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Smokejumper biographies for 1942 rookie class

National Smokejumper Association

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The 1942 Smokejumper Rookies

Terrance Dale Adams (Missoula '42)

Dale was born February 12, 1922, in Kane, Wyoming, where he lived until enrolling at Montana State University in Missoula, Montana, in the fall of 1941. While a freshman, in May 1942, he was accepted in the Army Air Corps reserve cadet training program. Dale spent the summer of 1942, with at least two fire jumps as a smokejumper before enlisting as a Private in the Army Air Corps in December 1942.

Dale resigned as a Major from military service in December 1945 and returned to Kane, Wyoming, where he was living in 1959 when his father died. Dale died in Payson, Arizona, on July 13, 1994, at the age of 72 and is buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona in Phoenix.

Murray James Athearn (Missoula '42)

Murray was born September 21, 1923, in Lewistown, Montana. As a University of Montana forestry student, he was a member of the 1941 Forest Service "fire-fighting" squadron and a smokejumper in 1942 when he had at least two fire jumps. During college, he was a wrestler, a marksman on the rifle team, and an aviation cadet. He earned his wings as a second lieutenant with the Army Air Force in 1944. After the military, he had a career as an engineer-geologist.

Murray was working as an engineer-geologist with Engineering Consultants, Quezon City, Philippines when he died on November 9, 1974, at the age of 51. Cause of death was drowning. He is buried in Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

Fred A. Barnowsky (Missoula '42)

Fred died July 15, 2008, in Kalispell at age 85. He was born February 18, 1923, in Scobey, MT. His mother died when he was two years old and the family eventually settled in the Swan Valley. He finished school in Swan and worked for the Forest Service before becoming a rookie at Missoula in 1942. With WWII underway, he entered the US Navy where he served aboard YMS-333, a Navy Yard Mine Sweeper. After the war Fred returned to jumping at Missoula from 1946-56 where he accumulated more than 45 fire jumps, six experimental jumps and a rescue jump.

He then went to Redding in 1957 where he was the first Base Manager, jumping there until 1960. In the 1960s Fred joined the CIA where he participated in covert airdrops in Laos and Tibet. He kept this phase of his

life secret until his death. His ashes were spread in his beloved Flathead NF and at a favorite near Goat Creek in the Swan Valley.

John J. Beck (Missoula '42)

Missoula jump records for 1942 state that "John J. Beck" was a "parachuter at Nine Mile Camp, Huson" in 1942. There is an additional notation that he became a "construction worker, Aleutians" sometime after 1942.

Definitive records have not been located that connect a John J. Beck as being a smokejumper. However, a WWII Draft Registration record appears to be that of John Beck. The registration document was completed October 16, 1940, stating that a John Jesse Beck was born in Lewistown, Montana, on May 19, 1916. He is employed at the Missoula White Pine and Sash Company in Missoula and his wife is Helen Bertha Beck. His address in Missoula has a line drawn through it with PO Box 711 Gridley, California, written. This is typically done to record updated addresses of registrants. Helen and John were married July 6, 1940.

The only records found for John Beck in Alaska is reference to a John Beck working for the Arctic Research Laboratory at Point Barrow, Alaska. In September 1963 he was an aerial observer for an airplane crash. Another article in December 1963 names John as the Arctic Research Lab shop foreman, and another in 1966 states that John Beck and his Eskimo construction crew from Barrow have moved a camp. The last article continues stating that Bill Beck came up to help with camp management, allowing John to spend time with construction. John had a brother, with the name Bill, born in 1924.

Harold Chaplin "Pete" Fuller (Missoula '42)

Pete was born May 9, 1916, in South Dakota. When he registered for the draft in October of 1940 his listed residence was Sedgwick, KS. Pete served in the Army Air Force until his release in 1945. He re-upped in the Air Force in 1948 and made it a career retiring as a Senior Master Sergeant in 1965. His date of death is October 17, 1974, age 58, in San Bernadino, CA. He had three fire jumps during the 1942 season.

We can't connect this information to him being a smokejumper but is it the best we can do at this time.

Arthur M. Cochran (Missoula '42)

Art died October 3, 2008, In Grangeville, Idaho, at the Grangeville Health and Rehabilitation Center at age 93. He was born October 28, 1914, in

Johnson, Kansas. In his teens he moved to Kooskia, Idaho. He was a "pioneer" smokejumper jumping at Missoula from 1942-51. During the period from 1951-67 Art worked for the CIA until his retirement in 1967 when he and his wife moved to a small ranch near Hamilton, MT. In 1978 they moved to Stites, Idaho. He is buried at Tahoe Mountain Rest Cemetery at Kooskia, ID.

George Edward "Ike" Eichhorn (Missoula '42)

George was born June 25, 1922, in Ashland, Rosebud County, Montana. Before starting school, the family moved to Scobey, Montana, where he graduated from high school in 1940. He entered Montana State University and was a Missoula smokejumper in 1942 with at least two fire jumps. Ike enlisted in the Army Air Force as a private in November 1942 and was commissioned a Lieutenant in June 1944. He flew a fighter plane making many missions over enemy territory in Europe. He wrote home in early 1945 saying he had been across eastern and western German lines and observed Russians attacking in the east. His parents received a telegram in late March 1945 informing them that he had become Missing in Action over Germany on February 21. Ike survived the War and was discharged in November 1945.

Ike married in 1946 and moved to California, living in several locations. In 2017, his address was 3990 Gregory Lane, Loomis, CA.

Winsor Fernette (Missoula '42)

Winsor was born in Los Angeles, California, August 24, 1920. After graduating from Benjamin Franklin High School in LA in 1939, he developed an interest in forestry while serving as a Forest Ranger in the Los Angeles area. This led to him entering forestry school at the University of Montana in the fall of 1941 and smokejumping in 1942, 1946, 1949, and 1951. While at the University, Winsor was active on collegiate ski and swim teams.

He served in the Army from January 1943 to October 1945 where PFC Fernette was wounded in action in January of 1945. After release from the military, Winsor attended forestry school during the academic year and during the summers alternated between smokejumping and serving as an aerial observer on the Couer d' Alene NF until he earned his master's degree in forestry in 1953. In the spring of 1951, he was detailed to the New Mexico smokejumper crew, and he had over 25 career jumps.

Winsor began a career in forestry with the Bureau of Land Management in Portland, Oregon, in December 1953. He was promoted as their Coos

Bay District Forester in 1961 and, in 1963, transferred back to the Portland, Oregon, BLM State Office where he retired. Winsor died June 15, 1989, at the age of 69 in Clackamas, Oregon.

William Thomas Flink (Missoula '42)

Bill was born on March 8, 1921, in Missoula, Montana. He graduated from Missoula County High School and worked in a local laundry until becoming a smokejumper in the summer of 1942.

Bill joined the U.S Army in October 1942, earned his paratrooper wings in March 1943, and served as a member of the 508th Parachute Infantry in the European Theater making combat jumps in Europe.

He was released from the military in November 1945 and went into the laundry business in Warm Springs, Montana. He was active in local organizations, including serving as Montana president of the Fraternal Order of Elks. After retirement in the laundry business, Bill retired in Missoula where he died November 24, 1997, at age of 76.

Harold Chaplin “Pete” Fuller (Missoula '42)

Pete was born May 9, 1916, in South Dakota. When he registered for the draft in October of 1940 his listed residence was Sedgwick, KS. Pete served in the Army Air Force until his release in 1945. He re-upped in the Air Force in 1948 and made it a career retiring as a Senior Master Sergeant in 1965. His date of death is October 17, 1974, age 58, in San Bernadino, CA. He had three fire jumps during the 1942 season.

We can't connect this information to him being a smokejumper but is it the best we can do at this time.

Melvin L. “Smoke” Greene (Missoula '42)

Melvin “Smoke” Greene, Colonel, USAF (Ret.), died January 20, 2014, at age 95. He was born April 12, 1918, in Columbia Falls, MT. Smoke graduated from Talbott H.S. in Columbia Falls and worked for the Forest Service as a teenager in Montana. He started college at the School of Mines in Butte before joining the smokejumpers in 1942.

In 1943 he left college early to join the Army Air Corps. He was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant and trained as a Flight Engineer on the new B-29s flying from Guam in the Pacific. On his sixth mission in April 1945, his plane was hit by a kamikaze pilot over Nagoya, Japan. After parachuting from the plane, he was captured and spent the remainder of the war as a POW in Omori Prison near Tokyo. Smoke continued his military career retiring as a full colonel in 1972 after 29 years of service.

In 1986 his wife, Martha, died and he relocated from Austin to the Air Force Village in San Antonio where he lived for the next 22 years before moving back to Austin in 2008 where he later died of natural causes.

Howard M. Gropp (Missoula '42)

Howard died July 19, 1971, in Seattle, Washington. He from graduated high school in Clarkston, Washington, and worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps, Lockheed Aircraft and was a lookout on the Clearwater NF. He rookied at Missoula in 1942 and reportedly was the first person to use the “slotted Derry” chute on a fire jump. Howard got a single fire jump during the 1942 season and four in the 1946 season.

Howard then went into the Army Air Corps in WWII as a parachute instructor and later took part in the battle of Ie Shima as part of the Okinawa campaign. After the war he returned and jumped the 1946 season at Missoula and then attended Farragut College and Technical Institute. Howard then worked as a “body and fender” mechanic and lived in the Seattle area most of his later life.

William Frank Jones (Missoula '42)

Bill was born October 15, 1922, in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, where he attended school in nearby Martinsdale. He graduated from Great Falls High School. After a summer of smokejumping in Missoula in 1942, he served in the Navy during WWII. After serving, he began a career with the Federal Aviation Administration as a safety inspector. Bill was a VFW post commander and enjoyed flying. He died August 26, 1994, in White Sulphur Springs.

Charles Donald Leaphart (Missoula '42)

Don died in an auto accident near Aberdeen, Washington, on March 31, 1981, at the age of 58. He was born in Sheridan, Wyoming, on September 19, 1922. At a young age the family moved to Missoula where he graduated from high school.

Don began studies in forestry at MSU in Bozeman and, at age 19, he was employed as a smokejumper and made one fire jump before registering for the draft on June 30, 1942. He served as an Army Infantry Lieutenant in the European theater during WWII.

Upon his release from the Army, he returned to MSU where he was on the football team and a member of the Druids, an organization of upper-class forestry majors.

Following graduation, he went on to Yale University where he earned a Ph.D. in Plant Pathology. At the time of his death, he was employed at a plant pathologist for the USFS in Spokane, WA.

Thomas Carson Lepley (Missoula '42)

Tom died June 19, 1992, in Waukesha, Wisconsin, at the age of 77. He was born in Butler, Wisconsin, November 10, 1914. In 1940 he registered for the draft while he was a forestry student at the University in Missoula.

In 1942 he made one fire jump before being called to active duty with the Army. Tom was one of the US Army ski troopers and served eight months in the European theater before returning to Wisconsin to resume his life. He is buried at Wisconsin Memorial Park in Brookfield, Wisconsin.

Richard Ellis McClung (Missoula '42)

Richard was initially listed as MIA on January 10, 1944, in the Helena, MT. *Independent Record* and later listed as KIA on January 12, 1946. He was born August 30, 1917, in Cleveland, N.D. and later moved to Missoula. He was a student at Montana State University when he registered for the Draft on October 10, 1940, at the age of 23. During the summer of 1942, he signed on with the smokejumpers and made at least two fire jumps.

His military service combat organization was with the Montana US Navy Reserve at the rank of Ensign. From the *Missoulian* November 1942, "Cadet Richard E. McClung will graduate from the Navy Pre-Flight school this week and will report to the advanced school of navigation at Coral Gables, Florida, for primary flight training. On completion he will be commissioned and ensign in the naval reserve."

He received a posthumous Purple Heart and added to a monument to the missing KIA at Honolulu, Hawaii.

Robert William Meigs (Missoula '42)

Robert, age 74, died in Spokane, Washington, November 30, 1994. He was born in Spokane, WA, November 14, 1920, and received his education in Spokane. He was enrolled at MSU in Missoula at the beginning of WWII and was with the smokejumpers during the summer of 1942 and 1943 when he made at least two fire jumps during the '42 season. He registered for the draft on February 16, 1942, and went on active-duty April 10, 1944, serving in the U.S. Army until his discharge on March 17, 1946. Following completion of his education he returned to Spokane and taught at the Spokane Community College.

Milton “Walt” Millard (Missoula '42)

Walt was born January 21, 1920, in Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Marshall high school in Chicago and moved to Missoula, Montana, to attend the University of Montana graduating in forestry in 1944. He worked summers for the Forest Service, in 1941 on the Blister Rust program and in 1942 as a smokejumper. Walt served as sergeant in the U.S. Army after college and was discharged in 1946.

He then started a career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Redwood City, California, retiring in 1979. Upon retirement, he moved to San Diego, California, serving as an officer for numerous organizations, including the National Association of Retired Federal Employees. He died December 28, 1996, in San Diego.

Richard Norton Moffett (Missoula '42)

Richard Norton Moffett Sr. was born February 17, 1907, in East Kamiah, Idaho, on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation, the son of a noted Nez Perce Indian Presbyterian minister. Richard was seven-eighths Native American and a member of the Nez Perce Indian Tribe. He attended the Fort Lapwai Indian School on the Nez Perce Reservation. By 1930, he was working for the Forest Service as a laborer and in 1932 he married a fellow Nez Perce and they had ten children.

On May 20, 1942, Richard reported to the old CCC station at Nine Mile where he began smokejumper training and making training jumps at the nearby Six Mile airfield. Fellow trainees were Arild C. Nielsen, Roy Mattson, Karl Nussbacher, Earl Cooley, John J. Beck, and Richard McClung from Missoula, John Nash from Hamilton, and James Cochran from Kooskia, Idaho. The following month, he was assigned to the Moose Creek RD, Bitterroot NF.

In April 1944 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and after a short enlistment, was released in November 1945 based on family dependency. Richard died in Kamiah on October 12, 1982, at the age of 75. He is buried at the Nikesa Cemetery in Kamiah, Idaho.

John Edgar “Jack” Nash (Missoula '42)

Jack died December 20, 1990, at age 87 of natural causes in Missoula. He was born in Utica, Montana, on December 10, 1903. He was one of the pioneer smokejumpers in 1942 and had five fire jumps that summer. Jack enlisted in the US Navy January 19, 1943 and served as a parachute rigger. Following his discharge from the Navy on October 27, 1945, he returned to the Missoula smokejumpers in 1946 as master parachute

rigger, training countless others as riggers, until his retirement in 1969. For his lifetime of service Jack received the USDA Superior Service Award in 1967, the Montana Jefferson Award in 1986, the Senior Citizen of Montana Award and the Boy Scout Silver Beaver Award. He is buried at Sunset Memorial Gardens in Missoula.

Paul A. Nicholas (Missoula '42)

Paul, 98, died October 5, 2019. He was the oldest living smokejumper at that time. Paul, who was born in Kansas, 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 and became certified to fly the PT-17 Steadman, BT-13A Vultee, AT-6, and the B-25 aircraft. Paul was a veteran of WWII and Korea and flew with the Air Rescue Service. During his time in the Air Force, he specialized in logistics and, among other areas, worked on the F-16 fighter jet program in equipment guidance. Nicholas also helped in the development of aircraft simulators.

He retired as a Major in 1964 after 20 years of service during which time he completed in 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 a smokejumper. It was a special time in his life, and I believe it formed his future careers in the Air Force.

Arild Christian Nielsen (Missoula '42)

Arild was born May 1, 1922, in Williston, North Dakota. He attended school in Williston until about 1937 when the family moved to Missoula, Montana. He graduated from Missoula County High School where he was on the high school boxing team in the 145-pound weight division. After high school he attended the University of Montana for two years working summers as a Forest Service lookout and in 1942 as a Missoula smokejumper, making at least three fire jumps.

After smokejumping, Arild enlisted in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper and in March 1944, he graduated from the Army Air Forces advanced flying school as a second lieutenant. He married in August 1944 and continued serving in the military while he and his wife had three children. He flew in the Pacific theater of operations in WWII and in the Korean Conflict.

Contact with Arild was lost on May 26, 1951, when the F-82 he was flying disappeared in North Korea while flying a weather reconnaissance mission 20 miles north of the 38th parallel. In July 1951, he was officially listed as

Missing in Action and in July 1954, he was reported as “presumed dead” when a returned prisoner of war from communist North Korea reported that “Captain Nielsen died while a prisoner of the Reds.” Arild’s remains were never recovered.

His name is inscribed on the Courts of the Missing at the Honolulu, Hawaii Memorial, at the National Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and at the Korean War Memorial in Missoula, Montana. Arild was awarded the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Purple Heart, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and the Korean War Service Medal.

Eugene Lee Pitts (Missoula '42)

Gene, 90, died Feb. 18, 2011, in Ronan, Montana. He was born April 9, 1920, in Spokane, Washington and was a registered member of the Salish Tribe at Flathead Reservation. After an outstanding track and field career at Hot Springs High School, he attended the University of Wisconsin on a track scholarship after sending newspaper clippings from his races to Wisconsin.

Gene joined the U.S. Navy Flight Program in 1942, training at Missoula County Airport while attending the University of Montana. He shipped out for World War II combat in the South Pacific, flying a Gull Wing F-4U Corsair. Gene became a squadron leader in Guadalcanal and was shot down during his second year of combat fighting.

Following the war Gene operated the Pitts Lumber Sawmill in Camas Prairie, Montana, until moving and expanding the operation in Ravalli in 1951. After the mill burned in the early 1960s, he developed a registered Polled Hereford cattle ranch in Dixon, Montana. He became the director of the CSKT Community Action Program several years later, and finally as postmaster in Dixon before retiring in 1990. Gene returned to ranching and joined the Mission Valley Power Board, retiring for good at age 85.

He jumped at Missoula in 1942, training at Nine Mile Base, one of the first jumpers to do so. As a freshman at the University of Wisconsin, Gene was the school’s top runner in the 880 and won the famous Turkey Cross Country race, breaking the record by 23 seconds. He also served as the pace runner for teammate Walter Mehl in his 1941 bid to break the world record in the mile. He is buried at Sunset Memorial Gardens in Missoula.

Thomas Joseph Poole (Missoula '42)

Tom, at age 75, died of natural causes in Missoula, Montana, on April 27, 1999. He was born in Helena, Montana, on December 25, 1923, and later the family moved to Missoula where Tom grew up and was educated.

He graduated from high school at Gonzaga in Spokane and at age 18 he trained with the smokejumpers in 1942, making two fire jumps that summer. He also enlisted for the draft that summer and joined the US Navy.

Following his discharge in 1947, Tom did an apprenticeship in carpentry and then began his own contracting business in Missoula. Over the years and until his retirement he built or remodeled many Missoula homes. He was actively involved in his church and is buried at St. Mary's Cemetery in Missoula.

Harold Russell "Dick" Richards Jr. (Missoula '42)

Dick, 82, passed away April 8, 2003. He graduated from Libby High and attended Antioch College Ohio and the University of Montana.

Dick jumped the 1942 season before entering the Army Air Corps where he was a B-25 co-pilot stationed in the Philippines and was eyewitness to the dropping of the A-bomb over Hiroshima.

He settled in Portland, Oregon after the war and was employed by United Airlines. Dick worked for the FAA for many years retiring from that organization and living in Oceanside, California until his death.

Donald Everette Rodgers (Missoula '42)

Don, age 86, died March 29, 2009, at Yorba Linda, California. He was born September 2, 1922, in Greybull, Wyoming, and graduated high school there before enrolling at Montana State University in Missoula where he was a forestry major.

Don enlisted in the US Navy as LtJG on October 10, 1942 and served in the Pacific theater until his discharge on February 20, 1946. Don resumed his studies at MSU and graduated in 1948. He worked as a land surveyor and is buried at Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, California.

Benjamin Alexander Skillman (Missoula '42)

Ben was born in Livingston, Montana, on March 24, 1913. His education ended after grammar school and by 1940, he was working for the Northern Pacific Railroad. He was a smokejumper in 1942 and enlisted in the Army September 21, 1942, two weeks after making his last fire jump.

Ben lived in various cities in Montana his entire life except for his short hitch in the Army, working primarily for lumber companies as a foreman. He died in Broadwater, Montana on January 26, 1991.

Henry Michael “Mickey” Smith Jr. (Missoula '42)

Mickey was born August 20, 1921, in Missoula, Montana. He was an avid baseball player and skier. He played third base for Missoula's first American Legion junior championship team in 1938.

After graduating from high school in Missoula, he worked for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service at Fort Missoula and attended the University of Montana, enrolling in the Civilian Pilot Training program.

Mickey was a smokejumper in Missoula the summer of 1942 and in February 1943, enlisted in the U.S. Navy. In 1944 he earned his wings from the Naval Air Training Center in Corpus Christi, Texas. In 1945, he was stationed at Patuxent River, Maryland, and the following year with the Army Air Force in China.

After military service, Mickey moved to California, living there until his death in San Jose, CA on September 24, 2000.

Marshall Eugene Spencer (Missoula '42)

Marshall died May 29, 2010, in Hamilton, Montana, from bladder cancer. He was born March 6, 1921, in Twin Falls, Idaho. He lived near Filer, Idaho, and graduated from Filer High School in 1939. Marshall jumped at Missoula during the 1942 season making nine training and three fire jumps while being stationed at Seeley Lake.

He graduated from the University of Idaho Forestry School in 1943 and went to Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Marshall landed at Omaha Beach as a replacement officer shortly after D-Day and was in combat in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. He was seriously wounded in October of 1944 and spent 19 months of hospitalization and was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

After the war he worked for the USFS in Region 1 for 18 years and transferred to Madison, Wis. and Washington, D.C. His last assignment was in Berkeley, Calif., as assistant director at the Pacific Forest and Range Experiment Station. He retired in 1977, after 35 years of service and moved back to Montana in 1978.

He was active throughout his life and belonged to many organizations. In 1991 he was chosen Man of the Year for Region 6 and received the award at a special ceremony where he was presented with a plaque by the governor.

His further education consisted of a two-year course in real estate at the Diablo Valley College, Labor Management School at the University of San Francisco College, and previous programs sponsored by the U.S Forest Service. In 1999, he was invited to Kerkrade, Netherlands in remembrance of his help in liberating Limberg.

Edgar L. Thorsrud (Missoula '42)

NSA Life Member, Ed died March 27, 2007, at Finley Point, Montana. He was born in Watford City, North Dakota, on August 5, 1922. Ed moved to Missoula in 1927 with his family and attended Missoula County High School where he competed in alpine and Nordic skiing.

After his rookie year, in which he had at least one fire jump, he joined the Army Air Corps and flew troops and cargo from the England to the Continent.

Following the war, Ed flew for the Johnson Flying Service delivering cargo, smokejumpers and firefighters to fires throughout the west. In the mid '50s, he invested in his own retardant aircraft and worked for many years in that business. Eventually Ed moved to Finley Point full time, settling into one of the many homes he and son, Lloyd, built in their years working together.

Donald Oliver Whitmarsh (Missoula '42)

Don, 88, died in Edmonds, Washington, on December 2, 2009. He was born January 3, 1921. Don was attending Montana State University in Missoula when he signed on as a jumper for the 1942 season. He was called to active duty on October 10, 1942, and served in the US Army stationed in the Aleutians until his discharge on December 5, 1945. After his discharge at the end of the war, he returned to smokejumping for the 1946-48 season.

Don was injured while working as a faller in Montana and moved to Washington where he worked on his parent's farm and various family businesses. He is buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Renton, Washington.

