstone '95)

As a firefighter, I have found that one of the most unusual locations in Australia to fight fires is Tasmania, due to its fire history, normal annual rainfall, and varied, largely park-protected vegetation mosaics. I understand there is interest in what it's like to fight fires in Australia, so here I'll share some insights.

In fighting bushfires in Australia, Tasmania is considered one of our fire frontiers, due to a current pattern of periods of extreme weather cycles that is once again making bushfires a more common experience on certain years.

Tasmania is a small island state that is separated from the mainland of Australia by Bass Strait and positioned in the "roaring forties" of winds that circle the globe. Its latitudes are similar to the south island of New Zealand, or Patagonia in South America.

It's a landmass of just 26,410 square miles (68,401 square kilometers) – slightly larger than West Virginia – and inhabited by a population of 520,000, of whom 80 percent are Australian born. Others primarily originated from England, New Zealand and China.

Approximately 60 percent of this population is found in Tasmania's capital city of Hobart. Of its land base, 46 percent of Tasmania is crown land (government-owned) or reserved for future timber production, 12 percent is actively under timber production, and 38 percent is freehold land where its public lives in towns or out on rural properties.

Fire protection in Tasmania is divided between two ownerships:

1. The Tasmania Fire Service oversees fire response on the private lands using a system of paid and volunteer firefighters. Sustainable Timber Tasmania oversees 2,006,496 acres of timber production lands, with its aim of using fire as a tool for fuel management and forest regeneration.

2. Parks and Wildlife Service is the Australian agency that most closely resembles a U.S. Federal Resource fire agency, with its fire militia-based field staff that oversees fire used for fuel reduction and

ecological management across the island's 46 percent of crown and timber reserves being held for future production.

Politically, however, the Tasmania Fire Service is the lead fire agency here, and the Timber and Parks and Wildlife Service are mandated to work independently, but cooperatively, to keep fire on their lands.

Due to abnormally active fire years, I have found myself responding to remote fires here in Tasmania as part of Australian interstate cooperative deployments in 2016 and 2019 on the lands of Parks and Wildlife Service. My fires were located up in the rugged high country of the Wilderness World Heritage Area, where some of Tasmania's huge trees still live protected in a normally wet eucalypt forest environment mixed in with fern trees.

I have also been part of large truck-based burn-out efforts, and flown in by helicopter, and taken up into remote river systems by boat to reach its expansive west coast rolling hills of buttongrass moorland, with their large sloping pockets of rainforest and tea tree thickets.

These regions are known for their uniqueness in fighting fires in rainforest environments, and their natural beauty are spectacular. Firelines carved out with hand tools are rarely used here, due to thick mats of organic decaying matter mixed with roots lining the rainforest floor. Instead, heat is extinguished directly with water from hoses, pumps and helicopter drops, or by pulling back and burning out from along dirt roads or dozer lines.

Much of the forest lands across Tasmania, due to past fire protection and normally wet seasons, have exceptional fuel loadings in many areas. The state's fire activity is usually marked by periods of massive fire runs, followed by weeks of slow fire movement. Even then in the slow times, the smoldering in deep organic peat-like soils is common, and it can retain heat until later times when hot dry weather again returns, causing the fires to rise up and run again.

Long hose lays and pumps in this environment are common, along with mopping up in the cold and wet conditions, and to put a fire to bed here

can take weeks of work, or very significant rainfalls of more than two inches.

The wilderness of this island is often influenced by the stormy weather blown across the water from Antarctica. As a result, its patterns of vegetation are mixed, ranging from wet thick scrub (tea-tree bush), wet eucalypt forest, open buttongrass rolling moorland, scrub and heath lands, ancient rainforest, non-eucalypt forest, dry flammable eucalypt forest, saltmarsh and wetlands, to treeless dense alpine highlands, and on to normal agricultural and grazing grasslands.

In this remote mix of locations up in the highlands, there are also pockets of highly sensitive fragments of ancient vegetation species with links back to the relic days millions of years ago when Tasmania was linked to Antarctica. These relic species pockets cannot tolerate any exposure to wildfire, and as a result the Parks and Wildlife Service has created special tactics, based on the use of mobile sprinkler kits to protect them.

Of all of these vegetation types, it is the buttongrass moorland – a dominant species that covers many miles of the island's western coastal interior rolling hills – that is the most volatile with its ability to dry out quickly and carry across it massive sheets of flame. This is true even with large areas of its grassy root bases being completely submerged in water.

Wet scrubland and dry eucalypt forest can also carry fire rapidly due to their evolved fire-attracting capabilities. In extreme dry conditions, the wet eucalypt forest will burn, as well as the hearty dense fields of high-altitude scrubby alpine heath. Even Tasmania's rainforest, without any of Australia's normal fire-attracting eucalypts, will burn as well under the right conditions.

In breaking away as an island millions of years ago, Tasmania has evolved some unique animals along with its vegetation that make it special as well. Examples include the small but tough Tasmanian devil and the possibly extinct Tasmanian tiger. There are also ticks, leeches, bumblebees, European wasps, spiders and snakes, and two large ant species that have toxins – the jack jumper and inchman. Both ants are a local type of bull ant that can grow up to half an inch long, and they are surely aggressive.

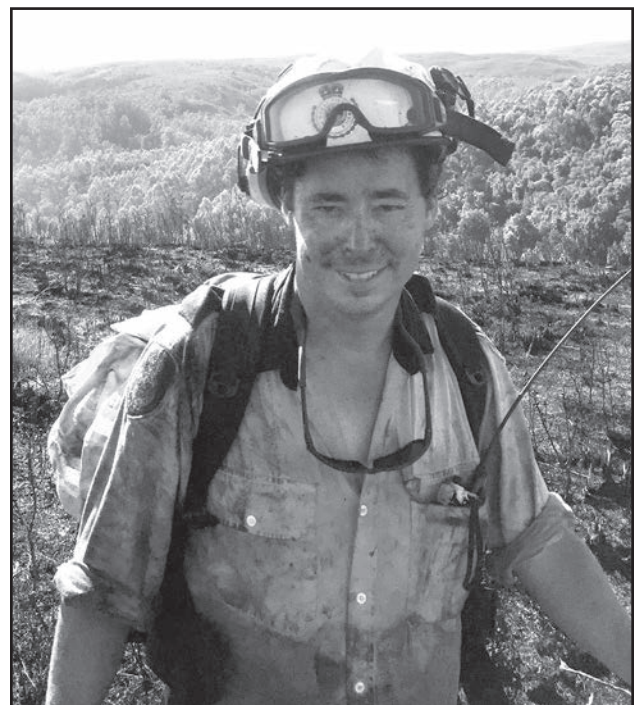
Jack jumpers are found on the ground and build conical mounds with multiple entrances, and jump

when disturbed. Inchman, their relatives, are the larger, but they're less aggressive and live under logs and rocks; but both types of ants investigate by biting.

Here in Tasmania, jack jumpers cause more deaths than spiders, snakes, wasps and sharks combined, as their toxin causes a localized swelling and reddening, possibly fever, a heart rate increase, rapid decrease in blood pressure, and a blister, and in 3 percent of allergic individuals, anaphylactic shock.

Tasmania is certainly a curious wildfire frontier and a unique place in which to fight fire. Its landscape is influenced by a normally wet climate, and much of its vegetation is covered land base, being made up of inaccessible remote Wilderness World Heritage Areas. A little more than 200 years ago, European expansion led to the loss of past Aboriginal custodians and their carefully managed fire regime of tens of thousands of years. That now is evident in brief, hard-to-control outbreaks of fiery blazes during its occasional summer extreme-weather events.

Those who get to fight fire here will discover Tasmania is also an odd land, full of natural extremes: deadly tiger snakes, endangered Tasmanian devils, offshore patrolling sharks, and two small species of bull ant that have evolved among the shadows of this island's varied vegetation to join the list of its most dangerous creatures. 🐜



Mike Hill on fireline in Tasmania (Courtesy M. Hill)

Wildfires And Global Warming: A Continuous Cycle Of Destruction

by Michael T. Rains (Associate)



IN SOME OF my past writings, I have stated that the primary culprit for the deterioration of America's forests—reminding us all that forests are more than trees—and the incredible destruction caused by wildfires is the *lack* of forest management.

Further, I have concluded that the impacts of a changing climate represents a real force, no doubt, but not the driving force. Lately, however, the lines between the two—effects of wildfires and effects of a changing climate on the warming of our planet—have become much too blurred for me to make a rationale distinction; there is none. This is what Jad Daley, President and CEO of *American Forests*, concluded in his November 2018 article, “Climate Change = More Fire = More Climate Change.”

Or, as Bob Berwyn of *Inside Climate News* stated in his August 2018 news note, we are in a “vicious cycle when the results of warming produce yet more warming.”

Accordingly, in this column contribution to *Smokejumper* magazine, I would like to focus on this continuous cycle of destruction and see what we might do to help break it.

First, let me provide some context. I prefer to use the phrase, “the impacts of a changing climate.” And, the warming of our planet Earth is *the* dominant impact that contributes to things like drought, floods, extreme weather events, water supply and quality problems, and the deterioration of wildlife habitat, economic prosperity, and our physical health.

Yes, the impacts of a changing climate represent a very big deal, and let there be no doubt, the climate is changing—a 2.5-percent temperature increase in 2019 from just the year earlier.

According to the Fourth National Climate Assessment completed in 2018, temperatures since 2000 have been hotter than any period in the last 1,300 years. This warming is altering landscapes, atmosphere, oceans, and ice in far-reaching ways.

The results of this most recent assessment are both sobering and frightening, including “... without substantial and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, transformative impacts on some ecosystems will occur.”

The word *transformative* really hits home. We are seeing this now, as wildfires and their associated impacts are getting more extreme and vegetative types continue to be converted from trees to brush. Will the great western forests of America even exist by 2070?

Since the 1880s, global temperatures have increased by about 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit. Science-based information suggests a 3.6-degree change—compared to temperatures before the Industrial Revolution—is quite dangerous. Many suggest that limiting future warming to no more than 2.7 degrees is much more preferable.

According to the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report, we are on track for a 5.4- to 7.2-degree temperature rise, easily exceeding the threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius within the 2030-52 time period.

A 0.5-degree centigrade increase may not seem like much. In reality, it's huge. For example, the difference

between 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees Celsius means 23 percent more of the world's population is exposed to severe heat wave increases. Another 60 million people will face water scarcity. Many plants and animals will lose one-half of their habitat range, and temperature increases across the planet are not uniform.

For example, for each one-half-degree temperature rise, the Arctic will heat up two to three times faster. A 4-degree Celsius temperature change would have catastrophic impacts on our safety and security.

The Paris Climate Agreement of 2015 provided worldwide awareness, leadership, and goals to help ensure post-Industrial Revolution global warming would not exceed a 2-degree Celsius threshold (from pre-Industrial Revolution levels). To many, including me, withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement indicates to the world that the United States no longer cares about global warming and its impacts on the health, economy, and security of future generations. We are abdicating our responsibility as visionary leaders, and that's a shame. Time is running out.

So why are temperatures rising? In basic terms, we are adding too much carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere. The leading cause of global warming remains overwhelmingly the burning of fossil fuels.

It is estimated that wildfires

make up about 5-10 percent of annual global CO₂ emissions each year. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that wildfires represent about 5 to 10 percent of the *solution* associated with current global warming. As fires increase in size and intensity, this percentage is expected to increase, and the solution for this part of the global warming problem becomes more difficult to achieve.

Fire is a part of Earth's natural carbon cycle. But now the lack of forest management over the last 25 years or more—forests are getting clogged up—has caused wildfires to become larger and more intense, emitting more CO₂ and becoming a larger contributor to global warming.

There have always been wildfires, but many of the larger wildfires that we have experienced in the last decade emit more CO₂ in a week than vehicles contribute in a year. With the number of acres burned in 2018, for example, the amount of CO₂ would equate to the annual emissions of several large coal-fired plants.

As wildfires grow in size and intensity, they destroy everything in their paths. CO₂-absorbing trees, shrubs and grasses are destroyed, as are the top soil layers—soon to be washed away with the next rainfall. Blackened landscapes and particulate matter—"soot"—reflect less and cause temperatures to rise. A growing body of research suggests that wildfire soot will contribute to accelerating the Arctic

meltdown in the decades ahead.

With a projected rise in sea levels of about 2 meters by 2100—due to ice melting—the impacts along coastal communities throughout the world will be devastating.

As with the difference between 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees Celsius, a 5- to 10-percent contribution to global warming by wildfires—about 4-6 percent within the United States—may not mean that much to some. But let's remember, it is only 11 years until 2030—the time whereby exceeding the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold will begin. Time is indeed running out. Action is required now.

Addressing 5 percent of this global and domestic issue is keenly important, actually, fundamental. As conservation leaders, we cannot stand by and allow the cycle of "lack of forest management leading to extreme wildfires leading to global warming leading to more extreme wildfires" to continue. We must now do all that can be done to break this vicious cycle of destruction.

Let's look at the numbers just a bit more. Total global CO₂ emissions are now about 36 billion tons a year. The United States produces about 5.1 billion tons or about 14 percent of total. Of the 5.1 billion tons of CO₂ emissions produced annually by the United States, up to 250 million tons comes from the type of wildfires we are now experiencing.

In the United States, forests

make up 90 percent of the carbon sink and can sequester about 10 percent of the total CO₂ emissions—that's up to 500 million tons. Becoming totally carbon-neutral would be a large, expensive undertaking, of course, even with some suggesting it is impossible.

The good news, it does seem perfectly realistic to expect that our forests can offset at least the CO₂ emissions from wildfires if these forests along the rural to urban land gradient are properly managed, and that's a huge contribution. Accordingly, we need to reverse the current "lack

of forest management" stance into one of "aggressive forest management." Thus, from a wildfire management *and* a global warming viewpoint,

aggressive forest management makes very sound sense.

Let me be clear. "Aggressive forest management" does not equate to "indiscriminate logging," as some might suggest. It does mean removing the right amount and types of vegetation from our forests that have become clogged up, enabling forested landscapes to become more resilient to disturbances—for example, wildfires. Simply put, aggressive forest management, including timber harvesting, salvage, hazardous fuel reduction, and prescribed fire when feasible, will help ensure effective fire management—which, in turn, will help reduce global warming.

To this end, I have recently suggested a "Call to Action." The degradation of America's forests, due to the lack of management and the subsequent destruction by uncontrollable wildfires, has brought us to a pivotal point. That is, a lowered capability of our forests to help mitigate the adverse impacts of a changing climate and produce the air and water we need to survive. This is resulting in planetary conditions that are threatening the very existence of humans and wildlife. Simply put, without the protections that healthy forests provide,

The good news, it does seem perfectly realistic to expect that our forests can offset at least the CO₂ emissions from wildfires, if these forests along the rural to urban land gradient are properly managed, and that's a huge contribution.

we are jeopardizing the future of planet Earth.

A "Call to Action" could help break the current cycle of "Climate Change = More Fire = More Climate Change." This can be accomplished through an unprecedented national, federal, state, and local commitment to aggressively manage America's forests along the complex rural to urban land gradient, so the destructive nature of large, high-intensity wildfires will be reduced.

This national commitment shall address the current lack of resources that have dictated a lack of forest management for decades, resulting in the landscape-scale destruction from wildfires we are seeing

every year. Leading the way for this national commitment will be a clear and powerful "Statement of Intent" to be enhanced by local and regional coalitions seeking to resolve common problems.

A petition for this "Call to Action" is underway. Please join a growing list that will place this cycle of destruction – wildfires leading to climate change, leading to larger, more intense wildfires – in front of the current administration and Congress and other leaders to demand change. Visit <http://chnng.it/bGsyZvSb> to add your name.

Recently, I was substitute teaching in a middle school science class. The students were all about 12 years old.

We were talking about climate change. In 2030, these students will be 23 and directly confronted with the more dominant impacts of global warming (assuming nothing changes).

The mission of the United States Forest Service—in which many of you have served—includes *meeting the needs of future generations*, including those Middle School science students. We cannot let them down. Thus, it is vital that we do all that we can now for our country's future. Addressing even 5 percent of the solution to a changing climate is pretty great. 🌲

References available upon request.

Kooskia Days

by “Swede” Troedsson (Missoula '59)

I cracked my left fibula July 3, 1958, on my second training jump. After getting fitted with a lower leg cast and crutches, I was sent to the Clearwater National Forest supervisor's office in Orofino, Idaho. It was there I was assigned the mundane task of auditing timber survey sheets.

An office clerk suggested in late July that I drive down to Kooskia, Idaho, to attend their annual celebration, which occurred over the last weekend in July. Kooskia is on the eastern edge of the Nez Perce Indian Reservation.

I drove down to the jump base in Grangeville that Saturday and alerted the jumpers about the celebration in Kooskia. I returned to Kooskia with Sam Rost (GAC-58), Doug Getz (GAC-58), and one other jumper, whose name I forget, in tow.

Upon arriving in Kooskia, we walked into a bar. The place was packed with people celebrating wildly. We stood in the middle of the floor, each with a can of beer in hand, watching the celebration. Across from us, against a wall, was a table where three good-looking women sat. The table was covered with free drinks.

After a short while, I noticed a very attractive Indian woman sitting at the bar. Noticing no wedding band, I clumped over to the bar on my crutches with the intent of pitching a little woo.

Things were going great until the woman informed me the only other man who had kissed her like that was her husband. I hastily clumped back to rejoin my “bros.”

So there we were, “innocent children” from Montana taking all of this in. Eventually, a fellow – who I guessed was in his early 20s – intentionally, kicked a crutch out from under me as he passed by on his way to the end of the room to join some of his buddies. He stood there, pointing at me as he and his buddies were laughing at me. I was doing a slow torch.

I stopped this fellow on his way out and reminded him that he kicked my crutch out from under me. He stuck his chin out and said, “Oh, yeah. So what are you going to do about it?”

There was a month of frustration behind my punch. He backpedaled and crashed into that table load of women. Drinks spilled, women screamed, and when he clawed his way back up, I hit him again. Three loggers came to my aid, grabbed the guy and threw him out onto the street.

I shed my cast after six weeks. I was assigned to a timber survey crew and spent the rest of the summer on the Clearwater National Forest. It turned out to be a pretty good summer after all. 🦋

NSA Scholarship Program Expanded - Take Advantage!

At 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 95% 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% 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 27 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, 2020.

None of the 2019 award winners will be eligible for the 2020 scholarships. There will be eight new winners this year.

The complete Scholarship document is online at the NSA website www.smokejumpers.com under “Outreach.” 🦋

Moose Creek Memorial

by **Jim Hagemeyer** (Missoula '57)

I was going through my papers and came upon a document that was printed for a memorial tribute to the smokejumpers who died at Moose Creek in a Ford Tri-Motor crash on August 4, 1959. I know most of you have heard about the incident, but many are not aware of the tribute thirty years later. It's an interesting story.

In 1986 I was transferred to the Missoula regional office. The *Missoulian* had a short news brief and mentioned that I had been a smokejumper in Missoula. I got a call from **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41). Fred had been the base foreman when I trained in 1957 and then had to quit because of an age restriction. Fred was well liked and took good care of "his boys." He went on to become a successful businessman but always looked after the jumpers.

Fred was very irritated that the Forest Service never gave any recognition to the two jumpers that died in that crash: **Gary G. Williams** (MSO-59) and **Jon A. Rolf** (MSO-57). They had recognized the Forest Supervisor, Alva W. Blackerby, who also died.

I was unaware of the situation and Fred asked if I could help get the long overdue recognition. I shared Fred's concern as I trained with Jon Rolf and considered him a friend.

I called **Tom Kovalicky** (MSO-61), the Forest Supervisor on the Nez Perce N.F., and Tom took the lead in putting the memorial together. He commissioned **George Cross** (MSO-78), a well-known local jumper, to forge a plaque and solicited the Moose Creek District Ranger to put together the tribute. On September 8, 1989, several of us, including Fred and **David Poncin** (MSO-58), flew into Moose Creek for the tribute. Also along was the only smokejumper who survived the crash, **Roland M. Stoleson** (MSO-56), and his wife, Maureen. Ron and Maureen had just gotten married less than two months before the accident.

From the Event Program

On August 4, 1959, a Johnson Tri-motor crashed into some helicopter gasoline barrels while landing at the Moose Creek Airstrip and caused the death of two smokejumpers and burned the pilot and two other passengers.

Gary G. Williams, 23, West Valley, New York, was killed at the scene. Jon A. Rolf, 23, Buchanan, New York, died at the General Hospital in Grangeville. Forest Supervisor Alva Blackerby also perished. Roland Stoleson, smokejumper foreman, suffered minor burns. The pilot, Herbert Culver, received multiple burns.

The men boarded the plane at Grangeville on a smokejumping mission. They put down at Moose Creek to get the location of their fire. A tricky wind prevented the plane from touching down on the first attempt. On the next try the plane was shoved ahead by the wind and veered into the gasoline barrels.

A memorial to the crash victims was placed on a rock in front of the Moose Creek R.S. office and is commemorated today, Sept. 8, 1989—30 years after the crash. 🕊



Touching All Bases



Missoula

Dave Sappington (MSO-17)

In Missoula, it is the time of year where the cracking of canopies is being replaced by the drizzle of rain and the flickering of new snow on the mountains.

We started this year in a furloughed government shutdown. Yet, starting from a full stop, things managed to find a way to slow down and 2019 may very well go down as the “Fire Season That Never Was” in R-1.

As the 28,963 people that toured the base were quick to remark, “Thank goodness there were no fires.” We all also “thanked goodness” because if there is one thing firefighters hate more than anything, it’s fighting fires with overtime pay.

Slow seasons, however, are not without their benefits. People, myself included, had a small chance to enjoy pockets of the summer and see blue sky over Montana in August. Families grew as more future jumpers were born, weddings were had, new houses were bought, and life went on.

We said our goodbyes to Jump-79, the hearty Sherpa A-model that had been our roost for years. We also said our hellos to four new Missoula Smokejumper Rookies: B. Ries, S. MacMillen, A. Jenkins, and L. Gutierrez.

Out-of-region things were a bit livelier. The MSO Smokejumpers furthered their international presence with **Dan Cottrell’s** (MSO-01) ICA classes in Morocco and Bosnia. **Naomi Mills** (MSO-15) taught S-classes in Jamaica. Nationally, jumpers provided RX assistance in R-3, burning/prepping over 17,000 acres. In R-8, 13 jumpers spent 255 days on assignment.

We reached across the aisle and continued our project work for the BLM, treating 3,494 acres. MSO jumpers also managed to go where the fires



were with over 2,500 days on boost at other bases.

Only 46 jumpers went out the door from MSO this season on a total of six fires. But, as we are learning as the program evolves, there is more to life than solely jumping fires. Jumpers went out on 72 single-resource assignments for a total of 962 days on the road.

Many of us found temporary homes in Alaska as the Arctic burned at an unprecedented rate. The “my” of the “Perfect Pay Period” was shattered time and time again as the siren of Big Ernie wound endless in

the land of the midnight sun.

MSO jumpers staffed fires in Alaska, Redmond, Redding, Grangeville, and West Yellowstone for a total of 189 jumps. It remains a testament to the dynamism of smokejumpers everywhere to find a silver lining and make the most of things.

The world we call home is changing. The great wilds of the west are shrinking as the ever-tightening serpentine road continues to snake and expand through the Rocky Mountains. IPads and GPS mapping, automated pumps and pocket infrared scanners seem to be more common in fire camps these days.

However, this is not to say that this is the death rattle for the seemingly shrinking population of folks that still prefer the feeling of a chainsaw and Pulaski in their hand to a keyboard and a mouse. We will, as we always have, adapt to the times.

In the loft, the humming of sewing machines continued through the spring, punctuated by the occasional exasperated expletive as a stray stitch missed its mark. The manufacturing train seems to have no brakes as new harnesses, containers, D-bags, and jumpsuits are made for the incoming rookies.

Computers use GPS to fly paracargo safely

to the ground, even in smokey conditions where the ground is invisible. Testing refinement of the Sherpa B-model aircraft continues to provide more streamlined delivery of jumpers and supplies. Drones are being slowly introduced into the wildland fire arena.

Task Books were signed off and approved as we welcomed new spotters and other four-letter acronyms. There is one qualification that we cherish more than all that invokes the pride of the program and legacy of those that come before us. SMKJ—no season will ever tarnish, degrade, or lighten the weight of history that these letters carry.

West Yellowstone

Patrick McGunagle (WYS-19)

Our beloved Doorknob (Dornier Do-228) has flown off to warmer pastures, the ramp is covered in snow, and even the echoes of the loudest laughs around the bonfire have faded. Now, just what all happened in 2019?

The season started with overtime opportunities to the southwest and back east. West jumpers completed 339 days of assignments on Rx burns all over the nation. As the summer approached, 28 jumpers refreshed out of WYS.

Nine Task Books were signed off and fifteen were initiated, particularly due to the addition of five new rookies: L. Dillaway, P. McGunagle, B. Robert, R. Varland, and B. Vesce. While completing Rookie Training is no joke, West's buddy system of Snookies mentoring Rookies to prepare through the winter months has shown its merit with successful rookie candidates. The Rooks, however, were suspicious of the fire summer after several frosty June mornings at the base. Snow flurries at West the night of Summer Solstice confirmed even the veteran's suspicions: This was going to be a slow year (indeed, the books show this to be one of the coldest years on record).

Big Ernie provided opportunity for most of the base to make it up to boost Alaska. WYS filled 17 Boost requests with 40 smokejumpers for a total of 823 days of support out of region. Up in AK, Varland and Karnik lucked out and earned the maximum tours of 35 days. The weather was so

rainy in West that when my boost call came, I left WYS at 28 degrees and landed in FBX at 82 degrees on the same day. Eventually, we all trickled back home with our wet feet and war stories.

Just when it seemed that all hope was lost for a R-1 fire summer, the Bridger Tetons and Eastern Montana provided. A few lightning busts and loads out the door put WYS, MSO and GAC jumpers on seven fires with 46 jumpers for a total of 302 days on fire. WYS filled three boost requests from MSO and GAC for 12 people for 96 days at WYS or on fire.

Cindy Champion (MSO-99) jumped her 100th fire jump on the Stink Water Fire on the Shoshone N.F. late in the season. With an exit at 11,700 ft, who could ask for a more beautiful jump over snowfields and glacial lakes?

All told, WYS continues to provide personnel to fill key roles around the nation and for a variety of fire and leadership provisions. WYS was able to fill 25 single-resource requests for a total of 311 days of leadership, equipment, and resource support.

Projects completed around the base this summer include more pull-up bars scattered between facilities, welded bear-proof outdoor coolers around the bonfire, and a lot of the legwork done for some outdoor concrete ping pong tables and a new obstacle course.

Now is the time for battle stories and reflections on fires and campfires. Think back on the special knots, the cool tricks learned, and rules of thumb to live by. Talk about good meals cooked under the midnight sun, the whoopses and oopses and you-didn't-see-thats, as well as staying humble and leading by example. This job is a dream for many and we, ourselves, stand on the shoulders of giants.

Alaska

Patrick McGunagle (WYS-19)

An All-Time Year for Alaska! 2019 will be talked about for a long time. Many future Divisions, ICs and Ops Chiefs will be talking about 2019 over truck hoods on future fires. How big was Swan Lake when you were there? Were you on 349, 367, or 391? Do you know how to say

“Chalkyitsik”? Did you really name your dog “Chandalar”?

742 fires in Alaska and 2,586,063.6 acres burned. On the SMKJ side of things, the first fire jump was April 27th and the last fire jump was on September 13th. Alaska sent 156 fire-jump missions for 1051 total fire jumps (431 by AK personnel, 620 by boosters). These numbers are all about double the ten-year average. Additionally, AK jumpers sent 200 paracargo missions (excluding Initial Attack cargo delivery) for 792,612 pounds of paracargo delivered in primary support of SMKJ operations. PC never sleeps!

All-time record: 206 smokejumpers on the List at one time, 13 July 2019. 138 Jumpers “in the Woods” (Committed on Fires) on 12 July 2019.

AK ran seven outstations for pre-position, utilized seven jumpships (4 CASAs and 3 Dorniers), hosted 202 boosters, filled 80 single resource requests with AK personnel, and sent ZERO personnel to the Lower 48 all season. There were 1801 total jumps (fire and training) and 680 total flight missions. Air operations were equally impressive. At the peak, 111 aircraft were in operation in AK.

All-time record: 800+ fire missions flown in one day by fire aircraft, 16 July 2019.

All told, 27 jet loads of personnel from the Lower 48 landed at Fort Wainwright, including 135 crews. The warehouse sent out 465 chainsaw kits, 606 miles of hose, and 918 pump kits. This totals 1.9 million pounds of equipment valued at over \$25.8M.

It’s safe to say that “things are just different up there in AK.” Alaska showed me the breadth of smokejumper adaptability to foreign environments of varying limitations for effective firefighting. Complementing this adaptability is the personability required to handle a few green

Lower 48 crews tossed to your division or entering a village and finagling a boat or two to aid in fire operations several river miles upstream. As a Lower 48 jumper, I doubt I’m alone in saying that 2019 in AK has set the bar for the leadership caliber I hope to emulate for the rest of my career. Now it’s up to Big Ernie to decide when and how another season like this can happen.

Boise

Patrick McGunagle (WYS-19)

Fire Season 2019 in Boise follows the trend seen around the rest of the Lower 48, with some skew to the Alaska Bonus for personnel and aircraft hours.

Boise staffed 42 fires with 232 personnel during the 2019 season. This is about 40% of average, which is similar to the numbers seen across the board for all fire resources this season. Including rookies and transfers, Boise completed 1316 training and proficiency jumps in 186 missions. Boise took in eight boosters and sent 63.

The spoke-and-wheel model shows its merit as Great Basin jumpers set up Grand Junction for seven jumps in 71 days, Pocatello for one jump in 23 days, Ely for 11 jumps in 75 days, and Winnemucca for nine jumps in 60 days. Boise has three dedicated aircraft and one aircraft shared with AK; 291.2 flight hours were logged in 2019 which is down from the ten-year average of 560.9.

Boise continues to provide SMKJ resources for single resource assignments, filling 35 requests for 485 shifts. All told, it was another successful year for Great Basin Smokejumpers and, while it was slow in the Lower 48, experience gained by boosters in AK and elsewhere continues to develop strong SMKJ leadership. 🔧

West Yellowstone Airtanker Base Closure

by Billy Bennett (West Yellowstone ’98)

“**W**e trained hard—but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we were reorganized. I was to

learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and what a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of

progress while actually producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization.” Charlton Ogburn (1957)

Most of us have seen it. It comes down from above. “We are going to reorganize! It will save the budget!” Interpretation: “This is really going to make me look good (on paper), and I’ll get that promotion.”

Unfortunately, reorganizing often involves permanently closing physical locations, such as districts, work centers, fire stations, heli-bases, smokejumper bases, etc. And then the “great reorganizer” gets that promotion and moves away while the rest of us have to deal with their bad decisions for the rest of our careers.

In 2015 just such a scenario did occur at the West Yellowstone Smokejumper/Airtanker Base. Management decided there was too much maintenance to be done on the buildings and the tarmac needed to be re-built to better accommodate airtankers. So, an easy fix—close the base and sell the site. Jumpers would just have to move to some other jump base.

A cloud of uncertainty and insecurity formed over the base. Jumpers did not know what they could do since first-line supervisors were not standing up for keeping the base open.

At least one jumper openly opposed the closure and wrote U.S. Senators asking for help. He was so severely retaliated against that the rest of the crew dared not to speak up. Whistle blower retaliation and civil rights complaints were filed. Friendships dissolved. Reprimands were written. And law firms were hired by the Forest Service to protect Management from complainants. Obviously, this is not what smokejumping is and not what most of us “signed up for.”

Luckily, politicians did get involved and over a three-year period money became available for building renovation, water filters, plumbing, and a new tarmac. The reorganization was quelled, at least for a while.

If reorganizers try to make “big” changes, they can trigger “big” resistance and their master plan will fail. Then they will engage Plan B: Break the resistance into small pieces that can be quietly manipulated “quid pro quo.” Small changes equal small resistance. Eventually the reorganizer succeeds and often the employees do not real-

ize what has happened because they never saw it coming.

Since 1968 the West Yellowstone Airtanker Base has been a cornerstone of the West Yellowstone Interagency Fire Center. It has been the most inexpensively operated base in the nation, primarily because it has been operated by cross-trained smokejumpers. In the last 20 years, we have trained and qualified at least 15 jumpers as Airtanker Base Managers, seven as Single Engine Airtanker Managers, and at least 17 have been carded in various other tanker base positions. It has been a great on-site opportunity for anyone wishing to diversify their qualifications beyond smokejumping. The base can also employ an injured jumper who may otherwise not be able to work due to a lost time accident. This cross training was recognized and encouraged to continue by the 2019 Washington Office Smokejumper Base Review.

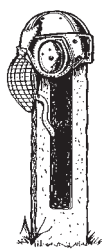
In 2018 the WYS Air Tanker Base delivered 156 loads for 364,000 gallons of retardant to nine separate fires in the greater Yellowstone Area, primarily for Initial Attack. This operation was managed by only three smokejumpers.

In 2019 the Gallatin National Forest announced that the West Yellowstone Airtanker Base was permanently closing, and they shipped the 57 tons of 2020 retardant away. We never saw it coming!

There are no legitimate reasons given by management for the closure. But the message that it sent was clear: The communities of Big Sky, West Yellowstone, Island Park, Jackson Hole, Ennis MT, and many others are no longer important enough to the Forest Service for initial attack Air Tanker protection.

The other message of concern: The closure of the tanker base was engineered by the same managers who tried to close the whole fire center in 2015.

So, what will be next? Eliminating the base’s government housing to discourage employee retention? This has been proposed by management before. Eliminating a West Yellowstone Smokejumper dedicated jump plane? This actually happened one year. Or, management just outright announcing the closure of the WYS smokejumper base? 🤖



Off The List

Remember and honor fellow jumpers with a gift to the NSA Good Samaritan Fund in their name. Hard times can fall on many of us at any time. The NSA is here to support our fellow jumpers and their families through the Good Samaritan Fund. Mail your contribution to:

Chuck Sheley
10 Judy Lane
Chico, CA 95926

Jack D. Heiden (Cave Junction '54)

Jack, 84, died February 28, 2018, in Madison, Wisconsin, where he had lived for 65 years. He was an orthopedic surgeon in Madison and got his medical degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1958.

Jack was a Big 10 champion fencer, master's national champion in road bike racing, and one of the best master's skiers in the Midwest. His children inherited Jack's athletic ability. Son, Eric, won an unprecedented five gold medals in speed skating at the 1980 Olympic Winter Games, and daughter, Beth, took the bronze medal in the 3,000 skating event at the same Olympics.

Jack participated in the NSA Trails Project at the Wilderness Canoe Base. He jumped at Cave Junction during the 1954 season.

Mark A. Hutson (North Cascades '75)

Mark died October 12, 2019. He had a long career as a smokejumper, jumping from 1975 to 1994. After his days as a jumper, Mark worked as Timber Sales Administrator for the Methow Valley R.D. on the Okanogan-Wenatchee N.F.

Robert E. Mackay (Missoula '51)

Bob, 92, died June 9, 2019 in McLean, Virginia. He had a 32-year career with the CIA. Prior to his work with the Agency, he spent two years in the Army Air Corps and jumped at Missoula in 1951 and 1952. Bob was a graduate of Northwestern University and served in many countries during his career. He spent two years in Laos working at Long Cheng during the 1970s.

Frank W. "Bud" Phillips (McCall '55)

Bud died November 2, 2019. He lived in Meridian, Idaho, and graduated from Boise High School, Boise Junior College, and the Northrup Institute of Technology. Bud served in the Army

and was a member of the Army ski team in Austria. He worked for Etna Helicopters, MK Aviation, Simplot Cattle and Texas International Cattle.

Bud was instrumental in the Boise Airport becoming an international airport, shipping cattle to Korea. He championed water rights for many years as the Chairman for the Canyon County Water Company. He jumped at McCall 1955-58.

Glen T. "Rip" Smith (Idaho City '54)

Glen died January 2, 2020, at his home near Kuna, Idaho. His father was career USFS, and Glen lived in many different locations while growing up. After he graduated from Boise H.S., Glen attended Boise Jr. College and jumped at Idaho City 1954-55. Rip started as an entry-level surveyor with the state department of highways but was quickly noticed for his abilities by Don McCarter. He joined forces with Don and Bill Tuller to start the surveying firm of McCarter and Tuller in Boise. Rip was the lead surveyor for the business for over 40 years retiring in 2002.

Paul A. Nicholas (Missoula '42)

Paul, 98, died October 5, 2019. He was the oldest living smokejumper at that time. Paul started his collegiate studies at Fort Hays in Kansas and transferred to Montana State University in Missoula where he earned a basketball scholarship and studied Forestry.

He entered the Air Force in 1942 and was commissioned as a pilot. Paul was a veteran of WWII and Korea and flew with the Air Rescue Service. He retired as a Major in 1964 after 20 years of service during which time he completed a bachelor's degree under Project Bootstrap.

Paul continued his work in the aviation field at several USAF Bases and retired from Civil Service in 1983. From his son Michael—"He loved being

NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions

<u>Donor</u>	<u>In Memory Of/Honor of</u>
Frank Just (MYC-54)	GSF
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Larry Newman (MSO-60)	“Smiley” Williamson (MSO-46)
Judith Stoleson	Ron Stoleson (MSO-56)
Bill Moody (NCSB-57)	Good Sam Fund
Lillian Wenger	Roy Wenger (CPS-103 Admin)
Jim Lancaster (MYC-62)	Frank “Bud” Phillips (MYC-55)
Lorinda Compben	Ed Compben (Associate)
Les Tschohl (MSO-66)	Good Sam Fund
David Auerbach	Whitney Sexsmith (Alaska Fire Service)
Pat Durland (MYC-75) ..	Greg Zschaechner (RDD-76)
Judy Meyer (Assoc)	Dick Terry, Ace Nielsen, Bud Phillips
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Jon Larson (FBX-89)	Eric “The Blak” Schoenfeld, Gary McMurtrey
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Contributions since the previous publication of donors January 2020
Total funds disbursed to smokejumpers and families since 2004—\$207,240
Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:
Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico CA 95926

a smokejumper. It was a special time in his life, and I believe it formed his future careers in the Air Force.”

Cliff Marshall (Cave Junction '46)

Cliff died in 1994, date unknown. In 1946 Cliff, who was the first jumper to report for duty at Cave Junction, was a Master Sergeant in the Paratroopers. He was active in combat jumps over Normandy and Holland. Cliff was also assigned to ground action in the Battle of the Bulge. The 1946 crew at Cave Junction were all veterans of WWII with the majority of them having been paratroopers.

In 1947 Cliff became the foreman in charge of the base. From WWII Marine **Dick Courson** (CJ-46): “Cliff Marshall left CJ in July of 1953. He went to the Parachute Development Center in El Centro, CA. I did find out he was working on the reentry systems for our space program and that he

was instrumental in parachute reentry from outer space.”

From research done by **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62): “Information from *The Redlands Daily Facts* in Redlands, CA for May 1960. Cliff was the Chief Engineer for the 6511 Parachute Test Group in El Centro, CA. They set a new record dropping a 35,000-pound bundle of cargo from a C-130 plane. (The old record was 31,000 pounds by the Royal Air Force.) The drop used six 100-foot chutes and was made from 5,000 feet. This must have been associated with his testing for the space shuttle reentry program. The first suborbital launch was in May 1961, one year after the test in the news article.”

Cliff's obit is certainly not recent but is written as part of the NSA History Preservation Program. As research comes in, I'm hoping to write more obits of jumpers who were the foundation of the program.

If you have the desire and the research skills to

help with this project, please contact me. (Ed.)

Roger O. Hearst (Missoula '50)

Roger died October 8, 2019. He was born in Plains, Montana, and in 1949 was a Plains High School graduate along with fellow smokejumper Hal Samsel.

Roger was a rookie smokejumper in 1950 with 53 other jumpers, including his brother, Bob. After jumping for the 1950 fire season, Roger served in the U.S. Coast Guard from 1951 to 1954. Upon discharge from the Coast Guard, Roger entered Montana State University (now University of Montana) majoring in horticulture, graduating in 1958. During the 1954 and 1955 fire seasons, he returned to smokejumping.

Upon his graduation from MSU, he began a career in fire control for the USFS. Roger started on the Plains RD, Lolo NF, and in 1964 worked on the Forest Service Dickinson Job Corps Center in South Dakota. In 1969 he became the District Fire Control Officer in Superior, Montana, serving in that position until his retirement from the Forest Service in 1987.

Greg Zschaechner (Redding '76)

Greg died November 6, 2019, in Grand Junction, Colorado, from a heart attack. He earned his degree in Forestry and Fire Science from

Colorado State University. He worked his whole life in support of wildland fire and jumped out of Redding 1976-79. Greg said: "Jumping gave me the confidence to do many things in life—like no other job." Greg worked engines and initial attack on the Angeles and Kaibab National Forests and at the Tok station in Alaska.

Greg was a Fire Behavior Analyst for Type I Management Teams. He was assistant state fire management officer for the BLM Colorado State Office and also was the coordinator for the Eastern Great Basin Coordination Center.

John H. Harns (Cave Junction '50)

John died December 17, 2019. He jumped at Cave Junction in 1950 before entering the Navy and starting his career as a Naval Aviator. John transitioned from WWII piston-engine fighters to jets. He flew off 12 different carriers with over 700 carrier landings and logging 89 combat missions in Vietnam. John was in seven different squadrons and was Exe. Office and Command Officer in his last squadron.

John retired in northern Idaho and built a high-performance plane that he used to fly all over the U.S. He flew charters and instructed for many years, only stopping in his late 80s. John received the Wilber and Oroville Wright award for over 50 years of continuous flying. 🕊

Pendleton Honors The Triple Nickles

by Robert L. "Bob" Bartlett (Associate)

Historical markers are values statements, reminding us of people and events once rendered invisible by their times and circumstance.

Much to my mother's chagrin, my father loved roadside markers and historical places regardless of the sometimes-grim stories they told. His spontaneous stops at roadside signs or battlefields would often add hours to what had begun as a short Sunday drive.

Markers are erected not for the here and now, but for the education of future generations. They are intentional attempts to communicate to the wayward traveler or casual passerby: *This is what we want you*

to remember! We want you to learn something, to appreciate what happened here – we want to pass along our wisdom.

The story of the Triple Nickles and their wartime mission of fighting the fires of blatant racism while serving their country and jumping fires in the Pacific Northwest is a story worth remembering. Stories about the Nickles have appeared previously in this publication beginning with the first written by **Carl Gidlund** (MSO-58) in the April 1994 issue (under the magazine's earlier name, *The Static Line*).

Pendleton

On Aug. 30, 2019, the weather in Pendleton,

Ore., broke clear and warm. This was the day a few community leaders, hobby historians, retired smokejumpers, and friends of the Triple Nickles story had imagined and planned years prior.

On this day, Pendleton was going to honor the Triple Nickles with a marker on the corner of Main and Emigrant streets. The events leading up to this marker celebration actually began at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base outside Cave Junction, Ore., a few years prior.

I asked Annie Von Domitz, Heritage and Community Assets manager and Oregon Historical Marker Committee lead, how she remembered the series of events leading up to this day in Pendleton.

Annie: The Oregon Historical Marker Committee had a field trip to Cave Junction and the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum in May 2015. We were there to look at some potential marker projects nominated by local community organizer Roger Brandt, who is closely connected to the museum at the base. Roger gave us a tour of the museum and showed us the interpretive panel in the base loft about the Triple Nickles.

The committee got excited about the story and asked Roger to put together a nomination. That's when he must have recruited you, Bob, to join the project. He put in a ton of research and when the committee accepted the nomination, Roger raised all the money through grants and local contributions.

The committee finished that project in 2017. Roger organized the Cave Junction event. Bob, that's when and where you and I first met in person.

African American Council member Ed Washington, the past chair of the Travel Information Council – the governor-appointed Council that oversees our agency and a member of the Oregon Historical Marker Committee – started talking up the Triple Nickle story.

[Ed, a longtime resident of Portland, was fascinated that he had never heard of the Triple Nickles.]

Through his influence, his good friend Sen. Jackie Winters sponsored Senate Concurrent Resolution 30 (SCR30), in the 2017 legislative session. SCR30 officially recognized and honored the 555th for their service. Sen. Bill Hansell, whose district includes Pendleton, co-sponsored SCR 30.

During the process of getting the bill passed, Sen. Hansell asked, "Why don't we have a marker about these guys in Pendleton?" The committee agreed with that sentiment and started building community sup-

port for a marker.

Kristen Dollarhide with Travel Pendleton came on board and helped us put on a History Happy Hour in Pendleton in March 2018. You, Bob, volunteered to join us in Pendleton. You gave a brief history of the Triple Nickles at the Happy Hour event that was open to the public.

There was a lot of community interest that night in commemorating the Triple Nickles. Kristen and Brooke Armstrong, of the Pendleton Underground Tours, put together a local committee to fundraise and find a location for the marker.

Oregon Historical Marker Committee member Robert (just to keep the "Bobs" straight!) Keeler wrote the final text for both markers. You, Bob, and other committee members contributed to it. Once the marker was approved and in production, Kristen and Brooke organized the dedication event space, which led to the fun historical event Aug. 30.

The Pendleton marker celebration was a wonderful and historically significant gathering of old and new friends. It is important to recognize that the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum and Pendleton are host to the only Triple Nickles historical markers west of the Mississippi River! Congratulations, Oregonians!

On behalf of the Triple Nickles Association, I want to thank all who made this event happen. A warm, heartfelt thanks to the good people of Pendleton who embraced and supported this marker project from the beginning.

A special thanks to Mr. Ed Washington. My personal thanks to **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) and wife, K.G., who made the long trip up from Chico, Calif.; friends **Karl Hartzell** (BOI-70), who came up from Corvallis, and **Pferron Doss** (MSO-77), who came over from Portland.

One of the main missions of *Smokejumper* magazine, as such, is to collect stories of people, events, and to share smokejumper and fire history and wisdom worth remembering. Historical markers like the ones at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum and Pendleton share a similar mission.

Thank you, NSA and *Smokejumper* magazine, for your support of the Triple Nickles story and for allowing the space to share this historically significant event that recently happened in Pendleton, Ore., at the corner of Main and Emigrant. 📍



Triple Nickles

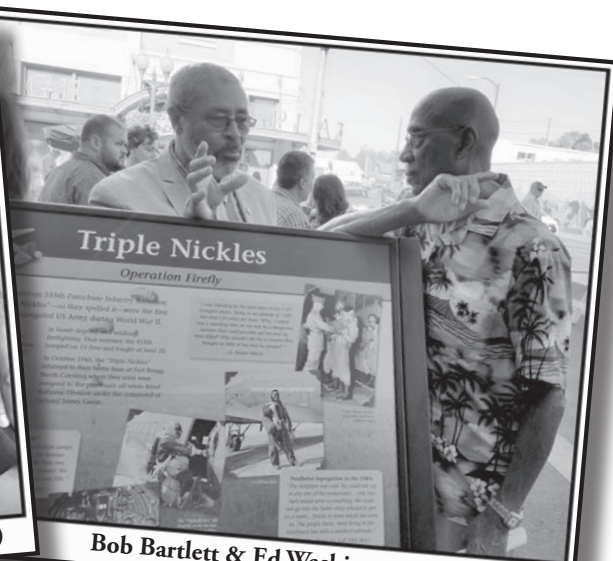
Photos: NSA File



Historic marker honoring the Triple Nickles placed
in Pendleton, Oregon, August 30, 2019.



Chuck Sheley, Bob Bartlett & Pferron Doss (MSO-77)



Bob Bartlett & Ed Washington



Leon Ransom, Bob Bartlett, Ed Washington & Pferron Doss

Triple Nickles were based in Pendleton &
Chico, CA, during the 1945 fire season.

Leon Ransom, Local Resident
Ed Washington, Oregon Historical
Society



Kneeling: Karl Hartzell (BOI-70), Bob Bartlett

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

Eric Schoenfeld Remembered

by Rod Dow (McCall '68)

Eric Thurston Schoenfeld (CJ-64), of Haines, Ore., passed away Sept. 14, 2019.

“Erik the Black,” “E the B,” “The Black,” or usually just “Blak,” was raised and went to high school near Portland, Ore., rookied in Cave Junction in 1964 and jumped there through '66. He attended Reed College and graduated from Portland State.

Eric joined the Air Force and rose to the rank of captain, spending most of his four years in eastern Canada working as an air traffic controller, connected to the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line North American defense system. He returned to jumping in 1973, this time at NCSB, and switched to La Grande in '74. He was injured that year and helped manage the La Grande rappel crew, then returned to jumping in '75 before transferring to Alaska.

He jumped in Alaska from 1976 through 1993, where he had a major impact as the lead spotter, training a whole generation of Alaska spotters.

Blak will long be remembered for his brilliant mind, his pragmatic view of life, the sheer volume of his voice, and his no nonsense approach to virtually everything.

Throughout his life, he slept very few hours each night, and we all remember the many times he held court around jumper campfires until the morning sun finally sent those few remaining to the sack.

There was another side of Blak. He was a kind-hearted man—if a little ill kempt and gruff—and generous.

When my boy, Julian, was 4 years old, Blak was visiting us for a few days, camped several hundred yards west of the house. He would join us for breakfast and dinner, but would just hang at his camp during the day. (He was always one of my wife's favorites among my jumper buddies.)

Julian decided he was “going on an expedition,” and after gearing up, he hiked over to spend some quality time sitting around the campfire with Blak. I always wondered what that dynamic was like, the innocent little kid and the rough-edged retired jumper who had no kids of his own.

Whatever happened out there, it made a big impression on both of them. Blak always remembered that day, and 13 years later began helping Julian with sizable annual checks to help defray college expenses. Julian, of course not knowing it would be the last, had just sent Blak a letter before his passing.

Blak dearly loved his many dogs, most of which were Chesapeake Bay retrievers, and over the years probably had nearly a dozen. He loved to hike in the woods and he loved to read. So, nothing was more enjoyable for Blak than to load up his van with a few books from the Baker City Library and head up into the Elkhorns with his dogs.

He'd make a camp, read by the fire, and take long afternoon walks with his canine pals. I never saw him make much of a demonstration of affection over them (he barely saw the need to even pet them), but the connection was clear and strong.

Blak was truly a good man who lived a strong, full life. He spent many winters working as a ski patroller and maintenance man at Anthony Lakes. He was true and dedicated to his wife of many years, Jennifer, who died last July after a long illness during which Blak was her caregiver.

He will be remembered in the dozens of Blak stories, which have been making the rounds over these past few days. ... his ability to remain fair-minded and even-tempered when he was in charge of a jumper load out in Galena or McGoo. ... the precise, succinct classroom approach during spring refresher. ... his 24-hour-a-day Copenhagen habit, his penchant for whiskey and cheap beer, his marginal hygiene, and his megaphone voice. ... that lightning quick, bear-trap-precise, opinionated thought process that pervaded everything he did. ... his unparalleled mathematical sense (“I decided to major in math at Reed College because that was the easiest major and I didn't have to write papers.”). ... his clear and efficient spotting technique. ... his love of campfire conversation and his long-time love of his many jumper buddies.

Blak, old friend, I doubt very much if you even

believe in a “great beyond” ... not your style. But, I don't care. I plan to see you there before too many years have passed, and I know you'll already have a pot of camp coffee on the tripod hook.

It was a great pleasure, Bro. You made life bet-

ter for us all. There will be a lot of us raising a cold one to your memory very shortly, and we'll all be listening for that trademark question from the door of the Volpar: *Can you hear me ...?* Yup – sure can, Bro. Always could. 🙏

The “Gobi”—Don't Be Offended

by Johnny Kirkley (Cave Junction '64)

The tradition of the “Gobi Salute” started at the Siskiyou Aerial Project when smoke-jumpers began residing at the current base for the 1949 fire season. At first it was an understatement of humor and jealous admiration in retaliation to those lucky enough to get a good work detail. The finger gesture then progressed to the ramp where jumpers, not on the flight, “saluted” as the plane departed to a fire, thus becoming the “unofficial, official” greeting among jumpers at the Gobi.

Eric Schoenfeld and I went through rookie training on the Gobi in 1964. We made our first fire jump together

on the Deer Fire with Jim Kloepper (RDD-57). The wind was blowing hard in steep terrain in a pine thicket near the top of a remote ridge of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. Pine needles were ankle deep. It was a gobbler. During the 1965, season we jumped a two-manner, the Eastside Fire, on the Siskiyou Forest.

I was always impressed with Eric's intellect, unassuming nature and perspective on life. He usually wore black “Can't Bust'em,” denim jeans, a floppy felt hat, and always had a dip of Copenhagen in his lower lip that made his teeth black. During a jungle-rules

volleyball game one morning, Tommy Smith (CJ-61) peered across the net at Eric and stated in a loud voice, “You know, I've heard of Erik the Red, so you must be Erik the Blak.” The name stuck.

Charley Moseley (CJ-62) and I visited our ole buddy at his home in Haines, Oregon, on September 21, 2008. As we departed, I snapped the adjacent photo of him flashing a sly, roguish grin while giving us the Gobi Salute. Because of his genuine unpretentious demeanor, Erik the Blak was endeared to all who met him.

Rest in Peace, my brother.



In Memoriam

Eric Thurston Schoenfeld (CJ-64)

aka "Erik the Blak"

April 12, 1944 - September 14, 2019

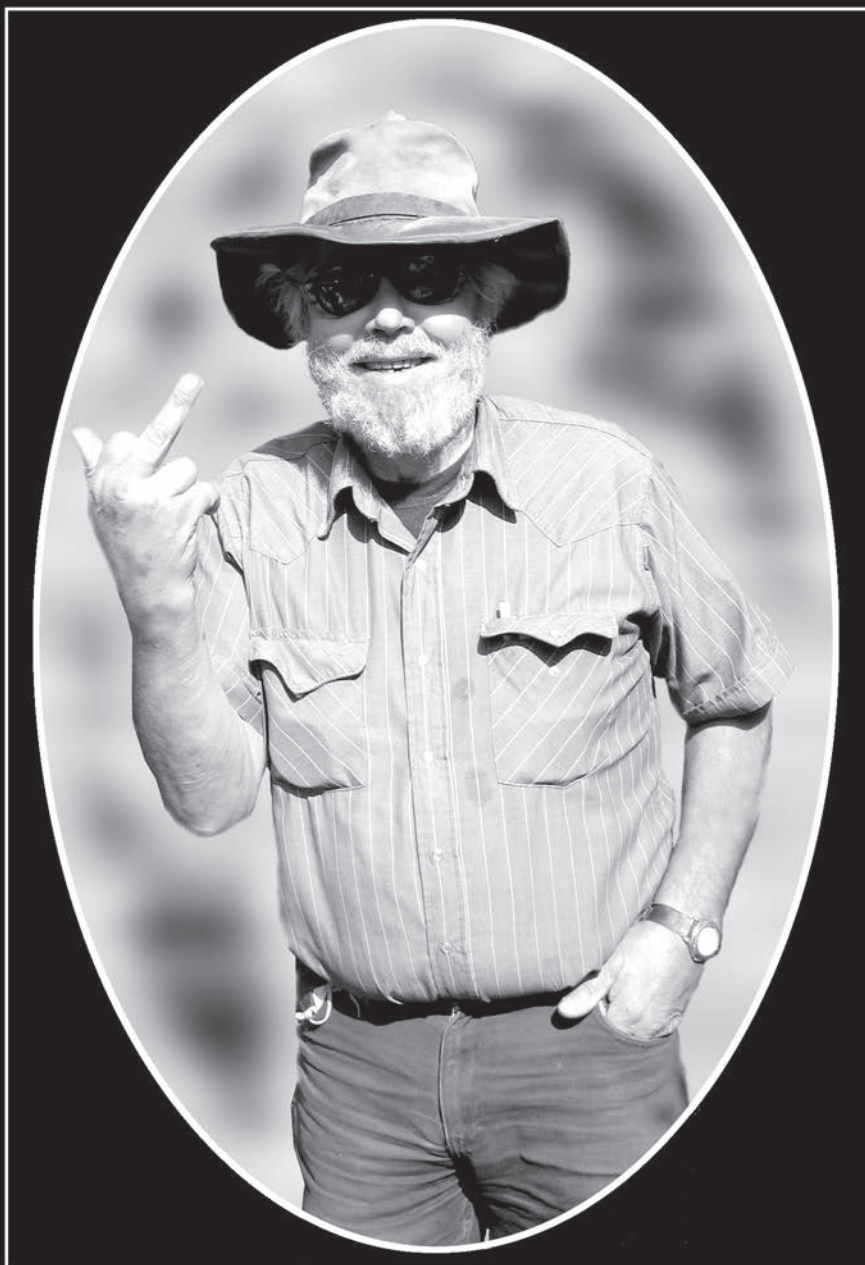
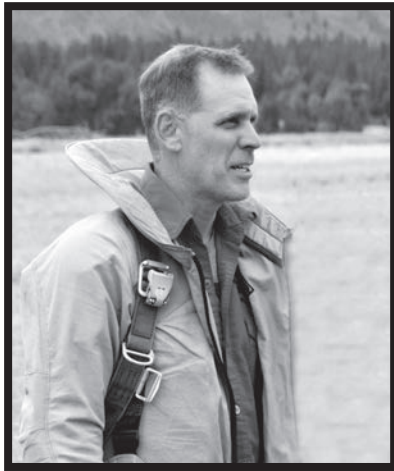


Photo & Layout Design: Johnny Kirtley (CJ-64)

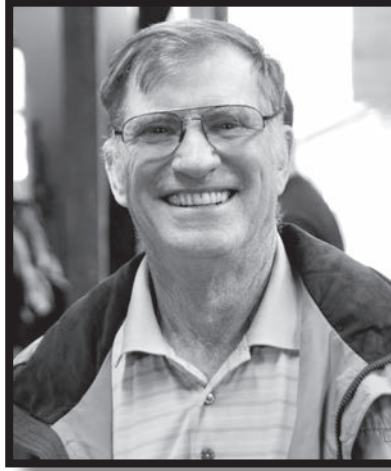


NCSB 80th Anniversary

Photos Courtesy Dennis



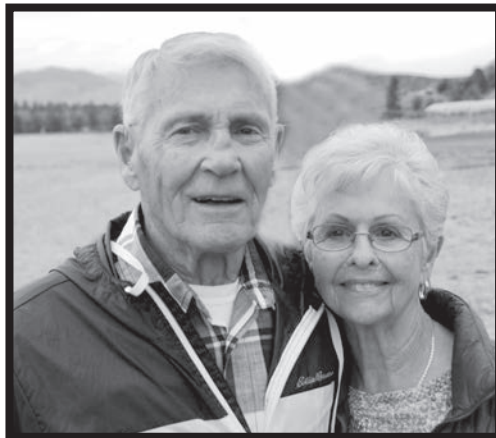
Ryan Taie (NCSB-00)



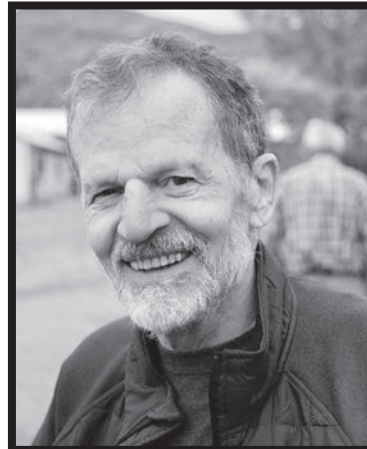
Ashley Court (NCSB-63)



80th Reunion



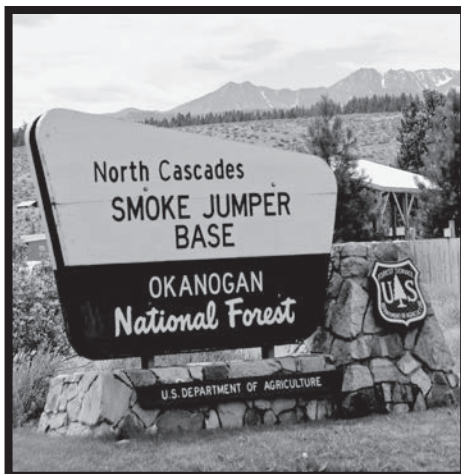
Dick Wildman NCSB-61) & Sylvia



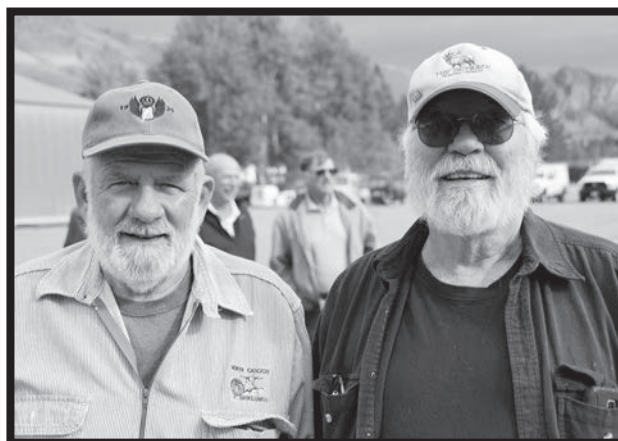
Steve Wight (NCSB-65)



*Bill Moody (NCSB-57), Ben Hull (NCSB-58),
Ron Borst (NCSB-64) & Mike*



NCSB Sign



Steve Reynaud (NCSB-65) & Tom Thomas (NCSB-62)



Jimmy Detro (NCSB-66)

Anniversary 2019

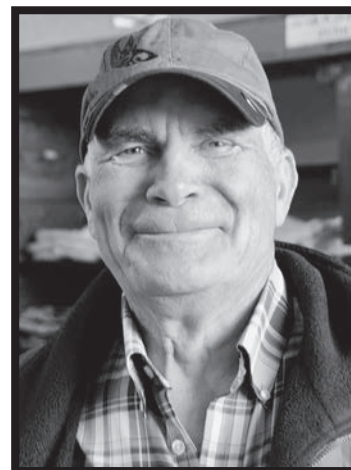
ay Breslin (NCSB-69)



Union Dinner



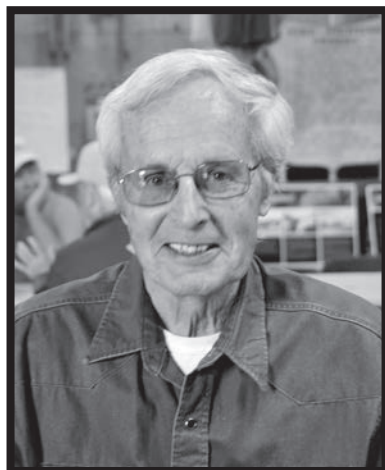
Daren Belsby (NCSB-86)



Jim Grant (NCSB-65)



SB-64)),
e Marcuson (NCSB-64)



Craig Boesel (NCSB-66)



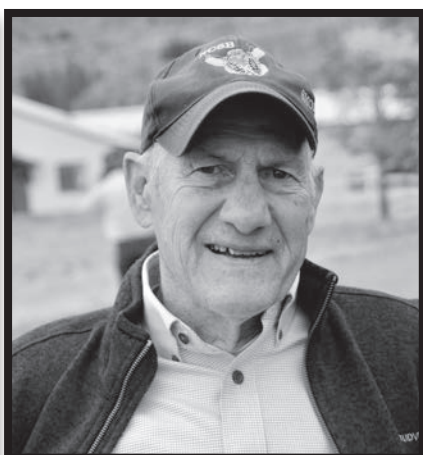
Meghan & John Doran (NCSB-72)



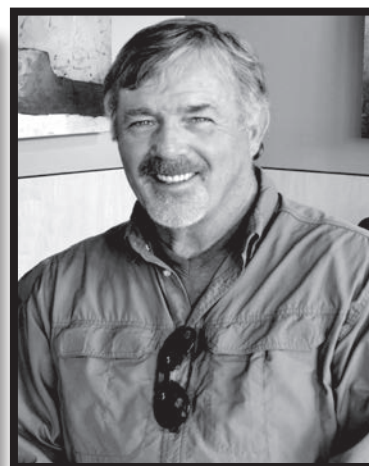
SB-67)



Jason Ramos (NCSB-99)



Bill Moody (NCSB-57)



Denny Breslin (NCSB-69)

Layout: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



ODDS AND ENDS



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to **Jim Elliott** (MSO-69), **Jerry Bushnell** (NCSB-72) and **Les Tschohl** (MSO-66) who just became our latest Life Members.

Alaska Magazine Nov. 2019: “**Bruce ‘Buck’ Nelson** (FBX-91) is the sort of Alaskan with stories to tell. Since retiring, he has completed the Triple Crown of thru-hiking, hiked and paddled the Lewis and Clark Trail, completed two solo treks across Alaska, and survived 70 days ‘living off the land’ in southeast Alaska. He lives in a log cabin near Fairbanks.”

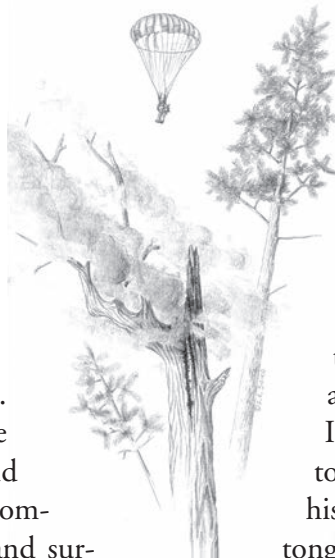
Bill Brandt (MSO-47) in reference to the Oct. 2019 issue of *Smokejumper* regarding a newspaper article about an injury to Bill:

“The article in the issue of *Smokejumper* magazine reminded me of my previous encounter (Bill was hit by an air drop of 20-pound climbing spurs).

“Thank goodness the climbing spurs did not strike my ankle. They struck my shin causing a ‘severe contusion.’ The leg healed so well that it didn’t interfere with my running. I had made it onto the Track Team at Montana State the preceding spring term.

“While working on a trail crew in 1948, word reached me that there was a dance at the Glacier Hotel. After putting in a full 8-hour day, I ran the 15 miles in three hours (2,300 elevation). By the time I reached the dance and showered it was 9:00 p.m. You would think the dance would last well into the next morning. No luck there. The band quit at 10:00.”

With the interment ceremony for **Ed Weissenback** (RAC-64) coming up June 5, 2020, **Dave Wood** (RAC-66) related details about a fire jump in which Ed was seriously injured. I had heard of this event before but never from someone who was on that fire.



From Dave: “I was in charge of the four-man fire on the Umpqua where Ed hit a fir and his chute collapsed. **Bruce Jackson** (RAC-69) was on that jump, but I don’t remember the 4th jumper.

“Ed was up against a tree when I got to him. It was clear he had fallen quite a distance from the collapse of his chute. I talked with him and he slurred that his tongue hurt as well as his back. I examined his mouth and saw he had nearly bitten his tongue in two. He clearly had a severe back injury as well.

“Communicating with the jump plane and explaining the situation, I was told someone from Cave Junction would be bringing Demerol. I think it was **Dick Wessel** (CJ-56) but I am not 100% sure. Whoever it was jumped and took over care of Ed.

“I remember that cutting a helispot was an arduous task, to say the least. A chopper came in and we loaded him in the litter on the skid.

“Ed had a baby rattler named Adolf that bit him. No big deal to Ed.

When I first met him, he drove into the Air Center in his Karmann Ghia with a deer in the back window that he had hit on the way over.

“I plan on attending the memorial in June.”

John Finnerty (Associate): “When fire managers mismanage their responsibilities and blame climate change, I think NSA is justified in exposing their nonfeasance. My logic thread is that if fire management knows that climate change is affecting fire behavior, why are they not mitigating the issue with more aggressive fuel management and initial attack?”

The Johnson Flying Service Hanger in McCall has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places as of Nov. 20, 2018. The following from **Bill Fogg** (Associate): “It looks like my past retirement years of interviews and photo contri-

butions may have paid off. The hanger that my Dad spent 30+ years of his life building and the hanger that I spent so much of my beginning working career has been accepted to the National Registry of Historic Places.”

Congratulations, Bill, on your hard work to get this done. (Ed.)

A big thanks to **Ernie Hartley** (MSO-62) for donating his collection of “The Static Line” and “Smokejumper” magazine to the NSA Historical Preservation Project. These publications are now housed at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho.

Our main collection is at Eastern Washington University where we are putting the NSA collection online for anyone in the world to access. You can view at <https://dc.ewu.edu/smoke-jumpers/>

We owe a lot of thanks for the continual work of **Stan “Clancy” Collins** (MYC-67) for his daily work on our Historical Preservation Project. We now have collections at University of Montana (Missoula), Eastern Washington Univ. (Cheney), Smithsonian Museum of Air and Aviation, Boise State Univ. and the Univ. of Idaho.

The NSA is unique in being the mover in collecting Smokejumper History and Records. The USFS—count them out. Be proud of what you are doing as an organization. When you and the NSA are gone, these collections will live on. (Ed.)

Ed Smith (MYC-68) relayed on a July Christmas story: “A Boise Smokejumper Loft tradition was to celebrate Christmas on July 25. There are very few smokejumpers employed on Dec. 25, so we needed an excuse for a party. As the years went by, some of the jumpers were starting to have kids. At one of the Christmas parties, Santa came to celebrate. The kids got to sit on Santa’s knee and tell him what they wanted for Christmas. A whispered comment was ‘Who is going to tell them they had to wait six months.’ One of the parents whispered, ‘This is just a preview, you have to be good all year.’ “

Davis Perkins (NCSB-72), well-known landscape painter, has been elected to the prestigious Salmagundi Club in New York City. Founded in 1871, the club serves as a center for fine arts, artists and collectors.

Mark Romey (MSO-75) recently passed away.

By some stroke of luck, I published two of his stories in recent issues of *Smokejumper*. I heard that he appreciated that. **Dick Rath** (MSO-73, a good friend of Mark’s, sent the following email as he was headed to Libby for a memorial. It is specific to Mark but also reflects, in my opinion, the thoughts of a lot of us as we lose important parts of the wildland fire community to eternity.

“It is pretty early in the morning and I am loading the Forerunner for the trip to Libby. I have become a bit melancholy as I lament the passing of Mark in such a short time. YouTube is playing in the background and Kris Kristofferson is singing ‘Like Desperados Waiting For The Train.’

“It seems a fitting song for the likes of us, old fire-dog nomads, who spent three to four decades traveling from one large fire event to another, then coming home to a family that knows well enough to give us space as we settle back into the world of normalcy.

“I wonder how we got pulled into this lifestyle that is far from normal. This gathering will be good as we celebrate life and then mourn the passing of our old colleague. We are a small group of men and women who, one tough fire assignment after another, have become closer to each other than many of our blood relatives.

“For those of you that are close, it will be good to see you. For those who can’t make the trip, I understand. I hope this message helps you understand what makes us tick and why we seem to live this fractured life. It was a choice each of us made and one, that if given the opportunity, I would make again. It is funny how some things never seem to change.”

Brian Miller (MD) (RDD-85): “I retired from my three Head and Neck Surgery practices here in Maine a few months ago. Medicine has become a refuge for pasty faced, miserable pudknockers. Hardly any of the stalwart surgeons I trained with have been able to endure the onslaught that has overtaken the profession.

“I am now a full-time, part-time gentleman farmer here in Maine, raising dairy goats and fowl to feed a burgeoning population of predators that I can’t seem to hit with my scoped rifle. I also read a lot of pulp fiction.

“Can’t tell you how saddened I was to hear about ‘Eric the Blak.’ He was one of the iconic Alaskan Smokejumpers when I was just a knob out of Redding in the ’80s. I could spend paragraphs talking about those role models: Boatner, Dow, Quillen, Beltran, Ken Coe and Snake. But who doesn’t recall what it was like to launch in a Volpar load, after eating three double cheeseburgers cooked by Buddha in the FBX mess, for a four-hour recon with ‘Blak’ as the spotter giving a non-stop commentary in an abrasive, observant, obnoxious, deafening, and interesting monologue? Stand tall, eat rocks and glass.”

Don Heinicke (MSO-51): “The Comments by Ms. Christiansen (Jan. 2020 *Smokejumper*) are very disturbing. I began my studies in Forestry before switching to Horticulture. The book *Principles of Silviculture* by F.S. Baker has been with me since 1950.

“In the Foreword, his three reasons why the science of Forestry or Horticulture is so backward really hits the nail on the head, especially #3: ‘—the best experiences die with the man who made them, and that many entirely one-sided experiences are copied by the merely literary forester so often that they finally stand as articles of faith, which nobody dares to gainsay, no matter how one-sided or in error they may be.’

“Enjoy *Smokejumper* magazine and your articles. Keep it up and maybe the empiricists will win out.”

Nick Davis (Arcus Fire UK London): “I have just read your latest piece (New Fire Triangle) on the daily NOTD (internet). Within the first few sentences I knew I had to read the full article and what an impressive piece that it is that oozes ‘common sense’—well done and it’s great to see someone sticking their head above the parapet and telling it how it is.” 🧡

JIM (RDD-85) AND RONDA LECLAIR— ALASKA CUTTERS

Jim and Ronda, owners of Alaska Cutters, might be the only husband/wife falling team in the U.S. They are entering their sixth year in 2020, and it is likely to be their last year.

From Jim: “Ronda worked as a sawyer on the Bitterroot Hotshot crew in the late 70s through 1988, and her brother **Rodney (Bo) Lane** (MSO-79) jumped out of Missoula 1979-83. We both really enjoyed working in the woods and decided to return to falling hazard trees after retiring as teachers for 26 years in Alaska.

“I worked as a faller in western Washington, Alaska, Idaho and Montana in the late 70s and 80s prior to working as a jumper. I initially trained

in Redding in 1985. We had just gotten married, and it was apparent that the distance was not a healthy choice for our relationship. So at the end of the rookie training, I resigned and returned to logging in Idaho.

“About a month later, I was picked up by the Missoula

jump base and worked out of Missoula in 1985, 87 and 88. I was really surprised that the Missoula jump base called since I pretty much figured that I had ended my jumping career. I was very thankful for the jumping organization giving me another chance.” 🧡



Jim and Ronda LeClair (Courtesy J. LeClair)

Feeding The “Beast” With Fire, Money

by Chuck Hinkle

Editor's note: This column appeared in The Missoulian (Missoula, Mont.) Sept. 13, 2017. The bolded parts are mine for emphasis—Mr. Hinkle is spot-on with his observations.

In the late 1990s there was a large buildup of fire personnel in the U.S. Forest Service. This was caused by or led to what I call the **fire-industrial-complex**, or what I will refer to as “the beast.” The beast needs fire and money to survive and needs some portion of the West to burn every year.

Now, a lot of people noticed when the first of these fires started, in mid-July, that **little if anything was done to suppress them**. When these fires were listed on InciWeb, most of these fires had containment dates of Oct. 21. These fires were only a few acres in size and these fire managers were saying that they could not contain them until October.

I, and others, noticed that when the helicopters started working the Meyers and Whetstone Fires, they were flying to Philipsburg to fill their buckets, which was about 23 miles away. Whetstone Lake and Moose Lake were about 2 miles from these fires. Who made the decision to not have a ground crew on the Little Hogback Fire in mid July?

According to the news, it was **too hazardous to fight the Lolo Peak Fire when it was small**. They want us to believe that it is safer for firefighters to fight a 40,000-acre fire. This is unbelievable!

They use safety as an excuse to do little productive work. That is a good plan for them, as what politician is going to challenge them on safety? Why do they get hazard pay? What about the safety of the forest users? We will now have thousands of acres of snags. What law gives any fire manager the right to decide to let a fire burn and pollute the air all summer? What is this doing to kids' lungs, not to mention those with heart and lung disease?

I would breathe less smoke, in my smokechasing days, as I didn't stand in the smoke and we put the fires out. **If these people are too afraid to fight the fires, then move on and we can get others who are not afraid.** How much money is wasted on the almost worthless indirect and contingency fire-lines as fires jump these lines? There were many days this summer when the fires cooled down that direct lines could have been built.

The beast has evolved the firefighter into the “fireherder.” Now that the fires are huge, the herders will whine to Congress that they need more

money and they will get it. Not all Forest Service employees are herders, **but those who are can retire and immediately contract to the beast.** They get paid very well and also get paid to attend 80 hours of training every year. What is the incentive to keep fires small with an aggressive initial attack?

Life is short and we have only so many summers. Unless you would like a majority of your remaining summers to be like this, I would urge you to contact your congressman and senators and urge them not to feed the beast. **I would urge Congress to increase the funding for “initial attack”; this would include more funding for smokejumpers and smokechasers.**

Maybe we need an elite firefighting group like the Navy SEALs. This would be cheaper in the long run, and we would not hear “we can't and it's too dangerous.” The “let it burn” policy is not working and is being abused at the cost of our health and the welfare of our nation. 🌲

Chuck Hinkle of Phillipsburg, Montana, worked for the US Forest Service for 38 years. He was a smokechaser on the Pintler Ranger District during the '80s and '90s.

North Cascades 2019 Reunion

by Denny Breslin (North Cascades '69)

I grew up in the Methow Valley about a mile south of the North Cascades Smokejumper Base in Winthrop, Wash. Our home was right beneath the landing pattern, so jump planes landing on Runway 31 flew over our house and were my first inspiration to aviation.

As a kid, I strained to see the jumpers inside the open door of the Twin Beeches and DC-3s as they flew low over our house. The unforgettable sounds of those radial engines at takeoff power reverberated their staccato off Balky Hill across the valley and were the “sound of the sirens” that would lure me into an aviation career.

As a child, they also inspired me to jump on my bike and pedal a mile to where I could wade the Methow River and run the length of the runway to watch the jumpers training on Cotner's Hill. I knew I wanted to be a smokejumper!

As proof that dreams can come true, I was in the rookie class of 1969, hired directly by **Francis B. Lufkin** (NCSB-40). Some of the smokejumper “legends” in the days of my youth became my training squadleaders, and some of them even made it to the 80th anniversary of NCSB, Sept. 14, 2019.

Their stories are more abbreviated now, and perhaps the embellishments have gotten a bit more nostalgic, but there will always be stories as long as there are White smokejumper boots to help tell them! *If only these boots could talk ...*

It was not the largest reunion, perhaps because the 75th anniversary was only five years ago. Still, Base Manager **Daren Belsby** (NCSB-86) was able to pull together a fun and memorable event. Those who came from as far away as Boise, San Diego, and Phoenix loved getting together with their gray-haired colleagues and catching up.

I think I was the only one with recent jumping experience, having volunteered to jump from the newly restored *Miss Montana* C-47 for the 75th anniversary of D-Day. I made two static line jumps with the World War II Aerial Demonstration Team in Frederick, Okla., in April. Ultimate-

ly, however, I did not make the final jump list for Normandy. It would have been such an honor.

In the spring of 2017, the Forest Service conducted a cost-benefit study whether to move the base to Wenatchee or Yakima. The study was highly criticized for the potential devastation to the local economy should the base close and should the valley lose a significant historical presence.

Complicating the discussion was a Federal Aviation Administration ruling that three of the buildings were too close to the runway and must be removed. The \$7 million cost could be a deal breaker.

But the valley celebrated when authorities decided to keep the base in Winthrop, and plans were made to repave the runway and add improvements. Paving and parking expansion was completed in time for the 2019 fire season. The saw shack, admin office, and parachute loft will be moved in 2021, once the project is funded.

The reunion was a mix of really old-timers and just plain old-timers like me. Daren set up demo jumps for Saturday morning and afternoon. The weather was overcast but the winds were light, so a mix of round canopies and ram-air square parachutes filled the air as everyone gathered to score the landings.

Looking for evidence of a good PLF and target accuracy, critics gave up and threw their score cards away when the ram-air guys made stand up landings on the target. Oops, I know they were supposed to do a PLF, but those who remembered to do them were essentially flopping, as an afterthought, since the boss was watching.

Daren said they only had 23 jumpers this summer. He's hoping for 28-30 jumpers next year.

Recently, the National Smokejumper Association became aware of problems with the U.S. Forest Service hiring process that limits local base input and adds unnecessary red tape to the process. In some cases, this has resulted in understaffed bases.

At the time of the reunion, NCSB had jumped on 11 local fires and posted 43 fire jumps. Daren said many of the jumpers had been boosted to Alaska and other bases as their fire seasons were far more active.

NCSB had nine ram-air jumpers this past season. Even so, Daren expects to have four more veteran jumpers complete ram-air transition training and expects six rookies to take ram-air initial training in Missoula next spring before reporting to NCSB.

The pictures accompanying this article are a mix of truly amazing people who share a fabulous historical experience as some of a little over 6,000 smokejumpers who have ever jumped fire. My apologies to those I was unable to include in the pictures.

I was hired by Francis Lufkin in 1969 when I was a Forestry major at Washington State University. I trained under **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57), who became base manager in 1970, **Elmer Newfield** (CJ-44), **Terry McCabe** (NCSB-58), and brothers **Keith** (NCSB-63) and **Don** (NCSB-62) **Fitzjarrald**. **Mike Marcuson** (NCSB-64) and **Mike Tabler** (NCSB-67) were squadleaders in training. It was the second best job I ever had.

Bill and Sandy Moody live in Twisp. Bill recently retired as a consultant with Global Super-tanker's Boeing 747. He joined us at the reunion exactly one day after returning from fighting fires in South America. He's pretty sure he's retired

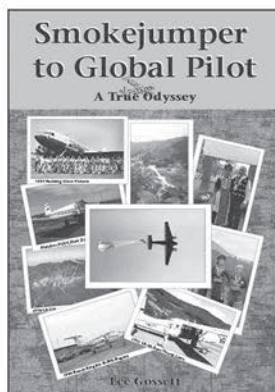
now, but with Bill, you never know.

Jason Ramos (NCSB-99), author of his memoir, *Smokejumper*, was a bright and shining face in the crowd as were Okanogan County Commissioner **Jimmy Detro** (NCSB-67), **John Doran** (NCSB-72), **Craig Boesel** (NCSB-66), **Steve Reynaud** (NCSB-65), **Tom Thomas** (NCSB-62), **Ron Borst** (NCSB-64), **Ben Hull** (NCSB-64), **Steve Wight** (NCSB-65), **Jim Grant** (NCSB-65), and **Dick Wildman** (NCSB-61). Dick and Silvia are a fixture at reunions and it's always good to see them. They are retired and now live in Boise.

In all, there were about 65 jumpers returning to the Methow Valley for the reunion.

Thanks to Base Manager Daren Belsby for the time and effort he and his staff made for a memorable and intimate reunion. Daren is an exceptional leader with uncommon, common sense and a natural ability to accomplish the mission. NCSB is in good hands with such an experienced and accomplished manager at the helm. See you this summer. 🙏

Denny Breslin lives in San Diego, married to Jean Marie 40 years, with two grown children. After jumping at NCSB three years, he spent seven years active duty as a Navy pilot during the Vietnam war, 31 years as an American Airlines captain, and seven years as director of aviation at San Diego Christian College. He now serves on the NSA Board of Directors.



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The Run For The Top

by Bill Mader (Boise '75)

These thoughts started after reading Norman Maclean's book *Young Men and Fire*, which dealt with the Mann Gulch Fire of 1949, and doing some thinking and walking afterward.

Although published in 1992—a mere 27 years ago—I'd never read it because I thought I probably knew more about jumping fires than Mr. Maclean and wouldn't learn much. This may be true since I'd jumped in the mid-70s, which was near the time he started researching his book in Missoula. But Mr. Maclean knew more about life and tragedy, and it took me some time in life to get to where he'd been.

The Mann Gulch Fire is not just about tragedy and the burnover of 12 smokejumpers and one fireguard. It is also about trying to do everything right and having everything go wrong, and maybe a few things about that pot-holed trail called life. It is about how bad luck, chance, and using one's best judgment nevertheless rubbed out lives and made men fading statistics with only white crosses on a bleached mountainside to remember.

The story of Mann Gulch is not so much about smokejumping but, as stated aptly by **Bob Sallee** (MSO-49) one of the three survivors, about "how fast you could run."

The tragedy of this famous fire had dimensions and aftereffects I never understood, until Maclean brought them to my attention, and I did some research on my own. There was tragedy during and some years after the fire.

The only material witness who is still around and who was there is the DC-3 jump plane, now named *Miss Montana*. She has yet to say a word about the event so long ago over the Missouri River country in 1949.

In 2019, as many of us know, she flew to England and participated in the "Doug" Squadron (24 planes) that flew from Britain to France in a commemoration of the Normandy Invasion of 1944. She also dropped jumpers—both former military and smokejumpers. So, it was something

of a good ending to a horrible event that started in 1949.

Before this, per Maclean, *Miss Montana* (though she didn't have that name yet) had flown to Africa and done some cargo hauling there. In 1954 she crashed in the Monongahela River near Pittsburgh carrying soldiers on leave; ten died from drowning and hypothermia. Planes on occasion can have more lives than people.

What I came to better understand after reading MacLean's book was the haunting death factor and that events cascaded long after the tragedy and smoke cleared. Twelve of the 15 jumpers died. Fifteen jumped into the fire; one former jumper had hiked in. The former jumper was **James Harrison** (MSO-47), who was a fireguard. He'd quit smokejumping the prior year because he felt, ironically, that it was too dangerous – or at least his mother thought it was too dangerous.

One of the jumpers on board that day declined to jump because he was ill and resigned from jumping when he returned to Missoula.

Twelve of the jumpers who landed had served in World War II. By way of old times, this reminded me a bit of the mid-70s when we commonly jumped with Vietnam War vets. It was my take that they transitioned to smokejumping because they liked the freewheeling lifestyle and adventure, and a life with a touch of risk. They were also not without blunt humor and, I think, needed the sense every day that they didn't know where they were going.

Jumping in Alaska seemed to especially suit them because regulations were few and far between, and those that were left were meant to be "bent" and "re-interpreted."

I remember **Leo Cromwell** (IDC-66) relating an incident in Alaska in the late '60s when a jump load was returning to Fairbanks in a DC-3.

Jumpers fully loaded with gear were sprawled over the floor with the cargo. Cromwell observed the jumper next to him take off all his jump gear, dump it on the floor, and walk forward to

the cockpit, stepping around and over jumpers, whereupon he replaced the pilot and flew the plane. Leo later identified the jumper as **Nels Jensen** (MSO-62) who became a career pilot for the Forest Service.

The Mann Gulch jump spot that was chosen was a second choice because the first was thought to be too dangerous. **Wagner “Wag” Dodge** (MSO-41), the foreman, even had second thoughts about this spot because a helicopter could not land there in the event someone was injured and had to be airlifted out.

Of course, helicopters then were primitive and dangerous, basically whirling contraptions waiting to fly apart. But smokejumping accepted a higher risk factor in 1949. Risk was more of a way of life and you grew up with it, especially those who had grown up in the Great Depression and survived World War II.

I think we accepted a higher risk factor jumping in the '70s than perhaps the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management accept now, but maybe that's just how time works.

Anyway, when the smoke cleared later that day there were three survivors: Dodge, Sallee, and **Walter Rumsey** (MSO-49). Dodge died five years later of cancer and, no doubt, no little degree of PTSD. Dodge, of course, started a fire with matches that created a burned area in which he could lay down and survive.

Dodge had called his crew over to join him, but none did in the confusion of the firestorm. Instead they all raced for the top of the ridge and safety with a roaring fire drowning out communication. It was every man for himself for a run of about three-quarters of a mile—1,320 yards—up a slope that meant a vertical climb of about 140 yards. This all boils down to a really steep run, uphill, on a really hot day (about 97 degrees), dropping gear as you go, and tossing glances over your shoulder to try and see how much the flaming chaos is gaining on you.

Maclean estimated the run took about 16 minutes during an onslaught of winds that varied from 20 to 40 mph, in addition to the winds the fire created. Sixteen minutes might seem like a long time at first glance, but flames tend to warp the physical laws of the universe and compress them into seconds; or time stops completely as it

did for 12 jumpers and one fireguard.

The Forest Service now has mathematical models to help predict the physical laws of how fires move—where, when, and how they think. But I've spent my life around beasts, and I've concluded that fire is something of a beast that picks the lock of predictability and leaves its cage to sniff out lethal weaknesses.

Although Rumsey was one of the survivors of the running race along with Sallee, Rumsey ended up getting killed in a commuter plane crash in 1980 near Omaha.

The pilot of the DC-3, or *Miss Montana*, was Kenneth Huber. He was killed flying a DC-3 in Montana in 1964 when he was 42 years of age. Huber had dropped paratroopers in World War II in Europe.

Needless to say, the DC-3 in which he died didn't make it to the Normandy Invasion celebration of 2019. The federal fire scientist who investigated the fire, Mr. Harry Gisborne, died at Mann Gulch of a heart attack when he was there in 1949 trying to understand how the fire blew up.

The only guy who lived to old age was Sallee, who passed away in 2014 at the age of 82 years. He lived a full life after he won his race with fire and traveled to New Zealand, India, South Africa, and Algeria setting up paper mills.

Even Maclean did not live long enough to see his book published, and this after about 12-13 years of research. Stark numbers tell stark stories.

The spotter, however, **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40)—the “first” smokejumper in the jump program, along with **Rufus Robinson** (MSO-40), who jumped first into the Nez Perce National Forest on a fire in 1940—who had slapped the legs of the men just before they exited and burned in the gulch, lived a long life and passed away at the age of 98 in 2009 in Missoula. Earl and Rufus jumped just 37 years after the Wright Brothers made their first powered flight.

As a quick but relevant aside to our story, while Earl and Rufus were jumping fires out of Ford Trimotors, German paratroopers were jumping out of Junker 52 Trimotors into combat and taking over countries. German *Fallschirmjäger* paratroopers captured Crete and key airfields in Norway in April 1940.

Fallschirmjäger roughly translates to “para-

chutist hunters.” The allies who fought them referred to them as the “green devils.” They were elite and deadly.

The great paradox here is that the *Fallschirmjäger* forced the U.S. military to study smokejumper operations in Montana by way of a critical visit by Army Maj. William Lee in 1940.

He came to study smokejumper parachute training and techniques. Back then in the states, smokejumping was the only professional government body parachuting into anything or attempting to parachute into anything; don’t worry about whether they were hitting jump spots or if all the chutes deployed perfectly.

Lee had been a peacetime observer after World War I in Germany and had seen the German military buildup. Lee went to Montana—after briefing President Franklin Roosevelt on the need for airborne troops—because the Germans, as well as the Russians, were already well ahead of us in the military parachuting game.

The American need to catch up subsequently led to an evaluation of smokejumping techniques and the birth of the U.S. Army Airborne units—starting with the 101st—and later various Special Forces parachuting units, some later trained at Missoula. In other words, an event on the other side of the world by German paratroopers caused a visit to Montana by an American officer who had briefed the president, which in turn gave birth to all future military parachuting in the U.S. armed forces.

Incidentally, a couple years later, Lee—by this point, a general—“developed the plans for the air invasion of Normandy on D-Day and had trained to jump with his men but was sent back to the states a few months before the battle due to a heart attack.”

Just nine years after Lee’s visit, which helped change the course of World War II tactics in Europe and the Pacific, we arrive at Mann Gulch. It is something of a miracle that Sallee and Rumsey survived their run to the top, even considering their excellent running prowess.

Maclean talks about going back to the site of the disaster 29 years later, in 1978, with these two

men and walking the battlefield where fire had won.

Sallee and Rumsey had made it to the top of a low rock ridge or wall. Through the smoke and fiery wind, they found an opening they could *squirm* through to the other side which, as fate would have it, lead them to more impending fire because they had become surrounded. They escaped by moving back and forth across a rockslide.

When **Laird Robinson** (MSO-62) and Maclean visited the site with Sallee and Rumsey, the latter two had trouble squirming through the same hole because of age and a few extra pounds. That’s how tight it was and how close things were—how they *almost* didn’t make it.

In my five summers of fighting fire in the west and Alaska (three as a smokejumper, two on helitack), I was on only one genuine life-and-death blowup. It was, thankfully, not as bad as Mann Gulch, but the same fire demons lived in the shadows—a steep slope, chance, grass and pines, squirrely winds, tall sheets of flame that stretched the skin over your cheek bones, dropped tools, and a long run to the top pushed by hope which in turn was pushed by a bit of doubt. I don’t remember how many minutes we ran up the steep slope, but I remember it didn’t seem fast enough.

This fire, a hot Class C fire (10-100 acres), occurred in central Idaho on the Boise Forest July 25, 1975, and was called the “Rattlesnake Fire.” Two groups of Boise jumpers were dropped in two locations on different ridges in an attempt to flank it in rough, mountainous terrain. Our spotter that day was **Bobby Montoya** (IDC-62).

In my drop, four of us jumped in two-man sticks: **Jerry Ogawa** (MYC-67), **Clarence “Ty” Teichert** (IDC-55), **Rob Talbot** (MSO-69) and me. Only Ogawa and I are still alive as I write this.

I frankly don’t remember a lot about this fire. I do remember that Teichert and Ogawa jumped first and hit hard on a steep slope of trees and grass in gusty wind. After recovering from their landing, they radioed Montoya in the jump plane not to drop any more guys because of unacceptable wind.

This somewhat useful information—through no fault of Teichert and Ogawa—got to Montoya right after Talbot and I got a slap on the leg and

exited the plane. I sometimes reflect now that this episode seemed to telegraph how other things would come to me later in my life.

In our twisting and turning descent, I remember Talbot disappearing over a sharp ridge of pines. I missed the jump spot—wherever it was—and was grateful to have had Montoya spot us or I might have hit Montana and drowned in a beaver pond, or maybe knocked out a bull moose.

We dodged big, rolling logs at night that were on fire. We made miscalculations on the ground because you can't calculate everything that might happen on a hot fire, especially one in the mountains with canyons and their own wind patterns. Miscalculations and bad luck create the worst of outcomes, and I remember one such outcome regarding our plane.

The plane was the DC-3 (tail number 148Z) we jumped that day, which commonly flew jumpers out of the Boise jump base. It crashed in Idaho in June 1979—two years after I quit jumping—when it was on a non-jump flight carrying cargo, ten people and two dogs to Moose Creek, Idaho.

No jumpers were on board. The right engine caught on fire and *fell off* the wing immediately *after the left engine quit*.

A hopeless situation in a short flight where “hopeless” was not on the manifest. No doubt all passengers had stepped on board that day thinking they'd done everything right and that nothing could go wrong—indeed, that a bright day would bring nice things.

And I have no doubt the pilots, Whitey Hachmeister (whom I remember flying some of my fire jumps in 1975 and was a former major in the U.S. Air force) and John Slingerland (who had an artificial leg from an injury in World War II, Montoya recalled) walked around the old DC-3 that morning inspecting everything, making sure all the dents and oil drips were in the right places.

What is particularly amazing is that a gentleman on horseback witnessed the engine fall off the plane and took a picture of it whirling downward, Montoya recalled. The pilots tried to crash-land in the Selway River in Idaho. They died, as did eight others.

They *almost* made it. There were two survivors—Charles Dietz and Bryant Stringham, along with a beagle.

I also remember reading that one of the first indications that they had not arrived at their destination at Moose Creek was a fisherman who saw the tail of the plane floating down the river; never a good sign. So 148Z, which had lived in the mountains dropping jumpers and cargo and flying through clouds of adventure, never had the chance to join *Miss Montana* at the Normandy Invasion celebration in 2019.

It seems that Moose Creek attracted mayhem back in 1959 as well. A Ford Trimotor jump plane with four jumpers crashed into trees at the end of the runway as a result of a gust of wind, and immediately caught fire. And as if that wasn't bad enough, a burning tree fell on top of them.

Two jumpers died of burns; the foreman made it. One of the burned jumpers sang a song at the crash site with his last breath and died.

Regarding our four-man jump in Idaho, Rob Talbot died at age 52 in his house in Seattle in 2001, after a career in law. Teichert, a junior high school science teacher, committed suicide in 1988 at age 53, using a rifle. He did so because he could no longer live with multiple sclerosis.

Sadly, and strangely, I did not find out that Teichert had MS until 2019 when I had lunch with Montoya and Cromwell in Albuquerque. You can sometimes outrun a fire, but you can't outrun MS.

Montoya and Cromwell told me Teichert's inability to run that day on the fire turned out to be the first indication that he had a medical problem, which was later diagnosed as MS after a visit to the UCLA Medical Center. The net of all this now—coming to life 44 years later—explained why, in all the smoke and fire that day, I had lost track of Teichert in our run to the top and feared he was dead, perhaps along with the others as well.

As it happened, Ogawa and Talbot found Teichert collapsed on their run to the top. He had fallen and was lying by a tree, flame and smoke racing up from below and along the sides.

The thing about trying to outrun a fire is that you have everything to lose and the fire has nothin'—it seems only a deadly game to the fire beast—and then you start losing momentum the further up you go. Meanwhile, the fire is only gaining momentum—roaring flames tapping you on the shoulder.

My biggest trepidation were pines crowning

and exploding below me and at my same level on the slope, as the beast started racing upward ahead of me. As Maclean put it: "... there is no class on how to run from a fire as fast as possible."

Teichert told Ogawa and Talbot to leave him, but they refused, lifting him to his knees and dragging him to a rock outcropping and safety. A helicopter shortly made an emergency landing and carried Teichert to Boise where he was treated for exhaustion and smoke inhalation.

An odd thing happens when you think of someone who is gone. You don't necessarily remember what is important; you may just remember a key event or two. In Teichert's case, I always think of a lightning strike we jumped into on top of a tall, glaciated cliff.

Lightning likes such places. I did not. It was the cliff mostly and my concern of tumbling down it. I missed the cliff, hit the jump spot on top, and almost hit a tree.

Incidentally, I've seen a lot of rattlesnakes in North and South America, even a couple Fer-de-lances and a handful of Anacondas. In fact, I saw a horse in a bathroom once in Venezuela and I've seen piranha swimming past my boots, but I never once saw a rattlesnake on the Rattlesnake Fire.

Tragedies and near tragedies enjoy each other's company whether rattlesnakes are there or not. Maclean put it eloquently when he said young men "hadn't learned to count the odds and to sense they might owe the universe a tragedy."

This brings us to the Granite Mountain Hotshots—although there is a trail of other fire calamities before and after including airplane and helicopter crashes, chutes that didn't open, tree-tops that fell on people, and other "runs for the top" like the South Canyon Fire (also called the Storm King Fire) which killed 14 firefighters. The list goes on.

Good records apparently started in 1910 in Idaho with the Devil's Broom Fire, which killed 78 firefighters. This fatality list seems to have no end when you include the towns and civilians that have been overrun in recent years. But of course, what makes the Granite event stand out is that 19 young men perished in a hot flash of seconds after having left a safe area "in the black."

There were no survivors from the burnover; no runs for the top through smoke and fire and

grass and pines, no hope. Their world collapsed in seconds.

They, like Wag Dodge at Mann Gulch, tried a burnout when they realized they were trapped and before they deployed their fire shelters. They also cut away some of the 10-foot-high fuel with chain saws. They knew the beast was coming like he'd never come before; they could hear his roar and feel him.

Dodge and the jumpers back then, of course, had no fire shelters and I doubt very much that it would have saved them anyway. (Fire shelters, as I understand, were first required in 1977.)

The Hotshots tried to do everything right—had trained for it—but everything went wrong. It was a last stand of fire shelters in a small clearing of tall brush and Manzanita that had no name.

A trilogy of desperate actions, called *almosts*, is when your last thoughts deny that the unthinkable is happening to you. The fire shelters and the souls in them lost. Pictures of the gruesome burnover show tattered, torn shelters.

There's still some truth and miscalculations buried in the ashes, some controversy and open spaces in a great many hearts. Both the Mann Gulch Fire and the Granite Mountain tragedies had movies made about them, and both sites now have plaques with names lamenting never-ending grief.

So, when I look at Mann Gulch and the other tragedies, I look through a special lens, something of a human lens, that leaves a landscape of personalities and how chance dealt them different cards, including the ace of spades called *unfairness*.

On the Mann Gulch side, I was particularly intrigued by **David Navon** (MSO-49). He captivated me because of what he'd been through years before his last jump at Mann Gulch. He'd been a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II and jumped into Holland in 1944 to fight the Germans.

Who would have guessed that, just four years after Lee's visit to Montana, American units would jump from the sky to kill Germans which had, ironically, caused the evaluation of smokejumping and the birth of U.S. airborne units?

Navon survived the Bastogne siege in the Battle of the Bulge and sustained wounds. After the war he earned a degree in Forestry from the University

of California in Berkeley. He was on the road to a bright, well-earned future.

So, after all the combat, bullets and bodies, and German Panzer tanks, death tracked him down in Mann Gulch, Mont., on a hot August day and showed him no quarter. Death had ceased caring and dealt him the worst ace of spades.

Navon was also Jewish; a Christian Cross had been mistakenly placed at his death site in the gulch. It was later replaced with a marble monument inscribed with the Star of David.

Navon died in the top end of the gulch and was one of the “Four Horsemen” who *almost* made it over the top of the ridge. But *almosts* don’t count in the fire business. Navon obviously knew a lot about *almosts* and how to stay on the winning side of life.

Maclean cited the fact that, minutes prior, Navon had stopped to take a picture of the fire. This might seem odd to an outsider, but most of us have probably photographed fires when other priorities were knocking at the door. I wondered if Navon had gotten so accustomed to close calls that this seemed like just another close call, minus the bullets, and that everything would work out like it had before during World War II—if you just kept going.

Maclean cites testimony that a number of those who perished in Mann Gulch, after being struck down by the fire, raised themselves and took a few more steps before they fell into the ashes one last time.

The long and short of our Rattlesnake Fire is that we made miscalculations that did not tip us quite far enough to earn white crosses on a fire-swept mountainside. The ugly sides of the universe did not crystalize and record tragedy. We never crossed into the zone of *almost made it*.

When I get to the end of the trail and try to make sense of fire calamities—including, now, entire cities burning—I’m sometimes left with the impression that fire just brings a reckoning with it and doesn’t much care what you’ve done beforehand.

So, there you have it—the debris path of space and time leaving questions, *maybes*, *what-ifs*, and sometimes a few *too bads* in the *almost made it* zone. When I study the information on Mann Gulch, I’m convinced I would have joined the

dark statistics and gotten a white marker somewhere on a charred hillside, maybe not even near the top.

A last footnote is in order regarding Mann Gulch. Maclean pointed out that there was an attempt to hide key information by the U.S. Forest Service to alter testimony—such as the watches of those killed and the times they died and important paperwork. This seemed to me an attempt to “simplify” the federal report and hide maybe a little ugliness in a bureaucracy. The problem is, ugliness is sometimes part of chaos, and chaos is the companion of fire.

A couple years back when I taught environmental science at Navajo Technical University on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico, I would sometimes ask my students (mostly Navajo but other tribes as well, plus a Filipino—all from rough backgrounds) a hypothetical question: What deceased people would you choose to have lunch with, and what intriguing conversations would you seek out?

My students and I would discuss their answers after I turned on my imaginary time machine and dialed my imaginary knobs into past times and dates (no little task).

It was a contemplating question that demanded thought, but there was also humor and occasional Navajo hysterical laughter, which can be contagious.

I miss these kinds of conversations with my Native American and Filipino friends who have since gone off to new horizons. I wonder what the Mann Gulch bunch would have said over beer and a few slaps on the back, and what questions they might have asked and stories they might have shared in our time capsule.

Many students would reply that they would have liked to visit with a notable Native American leader or a famous scientist or philosopher who had passed away or visit perhaps with someone who knew “the old America” before the whites got here.

It was all about gaining wisdom and maybe understanding the universe a little better. Then they’d ask me whom I’d like to have lunch with in the long-ago past. Of course, they’d never heard of Mann Gulch or, for that matter, the Rattlesnake Fire. Some had heard of the Granite Mountain



(Courtesy r4jumpers.com)

Hotshots. Time gets away from us.

Something of a hidden message at the end of *Young Men and Fire* is Maclean himself. The editors put a picture of him on the back inside back cover. This, of course, a couple years after he died. This is customary for the author of a book, but usually it's a close-up showing a toothy smile or a steely look into the camera.

The picture of Maclean shows an old, gray-haired man with a carved face sitting in a wooden canoe on a lake facing away from the camera, mountains in the background, bending over and thoughtfully looking down into the water, contemplating. His right hand is touching an oar. I think he had figured out aspects of life beyond the book he wrote.

I would like to have had lunch with him.

Pictured above are Boise Smokejumpers in 1976 in front of their DC-3, tail number 148Z. Some of these jumpers later went to Alaska along with Redding and McCall jumpers as part of the "Down South Crew" to assist BLM jumpers in

Alaska. This plane crashed into the Selway River in 1979 killing most of the people on board during a non-jump mission. Bobby Montoya, the spotter on the Rattlesnake Fire, is just to the left of the airplane door. Two spots below Montoya is John Snedden, in a light shirt with his arms crossed. Two spots in front of Snedden to the left, also in a light shirt with his arms crossed, is Leo Cromwell. Cromwell and Snedden conducted an in-depth study of historical Boise fire jumps now available on a website. Base leadership in addition to Montoya included **Herb Corn** (IDC-67), first row, fourth from the left; and **John Cramer** (MYC-63), standing at Corn's right. Ogawa is fifth from the left on the slanted top row, holding a picture of a jumper who was not present; Bill Mader is fourth from the left on Ogawa's right. Covered up by the first two rows of jumpers is a wooden ramp with a steel handrail leading upward to the jump door. On the side of this ramp were the words "Fly Fat Cat Airlines." It was a hell of an airline. 🐱

National Smokejumper Reunion 2020

June 26-28, 2020 in Boise, Idaho

by Lynn Sprague (McCall '59)

Do you have these dates on your calendars? If you don't, you should have!

Your Reunion Planning Committee is working diligently to pull off a grand event. The Venue is the Riverside Hotel in downtown Boise where all events will be under one roof, except for the Saturday daytime events.

We will have an agenda similar to prior reunions.

- Friday afternoon: Arrival and barbeque/beer.
- Saturday: Free day with special planned events and suggested unplanned activities depending on your whims, an evening happy hour and dinner (no long speeches).
- Sunday: Breakfast and memorial event and depart for home.

The planning committee's focus is on providing ample time for mingling, visiting, catching up, and retelling old jump stories and enhancing old escapades. Thus, the "under one roof" venue to cut down on driving around town for various reunion events and eliminating the banquet headline speaker to shorten the formal dinner time.

The hotel is located right on the Boise River Greenbelt where walking, biking (bikes are available to rent), and jogging are easily accessible. More information on the hotel, guest rooms, and other amenities will be included with the registration information packet in late Feb/early March.

There will only be two special planned events for Saturday: A trip to Historic Idaho City and a trip to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC).

The Idaho City trip is the signature event for this reunion! Idaho City was the site of one of the earliest Forest Service Smokejumper units, established in 1948 and continued until 1969 when it was moved to Boise. This little community is rich in early gold mining history and made richer by the presence of smokejumpers for some 20 years. The tour will provide opportunities to view this history (gold mining and smokejumpers) through stops at the Museum, historical buildings, and the home

that Kenn Smith, former assistant unit foreman, restored and turned into a mini museum. This will be a relaxing, easy trip that promises to provide a grand experience and will include a smokejumper practice jump. As an added attraction, the Idaho City Historical Foundation, which is assisting with museum and historic building tours, will be offering a full hot meal, complete with homemade huckleberry cheesecake dessert prepared by a well-known local chef.

The second planned event is a tour of NIFC. Located at the Boise Airport and a short drive from the reunion hotel, the Center offers an opportunity to learn about current coordinated wildland fire practices.

There will also be a list of suggested unplanned activities, such as golf, river floating, summer activities at the Bogus Basin Ski Area, Boise City tours, Birds of Prey National Scenic Area tour and others that the committee will be able to connect folks up with.

Looking forward to seeing everyone in June, so get it on your calendar. 🔔

Turn Your Pins and Patches Into **Helping Other Smokejumpers** *and Their Families*

Send us your Smokejumper or other pins, Trail Crew pins, and/or patches that are hiding in your sock drawer. We'll sell them to collectors on eBay with all money going into the NSA Good Samaritan Fund and acknowledge you in a later issue.

*Send to: Chuck Sheley—10 July Ln—Chico
CA 95926*



SOUNDING OFF from the Editor



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

I HAVE ALWAYS been an advocate of aggressive initial attack on wildfire. We are constantly bombarded with articles telling us how we created the current fuels in the forest by our work done in the past. The big “finger pointing” tries to justify the current lack of forest management.

Since we started acting on wildfire in about 1910, there certainly has been a buildup of fuels in the forests. If we hadn't jumped those fires and done a good job, thousands of acres would have gone up in smoke and millions of acres would be standing black snags.

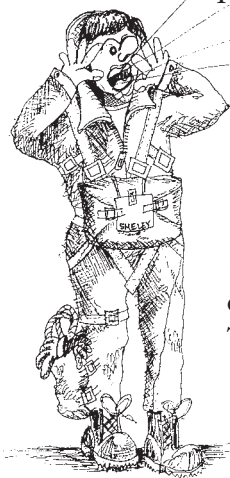
If we had not put out those fires, what would be the benefit to us in 2020? Certainly, there would have been less forest to burn. But, is that a good thing? Somewhere along the line, we had to realize that the citizens of the U.S. did

not want to let their forests burn. There was a need for timber to build this nation. Maybe they were tired of killing people. The 1894 Hinckley Fire burned 350,000 acres and killed 418 people and was followed by the 1918 Cloquet-Moose Lake Fire that burned 250,000 acres and killed 452 people.

I always like to go back to common sense. In a nation that is growing in population and needs timber to build, was it a good idea for the citizens of the U.S. to advocate for the prevention of wildfire? Seems like a good thought to me.

As we expanded our growth and our population, should we have left our wildlands to burn? There are many who say so. I listen to these people all the time. My thoughts: I want to go to each of these individual's homes and start throwing out all the wood products they have in their homes—framing, two by fours, tables, etc. Where do they think this wood comes from? When are these people going to stand up and realize that they don't live in a Styrofoam house?

After two trips to Vietnam and one to Laos, I can say that



I have seen the devastation done to their forests. You have to have your head in a dark space to not know that you are benefiting from the forests cut down in those countries. This really makes a certain portion of our population feel good. They can have their homes and furniture and still let our forests burn as they did in the 1400s. Hypocrisy—”The practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform.”

I am continually reading articles about how the Native Americans managed the forests. When I ask for any documentation of their burn plans and efforts, I come up with a blank response.

Let's go back to the common sense point of view. Certainly, these people, after thousands of years of living in an area, had a lot of practice on how to handle the forests in their areas. I am not questioning their culture.

But, do you think they had a plan to manage the forest outside their living area? If so, show me the plan. Common sense would tell you they had an annual burning plan that managed the areas around their living space. The main consideration would be to improve the hunting areas and

to open up areas for defense. Do you, in any wild stretch of your imagination, think they had a plan to manage the forest beyond their living area? Please, anyone out there that has a copy or any documents of the Native American Burning Plan, please forward.

Common knowledge: A lightning storm comes through a forest and there are 7,000 to 12,000 down strikes, and they start 40 or 50 fires. This is happening on multiple forests in the Western U.S. Do you think that the Native Ameri-

cans went out and managed these wildfires? Of course not. They let them burn. The forests of the past were the result of wildfire. A perfect plan with a limited population.

Current day thinking: We should let wildfire burn as this is nature's plan. Great—how about the 330 million people living in this country? Can we burn our way out of the 21st Century and, if we could, is that a good idea? Where in the USFS controlled burn plan do you see the considerations for the health damage done

by smoke inhalation by our citizens?

After living right next door to the Camp Fire (2018), I am a changed individual. I can not get this fire out of my mind as I live with it on a daily basis. Our community, Chico, has changed. It will take years to get back to "normal." I still can't fathom a community of 27,000 wiped completely off the map in a matter of hours. I find it hard to express my thoughts on this fire. It is just another news item until you live it. 🔪

One Year After The Camp Fire

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

One year to the day (Nov. 8, 2019) of the Camp Fire, our local newspaper put out an edition in remembrance of the event. There were photos of faces of many of the 88 victims on the front page. I bought 15 copies and mailed them to some of our members. John Culbertson, who experienced the Thomas Fire in 2017, had a moving response that I want to share with you. You can see the emotion as John recalls the similarities between his community hit by the Thomas Fire and Paradise, California. (Ed.)

Just finished reading the *Chico Enterprise-Record* special edition on the Camp Fire.

It was sobering to go through the paper. I folded it up next to the *Wall Street Journal* and *Los Angeles Times* sitting on the edge of the desk. It would catch my eye as I worked, causing no end of reflection on fire and flood.

I had a hard time reading it. I read a few pieces, then would fold it and put it back in the lineup, not wanting to think about it. Not ready for what was so apparent from the moment I picked it up.

People get hurt by fire, even middle-class towns

like Carpinteria get hurt by fire, and Carpinteria is wealthy compared to Paradise.

Not to mention the other fire-affected communities we are surrounded with—from Santa Barbara to Westlake. Communities of affluence with strong economies, celebrity fundraisers, established nonprofits, wealthy locals, and world-class media types both living there and flying in to cover the story.

I kept thinking about how they say New Orleans and Houston never really recovered in the poorer parts of town. Tonight I sat down and went through the whole thing. Read all the stories, looked at all the faces in the pictures.

What struck me most—people moving away, an entire community displaced. Even people with good jobs like Sheriffs pulling out. No housing. No sense of future. People living in the Walmart parking lot. I think that's what got me.

I shy away from big box stores. But after the Camp Fire, I started shopping at Walmart, buying gift cards there. When I saw that picture in the Special Edition of people sitting in the Walmart parking lot, it brought it all back—the displaced

people in our town and thinking of those now also gone.

It is not easy to forget streets lined with people who have fled fire—horse trailers, farm tractors, campers. People dropping off what they can and heading back for more—cars piled high with stuff, sleeping figures in the front seat. At 2 a.m. a horse bumps against its trailer stall. The power is out. Ash is falling—exits impassible and National Guard on the street.

I had sadness in me for our town, also. So I folded the Special Edition and put it back in the lineup once again.

You say a prayer and make a commitment to keep trying. Fix things you can fix. Stand up, dust off, and keep moving. You have done it before and you know you will do it again.

Thanks, Chuck, for sharing the story. My heart goes out to your community and the town of Paradise. Know I will not forget them. 🙏

Smokejumper Keep The Flame Legacy Jump List

by Mike Bina (Missoula '68)

New NSA Board member Mike Bina voiced a concern that a lot of us have had: How do we keep the NSA going in the future? With the change to move to more full-time jumpers vs the seasonal jumpers of our day, the potential for future memberships has dropped over the last 20 years.

Expenses will increase in the future. What is going to keep the NSA going? We have talked about legacy giving in the past. Years ago one jumper gifted the NSA a sizeable amount from his estate. Would any of you consider doing the same at any amount?

The following article by Mike introduces the new take on an old idea. (Ed.)

You are one of 6,025 smokejumpers who, since 1939, have “given it your all.” Now, as a retired jumper, you realize that smokejumping – in return – later benefited you in your career and family life.

Our gratitude

At any smokejumper gathering, we hear expressions of gratitude for having been afforded the privilege of having had this unique job. Stories are told how smokejumping made a lasting, positive difference in their lives.

With the passage of time, we increasingly feel the need to “give back” to others who influenced us. We realize we owe them a debt of gratitude for bringing out our very best. *But how can you best show your appreciation for the smokejumping experience that benefited you?*

To provide a way to “give back,” the NSA *Smokejumper Keep the Flame Legacy Jump List* was established to preserve smokejumping traditions, values, and culture ensuring its future legacy – including your own.

The invitation

You can become a *Smoke-*

jumper Keep the Flame Legacy Jump List member by making a planned gift donation.

Planned gift options include a “living monetary donation,” a bequest in your will, naming the NSA as a life insurance or retirement plan beneficiary or a gift of real estate, other property, stocks, or bonds. If you’re interested, please contact **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) at cnkgsheley@earthlink.net or (530) 893-0436.

You can make your gift in memory or honor of a family member, mentor, or other special individual. Requests to remain anonymous will be honored.

You, as one of 6,025 jumpers, have already played an important role in shaping the well-respected profession of smokejumping. Please consider this opportunity to include your name on the *Smokejumper Keep the Flame Legacy Jump List*. 🙏

The Pink Fire

by Mike McCracken/Ron Thoreson (Cave Jct. '60)

Our rookie year at CJ, 1960, was a good year for the jumper business. Earlier that summer, we had been called up to Missoula to back them up during a big bust. On August 21, 16 of us were sent down to Redding to back them up. They were nearly out of jumpers when we arrived and were soon completely out.

On the morning of August 24, we got a call to go down to the Tahoe N.F. They had two campaign fires going, the American Fire, which started near Donner Summit and was threatening the town of Truckee, California, and the Volcano Fire, which had started in the Middle Fork of the American River and was threatening the town of Forest Hill, California. A September 2013 article in the *Forest Hill Messenger* says the Volcano Fire (that we jumped) ultimately burned over 40,000 acres and destroyed several homes before the town was saved by “the valiant efforts of firefighters.” Obviously, any number of jumpers was not going to do any good in fighting that fire.

The Forest Service had brought in Zuni firefighters from New Mexico to build line and fight the fire, but they were stuck in Forest Hill without a means to get to the fireline. We were called in to build a helispot so they could be ferried in. Because the fire had been going for several days and was a major news story, we saw some TV helicopters before we got to the jump site and were doubtlessly making the local news.

It was about 10 a.m. when we got over the jump spot and found the knoll where we were to construct the helispot. Our spotter, **Al Boucher** (CJ-49), saw a likely jump site just down the ridge from that knoll. As we circled the site and threw out streamers, he told us our escape route was straight down the ridge. From about a thousand feet in the air, it looked to be covered with grass or low brush. Our Redding hosts, being more familiar with that country and its abundance of Manzanita brush, would not have made the mistake that we soon made.

Al decided to jump five. Besides the two of us, the others were **Mike Simon** (CJ-60), **Fred Cramer**

(CJ-59) and **Dennis Wheeler** (CJ-60). Mike Simon jumped solo first. As we came back around and looked toward the jump spot, it appeared that he was trying to get his streamer out to signal us. Al waived off our concern and sent two more of us out. Upon landing, the problem became very evident. Our escape route was totally impassable Manzanita brush, so dense that it had no openings and appeared to be something less menacing from the air. There effectively was no escape route.

The plan had been for us to proceed up the ridge, build the helispot, and call for evacuation by chopper. We were expected to be done clearing the spot by late afternoon. As a result, we had no overnight gear. We did have plenty of water dropped to us, which we retrieved and took up to the knoll.

The realization that we had no escape route was a great motivator, and we tore into our task with zeal. Ron cut his leg open with the axe blade of a Pulaski, quickly wrapped it, and continued clearing brush and a few small trees. Instead of late afternoon, we had the spot cleared by about one o'clock and promptly started calling for our ride out. We could hear the fire north of our location. At about that time the wind shifted, sending smoke over us and making it impossible to pick us up. We were stuck until the wind would die down or shift direction.

We had good radio contact. We were soon advised that although we couldn't be extracted, they were going to make sure we wouldn't burn. They knew approximately where we were despite the smoke. They decided to drop borate on the knoll. Time has dimmed some of the details, but we'd estimate that they dropped at least five planeloads of borate, some of which were direct hits, and we were soon swimming in ice cold, pink borate.

It was clear that we weren't going to burn. You couldn't light that knoll with a flamethrower. However, we were having difficulty with the smoke, which dropped lower with the coolness of evening. The wind didn't shift before nightfall, and we were stuck there for the night without even our trusty paper sleeping bags. It wasn't cold, except for the

borate. Some of us dug a little trench and laid in it with a wetted handkerchief over our nose and mouth to get clearer air. While lots of details have been forgotten, one remarkable factor we both remember was that there was no panic or drama. No goodbye speeches or notes to mama—just a long, cold, pink night.

The smoke lifted about mid morning the next

day, and we were evacuated to the main fire camp in Forest Hill. None of us sustained any injury, beyond Ron's cut leg which was quickly stitched up. We rejoined the rest of the CJ crew in Redding later that day and must have been a comical sight in our pink clothes. Ever after, it's been known to us as the Pink Fire, so named by Mike McCracken, coauthor of this narrative. 📌

Recollections of Mann Gulch 70 Years Later

by William (Bill) Brandt (Missoula '47)

Two of the jumpers on the Mann Gulch Fire were friends of mine. One survived, the other did not. The friend who survived was **Walt Rumsey** (MSO-49). The friend who died was **Eldon Diettert** (MSO-49).

I have always felt a pang of guilt about Eldon Diettert. He was the son of one of my Botany Profs at the University of Montana. Dr. Diettert had asked me, on one occasion, whether I would recommend smokejumping. I replied with an unqualified "YES."

Eldon had completed his initial training which included seven practice jumps. He was in the midst of his 20th birthday dinner party with family in Missoula when the call came for him to report to Johnson Airfield and ready himself to make his first fire jump. He did so.

When I returned to campus that fall and encountered Walt Rumsey, I, of course, wanted to discuss the Mann Gulch Fire with him. To my surprise, Walt said that Eldon and he were with a group of jumpers moving fast uphill to escape the flames. The group came to some rim rock. There was an opening through which Walt and Robert Sallee proceeded. Walt said that Eldon chose to not go up through the opening but instead, regrettably, continued along the rim rock. After going up through the opening, Sallee and Rumsey laid down in a rock slide and thus survived.

Note: The above recollection comes from a 92 year-old mind, 70 years after the event. I hope

that with the help of archival material, it's reasonably accurate.

Bill jumped at Missoula during the 1947 season. He later got his PhD in Botany and taught at Oregon State University 1957-90. 📌

NICKNAMES

by Bob Smee (Missoula '68)

Part of the culture and lore of smokejumping is the use of nicknames. These clever, colorful, and sometimes humorous descriptive pseudonyms for fellow jumpers have always been interesting and entertaining to me. Some have become so affixed and long lasting that many of us do not know the person's real name.

Wikipedia defines a nickname as a substitute for the proper name of a familiar person commonly used to express affection, it is a form of endearment and amusement. Many smokejumpers have derived these names from their characteristics, actions, or a memorable event. If you, the readers of *Smoke-jumper*, feel as I do that it would be of some value to capture as many of these as possible—please email me as many as you can remember. With the concurrence of the magazine staff, we will print what we collect in a future edition. Send the nicknames you have heard and, if you can remember it, the person's actual name to rwsmee@msn.com. 📌

Time To Get In The Door

by **Nate Ochs** (Missoula '11) and **Tyson Atkinson** (Missoula '11)

This is a story about **Ed Lynn** (MSO-95). We lost Ed this December after a fight with glioblastoma, a highly aggressive form of brain cancer.

In a letter to his friends, drafted in the last weeks before he died, Ed wrote: "This has been really hard and yet the best, most sad, happy, single most amazing thing ever to happen to me. I won't let you down. It gets rough, but I promise every one of you I will fight till there is absolutely no fight left, and I really don't know what that means, just not in my vocabulary. The only real way to thank you will be to be first in line to help our next friend in need. I will do my best to do that."

As we interviewed people for this article, the word that kept returning to them when they talked about Ed was "mentor." It's easy to see why. In the face of enormous adversity, Ed handled himself with the kind of poise and toughness that would look good on anyone, just as he had in the field and throughout his life.

There are a lot of stories about Ed, and this is just one of them, but I think it catches some of that spark that made Ed who he was to us: Ed the mentor, Ed the comrade and friend.

In mid-August 2017, smoke had been trapped for weeks over most of northern Idaho. The area continued to receive lightning, but reduced visibility made any new wildfires in the Panhandle difficult to detect. When the smoke finally lifted, a new fire was revealed in the St. Joe National Forest, and smokejumpers were dispatched from Missoula to suppress it.

What was strange about it, the jumpers noted as they circled in the aircraft, was that the fire was in the bottom of a steep and remote drainage, when experience and common sense told them that lightning strikes the ridge. It wasn't until they were on the ground and scouting the perimeter that they discovered why.

At the base of the fire they found a man in his 70s, his clothes in tatters, waving his arms at the helicopter that was busy dropping buckets on the flanks. He had gotten lost in the woods nine days

earlier, and he'd been foraging on little more than huckleberries as he tried to locate his wife. On the seventh day, weak and fearing the worst, he finally set fire to the dry ferns and the standing cedars in the drainage bottom as an SOS, a last-ditch effort to find rescue.

Once the jumpers had discovered and safely extracted the lost man, they called additional resources to assist in a search and rescue operation to find the man's wife, and Ed Lynn was dispatched with four others to parachute in as a rescue EMT.

No stranger to Northern Idaho, Ed was born in Coeur d'Alene, some 60 miles north of the incident, which they were now calling the Buck Fire. He'd graduated from high school in nearby Hayden, working his summers on the family farm in Washington. Ed had been a boxer in those days, and it was in this region that he'd earned Golden Gloves status.

Now, as the eight-foot-diameter burning cedars began falling and spreading fire up the drainage, Ed was in his element. This was the St. Joe, after all. It was no picnic, maybe, but it was home.

By the time Ed was on the ground, the couple's vehicle had been located. The de facto search zone became the area between the vehicle and where the lost man had been found.

Ed and his counterparts began their methodical search. This was in Ed's 23rd year of smokejumper operations. In his career, he jumped 109 times onto active wildfires. But however long that was, Ed had been a hunter for far longer, and those were the skills that he drew on now.

Hunting with Ed is perhaps the thing his closest friends remember most fondly about him. A masterful waterfowl hunter, Ed was dubbed the "duck whisperer," and he was never in the wrong mood to talk about the way ducks and geese had worked over the decoys in the early morning, forming the legendary "ducknado," with his dog waiting in the wings for its chance.

Taking the opportunity to introduce someone to that experience for the first time was one of his pas-



Ed Lynn (Courtesy Keith Wolferman)

sions; he and his hunting partners loved the social aspect more than the kill. With a hunter's sense of how to read a piece of ground, Ed and the other EMTs identified what was the likeliest path a person would follow in that remote wilderness. When they found disturbances suggesting the woman had passed nearby, it was Ed's idea to order a tracker dog through the local dispatch center.

Toward evening, the missing woman was found deceased. It was a blow. Ed helped arrange for her extrication, and when he returned to the main body of firefighters, morale was low. Everyone had been working hard and with hope, and the outcome had taken some of the wind out of everyone's sails.

Ed talked and listened. He had a master's degree in counseling and human services from the University of Idaho, in addition to his bachelor's degree in Education with a Science major. That wasn't something he spoke about much, but it gave him insight on how to listen and talk in a way that moved the conversation toward accepting circumstances, as they were preparing to engage the task at hand.

The fire was growing, and when it came to resources, they were it, at least for the time being. So they talked and they moved forward.

In the morning, Ed assumed the role of operations section chief of the Buck Fire and took a trainee with him. If you were to walk around the Missoula smokejumper base, you'd find a large percentage of the firefighters there have been trained by Ed. He was instrumental in the grooming of young firefighters not only with his saw skills, but also with his connections to crew-boss training in Porterville, Calif.

His approach to training was to be fully open with his knowledge, and yet to give his trainees a long leash. He had a way of giving people confidence by telling them they already knew what to do, which they often did, even if they weren't aware of it yet.

By this time, the fire had gotten well established in the great cedars in the drainage bottom. They were falling consistently, unpredictably, and there

was no safe way to construct direct fireline to halt the rate of spread down there. If the lower left flank couldn't be held, it would be miles before the crew would find terrain conducive to indirect line for a burnout operation.

As Ed scouted the flank, he discussed the possibility of holding it with unmanned portable sprinklers fed from the creek below, but the plan hinged on several hazard trees that would have to be removed. Otherwise, when the trees fell they would affect the fuel beds beyond the sprinklers and render them ineffective.

The complexity of these trees, however, put them beyond the scope of what even the most experienced sawyers of the group felt comfortable felling.

Ed, an accomplished logger for six years before he went to college and the primary sawyer for his father's Idaho logging operation, was on another level when it came to felling trees.

While it is certainly unconventional for an operations chief to take a turn in the felling rotation, a standard Ed was fully aware of, he couldn't help

himself. You could see the twinkle in his eye when he got word from his sawyers that they were turning the trees down.

“Let me borrow your chaps,” he said.

There are stories about how Ed could do things with the saw that defied gravity, how he could make a tree leaning downhill fall upslope – that sort of thing – but as he explained what he was about to do, there was no magic; just precise thinking.

“It’s all about the size-up,” he explained. “It’s what could happen next, and next and next. If it doesn’t happen, great. If it does, you have a plan for that. It’s not unforeseen.”

He talked about each tree, what he’d do if the roots gave, if a branch caught and rotated the bole, if the top broke and fell back. Then he went and brought each one swiftly, safely to ground. One of them, when it tipped, brought its shallow root system with it – an 18-foot disc that could’ve catapulted anyone to a bad end. Ed had foreseen it, and he was well clear.

With that done, the sprinkler plan became viable, and the crew could move forward with the mission. It was still touch and go; the next shifts were spent chasing spot fires that threatened to run and cancel all progress, but in the end the flank held. The Buck Fire was kept from becoming a major Type 1 or Type 2 fire incident, and the risk and exposure to firefighters that always accompanies a fire of that magnitude was prevented.

The Buck Fire was just another fire, but one of the things he loved about it, he said, was the sense that “we were winning, even though we weren’t supposed to be.”

On a reconnaissance flight of the fire, even the district fire management officer believed the plan had a low probability of success and called the plan “crazy.”

But despite the adverse conditions, Ed believed that when you gather your forces, design a plan together and execute it, you could pull something off, even against long odds, and he was proud when his people came together and did that.

As one firefighter put it, “When a salty guy like Ed is proud of what we did, that makes you feel right.”

During Ed’s illness, he had to face changes. While even in his final days, he never gave up the fight and at some point, he understood that his plans for the future were no longer possible.

What had meaning for him then was the community of people who loved him and who reached out and showed support. This included especially his wife, Elizabeth, and his children Amanda, Dakota, Sybil, Olivia and Zoe. It also included what he called the brotherhood, which is made of the smokejumpers and firefighters who shared the rigors and challenges of a unique work environment and were there for him when it counted.

Ed was proud to be a smokejumper and did not take this brotherhood lightly. As he wrote in his letter: “Who are you people? WELL, YOU ARE THE BEST DAMNED FRIENDS/FAMILY ANYONE COULD EVER IMAGINE !”

We are proud to be thought of in this way, and if it was meaningful to Ed, it is meaningful to us also. When things get tough, we’ll be thinking of the way Ed showed us how to act, and that if we put our minds to it, nothing is impossible. 🙏

NEW NSA LIFE MEMBERS SINCE APRIL 2019

Thanks for your support!

372	LAFFERTY	JIM	IDAHO CITY	1963
373	EBEL	FRED	MISSOULA	1957
374	LANCASTER	DAVE	GRANGEVILLE	1963
375	BECK	DOUG	CAVE JUNCTION	1970
376	KRISTOFORS	KRIS	REDDING	1964
377	ROSE	JACK	MISSOULA	1949
378	BILLER	ALLEN	FAIRBANKS	1982
379	BINA	MIKE	MISSOULA	1968
380	PROVENCIO	DAVE	MISSOULA	1977
381	MCMAHON	JOHN	MISSOULA	1958
382	ELLIOTT	JIM	MISSOULA	1969
383	TSCHOHL	LES	MISSOULA	1966
384	BUSHNELL	JERRY	NO CASCADES	1972

Smokejumpers carry the flame for eight decades

80th anniversary caps the latest to join our all-star hat selection

After 80 years, the “Greatest Job in the World” is still going strong ... and this anniversary cap proves it with its sharp “80” logo with superimposed tree and wings. Flanking the attractive design are “1940” and “2020” with arched “SMOKEJUMPERS” at the top.

Cap is made of durable khaki twill with dark green embroidery and “sandwich”-style bill. Adjustable band with brass buckle allows it to fit just about any adult head. Looks fantastic in the yard or around town.

Ready to wear a true conversation piece? This cap is another classic in our long list of winners!

80th anniversary cap \$20 • Shipping \$5



Challenge coin destined to become another favorite collectible

We were astounded by the response when we began offering challenge coins several years ago. Members and collectors alike – from the United States and several other nations – grabbed them as quickly as they could.

This impressive challenge coin features the 80th anniversary logo in shiny chrome, set against a rich blue background symbolizing the wide-open sky smokejumpers see when exiting their airplanes. On the back is the raised “SMOKEJUMPERS” logo with parachute, tree and wings on shiny chrome, with “The Greatest Job in the World” inscribed below.

Coin measures 1.75 inches in diameter. *Why not buy some as gifts for friends?*

80th anniversary coin \$5 • Shipping \$4



TO ORDER: Please write your request on a separate sheet of paper and include it with your check made out to “NSA.” The order form does not have any spaces for the 80th anniversary coin nor the 80th anniversary cap. Please calculate the item price(s) and shipping when writing the order. We apologize for this inconvenience.