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Wally Wasser diary on United States - Russia aerial firefighting exchange, summer 1997

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Wally Wasser

Diary
US–Russian Exchange
Summer 1997

5-17 Departure Day

Woke up at 5:30 to finish last of the packing. Finally got everything closed up into one pack out bag and one carry on P.G. bag. Mike Niccoli took me to the base at 6:15. First thing I did was weigh my bag and to my dismay it weighed 85lbs. 15lbs too heavy. I trimmed down some more stuff then put excess in P.G. Bag. P.G. bag is pretty heavy now. I think when I get rid of some trinkets I'll be alright. Plane left on time at 8:30 for Minneapolis. My cousin lives there and she and her 6 kids and husband came over for a visit. The layover was 3 hours so we had time to talk. The next leg of our trip was a 747 to Amsterdam ON KLM airlines. We left on time at 3:30 PM and enjoyed a pleasant Flight.

5-18 We arrived in Amsterdam at 7:00 AM. Our next flight was at 10:00 AM; It was on time and arrived at Moscow at 2:30 PM. We were met at the airport by Sasha and a driver of a Van. Sasha Spoke pretty good english and was good Company.

We had to stand in line to go through immigrations. It took about a half hour and by that time our bags were ready to be picked up. It only took a couple of minutes to go through customs as they x-rayed our bags and we were done. Next we had to go into Moscow to pick up our tickets to KRASNORSK. It was an hour drive that was on the verge of being terrifying. Russians drive very fast and take every chance they can to pass and get ahead. We were either flying down the highways or stuck in bumper to bumper traffic. After picking up our tickets we had a couple of hours to kill before we had to head back to the airport. Sasha took us over to Red square so we could take some pictures and do some sight seeing. It was time to eat so after getting some directions ^{Sasha} started leading us to a restaurant. It turned out to be McDonalds. Our 1st meal in Russia was a Big Mac. It might have been a welcome change in a couple of weeks but now it was a little disappointing not to have Russian food. It was now time to head back to the airport. After another adventurous ride in the van that by the way didn't have any seat belts, we arrived at the airport. We were 2 hours early so had

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plenty of time to get checked in. We exchanged some money at 6.06 to 1, the going rate. The new ruble is different from the old Rubles as they have dropped 3 decimal places. 1000 old Rubles are the same as 1 new Ruble. We checked our bags and found out that between the 3 of us we were quite a bit overweight. It cost about \$110 to cover the extra weight. At 9:30 PM we boarded our plane for a 4 hour and 4 time changes to Krasneorsk.

5-19 We arrived at Krasneorsk at 6:30 AM on Tuesday. It had taken 2 days and 18 hours of actual flying to get here. We are now 14 hours ahead of Boise time. Bruce met us at the airport with a driver and took us into town. It was another Mr Toad's wild ride taking advantage of every opportunity to pass all the way into town. The drivers are very good and it is very exciting to take chances and drive fast. Acts of passing cars in the center lane that would seem fool hearty in the states were the norm here. They must not give out many tickets here cause their driving at times seems down right wreckless. And they seem to take great pride in how fast they arrive at places.

We were initially going to stop at the store first but it didn't open till 10 so we went to the "Hotel". It was similar to the barracks at Ft. Wainwright. Lunch was at 1:00 so we slept till then. After lunch we went to the Smokejumper base to meet some of the chiefs. This is the main office for the Region and only the big wigs work here. A lot of them wear a Suit and Tie and work in offices. Hung out the rest of the day with them then went to the store to buy supplies for dinner and breakfast. The selection was small but got everything we needed. Back at the hotel I was really starting to drag. With only a few hours sleep in the past couple of days I was feeling the effects of some pretty serious Jet lag. I could have fallen asleep right then but it was not to be. 1st we had to be properly welcomed by one of our hosts, Victor, into drinking Vodka. Fortunately he had a couple of late nights the past two nights and was almost as tired as us. So after a couple of bottles of vodka, small, some toasts, we were free to call it a night. My ^{inner} mental clock is in a spin right now. I woke up at 3 AM and didn't get much ^{sleep} after ~~rest~~ that. y

5-20 Krasnojarsk is a pretty bleak looking city. It doesn't help that it's been cloudy, windy, and cold. Greenup hasn't occurred yet so the trees are still bare. At the base today we met up with Victor, Sasha, and Yev Gaiy, Started out with repelling. It seemed like a pretty simple operation. We spent about an hour going over the equipment then moved on to parachute packing. I've always considered myself some sort of expert on parachute packing and didn't anticipate any problems. ^{The} Lesnic II parachute system turned out to be a bigger challenge than I ~~was~~ anticipated. It's different than any other parachute I've ever packed. I know I'm not used to it but I still think there is an easier way to pack it than the way they do it. They gave us our ~~their~~ Jump suits and we practiced packing the remainder of the day. I was still in serious jet lag mode so after dinner and drinking a beer I was done. They have been providing lunch for us at the hotel we're staying at but for breakfast and dinner we're on our own. Everyone pitches in some money we go to the store for supplies.

521 Work started today at 9:00. We walked the 5 minutes or so that it takes. We started out rigging our parachutes again. Sasha was our instructor. He's a good teacher but unfortunately he steps in too often to help. Rather than let us fumble through it he often does it for us.

After we rigged our chutes up we were issued some equipment. We got a camouflage pants and wind breaker type jacket. We got a heavy coat that was really nice. I hope I can keep mine. We got our sleeping bags with an inner sheet. The left foreman gave us these leather caps that were really nice. It was strictly for a Souverein with no work purpose. After this we went up and rigged one more time. One of the more difficult parts of rigging is attaching the clip for the AAD, Drogue release, and the two side Flaps. IT is very easy to lose control and have it all come apart. Mike kept fumbling and Sasha kept stepping in to help. Every smoke jumper must pack his own parachute. Each parachute and AAD are logged into a log book.

After we finished rigging we went back to the Hotel for lunch. We were served Liver and Gravy, over mashed potatoes, Borsh Soup, and cold eggs served as a kind of tasteless quiche. There are two cats that roam the dining area. Let me tell you this, they had their fill of liver and cold eggs. This place is a great way to go on a diet.

After lunch Yevgany picked us up and took us to downtown Krasnoyarsk to register our visa. For some reason a tourist is required to register with the local authorities within 3 days of arrival. It was another Grand Prix driving experience and at times down right terrifying. Krasnoyarsk is a large city where everyone lives in apartments. There are row after row of run down looking apartments. There are several abandoned buildings that were just old or other buildings that were never finished. There seems to be a lot of stray dogs around town. After we got back from town we went to the aerial fire center and trained on packing reserves. All jumpers not only pack their main parachute but also pack their reserve.

Sasha demonstrated packing the reserve on the floor. It was interesting to watch him pack it in a relatively small area. After he packed it we were done for the day and tomorrow we would pack our own. We dropped some stuff off at the Hotel then walked into Town to buy some groceries. We stopped at a couple of different market places and bought juice, salami, cheese, bread, beer, wine, and fruit. It was probably a mile and a half walk but we were not in any hurry. We got paid today in rubles. They paid each of us 1000 rubles in a pack of 100 10's. This was unexpected but fun to get a bunch of cash. It is worth about \$170 * american. We also had just exchanged \$100 for rubles. ^{We were} ~~Loaded~~

5-22 Got up early today. Mike and I went for a run along the Yenisei River. It's a huge river about the size of the Columbia. There are several small garden plots where they grow potatoes along the path. Today was a drizzly rainy day. In the past few days we have not seen much sun. At work I got my new Russian Boots. It will be interesting to try them out. If they don't work out * the exchange rate was 6.05 to 1 8.

I still have my whites to fall back on. We rigged up our mains one last time AND got them ready to jump. Sasha rigged up all the reserves so I guess we won't be rigging our own. I think everyone is happy about that. We had the afternoon off in preparation for a party later on. Tony, Mike and myself walked to the store and picked up a few things. When Victor came over that 1st night it was pretty low keyed with vodka, some snacks, and some toasts. We were kind of expecting the same so we bought a couple of bottles of vodka, some tomatoes, and cucumbers. On the way home we stopped at the base and sent a couple of EMAILS. Andre' runs the computer department and is very grasious about us using his computer. He has to stop work to do this and I don't like to inconvenience him too much. I'll try to keep my Emails short and not send them too often. We put our valables in the "Safe" for the weekend. After seeing their Safe we were definately having some 2nd thoughts about leaving our money and plane tickets there. It wasn't much more than a locked cabinet. The 1st thing they did was pull out a big bag 9

of pine nuts to make room for us.

At 5:00 Niccoli and his staff showed up for the party. We went downstairs in the dining hall of our Hotel and Holy Toledo it turned out to be a banquet. There was so much Food and all in a gourmet setting.

There was Fruit, Smoked Salmon, Ham, Roast beef, Breads, Cheese, Trout, mineral water, and Vodka. We ate, drank beer, and then Drank vodka. Many toasts. It was quite a feast. After we ate we went with Yev Gairy to some airport that we were to jump at in the morning. It was 60 miles away but I slept most of the way in my Drunken stupor, Tony and Mike were pretty wasted also. For some reason they jump with the local Skydivers. We stayed in these small box shaped barracks. It was pretty rustic. Mike and I went to bed as soon as we got there.

5-23 Got up, went for a run, then had breakfast. It was pretty breezy and stayed that way throughout the day. We trained on mockups and the Russian Malfunctions. They do a spread eagle exit out of these Huge Biplanes. The plane carries squads of 5 and can do as many as 5 man sticks. Their emergency procedures are different

From ours as they pull their drouge release handle with either hand. To cut away they place left hand on clutch, right hand on reserve handle; then pull cutaway followed immediately by reserve. The extent of our "Tower" training was to hang in a harness and pull the handles. They let us do it twice and that was it. It ended up being too windy to jump this day. Sasha took care of us all weekend when it came to feeding us. He would come in and cook us lunch and in the evening barbequed us some excellent shishka bob. Sasha is a very interesting dude. Like so many other Russians he's got several gold teeth. Most Russians when they smile they have a mouth full of gold. It is more unusual to see someone without gold teeth than someone with gold teeth. On 1st impression Sasha comes off as a serious no nonsense person. He reminds you of a school yard bully. He is very uncomfortable to be around us alone. Afraid that we will ask him something and he can't understand us. After spending some time with us he started to loosen up. To get him to laugh or smile was quite an effort but worth it. Sasha asked us if we wanted

to take a sauna. Tony and I did but Mike was already in Bed. So we took a Sauna Russian style. First you get undressed and sit in a Hot and I mean Hot Sauna. There was Tony, Sasha, a skydiver dude, and myself in the sauna. After a short time you build up a sweat then go out of the sauna into a cool room. Cool off a bit then go back in but this time you lay down on your stomach and Sasha Slaps you with twigs. They are small branches with dried up leaves and its kind of a massage only He slaps your back and legs with them. Its pretty weird to be in a sauna undressed while another jumper also naked, slaps you with twigs. Thats Russia for you, I slept pretty good that night.

5-24 Woke up to a beautiful sunny morning with a slight Siberian breeze. Sasha was making sure we were up by 7:00 AM. At 7:30 we were at the plane ready to do some jumping. The 1st task was to go up in the plane and observe how exits are done. Then come down in the plane and watch them ~~jump~~ ^{land}. Then it was our turn. We ended up making 9 jumps this day. 9 jumps was quite a work out. 15

There are some major differences on how they operate. 1st the equipment. We didn't use jumpsuits, gloves or helmets. We wore a leather hat similar to what skydivers wear. long sleeve shirt, pants, and boots was the dress for the day. The spotter, or pilot observer, sits in the right seat and does all the spotting. The secondary spotter is back by the door. After take off the 2nd spotter hooks up all the static lines. He tells everyone how many jumpers to a stick. These planes held 10 jumpers with a mix of squares and rounds. Jump Altitude was 3000 meters. The 2nd spotter would make a gesture to let us know when we were on final. The Lead spotter would give the signal to jump. 1st buzzer meant open the door and the 1st jumper would get in the door. 2nd buzzer meant the 2nd spotter would slap the jumper and he would be followed by the rest of the jumpers in his stick all getting a slap before they jumped. It was a spread eagle exit followed by a 4 count. My parachute always opened in a sniffling fashion. Their harness is actually a seat harness and after you open you pull it under your butt. If you

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don't then you are being suspended by your crotch which Mike found out. He must of missed that part in the translation cause he was dangling from his harness with his chest strap in his throat. On his next jump Yeu Gary explained that during his drogue ride pull it under his seat. That seemed to work well and I did the same. We did our own packing for the 1st 3 or 4 jumps then the Russian jumpers meritfully packed the rest of the day. we made 6 jumps, ate lunch, then did 3 more. After jumping we packed up and drove back to Krasnojarsk. Since I was asleep most of the way over it was nice to see some of the country. Unfortunately it was another terrifying ride passing cars Grand Prix style. We got back to the Hotel safe enough, drank a couple of beers, and called it a day.

5-25 Today is Mike's B-DAY. We went down to the Clinic today to get shots for the Tick virus that causes encephalitis. It was pretty CAOTIC at 1st cause no one could agree on how much we should get. In the end Tony got 1 shot and Mike and I got 2 shots and I mean in the end.

Shot us up right in the Butt. After Lunch we gathered up gear and got ready to go to another Base. I think we will be leaving in a couple of days. Got a bunch of email today. That was fun. I've been wearing the Russian Boots and although they don't have the support of Whites type Boots they are comfortable like a pair of chicken skins. Today was a nice sunny day and things are starting to green up. We went out with Mike to celebrate his B-day. Stopped and got some Shish Kabobs for dinner then picked up some beer and champagne for when we got home. One last note here, I found that to start a conversation with the Russians all I had to do was ask them how to say something in Russian. In other words I would point to something such as a shoe and ask "Kak Paroskie". They know the answers to these questions so they would open up and talk some to us. Otherwise we would be ignored a lot. Tony talked to them and had a conversation with them on a simple level. Without Tony it would have been pretty difficult to get around. We all wish Bruce was here to help. I have a lot of questions to ask and its pretty laborous for Tony to translate.

5-26 Today we went to the units and did some Repell let downs. It is a simple system that uses a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch rope with 3 repell devices. I believe they do 3 man sticks cause that is what we did. The 1st guy carries the rope then the spotter hooks up all 3 guys to a tether then drops the rope out the door. One at a time the repeller hooks up to his let down device then the spotter unhook the tether. After the 1st repeller hits the ground he unhook then the 2nd repeller comes down followed by the 3rd. Having never repelled before it brought on a new respect for me towards repellers.

After lunch we dropped off some stuff at the base and started packing our stuff up in preparation of leaving tomorrow. After that we headed into town by bus. It was quite an experience for us as this was our 1st trip by public transportation. The bus service is excellent as they have lots of them and it only cost 2 Rubles or about 35¢. You pay when you get off the bus and we got off somewhere in the center of town. It was fun to sightsee and check out all the shops and stuff. One thing I noticed

was there are very few bicycles and the ones you did see were ridden by kids. We saw a lot of roller blades on kids but no skate boards. Russian people are very trim and tall. The women are beautiful and well dressed. You see a lot of leather both on men and women. It was a warm day today and I was pretty warm in a T-shirt yet people were bundled up in long sleeves and coats. And you never see any one wearing shorts. Some women will wear very short skirts and high heels. They look great with their long legs. In the past week it has really greened up and with the sun out Krasno doesn't look so bad. Even though Krasno has 1 million people there are still lots of woods with many trails through them. It's great for running and would be for biking also if there were any. On the way home we stopped for shish kabob and beer. For a bout \$5 you can get 2 shish kabobs Bread and a beer. It's a pretty good meal. It's hard to find cold beer. The beer is pretty good when it's ~~not~~ warm but is much better cold. Sometimes when I get home I'll stick it in the freezer for 40 minutes. OTLEECHNA!!

5-27 Got up and went for a run. The woods here have trails every where. The running is great. This morning we finished packing and headed South. With ~~all~~ the stops it turned out to be a 9 hour drive. Saw some nice country thought one of the things we saw that seems strange is that there are no farm houses or rural houses any where. You can drive for mile after mile with big fields on both sides and you will see no houses what so ever. Then all of a sudden there will be a city with apartment complexes everywhere. Then nearby there will be the small dachas with their gardens. Its really pretty bizarre. Most Russians live in apartments. We stopped a couple of times to eat. It seems like shishka BOBS are the main food along the highways. Every so often someone will set up a shishka bob stand and also have soft drinks. When we got to WYWEHCKOW we checked into a hotel. It wasn't ^{too} bad as we all got single rooms with our own bathroom and color T.V. A couple of more notes of interest. In the morning everyone shakes hands. Not only with us but with each other. Also you don't see very many long haired males. Maybe one in a hundred.

5-28 Today we did repel training from a Helicopter. Tony, Mike, and Myself made 4 repels. The system is very simple and doesn't take any rocket scientist to figure it out. It was fun also. From the airport you could see a couple of fires burning. They sent out a couple of groups to work on them. They told us we would be jumping in and reinforcing a fire tomorrow. We had lunch and Dinner at the hotel. The food is great and by far better than the food at our hotel in Krasnojarsk. In the evening we went to a museum where Lenin was exiled. WYWNHCKOE is a nice looking town. The weather is warm and dry. It feels like fire season.

5-29 Today we woke up to Smokey Skies. Its very hazy out and it must be from the fires. YevGaly took some videos of the fire yesterday and showed them to us last night. They really ripped. We drove out to the airport and got our staff ready to jump a fire. We were waiting for another person to show up to go with us. When Sergie did show up he didn't have his parachute so now we instantly became repellers. This was disappointing as we wanted to jump.

This will be our 1st Fire repell so at least that is something. They repell here as easy as we helitack in the states. The plan was to dump our cargo at camp and repell next to the fire. And thats what we did. We dumped our cargo off which had our P.G. bags including water off and went to the fire. At the fire we were there without water, food, gloves, hard hat, or P.G. Bags. We had a few tools but that was it. My #70 water filter was at camp so we were forced to drink out of the creeks like the Russians. The Russians don't carry any canteens or P.G. with them either. They don't seem to need to drink much water. We only did a burn out on this fire. This was the early fire season here. The grass from last year was burning. The main food here seems to be potatoes, rice, canned meat Bread, and Tea. Lots of Tea with sugar and canned condensed milk. Its great to work on our Russian with the Russian Jumpers. We've been grilling them for hours on how to say stuff. Its hard to remember but its coming slow but Sure.

5-30 Woke up to rain and it rained all day. We didn't even go out on the line today. The night before a couple

of CAT Drivers stopped by camp. One guy, Niccoli, had never met an American before. He was a very friendly guy. About mid morning today I was in my tent when I heard someone calling my name. I came out and here comes Niccoli with about 15 kids in their late teens. They were all happy to see the Americans. We visited with them for a while and then they invited us back to their camp for Tea and a Sauna. It turns out that these kids come from a Tech School and are out here planting trees for 2 weeks. We went back to their camp and visited with them. It was damp outside but the temperature was pleasant. But they kept wanting us to go in their Trailers. There was a boys trailer and a girls trailer. Each had several large beds in them. Russians don't seem to need as much space as Americans do. The boys trailer was especially hot inside. It must have been 130° in there. It was a relief to go outside. Their sauna was a log framed trailer on wheels. It was very nice. They served us a large meal with bread, salad, soup, and tea. The salad was made out of this wild plant called chirvin sha. It is kind of gahliky. We took several pictures and they

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Took several pictures with us. We started back to camp. When the Helicopter came by, the fire boss rides in the Helicopter and stays in town. He comes out every day and decides how long we will be on the fire and what he wants us to do. They landed in a meadow next to us and gave us a ride back to camp. Sasha had a radio so he could talk to them. The radios here are pretty bulky and Tony ended up with one. Back at camp Sergie #1 had arrived with fresh food and some summengone, moonshine. This was my 1st taste of moonshine and we had about 2 litres for the 9 of us in camp. The party lasted till after midnight and all the moonshine was gone. I often talk to Sergie #1 and all he does is smile cause he doesn't know what I'm saying. Sergie #2 understands quite a bit of English and looks like a small Bruce Lee. I've been getting some great Russian lessons since I've been in camp. It's great to actually live with the native people and see how they do things. The ticks are out in force. We've found several so far. I'm really glad we got the shots when we did. I talked to the native jumpers and they have gotten the shots also. Although we're learning a lot of Russian, 22

It's still very hard to hold any kind of conversation with them. It's like one big game of SHERADES.

5-31 This morning the rain quit and there was some fog. After getting up about 8:00 AM we ate breakfast then headed to the line. We dug about 300 meters of line with shovels and axes, 1st thing we did was build handles for the shovels. We cut line that was similar to building line in Tundra. It was interesting to see how they cut lines with shovels. We finished cutting line and headed back to camp. It was now about 2:00 PM and Sergie had lunch waiting for us. He made borsch soup. It was really good. It had beets, potatoes, meat, and onions in it. We were done for the day and hung out in camp napping and doing more Russian lessons. I would recommend that anyone doing the Russian trip should go as native as possible. Mike and I used our own tents, socks, underwear, T-shirts. I've tried to do everything the Russians did.

5-1 I woke up this morning at 3:30 AM and discovered a tick on my crotch. I didn't have a flashlight and it was dark. I had to decide whether to wait till morning or find someone to remove it. I ended up going to Tony's tent.

After Tony removed the tick I went back to my tent and tried to sleep. I kept thinking about the ticks and how they carry the encephalitis disease. Mike had one buried in his shoulder the previous night and Tony had one bite him the next day. We were all glad we got our shots. About midmorning we went to the fire and checked it out. The helicopter came by and told us to pack up. We demobed into EPMAKOBCKOE and checked into a hotel. Mike got a room by himself and Tony and I doubled up. We went back to the base and took a Sauna. The Russians were very hospitable and provide us with towels, soap, and shampoo. We went to a restaurant and had dinner then Yura took us back to our hotel. Yura was our babysitter and wouldn't let us travel outside of our hotel alone. So Mike and I went out with Yura in search of Beer. We went to several little markets but had a hard time finding any Russian Beer. Russian beer is pretty good and inexpensive. We finally found some and took it back to our hotel. After awhile Yura came by with his wife. He was going back to the base so Tony and I went with him. The driver lived near by and invited us over to his house. We caught his wife off guard so we looked at their garden while she went inside and put on a dress.

We looked at pictures, drank coffee, and ate cookies in their nicely kept house. It was a duplex and like all Russian houses they had a very nice garden. It was nice to be able to see how the Russians live. Their next door neighbor is Victor, one of the Russian exchange jumpers in McCall.

6-2 We went to the base this morning and had Breakfast at a local Restaurant. Back at the base everyone seemed like they were there and the day was spent airing out and Drying sleeping bags. By lunch time the Moonshine was out and we had a couple of drinks. This was kind of like an R & R day and they weren't too concerned about the drinking. At 5:00 Sergie, Bruce Lee, Came back to the base and fixed us Dinner. After Dinner he showed us the house he was building and then we went over to his house. He lives in a small 2 room house behind his parents house. Sergie is very oriental looking but his parents don't look that oriental at all. His wife is very blonde and white. We had a glass of birch juice. It was kind of hot out but the birch juice was cold and very refreshing. Like all the other Russians they have a garden and there's was quite impressive. They grow mostly potatoes, tomatoes,

Onions, Cucumbers, and Radishes. After Tea and cookies we went back to the Hotel.

6-3. We packed up our stuff in preparation of staying at the jumper base. We were given the choice of being repellens or jumpers today and of course we chose jumping. There was a patrol flight scheduled for 11:00 AM and by the time we got there it must have been 12:30 PM. Talk about a slow get away, Sergie and Sasha had to pack their parachutes before we could leave plus the other endless chores that had to be done. Before you can jump they have to take your pulse. It needs to be under 86 beats per min. That applies to repelling also. The patrol flight finally left at 1:15 and after 2 hours I was wishing I had not drank that last Pepsi. I was getting pretty uncomfortable when we found a fine to jump. We were patrolling in just our boots, pants, and T-shirts. There are no seat belts, gloves, or helmets. When we got the call to jump we were given the option of jumpsuits or not in which we declined cause we were jumping in a large field. Sergie only wore a leather hat and short sleeve shirt and sweatpants. We pulled our parachutes out of the bag and got dressed. Sasha pointed out the jump

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spot where we were going to land. The spotter sits up front and when its almost time to toss the streamer he blows a short horn followed by a long horn to toss the streamer. The jumpers do not look out the window at the streamer. Sergie jumped by himself then Myself, Tony, and Mike jumped on the next stick in that order. I watched Sergie let the a.a.d pull for him so I did the same. Its nice to be able to just work on your drogue fall and keep stable for when your chute opens. They do a spread Eagle exit which is fine but I don't see an advantage over the military exit. Another thing of interest is that they don't jump with any water. It was warm out and it was very nice to have water with us. Our P.G. bags are cargoed in. After everyone was on the ground we made camp and got something to eat. We then went to the fire and burned out to the closet road. That done we went back to camp and Sergie had dinner ready for us. That night it rained Really hard and the wind blew pretty good. We got our water from this moss covered pond with cattle tracks all around. I was really glad to have a water purifier now.

6-4 The helicopter showed up about 1:30 this Afternoon. It took us back to town and after dropping our stuff off we went to the hotel. Mike and I went for a run and Anatoli went with us. Anatoli only had his street clothes but kept up for a while. He was our chaperone for the evening. Wherever we went he went. We got some beer and went back to the Base for a sauna. Right after that Bruce showed up with the long anticipated EMAIL. It was also his birthday but you would have thought it was mine the way I was putting away the piva and vodka. About 10:30pm, Mike, Anatoli, and myself staggered back to the Hotel.

6-5 I Woke up this morning at 6:00 to a mild Hangover. Bad enough to take some asprin. My clothes were still wet from the washing I gave them the day before. It took a while to pack as I was moving rather slow. At the base we found out that we were going to Repel a large fire. With all the rain it was pretty quiet and they wanted the edge mopped up. So After an hour Helicopter ride and my hangover in full swing we got to the fire. They repel fires here as easily as landing. Sasha was our leader.

Sergie is our Cook. He does an excellent job in keeping us fed. This was Bruce's 1st fire for the trip. We went on the line at 5:00pm and cold Trained till 10:00pm. Sergie had Dinner for us and I went to Bed at 11:30pm.

6-6 It got cold last night. It was hard to keep warm even with their heavy sleeping Bags. The sun came up this morning and warmed up the inside of my tent. I worked on my Russian cuss words with Bruce and Sergie along with other vocabulary. The Russians really get a kick out of me saying ZIE BEASE. Whenever they see me they say "KAK DILLA" and I say "ZIE BEASE". Then they all laugh. Its Fun for them so I play along. On the other hand Sergie II will say "Oh really" and we all get a kick out of that and laugh. I guess we're easily entertained. The helicopter came in tonight at 8:00pm. and picked us up. It then dropped us off in a large meadow so it could pick up a couple of other groups in a tight spot. It came back and got us and everyone went back to ЕРМАКОВСКОЕ and I believe with all the pilots, passengers, and firefighters there were 20 people on that ship. When we got into town the kids came running out to meet the Helicopter again.

ZHENE said they were future firefighters and that is what he used to do. I passed out pins to all the kids there. It was nice to be back in town again away from all the Ticks. Mike and Tony each took a hit in our camp. Tony had a tick buried in his arm and Mike got one in his crotch. That one was really buried.

6-7 Today is a Russian Religious Holiday. We went to the base and packed our parachutes in the morning. In the afternoon we went to the Base managers house for dinner. We got there after one pm. and stayed till 11:00 pm. The dinner was quite impressive with a large variety of Russian dishes. We drank Vodka all day then drank moonshine that evening. It was quite a feast.

6-8 They sent two groups out today. We decided to split up and Mike won the coin toss and went out with Bruce. Tony and I hung out today. Tony was a bit hung over so he didn't seem to mind. We heard there was no jump spot so they repelled. Tomorrow will be our turn.

6-9 & 10 & 11 In the afternoon we ended up helilanding the same five as Bruce & Mike. We landed by the lake they call the Krasnoyarsk Sea. It's a very large lake and we landed in one of the coves. It's a nice place

to camp and we are at the very bottom of the fire. The fire is steep and a lot of rocks are rolling down. Bruce and Mike cut line today but when they tried to burn it out it crossed their line. So much stuff was rolling down that they are in a monitor stage. After 2 full days here we are still monitoring the fire. I have yet to step on the fire. The past 2 days have been spent fishing, swimming, sleeping, and eating. The fishing has been pretty good. I caught a 2 pound pike and a bunch of small perch like fish. The Russians can't understand why I go to the trouble of catching fish and throw them back. To me the fish are small and not worth keeping. The Russians keep them all and have them for dinner. When I 1st got here they showed me what to use to catch them. Worms and a Bobber. They even let me use their pole. Their poles are long and clumsy but they get the job done. I take out my \$70⁰⁰ fishing gear along with my \$200 lures and catch a bunch. Russians do an incredible lot with what they have. I am constantly reminded how easy life is for me. I do not feel sorry for them as they are happy and make do with what they have. 31

They have a certain way of doing things that work for them. They like the way they do things and are not very open to suggestions. We're here to learn and not to teach and that's the way they like it. They eat a lot of potatoes and peel them with a knife. I gave one of the guys a potato peeler which most Americans find a necessity to peeling potatoes. He prefers a knife. #P38 can openers are a hit but given a large old knife it is quicker and faster to open a can with a knife. Of course I'll ^{have to} borrow your knife to show you. We were given air mattresses to sleep on. They are heavy and we were tempted to leave them behind. Fortunately we brought them as they have been very comfortable and we used them in the lake to go swimming. The more I'm around the Russians the better I get to know them. I have become pretty good friends with a couple of them. When you don't speak Russian and they don't speak English it is pretty easy to ignore each other. But there are ways of breaking the ice. I've been hanging out with Andrei for awhile the past couple of days. He speaks less English than I speak Russian. But he and I will go out fishing for several hours.

He is not afraid to act things out and we seem to get by on a limited vocabulary and sign language. Most Russians are eager to help you learn their language. If you start speaking English to them it makes them feel uncomfortable and many will shy away. But asking them simple questions in Russian will help to get to know them. Learning all their names helps. It's easy cause they only have about 5 different names. If you're even in a group of Russians you can be sure of running across a few Sasha's, Sergei's, Victor, Andre's, Yura's, and Niccol's. Camps are very water dependent. They carry no canteens and no water is dropped off. The 1st thing they do is look for water. On the fireline they drink out of the backback pumps. It seems odd at 1st but you get used to it. Even in camp they use a piss bag like we use cubies. I can't get used to not having water and I carry 2 canteens with me. I've long since quit using my water filter. I'll save it for the big city. We drink right out of the creek with no problems.

6-12 It rained all night long starting about 8:00 PM. I feel like a prisoner in my little tent cause it's my only sanctuary from the rain. Today is Demob day and I'm ready.

The creek beside our campfire swelled to overflow last night the pots and pans had to be rescued before they were carried off into the lake. The Helicopter showed up at 1:30 PM to tell us Demob was at 3:00. There are 17 of us on the Helicopter takes us all away easily plus all the cargo. I thought jumpers in the US, had a lot of cargo but I think the Russians have us beat. Their stuff is bulky and fills the Helicopter. We stop to refuel on the way back to ERMAKOVSKOE. There is a jump club there and a group of 5 boys that are going to make their 1st jump in July. The boys look to be no older than 12. This is fairly common among the Jump clubs in Russia. When ~~they~~^{we} fly into Ermakovskoe the kids come running again. This time several of them recognize me from before. They know I have pins and have their hands out. A couple give me a thumbs up and a smile. Back at the base it is time to pack up and go to Gene's for Dinner and do their favorite thing, bathe the Americans. Gene's wife and helper put on a splendid meal Russian style. The women didn't eat with us, they only served us. AH, the life of a Russian male. Gene made sure we had plenty of

moonshine and after a few toasts we were toasted. Gene lives in this house that used to be his Grand Father's. The House is over 200 years old but it is very tidy and clean. Gene lives here with his wife and 5 year old daughter. They're young, mid twenties, and are very gracious Hosts. We spend the night here, 2 in the main House and 2 in a small guest house out back.

6-13 Got up about 8 only to find that Bruce and Tony took off to meet Dick Adams and Gene Benidict. It would have been fun to go along to see them but Mike and I got abandoned. Now Gene' was stuck with us. He speaks no English so it was a bit of work to get any conversation going. Sometimes that's better cause this way they have to try harder to talk to us rather than run off to Tony or Bruce. Mike and I feel like an imposition as they make us another fine meal. We took a walk through town with Gene. This is the smallest village we've been to, Gene' has many relatives here. Niccolavskoe is the name of the town. Gene' is the nephew of Sengie I and Yura, two smoke jumpers at the Base. At 2:00pm A truck shows up to take us away.

Mike and I have no clue whats going on. We gather Tony and Bance's stuff and load everything onto the truck. We here stuff like Krasnojarsk and when we get to the base it looks like we'll be driving to Krasnojarsk in two cars that are going that way. 1st we have to have a going away party. It is quickly prepared but very nice. Its amazing the feast that the Russians can come up with on such sudden notice. I am ready to leave and see some new country but I'm sorry for leaving so hastily. There are several new friends that I've met and will not be able to say good-bye to. My Friends Sergie II, Andre', Victor, Marot, Yura, and Sergie ~~III~~. It bothers me not to have said any kind of Farewell to these people I have worked and lived with that I've become close to. They have treated me very kindly and I feel I owe them so much. To up and leave like this leaves me feeling empty inside like I've lost something. After several Toasts and food we were off. The head dude here, Victor, was very gnatious with the whole setup plus some Souvenirs, and a lot of nice things he said. It was another Grand Prix Drive to Krasno and we arrived just before 2:00 AM.

6-14 Today was a slow Rainy Day. We took the Bus into Downtown. We wanted to go to a Souvenir shop but they were Closed today. We'll try again tomorrow. I bought some Food downtown For Lunch, Tony, Mike, and Bruce elected to Eat at the hotel. I Find the Food there dreadful, the worst Food anywhere on the trip. Today was no different and I was glad I got some stuff in town. After Lunch we went and sent off some Email. It was nice to get in touch with the outside world again. I'm so out of touch right now that its been a month since I've heard any news at all. I wonder what I've been missing. We then headed to the store to pick up some Supplies. Victor was with us and he seemed half plastered. We stopped for chish-ka-bobs and out came the Vodka. A drunk dude came by and sat with us after awhile. His name was Yuree and I think I ended up giving him my hat. Anyway after a few bottles of Vodka who knows. Bruce and I stumbled back to the hotel I think around 10:00. Vodka is easy to drink and it doesn't leave you hung over very often. My biggest complaint is I don't like doing shots. I'd like to have a drink and just sip it. You know, like beer. Oh, well.

6-15 Have I mentioned how much I hate Russian beds? They're the worst. They're small and short. The worst part about them is the foot board. If they didn't have that then your feet could hang over the end. I suppose if that's the worst thing that happens to me I should be thankful. Yesterday we found out where the shower is and it's wonderful. The 1st decent shower I've had since I got here. I also hate Russian curtains. They're always in the way. Not much else happened today. We went to downtown, Faxed in time, sent Email. We got Train tickets to Irkutsk that would be leaving tomorrow at 2:00 PM. We had some Farewell Toasts that evening with Big Sasha and Mishka. НРKYCK НРKYCK

6-16 Moving day. Today we packed up and Took the train to Irkutsk. I like to call it the Siberian express but it was anything but an express as it stopped at every cow town along the way and a top speed of 40 mph. We had Farewell Toasts and Big Sasha made sure we got a compartment to ourselves. When all the doors are closed it's easy to get lost on the train and forget where the compartment is. Tony, Mike and myself all ended up wandering the corridors at one time

The train was a very relaxing way to travel. Before we left they paid us another 800 Rubles. so we were fat on Rubles. We paid for our own train fair ^{which} ~~with~~ was 382 rubles, pretty cheap. The computer had 4 beds with blankets, sheets, and pillows. It was an overnighiter and quite comfortable.

6-17 Arrived at IRKUTS at 10:30 AM. Anatoli the head Jumper and Misha met us at the station. We drove to the base there in town and dropped off some stuff. The weather was okay by now but it had been raining and every thing was wet. Anatoli treated us to a bottle of vodka made from the deep waters of Lake Baikal. The water was suppose to come from a Depth of 300 meters. It was pretty smooth. Mike quit drinking vodka about 3 days ago. He didn't like the taste, the effects, or the after effects. Misha had been to the states working on the logan hot shots. We checked into our hotel then took a trolley car to downtown. It cost 2 Rubles to ride a trolley car. Irkutsk deffinatly felt different than Krasnojarsk. It didn't seem nearly as depressing. The parks and buildings seemed nicer. We stopped for dinner at a pretty fancy joint. The food was great and cost about \$75⁰⁰ for the 4 of us including Tip.

After Dinner we took the trolley back to the Hotel. The Hotel is the nicest one we stayed at yet. We had single rooms with a bathroom and Hot Water. It was pretty nice for Russian standards. For America it wouldn't meet Motel 6 Standards. For the most part we're happy to be here and are looking forward to other adventures.

~~6-18~~ Today we found out that we were going to take the evening train up north to a SMJ base. It would take nearly 24 hours by train. We ate breakfast and lunch at the hotel. It was cafeteria style so you could pick and choose what you wanted. A good Deal also cause it only cost \$2⁰⁰. Back at the Base they paid us \$1000 rubles, another good Deal. They gave us a Final meal at the base which was quite good. They then drove us to the train station and we took the 7:00pm train north. It was configured much the same as our last train ride. It was even more of a milk run than our other train. It must have made 30 stops. It seemed like it rained on and off the whole way. We got to ЖЕЛЕЗНОГОРСК at 5:00pm the next day. They set us up in a room with 4 beds and a bathroom. I'm not sure but I think its in some Forestry building.

They set up a banquet for us and again lots of vodka. I was barely through my hangover from the night before and could barely handle it. In fact I had to quit drinking vodka. I'm glad I quit to cause I felt a whole lot better the next day. There was a tray of raw fish at the dinner. I just can't handle raw fish. It was cut up into big chunks and didn't seem to be appetizing to me. Everyone else ate it though; Tony and Bruce got pretty drunk and Tony actually puked. I'll be glad to get away from the vodka.

6-20 ⁶⁻²¹ Today we went on a camping trip. We left in the afternoon and drove up to a bay in a large river. We stopped in this small town at the smokejumper base to pick up a couple more people. One of the guys we picked up was Eger. Eger would soon become my good friend on the camping trip. He spoke very little english but that didn't seem to matter. He was very helpful and determined that we had a good time. Someone brought a pike that was the biggest I'd ever seen. It must have weighed 30 lbs. It was cut up into big pieces then everyone started eating this raw fish.

I'm sorry but I can't eat raw fish. I'm just not that hungry. Of course we drank vodka, then more vodka, then some more. I had to look at the video the next day to see what happened the night before. I think everyone got pretty hammered. The only difference is the Russians are really good at it. The next day I was feeling pretty hung over plus I think I had a cold coming on. I was right about the cold and I was feeling pretty sick all day. Eger my friend wanted me to have a drink with him. He was pretty relentless but the mere thought of vodka made me want to wretch. They cooked up the big Pike then gave me one of the jaws to eat. They said it was the best part and the honored guest gets to eat it. Lucky me. At least it was cooked. We packed up camp and went back to town. Eger gave me his coat. I told him I had one just like it but he wanted me to have his. Eger is one of the people I've met that has made the Russian trip very memorable.

6-22 Woke up this morning with a full onset of a cold.

Nothing much happened today, we went into town to mail some postcards, picked up some Cold medicine, and stopped off at the store. We went out to dinner

at a Chinese Restaurant, The owner/cook left about 2 years ago. There was nothing Chinese about the restaurant except the Decor, Lots of cock roaches running around. It was a typical Russian menu though and cost about \$7.00 a piece. We got our parachutes today and re-rigged them. The mains looked pretty used. We had to pack the reserves ourselves with some help. I hope they open.

6-23 I woke up today with my cold in full force. My nose is a constant drip, my throat is sore, and I'm very congested. Hope I get through today.

6-28 I got kind of lazy the last few days about writing. We made 2 jumps on the 23rd and everything went well. The parachutes opened fine and landed ok. The Russians are pretty proud of their square. It's smaller than ours so it goes faster and they like that. It's okay but I prefer our gear. I do like not wearing a jump suit and we did a 5 man stick. The next day we left around noon and took the AN-2 to Bratsk. The weather was pretty rough with rain all the way. This was a pretty bad day weather wise

We were met in Bratsk by a Smokejumper named Kirill. He would turn out to be a very good friend of ours in a short time. Kirill was on the Redmond Hotshots ^{in 1995 and} ~~and the~~ the Salmon crew in 1997. He spoke excellent english and it was the 1st time Mike and I could have some in depth conversation. He ~~was~~ extremely hospitable to us making sure we ~~were~~ as comfortable as possible. He knows what it's like to be in a foreign country and how his hosts treated him. It was raining very hard all day and the plan was to drive to a fishing lodge. We took this big 4x4 ~~off~~ truck to get there. The road was as muddy as any I've ever seen. It looked unpassable and way too ratty. But that 4x4 just went and went till it got there. The next 3 days were spent eating, fishing, and playing durock. Besides Kirill we had Deme, our cook, and Sergey, Our Russian smokejumper going to Boise. These guys could eat Raw fish. There was always a plate of raw fish to be eaten. It rained on and off the whole time we were there. On Saturday the 27th we were picked up by the helicopter.

It's kind of nice to get that kind of service. We flew into Bratsk taking pictures along the way. They put us up in a Ranger Station at Bratsk. It was okay, nothing special. Kirill and Sergey picked us up at the ranger station and we went out. There was some festival going on in town and we stayed out till about 1:00 AM.

6-28 Slept in a bit, Kirill and Victor picked us up at 11:00. Went to a few stores, the outdoor market, and a park. Many Russians wear clothes with adidas, Reebok, and Nike written on them. There are several kiosks all over many selling the same stuff. Kirill dropped us off at 7:00 PM. to rest before picking us up at 9:00 PM. At 9 o'clock we went to a restaurant disco. The food was good and there was music and dancing going on. I felt underdressed there as all the Russians were dressed up. We were in our Levi's and T-shirts. It was okay for dinner but for dancing it seemed out of place. We were out till 1:00 AM, the 2nd of many late nights.

6-29. Today was moving day the plan was to drive to Irkutsk taking Boris Sergey with us. It was an 11 hour van ride. It was pretty comfortable and time went fast.

We got into Irkutsk before 10:00 PM and Mike and I doubled up in a Hotel. We played some darts with Sergey and Bruce then went out for Sashlee just before midnight. We got home around 1:00 AM.

6-30 The plan today was to go to Lake Baikal. It was a slow start cause we had to get our plane tickets to Moscow. It cost \$320 and it was 5 time zones and 5 hours and 40 minutes to Moscow. We got going to the lake at about 3:00 PM. Besides the 4 of us we had Anatoli, Victor, and 4 secretaries with us. Let the party begin. We went on a picnic with all the usual stuff and VODKA. So after polishing off a few bottles of vodka and eating a bunch of food we went back to Irkutsk. When we arrived at the base I figured we would be heading back to the hotel. Wrong! The party was just beginning. The evening was spent drinking vodka, eating, and dancing. About 1:30 AM Mike and I managed to escape to the hotel. Tony had passed out around 11:00 and Bruce was somewhere else. I was a little more careful about how much I drank and I didn't feel too drunk.

7-1

7-1 We were up by 7:00 AM. I needed to compact all my stuff down and get packed. I left as much junk as I could. From my experience here I learned not to overpack. Try to take stuff that you can leave. I wish I had not brought my Whites. They are heavy, bulky, and I never used them. If a person is going to bring their boots, it would be better to bring an old pair you could throw away. I did use my tent. But it is bulky and if I didn't have it they would provide one. 3 or 4 changes of clothes are all that's necessary. Bring clothes that dry quick. Avoid heavy cottons that take a long time to dry. Light running sweats are very common here and you can wear them any where. One nice set of clothes is all that's necessary. Nice meaning Good Levis and a collared shirt. Remember, there is a 20 kilo limit when flying Aero flot. It is nice not to go through the hassle of paying for extra baggage. If your total weight is more than 60 lbs you need to cut back. I probably started with 90 lbs of stuff. Don't get carried away with warm clothes and jackets. At one time I had 6 coats and jackets. I wouldn't bring a 5th coat. They gave us all the clothes and jackets we needed for fires. Don't bring Nomex clothes.

They will provide everything. Anyway, more on this later.

I got all packed up at the base and was ready to go by 9:00 AM, I walked into Anatoli's office just in time for one last toast, Drinking Vodka at 9:00 AM. that's really living.

We arrived in Moscow at 11:00 AM not much later than we departed thanks to the 5 time zone difference. Yev Gairoy met us and took us to the Forestry institute where we would stay, It looked like a typical Hotel and was one of the nicest places we stayed on the trip. We all had our own room and it was wonderful to spread out. We went to lunch at a nearby restaurant and it was very nice, Great Russian cuisine. After lunch we drove about an hour to this monastery, It was very interesting and we had a great tour guide. Her name was Alina and she spoke great English. After our tour we went back to the restaurant for more Russian food & Vodka. There was only one bottle and 3 or 4 toasts and that was it. Mike and Bruce went back to the hotel and Yev Gairoy, Sergey, Tony, and I went to the office. Tony and I wanted to make a phone call while Sergey and the other Russians had paper work to fill out prior to their coming to the USA.

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It looks like Sergey speaks a little English, Sasha says he doesn't speak much but I think he speaks quite a bit. George and Anatoli don't speak much. I'm looking forward to showing the Russians America and our System.

7-2 ~~Get up at 3:30 AM~~ Today we went on a tour of Moscow. We started at Red square and looked at all the stuff there. Next we went to the War Memorial. This is a very impressive Monument of the War Veterans of World War II. The gang elected to go to dinner with the Russians over going to the circus. The Circus was my choice but no one else seemed to want to go. It was fun to meet everyone and get to know them. I got out of the party at about 11:30 PM. I needed to be up ⁱⁿ 4 hrs.

7-3 I actually woke up at 3:30 AM with the help of an Alarm. I checked on Mike who was up and then woke Tony and Bruce up who were fast asleep. We got to the Airport in plenty of time. The flight was on time and we Arrived in Frankfurt just after 8:00 AM local time. It was kind of a culture shock to go back into the real world. Frankfurt was awesome. The Sheraton Inn was walking distance from the Airport.

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It was a 1st rate hotel And I had a great time. Mike and I got directions on how to ride the train into town. It was incredibly easy to walk down stairs of the terminal building and walk onto A high speed Metro. Downtown was the 5th stop and took less than 15 minutes. Frankfurt is a beautiful city with many places to walk and shop. In the 2½ days I was here I spent \$160.00. On Saturday night there was a music festival going on with at least 6 sound stages set up in the downtown area, I'll bet there were 50,000 people out that night. On Saturday Mike elected to bail out and go home. I didn't mind as it gave me more Freedom to move around. It was nice to be able to go back and forth on the train between Downtown and the Airport. It cost 8 marks or \$5.00 for 24 hrs. You could use the ticket as often as you liked in a 24 hour period. You must purchase tickets prior to boarding the train. That 1st day Mike and I were never checked. The second day I was checked twice. There are big fines if you are caught without a ticket.

7-5 Today is travel day. I'm looking forward to going home. Although the time went by very fast. I would have liked to have stayed 2 more weeks. But now that I'm on my way I'll be glad to get home. My 1st meal in Europe was a Big Mac in Moscow so fittingly so my last meal in Europe was a big Mac in Frankfurt. When I got here I took out my Russian Visa from my passport and haven't seen it since. I hope I don't need it. On Friday it was a gorgeous summer day with Blue skies. Saturday was overcast and today it rained. I hung around the Airport today to Finnish spending the rest of my marks. Its a great Airport. With all my bags it was easy cause there are free carts every where.