2002

**Book of Gobi, Book 1: Siskiyou Smokejumper Base, 1943-1981**

Stan Collins

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To the Reader

The Book of Gobi: Book 1, is the result of asking, What made the Gobi special? Included are responses from those who served at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base, 1943–1981. Except for a 1943 Forest Service report, these reflections are previously unpublished. All submissions have been edited for the usual reasons, as well as for suitable reading. In some cases, stories have been shortened to maintain the defining focus of what made the Gobi special. The book is arranged in rough chronology. Small period or associating pictures have been included as they seem appropriate. Clarifying remarks proceed some stories to include necessary information and to maintain a clear chronology. All contributors have been recognized by the first year they served at the Base.

This is Book 1 with the narrow focus on what made the Gobi special. The Siskiyou Smokejumper Base (the Gobi) is worthy of further publications that record its history—stories, newspaper articles, reports, periodical entries, photographs, and oral history. Other books or forms of recognition are likely to occur from those who in the future volunteer their talents.

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Editors Note: Jack Heintzelman was incharge of the Cave Junction Smokejumpers from the beginning of the base in 1943 through 1945. Originally a Protection Assistant at the Redwood Ranger Station, he had no connection to parachuting. After three years at the head of the Smokejumper project, he returned to forestry duties. The following are excerpts from his formal 1943 end-of-the-season report to his superior, Forest Supervisor Hershel Obye, Siskiyou National Forest.

Why Organized

In modern day fire fighting, we are constantly working toward the “getting them while they are small” policy. One means of “getting them while they are small” is to reduce travel time to the fire. Means used to accomplish this end have been quick get-a-way, better roads, better trails, more pack stock and trail jeeps. In spite of all this, it was felt that further reduction of travel time must be achieved and would tend toward have less blow-ups and fewer expensive fires.

As a consequence, Region Six, of the Forest Service, added a Smokejumper Squad this year. The Smokejumper, stripped of all adjectives, is a smokechaser with a faster means of travel.
History of Smokejumping

Jumping men to fires is a natural outgrowth of cargo dropping which, by now, is a tried and proven method of supplying back country fires. In the fall of 1939, Region Six made extensive tests in jumping live cargo at Winthrop, Washington. Winthrop was chosen because of its proximity to rugged forest areas. Results of these tests proved:

1. Men can jump over forest terrain with comparative safety.
2. Forest Service men with proper physical qualifications and mental attitude for the work could be taught to jump in a comparatively short time.
3. It is cheaper to train qualified smokechasers to jump than it train parachute jumpers to fight fire.

Smokejumping came into practical use in 1940 with small squads being stationed on the Chelan National Forest in Region Six and on the Bitterroot National Forest in Region One. Nine fires were jumped in Region One, resulting in an estimated savings of $30,000, three times the cost of the entire project.

1941 saw further expansion of smokejumping in Region One and the temporary withdrawal of smokejumpers from Region Six. Region One was set up with three eight-man squads, a project leader and a jumping instructor with the understanding that it would undertake the responsibility of jumping on threatening lightning fires in adjacent portions of Regions Four and Six.

1942 saw further expansion of jumping activities in Region One and by now smokejumping was well established.

1943 brought radical changes. The pressure of the war was making great inroads into the ranks of the Forest Service jumpers. The continuance and expansion of the project stood in jeopardy, due to the labor shortage. Fortunately a new labor pool was created in the form of conscientious objectors from Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camps, selected on a volunteer basis. In view of this supply of labor the project expanded with Region One having four squads of 12 men each, Region Four established a five-man squad, and Region Six returning to active participation with an 11-man squad. All units were headed by the Forest Service.

Personnel—Forest Service

A short term Forest Service man volunteered to head the Region Six squad which was stationed at the Redwood Ranger Station, Cave Junction, Oregon. Unlike Region One squad leaders he had no past experience at smokejumping and, as a consequence, was sent to Seeley Lake Ranger Station, Seeley Lake, Montana, in
May for training as a rigger, jumper and spotter. He was experienced as a lookout, administrative guard, member of 40-man suppression crew and protective assistant. The only other Forest Service employee on the squad was a woman cook. She cooked only at the base camp and also cooked for the district 10-man suppression crew when it was not in the field.

**Personnel—CPS**

The CPS personnel was chosen by a different procedure and inasmuch as Region One performed the original recruitment of conscientious objectors for Region One, Four and Six I take the following directly from a report by Vic Carter, Region One Smokejumper Project Leader: “Approximately 350 applicants from CPS camps in many states were submitted to the National Service Board in Washington for ‘weed-ing’ in accordance with requirements and specifications forwarded there by this office. The 118 remaining, applications, somewhat evenly divided among the Brethren, Mennonite and Friends groups, were sent here from which the 60 jumper applications were selected, 20 from each religious group. The final selection was based principally upon work and experience background of the man and his health and freedom from pervious injury. The educational standards of the group as a whole, were so high that this factor was practically eliminated as an influencing element in final selection.”

“The 60 applicants were in addition to 6 cooks, a CPS camp director, assistant director, dietician, and camp nurse. The 10 overhead were selected by the church organization.”

The smokejumper training was held at Seeley Lake Ranger Station, Seeley, Montana. Because of the large class and shortage of equipment the men were trained in two sections. Upon completion of the training of the first section, a squad of ten men was selected and returned to Region Six with the Forest Service smokejumper squad leader.

**Region Six Smokejumper Personnel**

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<td>Lillie White</td>
<td>Cook</td>
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<td>William Lauglin</td>
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<td>Marvin Graeler</td>
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<td>Winton Stucky</td>
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<td>Walter Buller</td>
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<td>Calvin Hilty</td>
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<td>Ray Hudson</td>
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<td>Gus Jenzen</td>
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<td>Floyd Yoder</td>
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Relation of Project to Region Six

The Region Six smokejumper project was stationed at the Redwood Ranger Station, Cave Junction, Oregon. Though it was located on the Page Creek Ranger District, it, through the squad leader, was directly responsible to the Siskiyou National Forest Supervisor and, more particularly, to the Assistant Supervisor who is the Forest's fire control assistant. Dispatching of smokejumpers to fires cleared through the Supervisor's office. The crew, in addition to being available to all the National Forests in Region Six, was also available to the Klamath, Trinity and Shasta National Forests of Region Five. Though the machinery was set up for fire jumps outside the Siskiyou, due to mild fire season all jumps were confined to the Siskiyou.

Parachute Loft

The main project for the summer for the Region Six jumpers was the construction of a parachute loft at the Redwood Ranger Station.

The bulk of the material needed for the construction of this building was obtained by salvaging a barracks building at the Grayback CCC Camp. Additional materials were requisitioned through the Supervisor's office and expedited by them in order to whip the building into shape as soon as possible.

One of the CPS men, Tay Hudson, had previous experience in the designing and construction of houses and upon him fell the job of designing the loft and the subsequent task of supervising its construction.

At this writing the building is completed with the exception of minor plumbing and several inside finishing jobs which we are saving for wet weather. We have one excellent packing table and can readily improvise another from miscellaneous tables around the ranger station. An early fire season next year will find us prepared in this respect and in a position to rapidly place our equipment back in order.

It should be borne in mind that our equipment and personnel training allows only for the making of minor repairs on damaged parachutes and chutes sustaining need for major repair must be sent to Montana. Because of the shortage of equipment in Region One, replacements from there have been slow in coming in. This should not be construed in any way as a criticism of Region One cooperation as their personnel has gone overboard in aiding us within the limits of their time and equipment.

While not directly part of the loft, we have constructed a practice let-down adjacent to the loft for the purpose of obtaining practice in letting ourselves down out
of trees. The let-down is a pulley device suspended between two trees. Using this, we can pull a man in jumping equipment and harness to a height of 60 feet. It then becomes his task to utilize his ropes and lower himself to the ground. This simulates field conditions in getting out of trees should a jumper be left suspended. In addition we are commencing the construction of a jumping tower which can be used to train new jumpers and freshen experienced jumpers in the techniques of leaving the plane and absorbing the opening shock. It will be modeled after the Region One tower in Seeley Lake, Montana. An obstacle course is also planned and will be constructed adjacent to the loft at the earliest opportunity.

Airport Facilities

Airport facilities at hand are adequate. The Illinois Valley Airport, a Forest Service field is located four miles south of Cave Junction on the Redwood Highway. This dirt field is 4500 feet long and 300 feet wide, and center 150 feet of surface being relatively smooth. It lays close to north and south and usually has winds parallel to its direction. The only improvements at the airport are a wind sock which functions satisfactorily, and a telephone. Fence posts were erected entirely around the field at the time of its construction but wire has never been stretched between them. One improvement to be desired should the jumper project remain here is an adequate hangar. It is appreciated that building materials are scarce but a hangar could be constructed at a minimum cost with CPS labor and natural materials. Hewn timbers could be used for the structural members and shakes could be made by the crew.

The airport is well located in relation to the Siskiyou National Forest and is centrally located in regard to the Siskiyou lightning zone.

Airplane Hire

The most difficult task in establishing a smokejumper project in this region was the obtaining of a suitable airplane. The plane needed to be sufficiently large to handle at least two jumpers, their cargo, a spotter, and a pilot. This calls for a plane of the seven passenger class. In addition it must be a slow plane or one which can be throttled down to a slow speed. The following quotation from the Certificate of Award for the hire of a seven passenger Fairchild from the S&M Flying Service presents the difficulty: “In connection with securing a plane for use with a 10-
man parachute smokejumping crew, contact was made with Wing Commander of the local Civil Air Patrol. Under date of June 21, 1943, he advised that only one plane of the size required was available in this territory and that all other planes had either been requisitioned by the owners or were on active duty assignment with the Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol and the Southern Liaison Patrol."

The S&M Flying Service was awarded a contract calling for use of L.C. Moore's seven passenger Fairchild airplane, and for pilot Larry Moore to fly the plane. Under the circumstances as stated above this was the best arrangement that could be made at the time. Under this arrangement the pilot agreed to have the plane available on two hours notice. In addition, the plane being stationed in Dallesport, Washington, it would take approximately three hours for it to fly to Cave Junction, Oregon, to be available for jumping. This was the theory of it, but in practice the plane's availability was not as specified in the contract. Due to radio difficulties, difficulties in gassing the plane enroute and other troubles it was consistently late. Pilot Moore was extremely cooperative and it is felt made every effort to fulfill is contract but in actual practice, the availability of the plane was not satisfactory. This should be borne in mind and should, if possible, be remedied before next fire season. In bending every effort to cut travel time to fire by utilizing smokejumpers we are losing a great deal of our advantage by not having a plane on tap for quick get-a-way.

Fire Jumps

Six fires were jumped to this year on the Siskiyou National Forest. Fire jumps were made in two sessions and in both sessions the plane had be ordered for routine refresher jumps and therefore was on hand when the fires came. Admittedly the plane was ordered for the second session with two things in mind—refresher jumps being due, and promise of a possible lightning storm threat.

Just one of the six fires jumped was a "B" fire and the rest were "A"s. One fire jump showed promise of developing rapidly to a large size. This was the Holcomb Peak fire which started in a snag patch and, thanks to the smokejumpers, was kept from spreading until an adequate ground crew arrived. One highlight of the jumping occurred when two jumpers jumped to two fires on successive days, the fires being at opposite ends of the Siskiyou.

All fire jumps were made without injury and all smokejumpers save one managed to reach the ground without having to rely on their let-down ropes. The only jumper not reaching the ground was left suspended two feet up. Jumps were made everywhere from 200 yards to three-quarters of a mile from the fire. Cargo
Smokejumper Report Region Six 1943

was usually dropped to the jumpers rather than at the fire because it is too difficult to find equipment in the Siskiyou brush, unless the jumper actually sees where it goes. There will, of course, be times and places where cargo can be dropped closer to the fire. Parachutes, unless readily obtainable, were usually left hanging until the fires were controlled. This point calls for emphasis in future planning as considerable time may be lost in collecting a parachute and placing it in its pickup bag. If the chute is on the ground and easily retrievable, it is good business to get it under cover. All jumpers were extremely enthusiastic and desirous of making more fire jumps.

Summary and Recommendations

1. This year's Region Six project was somewhat experimental but we conclusively feel that results achieved justify its continuance.

2. Jumps were made with comparative safety, only one man being incapacitated for a period of time and he should be available next fire season.

3. CPS men proved to be of good caliber and though new to both parachute jumping and firefighting took to them well.

4. The number of fires (6) jumped this season was not a fair test of the smokejumper squad's worth.

5. The present plane arrangement is unsatisfactory. The theory of quick getaways is suffering as a result of the plane being stationed three hours from the smokejumper squad. Additional losses in time further complicate its value.

6. Additional parachutes are needed. Jumpers can jump to fires, control them, return to their base and be ready to go again before their chutes can be repaired and made ready for further jumps.

7. The 30-foot Eagle back pack parachute has not proved too satisfactory due to the strong opening shock it provides. We had one relatively bad injury as the result of one of these openings. It is suggested that either 27-foot Eagle chutes or 28-foot Irvin chutes be substituted for them next season.

8. Communications from plane to ground needs improvement. Each two-man jumper squad should be provided with a radio. In addition, SPF radios should be available for use on more troublesome fires.

9. The desirability of a light portable pumper for dropping to fires should be investigated.

10. The active Western Air Defense zone rules little hindrance to our activities.

11. Ten men do not approach satisfactory the need for smokejumping throughout Region Six.
Letter from
Jack Heintzelman
August 17, 1976

The following handwritten letter was found in the Siskiyou Smokejumper Archives. It is from the leader of the first Siskiyou Smokejumpers, dated August 17, 1976, and outlines the birth and high points of the Cave Junction base. It nicely complements Jack's formal report submitted to the Siskiyou Forest Supervisor at the end of the 1943 season.

Here is a sketch of what I remember of the project:

1. The first I heard of the project was in the spring of 1943. Supervisor Obye called me and asked if I would like to head the Smokejumper Project to be started in Cave Junction. I was the Protective Assistant at the Redwood Ranger Station at the time (Harold Bowerman was the Ranger). I went over to Medford and got an army captain to take me up in a Piper cub as I had never been in an airplane and thought I should at least go up once to help me make my decision. That went OK and I returned to Cave Junction and paced the floor for hours. Then I accepted the job.

2. So I had to vacate my $10.00 a month PA house and rent in the town for $40.00 a month. As a jumper job brought no increase in pay, the net result was a pay loss.

3. Next I went to the Ranger Station at Seeley Lake in Montana for training. At Seeley Lake, I was assigned 10 men from the CPD crew there. These men and I trained principally under Jim Waite and Earl Cooley. Frank Derry was the parachute trainer leader. On alternate days we trained in firefighting and smokejumping. We (three of us) also trained in parachute packing and repair. This crew was of very high quality with a variety of skills. After six weeks, we returned to Cave Junction. Both the crew and I trained in Montana all three years I was there. The latter two years, we trained at Nine-Mile which was a remount mule farm, too.
4. At Cave Junction we had one red dirt airstrip, a crew, a cookhouse, and platform tents. The later were at the Ranger Station down by the river. We had no airplane, no parachutes, no loft, no training facilities, and no hanger.

5. As I’ve already mentioned, we had a versatile CO crew and it wasn’t long before we cut up a CCC barracks building at Grayback and rebuilt it into a loft with a tower, down behind the Ranger Station. We also built the standard jumper training facilities there. And we built a small hanger at the airport.

6. Frank Derry flew down from Missoula with a Johnson Flying Service plane, Travelair as I recall, and we had practice jumps. We also eventually got parachutes from Missoula, Eagles, with the hard opening, and Irvins.

7. Later we contracted with the S&M Flying Service from The Dalles for a plane to be stationed at Cave Junction. I don’t remember how long the S&M Flying Service contract was in effect over the three years I had the project, but I do remember that S&M had a young pilot stationed there. On one fire jump, we took off with three or four jumpers. When we were up about 30 feet, the motor quit and we landed OK as there was plenty of strip left. The pilot then tinkered with the fuel attachments and was satisfied that the plane was OK. He asked me if I wanted a test flight and I said yes. He taxied to the south end of the field and took off. He climbed very fast to about 200 feet, stalled out, and crashed and burned. He died instantly. We then filled in with Johnson planes.

8. Somewhere along the line (I don’t remember which of the 3 years I was there, though it probably was 1944 or 1945), we heard we were going to get a Nordyne Norseman. We also heard thru our smokejumper rumor circle that these planes were crashing all over France in WW II. At any rate, we got one, and Larry Sohler was the pilot. He was great.

9. We had a lot of practice jumps at Cave Junction. The number of fire jumps was not large. Aside from the Siskiyou, we jumped a few men on the Umpqua. Also, all of us flew up to the head of Lake Chelan and jumped out of a Marine C-47 on a tough fire. (I have no personal records on either practice or fire jumps.)

10. We fought several ground fires and the crew could really produce with a progressive method.

11. We didn’t sustain a lot of injuries. As best I can recall, a back injury was the worst.

12. After three years, I asked to be assigned to other duties as I was a forester and wished to pursue a forestry career.
13. In the second or third year, Les Coville showed us a piece of Japanese rice paper which was from one of the Japanese balloons that floated incendiary material to the US. This was pepped us up with the idea of saving our forests from fires started by these devices. Actually, we never jumped a fire caused by them.

14. I remember landing on a practice jump once and heading lickety-split for Grants Pass where my wife was having a baby. Don’t remember whether I got there before or after.

Well, this hasn’t helped you much, but is about all I can help you with. The old days of getting into jumper gear on the way to the airport, in the back of a truck, are over. All the physical structures we built are gone. The Redwood Remount Station is gone and replaced by a helicopter—But maybe we had more fun.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

16
First Fire Jump  
at the  
Siskiyou Smokejumper Base  

MARVIN GRAELER  
'43  

This is the first fire jump from the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base and the first recorded Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Jump Story. All other Siskiyou Smokejumper stories, fact to fiction, begin here. The fire and story began on July 22, 1943, a 2-man fire for Marvin Graeler and Winton Stucky.

On July 22, Frank Derry, instructor parachute rigger, arrived with our plane and pilot to give us our first practice jump in the Siskiyou National forest. Instead, a lightning on the evening of the same day provided an actual fire for Winton Stucky and myself.  

At 9:55 AM on the twenty-third, Jack Heintzelman informed us that there was a good possibility of jumping to a fire and that Stucky and I had been selected to make the jump. We loaded our equipment in a truck and left for the Airport at 10:32 AM.  

Upon arrival at the Airport Stucky and I immediately suited up and the rest of the crew checked our fire equipment and stored it in the plane ready for dropping. We were ready to take off at 11:50 but had to wait until our pilot, Larry Moore, obtained permission to take off.
We received our OK at 11:45 and Heintzelman, who was to do the spotting, Derry, Moore, Stucky, and I took off in our plane, a seven place Fairchild powered by a 450 HP engine. We gained altitude rapidly and headed northwest towards Pearsoll Peak and York Butte as the fire was on one of the ridges between the two. Jack pointed out peaks and other landmarks to orient us and to familiarize us with the country.

We sighted the fire and saw it was a snag burning on a ridge top which ran north and south with the north slope dropping down into the Illinois River. The ridge was flanked by Nome Creek on the west and Labrador Creek on the east. These, together with York Butte, which lay directly across the Illinois River and north of the fire, were pointed out to us. Since the fire was on a narrow, sharp ridge we chose a basin south of the fire as our jumping spot. Jack cautioned me to hold to the Nome Creek side as the east slope was very steep and the rock slide we saw looked anything but good for jumping. I rode the step as we came in for the jump.

With the cut of the motor and the clap of Jack's hand on my shoulder I stepped off. Falling straight with feet down, I received very little shock as my chute, one of the new Derry slotted Irvins, blossomed out above me. It was as easy an opening as I have had. We had been dropped higher than usual and I spent the first few moments experimenting by slipping and getting the feel of my chute. I held into the wind and came nearly straight down. Jack's spotting was so good that I had no difficulty in working to the spot we had chosen for the landing. The ridge side was covered with heavy brush and the largest opening between the groups of trees was less than 100 feet across. I turned with the wind as I neared the trees and used my guide lines to avoid trees and land in the open. As I came in the perimeter of the chute caught on a top limb of a tall pine and the chute was partially collapsed. The chute slipped off and I dropped 20 feet before it opened again. In landing among a group of Madrona trees about 30 feet high my foot caught in the fork of one and tipped me up so that I slid down the tree head first giving me a full view of the canopy as it settled over the tops of the Madronas. My landing thus broken, I landed easy in some dense brush. I unhooked myself from my harness, took off my jumping suit, and laid out the yellow cross to tell the plane I was all right. The men in the plane had some difficulty seeing my signal as there were no clear open spaces but I finally saw their streamer showing they had.

Stucky jumped and came nearly straight down and landed 30 feet from me. His fall was also broken by the Madrona trees. He jumped a 30 foot Eagle and rode down facing east or exactly opposite from the direction I came down. The cargo chute was dropped with our fire packs and landed 200 yards further from the fire than we were. We were 250 yards from the fire and 100 yards from the top of the
First Fire Jump at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base

ridge. The saw was dropped on a burlap chute and 30 feet from Stucky, who had gone up the ridge to sight the fire. We retrieved the saw chute and after some searching found our muslin chute with the fire pack. As the brush was very wet underfoot and our chutes were off the ground we decided to leave them and proceed directly to the fire.

We took only a canteen and our fire tools as the brush was very dense and we wanted no unnecessary equipment. It took an hour and a half from the time we left the Airport until we arrived at the burning snag. Forty five minutes after I landed we began our attack on the fire. The burning snag was on the extreme crown of the ridge and leaned towards the north slope. It was burning about 30 feet up and soon after we arrived began to throw sparks. Since the underbrush was still wet we decided to fall the snag before we had completed the brushing out. We felled it along the ridge towards the north slope. When it hit it broke at the point it was burning. The spot was hot for awhile but by 3:05 PM we had it cooled down and under control. Leaving Stucky with the fire I started back to the packs for food. I miscalculated my direction and missed the chutes and packs in the brush. I went completely around the ridge and ended up in Labrador Creek, finally returning to the fire without the food. Stucky then left while I stayed with the fire.

At 6:00 PM Art Cribb and three suppression crew members arrived to help us mop up the fire and pack our jumping equipment. They had left the Ranger Station at 1:52 PM. Two of the crew and I went back and helped Stucky take down the chutes. When we returned to the fire at 9:00 PM Art had nearly completed the mop up so Stucky and I ate our first meal since six that morning. By 1:00 AM the next morning the last spark was out but we thought it best to wait until daylight before packing out.

We left the fire dead at 8:00AM on the twenty-fourth and hiked down the ridge to the river and then upstream two miles to the pick up. We stopped for a breakfast of iron rations at Oak Flat and arrived at the Ranger Station in the early afternoon.

Several things are apparent to me since making an actual fire jump. Our signals were inadequate and a radio would have been helpful. The compass if carried down by the jumper would be useful in locating cargo chutes which drift too far. Sleeping bags seem to be just excess bulk. Items such as tomato juice, more lemons, more water, and other thirst quenchers would help and would not have to be packed out. We learned that one can work too hard at the start and it would have been better to have completely brushed out the spot where the snag fell so as to rob the fire of additional fuel. The saving of time and the fact that a smokejumper is in better condition to work when he gets to a fire outweighs any disadvantages the extra equipment may cause.
History of Cave Junction Smokejumper Camp

CALVIN HILTY

'43

We were a group of Civilian Public Service men. We were drafted for military service, but we opposed military service for various religious reasons. We belonged to the Mennonite, Quaker, Church of the Brethren, as well as almost all other denominations. Others for philosophical beliefs had arrived at Pacifist beliefs.

We were doing work in soil conservation, hospital work, forestry work, and other work of national importance. I had been in soil conservation at Dennison Iowa, for several months when a forest service person came to give some basic training in fire fighting, this was in 1942. I remember asking about parachuting to fires. He said this was very experimental and none of us would be used in that work.

In May of 1942, we were given a chance to go to California to a Forest Service Camp to work in fire fighting and so forth. After a year of this, we were given a chance to volunteer for Smoke Jumper training. Four of us volunteered, passed the physical, and were accepted: Floyd Yoder, Winton Stuckey, Leon Rateslef, and me. We were quite excited and a little apprehensive about what were in for. We met a bunch of fellows and rode a truck to Seeley Lake. What beautiful framed cabins, dining hall, and lake.

We were a bunch of excited country boys from the Midwest. We got up, did calisthenics, ate breakfast, and took a boat ride to training camp. Talk about being
psyched up, we were that. We hadn't ridden in an airplane except at the county fair.

We all made our training jumps and signed up for where we wanted to go. Walt Buller, Ken Diller, Gus Jentzen, Floyd Yoder, Ray Hudson, Marv Graeler, and I chose to go to Cave Junction with Jack Heintzlman, our Forest Service leader. Jack told me about our camp tents by the Illinois River. We had shower and restroom facilities and a dinning room. Mrs. White was our Forest Service cook.

We had a landing strip a couple of miles away. It was a nice long strip. It was quite exciting in the community to see the practice jumping. I believe we always had 40 or 50 spectators watching the show. Winton Stuckey was injured in the opening shock of an Eagle chute. He had to miss several training jumps and was released at the end of the season.

Our first job was to assemble a couple of CCC barracks and build a loft for packing parachutes. We made a loft with a gable to hang up the chutes for inspecting and airing. We got all of this organized before we were ready to have our practice jumps.

Ray Hudson was a trained architect as well as the leader of our group, a very likeable and talented fellow. After the loft was completed, we built a jump tower and a shade for the Fairchild plane. The plane was a 5 or 6 passenger monoplane. It would carry 3 jumpers and a spotter. It had a hand inertia starter that two of us would wind up and the pilot would kick it in contact with the motor. We always hoped we didn't have to wind it up again and sometimes again and again.

We used this Fairchild the first year, 1943, and part of the second. Sometimes it would get up in the air and sputter when we were on our way to a fire. One time the pilot turned back to us and told us to hook up our static lines. But we made it back. Then on day three fellows suited up and it quit when the plane was airborne. Ray Frank slipped the plane and landed on the end of the field. It was a shaky crew that got out of the plane. Ray said he would take the plane up by himself on a test run. It started right up. He took it up in a steep climb to 100 feet or so. It sputtered a couple of times, fell in a spiral on the other side of the field, and burned with Ray inside. It was a sad day for us. Ray perished inside the plane. The plane was owned by a flying service in Washington. A much smaller plane from Johnson Flying Service in Missoula was sent for the rest of the season.

A group of us were flown up to Lake Chelan in Washington in a Marine DC3 to a fire on Lyle Lake. It was quite an experience for us. Especially the 20 mile hike to Lake Chelan in the rain and to a boat that took us to a road and a truck that took is to a ranger station for the bus ride back to Cave Junction.
After the fire season was over, we cruised timber for the winter project along with trail work, slash burning, and various other jobs on the Umpqua and other forests. Of course, I should report on the fun side of our work. When 4 o'clock came, we would race down to the swimming hole behind our tent shelters. We had picked up rocks behind our tents shelter. We piled up a rock dam that made a pool 6 to 7 feet deep. We even built a diving board that we really would perform on. Especially when girls would come down from town. It was great sport to swim and to cavort under water with them. We hardly missed a local movie in the theater. We were regular customers at Ken Hamilton's milkshake place when we had the $.40 to spend. We would work for some of the local people making wood, gardening, and other odd jobs to supplement our 15 dollars a month.

We would make about 12 jumps a season. Six or 7 fire jumps and 5 or 6 practice jumps. I even jumped on South Bolin Peak across the line in California. We thought it was the first parachute fire jump in California. In the second year, three more jumpers from Missoula were assigned to Cave Junction. They were Art Penner, Elmer Nuefeld, and Bob Painter, bringing our group to twelve. Stuckey was released, Eldon Boese was our cook the second year. He was a CPS person who was especially trained in a cooking school.

After a couple of years in Smoke Jumpers, I transferred to a war relief training on a large experimental dairy farm near Washington DC. I was always proud that we were in the early days of Smoke Jumping in 1943 and 1944.
Cliff Marshall succeeded Jack Heintzelman as Foreman in 1953. He brought with him a background in the airborne and a skill in leadership. This brief oral characterization was provided by Dick Courson ('46) and gives a quick glimpse of Cliff.

"Cliff Marshall was my hero. Cliff stood about 6'1", he had a large chest, and he stood very erect. An interesting feature of Cliff that always amazed me he had real small hands and rather small feet. He was a boxer and made a living immediately after he was discharged from the Army as a sparing mate for a number of notable boxers. Matter of fact, Gus Lessnovich, who was a title contender, used Cliff as a sparing partner. So Cliff was real handy with his fists. He never really raised his voice much. He ran a pretty tight show there with the smokejumpers. Of course he kind of had to, we were a rather obstreperous group of people....

As I indicated earlier, Cliff Marshall was the foreman there. Cliff, as I mentioned, was a pretty large man, pretty quite spoken. He ran a good crew. He was a real leader. I talked with a gentleman later who served with him in the Airborne in the war and related that Cliff was considered one of the best NCOs in their battalion. I sure can understand that. He left Cave Junction two or three years after my last year in 1950 and went to the Parachute Development Center in El Centro, California.

I visited him and his wife there on a couple of occasions. He couldn't really explain very much about what they were doing, because it was all pretty much secret. I did find out later he was working on the reentry systems from our space program and that he was instrumental in parachute reentry for outer space..."
In May 1946, I was off to Missoula, Montana, for Smokejumper training. The base for training was located in an old CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camp about ten miles outside of Missoula. (The Forest Service many years later built a permanent smokejumper base.)

Training consisted of: how to put a smoldering fire out with a Pulaski; letting yourself down from the top of a tree with a rope, in the event of a tree landing; climbing a tree with spikes; calisthenics to get in shape for jumping; and, jumping from a plane in flight.

In Missoula, our training plane was a Ford Tri-motor. The prop blast on the Ford wasn't as strong as on the C-47. Out of the C-47 the prop blast actually opened your chute and you had a feeling of being blown back. We made five training jumps in Missoula. I made five more training jumps at our assigned base that summer. I made a total of twelve parachute jumps for the Forest Service. Smokejumpers wore a fireproof canvas type suit for jumping and a football type helmet in the event of landing in a tree or in a fire. The pay for a Smokejumper in 1946 was $225 a month.

Training was over in Missoula about June 1, and my group was transferred to Cave Junction, Oregon, about thirty miles southwest of Grants Pass, at the Siskiyou National Forest Ranger Station.

There were about twelve men in our group, most of them were World War II veterans that were going to school in the fall. One fellow was studying medicine, we called him Doc. We had two pilots, two single engine Canadian planes that would
carry ten jumpers. Cliff Marshall was my foreman. He had been First Sergeant in HQ. Battery, 377th PFA, my old outfit. When we weren't training, we were doing maintenance on the airstrip. I was designated parachute rigger. I repacked all the parachutes after jumps.

Fires that Smokejumpers jump on are usually fires started from lightning strikes, usually out in the wilderness.

Andrew (Andy) Henry and I jumped on a fire in Northern California one afternoon. It was just a smoldering fire, most of them were. We had the fire out before night and camped there overnight. We started walking out the next morning. We always carried a couple of days of K-rations with us on a jump. Hiking out was the toughest part of the jump, carrying your parachute and all of your equipment. It took us three days to get back to base camp in Cave Junction.

Late one afternoon, Robert Gerling and I jumped a fire in Southern Oregon. We jumped into a clearing about two miles from the fire. At the edge of this clearing was an old mountaineer's cabin. We stopped and talked to him a couple of minutes and he gave us a couple of apples.

It was dusk by the time we got to the edge of the forest, heading to the fire. We were a ways into the forest and I saw what I thought was a bear (it could have been a dead tree stump.) I said to Gerling, "There's a bear!" He said, "Where?" "Straight ahead," I said. We took off to the left, and if it was a bear, we avoided it.

Gerling was studying journalism at the University of California. He was going to write a story about the bear incident. I had contact with him a couple of years later and I asked if he had done anything on the bear story. He said no, that he couldn't make any sense out of it. Well, Robert, if you happen to read this, here's your bear story.

Anyway, the bear incident made a good story around camp.

Complete darkness fell upon us before we got to the fire, so we decided to bed down for the night. It was almost noon the next day before we reached the fire. Luckily, it was still smoldering. We got it completely out, then started the trek out.

On our way out we ran into a Rogue River guide. The fellow was a talker. Anyway, he gave us good directions to get back to Cave Junction, which we made in about two days.

The Smokejumper season was over at the end of September.
This is part of an oral history recorded by Dick. It helps briefly to provide a picture of the community of Cave Junction and the transition taking place in Smokejumper operations from the Ranger Station to the Illinois Valley airport.

The Ranger Station faced the highway. It had been a remount station. In the back of the Ranger Station, between the Ranger Station and the Illinois River, was a large pasture area with trees. There was a large building that was the parachute loft. There were a number of other out buildings. Cliff Marshall, the foreman, had been able to acquire a number of 6-man tents. These were erected in the area around the pasture. The messhall was a long tent with the cooing facility at the far end. The town of Cave Junction, at the time, was pretty small, just, I believe, two restaurants and a tavern, called the Owl Tavern. Or as we called it the "Hoot Owl Tavern." It was on one side of the highway and the two restaurants were on the opposite side of the highway. There was a service station and, I believe, a blacksmith for repairs and that sort of things. I don't recall that there was any kind of grocery store, there may have been one there. And I believe there was a small theatre building. The residents were scattered up and down the highway and in back of these buildings I have referred to. And that's about all there was at Cave Junction....

The airport at Cave Junction was some miles to the south of us. It was just a raw strip of cleared land. There were no structures on it except a wooden hangar that would house one airplane.
The personnel of the camp was made up of veterans from the war, a number of forestry students, and one or two loggers. That pretty well made up the kind of personnel who were smokejumping at the time.

The District Ranger was Hershel Obye who was a tall, slender gentleman. His office was in Grants Pass, some distance from Cave Junction. I always got a kick from Mr. Obye, he referred to the smokejumpers as the 'Eagle Squadron.' We caused him no end of headaches from time to time, from the administrative view.

My second year (1947), we were engaged in work on the airport at Illinois Valley. Cliff had, during the winter constructed the training area and that season all of the new recruits for the program were trained there at Cave Junction. We had our own letdown procedural area, mockup, and other training aids right there at the airport.

The construction of the buildings was going on. The barracks, parachute loft, and other buildings were begin put up. We were still living in tents at the Forest Station in Cave Junction and we would truck down to the airport everyday.
In My Time
There Was No Gobi
ED ADAMS ‘46

The moniker ‘Gobi’ may not have been born yet, but the Gobi Spirit was alive. Ed reflects on the Spirit and history of the Base in three segments, presented as chapters.

Chapter 1

There I was, with 20 other Stump Jumpers standing in a barren, desolate, lonely piece of real estate, that would one day become the Illinois Valley Airport.

It was June 1946 and way before the "GOBI" mystique was born. I have never seen the real Gobi desert. But from movies and the National Geographic magazine I've seen, this was pretty close to the real thing!!!. There was a dirt strip that I thought was a road. This, Cliff Marshall (our foreman) proudly said was our airfield. I was a Paratrooper in Europe during WW II. And I saw better battlefields with tank tracks all over and in better shape then this. On one side, was a beat up old pole with a windsock that looked like one leg from somebody's worn out long underewear. Across the strip from that was a shack that we were told was the hanger. It was only big enough to hold the Spotter Plane, which was a well kept L 5 Stinson, painted bright red. Next to that was a big rusty 200 gallon fuel tank sitting on rusty legs. And next to all of that were parked two beautiful silver Noorduyn
In My Time There Was No Gobi

aircraft. They were so out of place. But at least they were something nice to look at, on that piece of dirt called an airport.

Now comes the good part. In the HOT days ahead, they brought in truck load after truck load of gravel. Twenty elite StumpJumpers, armed with Rakes, spread out that gravel, the whole width & length of that strip. Plus the parking area. Next came an antique steamroller that took two days to flatten it all out. Then an oil truck showed up and sprayed its load. After that the steamroller took over again. This went on for quite a few weeks, until it began to resemble an airstrip. It wasn't pretty, but it was ours.

I flew off that strip for the next two years. I never heard the term Gobi while I was there. But who ever coined that phrase. They had to be thinking of that place.

Chapter 2

Now that we have the airstrip ready, we got more involved in routine chores and training. Our living quarters were 4 man tents with wooden floors. They were situated about a 100 yards in back of the Redwood Ranger Station, in Cave Junction. There where two small buildings across from the tents. One was the Mess Hall, the other one contained the showers and latrine. It was in a nice, shady area with the Illinois River right in back of the tents. It also had a small diving platform for swimming (more about this later). About half way between us and the Ranger Station was the Parachute Loft, the 34-foot jump tower, and the high wire let down. In 1947 they moved the tents to this area. The mess hall and latrine stayed they were. However, they did build a 4-man outhouse close by. It was in this area that we spent a lot of our time, getting a lot of practice on the let down procedure and the tower. Later on, we made our first practice jump after we left Missoula. Our small group of 21 Jumpers, not including Cliff Marshall the foreman, nor Bill Green a squadleader, was made up of quite a few interesting characters!! A little over half of us were ex-paratroopers and one ex-paramarine (Dick Courson now a retired Oregon Supreme Court Judge). He also became our main parachute rigger. There was Paul Siler (a private eye); James 'Doc' Middelton (med student), more about him later, too; Bob Gerling (a enlisted Navy pilot); Neil Shire (Navy tail gunner); and, Clem Pope (Lt. OSS I think?). These are just a few that I can remember. Herb Krissie, ex-paratrooper, was in the same machine gun section that I was in. We went to jump school together in '43. You have to remember, that the War had just ended a few
months back. So there was still a lot of pent up emotion in us ready to explode, like: moving Cave Junction about 10 feet to the right every Saturday night, and shooting Roman candles at each other during the 4th of July (during the fire season yet).

One of the funniest things that I remember, was an incident that occurred on Hwy 199 at the intersection of Hwy 46. There is a state direction sign there that shows the mileage of the towns up ahead. Heading north, the mileage of Portland, Medford and Grants Pass are shown. Well somebody one night, got some white paint and painted out the letter "P" on Grants Pass. It was fun watching tourist's stopping and taking pictures. I'll bet this was still being done years after I left in '47. We even pulled a few stunts on our practice jumps. Somebody, while helping Dick Courson pack chutes put little sheets of toilet paper into the folds of a canopy. I don't remember who jumped with that chute. But it sure caused a commotion in town. Including with the jumper. That gave me an idea and on one jump. I put a role of toilet paper into the front of my jacket. After my canopy opened, I held the end of the roll and let it unwind. The guy's on the ground said it was very unique. Instead of staying in one long line, it kept breaking off about every 20 feet. Since the weather was real calm, I was coming down in a fairly straight line and catching up to all those strips. I wish somebody had a camera on that day. When I stood up, I looked like a mummy, who had a bad Wrap Day.

Then there was the day we had fun with a runway cargo chute. We were testing burlap canopies with sandbags as cargo. The opening shock tore up one the bags and about half the sand spilled out. But there was enough sand left to keep the canopy inflated. Instead of coming down, it just floated off till it was out of sight. That night, at the coffee shop we hung out at, one of the waitresses asked who that was that drifted off. I think everybody got the opening she left us. And somebody said, "It was Joe Doakes. They're still out there looking for him." We played that one out for a week. Then there was Doc Middleton. He became a legend. Some of the things he thought up could get you killed. He was also a licensed pilot. We used to get an Aeronca Champ aircraft from the Grants Pass airport on weekends to rent and learn to fly. That's when I learned to fly. Anyway I went up with Doc one time and he did a little buzzing. And flying pretty low. How low? One time, we had to get altitude to get over a fence. I was in the front seat. What a blast!

Then there was the Saturday night dance at the Cave Junction American Legion Hall. The dance floor was packed and Doc said, "Watch this." He strolled out to the middle of that crowded dance floor and went into a fake fit!!! He was thrashing all over the floor and suddenly went stiff as a board. You can imagine the reaction of the dancers. Ladies screamed and one even fainted. What we didn't
know at the time was that he had gotten two of our gang to come out on the floor and pick him up. One guy picked him up by the head, the other one by his feet. And when they picked him up, he stiffened his body so that he was as straight as a board. They carried him out the front door and into a waiting car and rode off into the night. A lot of the locals talked about that one for a long time.

Chapter 3

I forgot to mention what happened to our diving platform behind the Redwood Ranger Station. Underneath the platform was a huge rock that jutted out about three feet in front of the platform. So one had to dive out far enough to clear it. One day somebody didn't. Almost broke his neck. So Doc Middelton decided that the rock had to go. You won't believe what this guy did. But here goes. He went to the head Ranger, at the station, and told him that the district Ranger in Grants Pass said it was O.K. with him if it is all right with you. Then he went to Grants Pass and gave him the same story, the other way around. With this questionable O.K, they gave Doc 80 Sticks of dynamite to do the job.

Well, our Hero got a bunch of sandbags together, a diving mask, and began to place 40 sticks of dynamite on the surface of that rock. There was no way he could drill holes in the rock. So he placed 3 to 4 sticks under sandbags at various points as many places as he could. 40 sticks!!! By this time, we gathered quite a crowd of our crew, including a pilot's wife.

Nobody in town, not even the Ranger, or our boss, knew when we were going to set this off. Some how I was the one who got the job of setting it off. So with wreckless abandon, I yelled "FIRE IN THE HOLE." Well, the diving platform vanished and I swear it rained fish for ten minutes. You know what, it didn't even scratch that rock. But old Doc didn't give up. He did it all over again the next day. Same results.

Doc did not return for 1947 season. Nobody ever heard or saw him again. But believe it or not, one day some us went down to the river and that Damn rock was gone. Just wasted away during the winter. We will never know if Doc ever became a real Doc, but I hope his patients had a sense of humor.
But, let us get on to what we were here for. Fighting fires. One, that stands out in my mind, was a ground fire that was only a few miles away. It was a Saturday morning and most of us went to Grants Pass. On our return to Cave Junction, we saw an American Legion Post, which welcomed us with open arms and a lot of BEER!! Anyway, it was late afternoon when we got back to the Ranger Station. And the first person we ran into was Cliff Marshall's wife. All she said was, "Cliff is looking for you, there's a fire." Now, we weren't drunk mind you. Just a few drinks from it. But let me tell you this, it's one helluva way to sober up. We didn't get to bed till midnight. We turned it over to the people who started it. But it got away from them and back we went. Bright and early. It wasn't a big fire, but a memorable one!!!

My first fire jump is also one I'll never forget. A bunch of us were varnishing the Ranger Station when Cliff came by and took three jumpers who were next on the jump list to get their gear. The rest of us were to standby. Andy Henry and I were next on the list. (Andy was a nephew of Roy Rogers). Sure enough, Cliff came back in about 45 min. He told Andy & me to mount up. The airstrip was 5 miles from the Ranger Station, so when anybody got the call, you suited up in the back of the truck, while it was highballing down the highway. HO, HO,H0 !!!

By the way, in those days, the first piece of equip you put on, was a kidney belt. Do they still have those?

Anyway, after we became airborne, Cliff told us that on the way to the fire with the other jumpers, he spotted a small fire Andy & I were going to jump on the bigger one. It wasn't long before we were at the fire. Cliff dropped a wind streamer, then motioned us to get to the door.

Andy went out first and I was right behind him. I saw right away, we were heading right for the fire. I didn't see any flames, just smoke. But it was going to be a little warm where I was going to land. As I came crashing down through a tree, my feet were broke off all the smaller branches. And some of those branches had very sharp points as I found out. When I came to a jolting stop. I saw that the tree was not on fire. That was relief. However the grass beneath me was. I wasn't hot then, but I new if I stayed there any longer I would be getting a double hotfoot. So it was time for me to part from my chute. It was then I saw what one of those sharp branches did. As I was coming down, the sharp edge of one, ripped the sleeve of my right arm, from the elbow to the wrist. It left a scratch on my arm, but did not break the skin. I was only about 10 feet off the ground and I could see that the fire line was only a few feet away. I jumped, when I hit, I did a tumble, rolled to my feet and ran thru the fire. Losing my jump rope in the process. I quickly got oriented, found Andy & the other two jumpers. The other two were looking for there
In My Time There Was No Gobi

fire equip. So Andy and I watched for Cliff to drop ours. We saw the cargo chute open up fall a few feet, go behind the tree line, and out of sight. When we found the chute, it was up in a tree about a 100 feet up. The base of the tree was a good 4-feet in diameter. And without climbers, there was no way we could get our gear. We also found out that the other two guys had the same problem. So we laid out a yellow signal strip for climbers and waited. In the mean time, we found a small clearing that had been burned off. This, we thought, would make a good place for a CP & drop zone for more equip. About an hour later the Noorduyn showed up and we all stood in the clearing so they could see us. Out came a yellow streamer with a pair of climbers on the end. They fell behind the tree line, never to be seen again. Bet there still there. Well, there we were, four fine, fire fighters, with nothing to fight the fire with, but our spit! It was getting late in the afternoon, hot, no water, no food. When we all heard the sound of the Noorduyn coming in. We had signal streamers out, for a radio, food, water shovels & pulaskis. Two more of our guys came out of the plane on the second pass. more of our guys. Guess what, we never even found there gear... Now there was six fine, fighters on the fire, with nothing but spit to fight the fire with. In the mean time one of the guys found a creek down below us, about a half a mile away. The only problem was, that by the time you got back, you were ready to go back down again.

It was just starting to get dark, when we heard the Noorduyn coming in. Out came a chute, which we followed all the way down. We found it. It was a radio. It landed in a tree that was easy to get at. The only problem, it was hanging on a branch just above some hot embers. It didn't take long for it to get hot, so we had to wait for it to cool off. After about an hour, we were able to get it down and start hollering for help!! By this time, it was midnight and we got no reply from anyone. So we gave that up and tried to get some sleep. The fire had cooled down a bit, besides there wasn't anything we could do to slow it down. We were to dry to spit.

After a restless night, the dawn came and we could hear the sound of an airplane. I jumped up and turned on the radio. I got a response right away. It was the pilot of the LS spotter plane. I told him of our problems, no food since breakfast yesterday. Nothing to fight the fire with, etc, etc. He gave me a Roger, buzzed us, and flew away.

Very soon, we heard the engine of the Noorduyn. Apparently Cliff was already aware of the situation and he was on the radio, telling us to clear the area of our CP. He was going to start dropping food & equip. I forgot to mention that we were on the side of a Razor back Mountain, which put us at about a 45 degree angle. The Noorduyn came over the ridge line straight for the clearing. The first load that came out was a bundle of shovels tied together with a yellow streamer. No chute!!! We were getting dive bombed with shovels. They came around again, but
this time they dropped cargo chutes with water & food. The first bundle I found was a case of pineapple juice. About to die from thirst, I started to bust into a can with a large rock. Without a knife, it was the only way. I don't have to tell you about that drink. Heaven sent!!

Well, we stacked all the Goodies as fast as we could fine them. It got to be a pretty big pile. But the last thing they dropped started us to wonder if we were going to be here for a spell. It was a large wood stove and a whole side of beef wrapped in burlap.

There was enough food on the ground to feed us for a week!! I got on the radio and asked Cliff why so much food. He said that the ground crew was on its way, that most of the food was for them. We were to leave as soon as they showed up.

About noon they arrived and we started to retrieve our equip & chutes. Everybody had landed in the trees on the jump, so it took us quite awhile to get them down. We all helped each other and most of them came down without any trouble. Except one!! MINE. No matter what we tried, it wouldn't budge. So we asked the Head Ranger if they would get it down later. Because we had to leave. No problem, he said. So away we went. A week later, at our base, my chute showed up. It was in two bags? What gives? They cut all the suspension lines off the canopy, so that they could remove it.

Cliff had a few words with me after that. What the hell, what could I say?
**Whence Came the Name “Gobi”**

**ARMAND RIZA**

**'48**

By 1948, the transition from the Redwood Ranger Station to the Illinois Valley airport was well underway. The ‘Gobi’ and Gobi traditions were born.

In the beginning, there was a Smokejumper Base...behind the Redwood Ranger Station, just down the road from Cave Junction. We were in tent-like barracks under tall whispering pines, right in the heart of Siskiyou’s wild forest.

The loft, training grounds and the mess hall were all in this lavish forest. When a jump call came, we’d get into a stakeside and drive twenty minutes to our Noorduyn parked at the Illinois Valley Airport.

One morning in the summer of 1948, Cliff Marshall, the Foreman announced that we would be moving to the Illinois Valley. At this time he formed the infamous Gravel Detail. He would ask Terry Fieldhouse to drive the dump truck, then Riza, Cole, Moffit, Sweet, Snyder, Jenkins, Clemensen, and Wolfertz would shovel the gravel into the truck to be used for the new base.

Upon arrival at the airport with the first load of gravel for our future home, I saw a dry barren treeless valley. I looked to Terry Fieldhouse and we both said, “This looks like the Gobi Desert” (the mother of all deserts in Mongolia between Russia and China).

By the summer of ‘49, we moved to the Illinois Valley Airport, a.k.a., the **Gobi**.
We were now closer to the Noorduyn which made for faster fire response time. With work on the new base completed, it was back to cutting brush and felling snags with our singing crosscut saws to make them fall domino style.

We did our practice jumps, big and little fire jumps from Mount Shasta to the Washington Border. Life was good on the Gobi.

We bought a '29 4-door, green Dodge convertible to go into “town” and to the swimming hole in the Illinois River... and as they say, the rest is history!
The Gobi

It was 1948. We were living in tents down the hill behind the Redwood Ranger Station. After training was completed (3 weeks), there was a work detail sent our to the Airstrip every day. That area was known to the locals as Rattlesnake Flats: hot, dry, practically no shade, and paved with the famous Gobi Rocks.

We had a loft and a small 10' x 10' office next to our tents. Every morning at 8:00 AM, we would shape up in front of the office to check our assignment. Going out to the strip meant digging a ditch, or a well, or helping to put up a building in the hot sun. But if you were lucky and assigned somewhere else, in camp or working a trail, you were able to work in the shade.

Terry Fieldhouse was one of the few licensed to drive the truck that carried the work detail back and forth to the strip. He worked when we reached the destination, too. One morning as we were checking the list he commented, "On no! I'm at the damn Gobi Desert again!" That name caught on, and before a week went by it was called nothing but the Gobi by all the crew.
The Gobi Salute

The Gobi Salute started shortly after Terry named the Gobi Desert.

As those who were lucky enough to go to the Gobi were loading on the truck to go to work, all sorts of comments would be made by those us lucky enough to be on a different and better detail. Shortly, those staying behind retaliated with the same feeling in self-defense. In a short time, the finger became the "official" unofficial greeting for all of us at the Gobi.

The jumpers being such friendly and outgoing people it became necessary in the Spring of 1950 to explain to the rookie class that the salute was not to be used to greet the tourists and locals traveling the highway next to the Gobi. There had been a few phone calls from people who didn't understand that they were just being friendly!
Jumpers: Orv Looper, Al Boucher, Gordon Cross, and Dick Merrill

On September 17, 1952, the four of us jumped on the slope above Koontz and Davis Creeks near the coast from the Noordyn piloted by Ed Scholz. The area was an old burn, covered by thick reproduction and tall, white snags.

Everything went fine until the cargo drop. We only got one fire pack, because the second pack hung on the tail of the plane. Ed quickly headed back over the hill toward Cave Junction. The fire pack came loose before he landed, which we learned when we returned from the fire.

By dark we had the fire taken care of without any trouble. But we had to decide who got the one sleeping bag. Looper tossed a coin and he won. The rest of us used jump gear and parachutes. We were downhill from our jump spot and Dick Merrill needed some of his gear. So, up the hill he went. Much later, no Dick Merrill. We hollered and he answered from far below us, asking what we were doing way up there.

After checking the fire the next morning, we headed out. We really loaded the one pack we had and fashioned another. We also cut a pole and hung a sling load from it. Orv and I carried it, with Orv at the front. There was no trail and the brush was thick, so down the middle of the creek we went with Orv leading the way. You know Orv—lead, follow, or get the hell out of the way!

I have to add that I had to pick one person to be on a fire with, it would be Orv. I survived, but to think, to go on this fire I had to cancel a date with my future wife!
It was a typical training day for the new recruits. We were hot and sweaty from all the earlier activities that morning. We were being forced into the change from easy living to getting toughened up, harassed by the trainers as we were goaded into doing all the things we didn't want to do. And even threatened that if we didn't do something correctly, we could always run a few more laps or do a few more pushups.

By 11:00 AM, it was just great to sit and watch as we were introduced to climbing with spurs. "Who knows, sometime you may hang up in a tree and you'll need to know how to climb with spurs to retrieve your chute." "Be careful, don't jab that spur into your leg cuz it hurts, it bleeds, and it takes forever to heal." "Watch that rope around the tree and don't EVER let it get below you, because if it does you'll fall over backward and be in a bit of trouble." Sure, sure—we hear you and if you can do it, so can we.

My turn. "Find a pair of spurs and waist belt that fit." "Check the rope." "Get the rope around the tree." "Check the knot." "Take a step up and go around the tree." "Looking good, now go higher." "Come on down." "Don't let the rope go below you as you descend." No problem, see I can do it.
Now comes the test. "Climb to the top of the tree, come back down and we'll go to lunch." Things went reasonably well, except for Fred (can't remember his real name). Fred was from some urban area back east, and his outdoor experience prior to the smokejumpers had been an occasional trip to play in the city park, certainly nothing that prepared him for this tree climbing adventure. Things went OK going up, but something happened at the transition point. He could not make himself take the first step down. (Think about it—that first step down was somewhat threatening.) Looking at the clock, it was definitely time for lunch, in fact, it was getting past time for lunch. "Sorry Fred, we can't wait any longer. We're going in for lunch, and we'll see you later."

A half-hour later, Fred was still frozen in his top-of-the-tree position, trying to talk himself into that step down. I believe it was Orville Looper who played the hero, climbing up to Fred and talking him into making the decision to come back to earth.

It was a good lesson for all of us in overcoming fear and dealing with the unknown.
This was the last fire of the season, more than likely started by a cigarette or some other incendiary object. And it was next to a road. You will first have to consider the make up of the fire crew that was destined to attack this furious fire. The non-suited person, Bob Newberry, was ready and willing, but was turned down due to a beer bust that had gone on during the night and well into the present time when this picture was taken. He was judged marginal for joining the crew. Next was Orv Looper who was a squadleader and ready to do battle. Next was Phil Clarke who was a second year jumper and still considered a "Gobi Rat (Coolie)" at this point in his career. Next was Jim Allen who was visiting, or call it a junket, from the far North Washington base they used to call Winthrop.

So here we go to the fire at hand. I think Cliff Marshall, the foreman at CJ base at the time, was the spotter for the jump. I believe Orv jumped first, single stick, landed on a log shoving his toes to meet his shinbone, good trick if it doesn't hurt. The next pass was Phil Clarke and Jim Allen's two-man stick. Away they went. Normally you would try to pick a spot to land where it would be somewhat open and without too many obstacles. Phil managed to accomplish this without a problem. However Jim, squadleader of the North, decided to destroy a major highway sign.

So guess who was elected to fight the smoldering quarter acre fire? Not injured squadleader Orv, foot hurt. Not squadleader of the North, he was exempt from
any further action after nailing the highway sign.

Now you may want picture this in your mind. One hurt squadleader, and squadleader of the North sitting on the edge of the road, directing one each "Gobi Rat" to combat the the fire. Phil was wishing he at least had marginal Bob with him to help out.

To wind up this tragic story, the fire was out and all were transported back to the Gobi. Squadleader Orv was still limping for a few weeks after. Squadleader of the North, returned to what was called Winthrop at one time, to spreads the harrowing story of his initial attack on a major highway sign that he destroyed all by himself. So now you have the true story about the Mule Creek Fire, jumped and extinguished by two squadleaders and one each "Gobi Rat."
The Who, When, Where, and Why

ANONYMOUS


The upraised middle digit was not a common method of communicating among loggers in the Illinois Valley. Strongly felt sentiments were more commonly expressed up-close with all fingers clinched in a fist. Such a gesture was obviously introduced, and by a most unlikely duo.

Phillip Clarke and Cap Rowley were rookies and barrack roommates when training started in 1951. Phil was tall, blonde, and an extraordinary ladies' man. His sister worked in the office (Charlotte Looper) and his brother-in-law (Orville Looper) worked everywhere else. Cap Rowley was smaller, darker, and unobtrusively shy. Training was competitive and they competed with each other and all rookies.

The first fire call of ’51, after the rookies had made the roster, came on July 24th, a magnificent 12-man fire on Dumont Creek of the Umpqua National Forest. Rowley made the fire, Clarke didn’t! Suiting up, equipment checkout, chute fitting, etc. went smoothly, and the chosen jumpers were loaded aboard the Noorduyn. Now, we’re talking about the last load for Dumont Creek.
Rowley was seated on the bench opposite the door, within full view of a crowd of envious onlookers. Then, as the Noordyn started to move, Rowley did the deed. He looked straight at Clarke, grinned hugely, and gave him the finger salute. Clarke responded vigorously, and most of the crowd joined in with noisy enthusiasm. That quickly, that simply, a tradition was born!

Cap Rowley has insisted, in all his interviews of record, that THE DEED was not spontaneous. He has said that it was planned while they were suiting up. He had two goals in mind. First, Clarke was really down and this would rub-it-in just a little. Second, if Clarke and the other left behind responded as expected, maybe Cliff Marshall's chain would get pulled, slightly. Cliff was a little starchy about horseplay during fire dispatches—and then again, maybe it was just a case of nerves on Rowley's part.

Should anyone have any doubts about the veracity of this story, the accompanying two photos should convince anyone: Rowley in the act, captured forever; and, Cliff Marshall later that season—if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Anonymous—to protect the innocent

GOBI RULES
Late Checks
and the
Communist Conspiracy
on the Gobi

Jimmie F. Dollard
'52

The early '52 season was rather slow so everyone was bored and looking forward to weekend fun and relaxation as soon as the checks arrived on Fridays. There was a problem, however, because the checks did not come on Friday as scheduled but some time the next week. Most of the jumpers were broke or near broke and didn't have gas and grub money for weekend excursions, so most of us had to hang around the barracks where we would at least get fed. Each time this happened complaints were filed, but all we got were excuses like "our payroll dept is overworked because of all the fires" (a lie). Basically the Forest administrators told us that there was nothing they could do. By the time this happened on three successive paydays, tempers were running a little hot and there was not much to do but sit around and bitch and fanaticize about various way to fix the problem including strikes, pickets at Forest headquarters, and more sinister plots.
Roger Newton, a squad leader who was then finishing law school and had a more level head than most of us, suggested that we write to Senator Wayne Morse who was known as a mover and shaker. Roger drafted a very professional letter and after a few modifications the letter was signed by every jumper at CJ and mailed to the Senator. We heard nothing for about a week and assumed he had filed the letter in the round file.

One day about a week after we mailed the letter a convoy of about ten cars full government brass showed up at the Gobi. We were never really sure who all of them were, but we recognized the District and Forest brass. There was also some USFS brass from DC, and we figured out that some were from the Labor Dept, the Inspector General's Office, and some of the jumpers later insisted they talked to someone from the FBI. At first we were thrilled, figuring that at last someone was going to hear our complaints. We were all still young and didn't understand bureaucrats, and we were soon to be sadly disappointed.

We found out later that Senator Morse had forwarded the letter (not to USFS District, Forest, or Region headquarters, not even to the head of the USFS) but to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Labor (late checks are against US labor laws) demanding an immediate investigation and a report to him personally. Of course all hell broke loose as the letter filtered down the chain. Being bureaucrats they never considered that they could be doing something wrong, so they figured there must be commie (this was in the McCarthy era) trouble makers down there and it was the government's duty to root them out. Just how writing to our Senator could be considered un-American was never explained.

They ordered all jumpers confined to base, split up into groups, and began interrogating us one by one under oath like criminal suspects. The first to be grilled was the base manager, Cliff Marshall, who knew nothing of the letter but was well aware of the late check problem. They then interrogated every jumper. The thrust of the questioning was: a.) Since any one who would jump out of an airplane could never have thought of writing a Senator and certainly could not have possibly written such a professional letter—who were the communist (they actually used that word) trouble makers that wrote the letter and talked us into signing it? b.) If it was generated on base, who wrote it? c.) Since we were seasonal employees, we shouldn't expect our checks on time—so why did we sign it?

If we didn't understand bureaucrats, they didn't understand "bros". Every jumper gave exactly the same story without any discussions or cor-
roboration. "We had repeatedly complained about late checks with no results. We all decided to write a letter to the Senator. We all helped draft the letter. We all expect our checks to be on time." No one mentioned Roger as the author. By the time they got to me they were pretty beat. After the standard questions, one of them asked me, "What other things were suggested?" I truthfully said we discussed a lot of less appropriate things but that this seemed like the best idea. He jumped on the answer and pressed me to tell him some of the suggestions. I hemmed and hawed, but he got right in my face and insisted that I tell some of the suggestions. I finally said, "We discussed silly things like hang the paymaster by the balls." He flinched and dismissed me. I later found out that he was the Controller responsible for the checks. When they left they looked beat. They clearly didn't get what they came after, which was to hang a subversive act on someone.

We found out later that the seasonal checks were written by a contractor. Apparently someone in the group was paying attention because their further investigation disclosed improper selection and management (brother-in-law, payola or some such) of the contractor and they were fired. The USFS manager of the contract was reassigned (they don't fire those guys). Oh yea! Our checks were on time for the rest of my days at the Gobi. This lesson has served me well, and I have used letters to Congressmen to light a fire under government workers several times since.
The Elephant Fence

I assume this means the single log fence around the buildings. There was none before 1952. We put the first one up around the barracks during the 1952 season. Bob Newberry, Danny On, and Roger Newton each led crews on expeditions, on different days, to cut cedar logs on the Siskiyou about 20 miles east of the Project. We cut them with misery whips, bucked them by hand, manhandled them back to the road and loaded them on the stake truck. We had a hard time finding cedars small enough to meet the specs. Several of us spent much of the summer helping gather the logs or building the fence. There were few fires so that was the best duty around.

While on one of the logging trips Danny On found an old log about 4 feet in diameter and 80 feet long. Danny identified it as Port Orford Cedar and estimated that it had been down for over 50 years. Such a large, well seasoned Port Orford log was treasured for making arrows (before aluminum and graphite). Danny, who was an excellent archer and bow maker, got permission from the Ranger to take some of the log. Danny enlisted several of us to go up on weekends to cut off wheels, quarter them and haul them to an arrow maker. The wood was pure white and the grain so straight that the arrow maker choose to split, instead of saw, them into .5"x.5" x 36" sticks prior to turning, so he could pick out perfect grain for target arrows. I think Danny got a life-time supply of arrows from the deal, and I got infected with the archery bug which is still with me.
Tree in the Road

One night in 1953, the Oregon Caves management brought a bus load of the college girls (and a few fellows), who were working at the Caves, for a picnic at the Illinois River swimming hole near the Ranger Station. They let it be known that Smokejumpers and alcohol were not welcome. That very night at about 9:00 PM, a 4-foot diameter fir tree fell (with just a little assistance from a cross cut, pulaski and wedges) right across the only road leaving the swimming hole. Just who manned those tools remains a mystery to this day. However, coincidentally, a large group of smokejumpers hiked to the picnic carrying a large supply of beer. While the chaperones who had heard the tree fall went to investigate, the group split into couples and disappeared up and down the beach and into the bushes for private parties. There were even rumors of hanky panky in the bushes when some girls and smokejumpers came down with poison oak in some very private places.

Sometime after midnight the chaperones made it to the Ranger Station and came back with the Ranger, who was in a very foul mood. When he heard there were smokejumpers present, he came looking for help to remove the log. Guess what? The smokejumpers had disappeared and the Ranger had to buck up the tree and move it by himself with a little help from the girls, many of whom were still missing. The bus was finally freed and, when all the girls were accounted for, left for the Caves. The next morning the Ranger called our foreman with smoke coming from his ears. He had somehow jumped to the conclusion that smokejumpers had something to do with the tree falling. Just because the tree was cut with a misery whip (a logger would have used a chain saw), and Forest Service type pulaski covers and wedges were found at the stump, and because the smokejumpers crashed the party 10 minutes after the tree fell, he assumed that smokejumpers had something to do with it. After the foreman got a real chewing out from the Ranger he called an all-hands meeting and, without even asking, he assumed that everyone was guilty, put everyone on probation, and emphasized that we needed to make up a lot of good will with the Ranger who could influence the future of the base.

We took that to heart and regained the Ranger’s support by really busting our butts on all District trail and line maintenance projects the rest of that summer. Also, coincidentally, I was married to one of those Cave’s girls for 13 years.

Rookies First Fire Jump—a Real Dud

The USFS decided to pave the C.J. runway in 1953. In typical government fashion they started it in mid June right in the middle of the fire season. A spike camp was set up at the USFS warehouse at the Medford airport. The accommodations were
not great. We slept on bunks in one big warehouse building and had quite a hike to the head and shower. There was no cook shack, so we had to eat in town. We kept a small group of jumpers there and planned to backfill via auto from C.J. when they got a call. I was in the first group stationed there and we spent about a month waiting for the first fire call. Finally, what looked like a good bust started, and we put up the first load. They brought in another plane and sent out a second load. Both planes came back after dry runs with airsick jumpers. One of the planes turned around for another fire but returned after a third dry run with a bunch of disappointed and pissed-off guys. In the mean time Orv Looper brought a crew of replacement jumpers from C.J. With the replacements and the returning jumpers there was not enough bunk space nor transportation to town for chow. Things got a little tense and everyone, from lookout to spotter, was blaming the other for the dry runs.

Early next morning, I loaded out with two rookies, Stuart Roosa (later an Apollo astronaut) and Bob Wood. Rod Newton was the spotter. While we were loading into the plane Orv Looper came over and said to Rod, “Don’t bring them back.” From the look on Rod’s face, that probably was already understood. I told the guys that I would take 10-to-1 odds that we would not be on a dry run. We headed somewhere up on the Umpqua where we were to be directed to the fire by “Shorty” the only lookout to see the fire. We were later to learn that this was Shorty’s first season and his first fire. When we reached the lookout, we could clearly see a fire about 6-7 miles due south of the lookout. We flew over the lookout and straight for the fire. About 3 miles out Shorty began to scream into the radio that we were over the fire. Every time we got close to the only fire we could see, he would say that it was the wrong fire for us and it was to be manned by a ground crew. Rod and the pilot spent about an hour crossing the area and getting sightings from Shorty. Whenever a flight path crossed a meadow about 3 miles from the lookout, Shorty would shout that the fire was right under us. Rod was very suspicious and wanted to drop us on the very obvious fire 6-7 miles from the lookout. Shorty was adamant that it was soon to be manned by ground pounders and was much further away than the fire we were to be on. Rod was still skeptical and called the dispatcher for clarification. The dispatcher said they did not have another sighting and supposed it was a sleeper that only Shorty could see and to jump where Shorty directed. We were all
tense and stalemated as we continued circling when Rod looked at Roosa and saw he was green. The rest of weren’t feeling so good either. Rod made a quick decision and vectored the plane for a streamer drop in the meadow. He put me in the door and said, “Set up a grid and find that damn fire.” I had a cream puff landing in a 5 acre meadow with a small island of trees in the middle. In the middle of these trees was the biggest, ugliest dead snag I have ever seen. The rookies came out on a two-man pass. Roosa made a turn and came into the meadow near me, but Bob Wood was much nearer the snag. Just as he was about to clear the snag a gust caught him and pushed him into the side of it. Bob’s chute spilled and he began breaking limbs and ripping the chute as he fell like a rock right toward a huge downed log about 6 feet in diameter. At the last instant he swung his legs over and caught the side of the log on his leg pocket which shot him horizontally about 20 feet where he came to rest, unhurt, in a pile of limbs, lines, and ripped nylon.

We secured our gear and hiked to a nearby trail we were going to use as the base for our grid. It wasn’t long before we ran into some ground pounders heading south on the trail. We learned they were on their way to relieve us, but informed us that we were 3-4 miles from the fire which was due south of us. You guessed it. It was the fire we had seen and been told not to jump. When we told them our tale they replied, “Shorty don’t know sh__,” They had gotten another reading on the fire and had it pinpointed exactly where we had seen it. There was no second fire. We gathered up our tools and had the embarrassment of being led to our fire by ground pounders. We thought about leaving but decided that if we came to put out a fire by-gawd we were going to put out a fire. The fire turned out to be a snag and a small area around it. We worked frantically to get the snag down and a line built. The ground crew wanted to know why we were working so hard and we explained that we wanted to get back to the meadow for the night so we could get out early and back on the jump list. They said heck they wanted to stay 2-3 days. We said good bye, made the meadow that night and started out the next day-straight up to the lookout. We were so ashamed of the screw up that we brought out everything so the packs were pretty heavy. We entertained ourselves trudging up the hill by telling each other what we were going to do to Shorty when we got there. There were lots of gruesome suggestions. When we finally got to the lookout, Shorty was sort of like a pitiful little puppy and none of our abuses seemed appropriate, so we held a vote. It was two to one to let him go Scott free. I won’t tell you who voted nay. We hurried back to Medford and all of us had 2-3 more conventional fires during that bust. The Rookies had lots exciting jumps after that, but Roosa (now deceased) and Wood both say that first dud will always be remembered.
Jim fashioned a new type of stewardship at the Base. His position became Project Air Officer and reflected leadership that, for the first time, marked a managing Smokejumper who was broad based in jumping, fire control, and administrative skills.

It was July 1953, at the North Cascade Smokejumper Base. The rookie training was completed and the Region 6 Division of Fire Control was conducting an inspection of the base. Assistant Regional Forester Les Colville was in charge of the inspection. During this time Francis Lufkin told me that Mr. Colville wanted to see me in the office. When I went to see him, he told me that Cliff Marshall, the foreman of the Siskiyou Aerial Project, had resigned. He then told me that he had been authorized to offer me the position and that it would be necessary to transfer there as soon as possible, as Cliff had already left. I told him that I was happy where I was and did not care to move. I further told him that we had just purchased a home in Winthrop, that we had two small children, that it would be very difficult for my wife, Emily, to be burdened with selling the house and getting ready to move. He listened patiently to my reasons and then told me, "Go home and talk it over with your wife and get back to me tomorrow with your decision." He then said, "If you decide not take the position, I will personally promise you
that you will never again get another chance for a promotion in the Forest Service." Was he bluffing? I still don't know.

When I got home, I told Emily about my conversation with Mr. Colville. After much discussion, we decided to take the job if I could return to Winthrop in the near future to help with the sale of the house and to help Emily prepare for the move. Mr. Coville agreed, so I started packing my suitcase and the next day I was in the Forest Service L5 observation plane heading for Cave Junction. The pilot of the L5 was Monte Pierce who had just been hired as Regional Air Officer. The L5 was so small that I had to hold my suitcase in my lap.

As we departed Intercity airport, my thoughts went back to May 1946, when I first reported to work at NCSB. Four months prior to that I had been discharged from the army where I had served with the 101st Airborne Division in Holland and the Battle of the Bulge. After I was discharged, I started working in the paper mill in Camas, Washington, where I was raised. In April, I read in the newspaper that the US Forest Service was looking for ex-paratroopers to parachute to forest fires. As I liked parachute jumping, I sent in an application and a few days later I received a phone call from Okanogan, Washington, offering me a job. I immediately accepted, quit my job at the paper mill, and headed out for Intercity airport.

In 1946, there were four smokejumper bases. They were Missoula, McCall, Cave Junction, and Winthrop. The only base that had training equipment was at 9-Mile, west of Missoula. The jumpers from the four bases were all trained there. Most of the "rookies" were ex-paratroopers, although there were a few from other branches of the service. The crew size at both Winthrop and Cave Junction was 16 jumpers, and we all trained at 9-Mile. After we finished training, we headed back to our respective bases. In 1946 and 1947, I worked seasonally, and in 1947 I was promoted to squadleader. In May of 1948, Emily and I were married in Winthrop and later that year I was given a full-time civil service appointment.

Francis Lufkin and I became close friends and we hunted and fished together whenever we could get away. We also ran a trapline near the Canadian Border. We trapped pine marten for three years, during the month of December in 1948, 1950, and 1952. The trapline was 55 miles long and we made four circuits of the line for a total of 220 miles each year.

When Monte Pierce and I finally landed at the Illinois Valley Airport, I found everything running smoothly. The rookies had almost completed their training and the base was in good shape. This can be attributed to Cliff Marshall, but also to squadleaders Orv Looper, Bill Padden, Rod Newton, and Danny On. The office and records were in very good shape thanks to Charlotte Looper who was very knowledgeable about the entire operation.
At NCSB the fire season normally ended around the first of September, so in 1951 and 1952, a few of us who were available were sent to CJ to replace jumpers who had returned to school. Because of this, I had become familiar with the operations of the base and acquainted with many of the personnel. This proved to be very helpful to me. The personnel at CJ were very helpful and made Monte and me feel. Monte stayed with me for several days as he, as the new Regional Air Officer, also wanted to become familiar with the operation and the personnel, especially Ed Scholz, who was the jump pilot.

In 1953, the Illinois Valley Airport runway was scheduled to be resurfaced. This had to be done in warm weather, so we made arrangements for flying the jumpers out of the Medford Airport while resurfacing went on. As the resurfacing took several weeks, the Illinois Valley Airport would be closed all summer. We were given space in a warehouse at the Medford Airport and we kept four jumpers, a spotter, and pilot Scholz on standby there along with our jump plane, a C064 Noordyn Norseman. Requests for jumpers were made to the office at CJ and forwarded to the spotter at the Medford Airport. We had made arrangements with a private pilot in O'Brien to ferry replacement jumpers and equipment from his private airstrip back and forth between Medford and CJ. This worked fine, as by the time the plane returned from dropping jumpers, the replacement jumpers would be waiting at the Medford Airport. When a "fire bust" occurred, we would pack up everything in trucks and move the entire operation to the Medford airport. The exception was the loft equipment. We trained Glenda Marchant to rig parachutes. She would repack the parachutes and send them to Medford via the O'Brien airport.

The first fire of the year was a 3-manner on August 1, on the Klamath Forest. Between August 1 and September 26, 166 jumps were made on 59 fires, mostly in Northern California. It was a relief to have the fire season end the last of September. It seemed the job was almost non-stop except for the trip I took to Winthrop to assist Emily with the move. I learned a lot in the three months since leaving NCSB. 1953 was the beginning of 13 years as Project Air Officer at CJ. There was a lot to be done during those years and the first priority was to get some decent buildings. The messhall and the bathhouse were old CCC buildings that had been moved to the airport when the jumper operation was moved from the Illinois Valley Ranger Station. There was only one crevhouse, and it was inadequate. No buildings had been upgraded when the project was enlarged from 16 jumpers to 28 in 1948.

Over the years, the following improvements were made at the base. During the summer of 1954, the jumpers, under the guidance and supervision of squadleader

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Bob Scofield constructed a new messhall. Later that fall the foundation, exterior walls, and roof for a new creighthouse and bathhouse were contracted out. The interior finishing including plumbing was done during the winter by pilot Ed Scholz, chief squadleader Orv Looper, me.

In 1955, the jumpers constructed a combination tool shed and a rations room. Prior to that time, the jumpers were furnished army C-rations to take on fires. After the rations room was completed, the jumpers were allowed to select their meals from a variety of canned goods that were stored there. This turned out to be a good morale builder.

In 1957, a new residence was constructed on the base, and my family moved into it in June. After the birth of my third daughter in July 1955, the small house on base was much too small for five people. We were really thankful for the larger house when our fourth daughter was born in October of 1962.

In June of 1962, we inherited the Illinois Valley Ranger Station's office when a new one was built for them in Cave Junction. The office building was transported by a moving company to the base early one morning and was placed on a concrete foundation next to the paraloft building. It was a welcome addition as the small office that was previously located in the paraloft was entirely inadequate.

In 1963, the runway was extended 1000 feet and the entire base was enclosed with a barbed wire fence.

Besides the construction projects, we were also involved with the training and planning for two other bases. In 1957, we trained and transferred 20 jumpers and three squadleaders to the new base at Redding. Orv Looper was also transferred there as assistant to foreman Fred Barnowsky. Fred had been transferred to Redding from the Missoula base.

With the addition of the Redding base, we lost our best "customer" as at least 75 percent of our fire jumps had been made in Northern California up to that time. To compensate for this loss, we made a concerted effort to encourage the use of smokejumpers on the Oregon forests. Besides encouraging the forest personnel, we also placed fire packs at several locations prior to fire seasons. By doing this, we were able to send a plane load of six jumpers plus a spotter in the Twin Beech. The plane would have been otherwise over loaded with six jumpers and their fire packs.
Some of the places that we placed fire packs were at the Toketee Airport on the Umpqua Forest, the Crescent Airport on the Deschutes Forest, and the Redmond Airport.

In 1961, the Regional Office and the Deschutes Forest started making plans for a new Air Center at Redmond. Between 1961 and 1964, Francis Lufkin, NCSB, and I made many trips to Redmond to assist with the planning and construction of the new facility. In 1964 when the base opened, we trained and furnished 10 jumpers as did NCSB. NCSB also furnished two squadleaders and a loft foreman. My principal assistant, Al Boucher, was selected as the smokejumper foreman, in overall charge of the smokejumpers there.

Al Boucher was the second principal assistant I had at Cave Junction. The first was Orv Looper from 1953 until 1956 when he was transferred to Redding. Al was next in 1956, until 1964. The third assistant was Eldo "Mick" Swift, who was in the position during 1964 and until he resigned in 1965 to go to Laos with Air America. I can not say too much about the three of them. They were the backbone of the unit and were in charge of training and the day-to-day operation with the assistance of squadleaders. They all did a great job and made my job a lot easier!

In the spring of 1962, we trained six Portland Air Force Reserve Air Rescue members to jump. The next year, 1963, we trained four additional jumpers for them. From then on, they did their own training, using men we trained as instructors. They were a fine group to work with.

My next move was in 1966 when I was transferred to the Redmond Air Center where I was the Air Center Manager. I retired in Redmond in 1976, after 30 fire seasons with the Forest Service: seven at NCSB, thirteen at Cave Junction, and ten at the Redmond Air Center.

Although I have fond memories of NCSB and RAC, the year I spent at the Siskiyou Aerial Project will always stand out in my mind as the greatest. There were two main reasons I feel this way. First, it was the first base I was the "person in charge." Second, and the most important, was the personnel I had the privilege to work with. From the foremen to the squadleaders to the jumpers, pilots, cooks, clerks, and parachute riggers, I have but the fondest memories and the greatest admiration. I was told recently that some of the other bases considered the SSB unit as rebels. I don't know if that was intended to be a complement, but I will consider it such! All I know is, it seemed that we always had the highest esprit de corps of any unit! THANKS TO ALL
As you all know, Stu was the pilot of Apollo 14. Stuart and I were both novices—fledgling smokejumpers at the time we appeared at the base in June of 1953.

During the summer of 1953, I had the pleasure of claiming to be, and the distinction of being Stuart's personal barber. I'm not sure now what kind of haircuts he had but, I do know that I learned to cut hair with Stuart as my guinea pig.

In the summer of 1953, the US Forest Service, true-to-form, waited until jump season to start repairing the runway at Cave Junction. Consequently, we kept a 4-man squad plus spotter and pilot at the USFS section of the Medford Air Base.

Historically, in 1953, very few jumpers had cars. Stu was one of the few lucky enough to a car, and naturally his car was always in demand.

On the Saturday the 5th of September, I was fortunate enough to be stationed with Stu, Bob Creek, Gib Newton at the Medford Airport. That night saw the proverbial dollar signs lighting up the sky and the assumption that we would be jumping the next morning. However, this did not phase Bob, since Bob decided that we should do-the-town one last time before jumping. He talked Stu into taking Gib and him to the local pub. I had more sense: I went to bed.

We were rousted on the morning of the 6th of September with the knowledge that we were going on two 2-man fires on the Umpqua National Forest. We loaded our
Tribute...The Tree that Wouldn’t Fall

gear in the plane, suited up in the wonderful canvas suits we had, and boarded the Noorduyn Norseman. As you’ll recall, our air conditioning was two front windows open and the door open in the rear.

In any event, it was a hot and bumpy ride to the fire. Bob and Gib jumped first; we then went on to our fire. The idea was to jump Stu and me, drop cargo, and then go back and drop the cargo to Bob and Gib. As we were happily bouncing in the sweltering heat of the Noordyne, Stu indicated that his partying from last night was starting to catch up with him and that if we didn't jump soon, problems were going to occur. As I watched Stu, his face turned from human color to that of white ash. I knew that the time had come. I gave Stu one of the bungees from the previous jump and told him that if he had to, he should up-chuck in that.

Up-chuck he did. At this point, as I watched, I was shocked. Not because of the up-chucking, but because I’d forgotten that there was a hole in the middle of the bungee and, with the way Stu was sitting and holding the bag, the faster he was up-chucking, the faster it was flowing into his right leg pocket. I figured what the heck.

From the air, it appeared that the fire was small and basically in the top of a broken sugar pine on the north slope of a ridge. The ridge ran east and west and then turned south. At the point where the ridge turned south, a smaller ridge joined the main ridge. This is where the squad leader indicated that we were to jump. He further indicated that we were to transverse the smaller ridge to where it joined the main ridge and then turn left and we'd be almost at the fire. However, the squad leader failed to realize that Stu and I were both flat-landers, and we probably knew more than he did. I was from South Dakota and Stu was from Arizona.

Our jump was uneventful and our gear was dropped to us. As indicated, any flat-lander knew that the shortest distance to a point was a direct line. Thus, rather than follow the ridge we were on and joining up with the main ridge and then cutting back, it would be faster to head directly to the fire. We started heading for the fire, but to transverse to the fire we had to go down the slope of this ridge and up the other side. After all, this was a straight line. I hate to admit it, but it took us approximately 12 hours to get from the jump spot to the actual fire. I'm sure, had we followed the spotter's instructions, we'd probably have been there in a couple of hours.

In any event, when we arrived at the fire, we only found a little fire at the base of a sugar pine with a diameter of 8 or 9 feet. Growing on a 30° slope, the top of the sugar pine was approximately 100 feet above us, and that's where the fire was. Puffs of smoke rose every now and then from the top. Being true jumpers, we
were not going to leave the area until that tree came down and/or the fire was put out. After all, the spotter had been nice enough to drop a cross-cut saw when he jumped us. However, that saw was only a 6 foot saw, but no matter. We started working the next day. We had a couple cans of oil, but as everyone knows, sugar pine is very pitchy and the oil only works on the saw for so long. Soon we were out of oil. From that point, it was sheer torture.

Back in 1953, we had the proverbial C-rations. Everybody knows that you don't eat the C-rations totally. We would naturally discard crackers and other foods that weren't tasty. On the third day, because of hunger pains, we located them. After all, C-ration crackers weren't too bad.

As indicated, the tree was an 8-9 foot diameter sugar pine; we had a 6 foot cross-cut saw; on a 30° slope. To this day, I don't know why that tree didn't fall. We quartered it every way we could, up, down, and every angle, but the tree would not fall. We even tried to chop an undercut. Still the darn tree wouldn't fall.

Working on this tree was pure torture after we were out of oil. We would have to rest our feet on the tree and grab the saw with both hands. First Stu would pull while I pushed it; then, I would pull while he pushed it. Going into the third day, I told Stu I'd walk out and get a faller and bring him back. I brought the faller back the next day, and he indicated that if he didn't have that tree down by a certain time, his name wasn't "Joe Blow." A few hours passed and I asked him what his name was. He wouldn't tell me. We were still working on the tree that evening and the tree was still standing. However, the next day was Friday and my old alma mater, South Dakota State College, was about to commence the following Monday. I had to get back to SDSC. I told the faller that we would walk out with our gear and have a ground crew come in to help him fall the tree. We left never again to hear bout the tree, I thought.

I was fortunate enough to spend summers of 1954, '55 & '56 again jumping in CJ. I then went into the Navy and spent three years as a aerial navigator, getting out in 1960. I then spent the summer of 1960 at the Fairbanks Fire Base jumping. I then jumped '61 and '62 again in CJ. At some point in time, I had the occasion to jump on the Umpqua and while waiting to be transported back to CJ, a discussion was had about those two jumpers who couldn't fall a tree back in something-or-other. I was too embarrassed to straighten out this record; so, I kept the secret until now.
I had occasion to jump with Dick Board in Cave Junction in 1957, and again in 1961, and '62. Dick and I were making our practice jumps in '61. As we were getting ready to board the plane, I politely told Dick since I was to be the second man out he'd better exit the door in a hurry, because I was going to be right on his back. The squad leader overheard me and indicated that, no, I was going to go first and Dick was going to go second.

When we were in the plane, I happened to whisper to Dick that he didn't have a hair on his chest. As I sat in the door, I was watching the spotter's hand signals, as all experienced jumpers do. My idea was that as soon as I saw the spotter's hand go down, I would go out. I saw the hand go down, but before I knew it I was sitting out in the air, not really knowing how I exited the door. In any event, as soon as I got the opening shock, I checked the risers and guess what? There were two feet coming through my shroud lines. They were Dick's. He had made sure that the two of us were gonna go out together. We did. Dick's chute was on one side of me, while he was on the other side.

Dick grabbed me like I was his long-lost buddy, while I tried to get him to crawl back up through the shroud lines to get out. He wouldn't talk to me on the way down and I'll tell you that when we landed, I learned all about never, never allowing an oscillation of the chutes in our condition to occur. Those oscillations are
why Dick grabbed me and why we came down together safely. This was one of the five times that I think Jim Allen was tempted to get rid of me. One of the other four times involves Stu Roosa and a different story. The other three times I didn't know why Jim was so bothered about getting rid of me. In any event, luckily he never did.
suppose that everyone remembers their first jump, but as our hair turns gray and our memory fades, we tend to forget some of the jumps. However, I can remember with vivid clarity my second jump; it was the one when I hit the cow!

We were jumping the old Twin Beech from 2000' AGL. I think Milan Ferry was the spotter, Orville Looper was on the ground, and I believe that I was the third or fourth jumper. The instructions were to check your canopy for a good opening, turn 360° to the right and then 360° to the left, and then head for the target.

My exit was OK and after the opening shock and checking my chute, I glanced down to find the target; when I did, I saw a number of small figures walking around. My initial thought, as I was making my first 360° turn, was that people from town had come out to watch us jump. Town people meant that there was a good chance of girls—single girls—and I might get lucky.

By the time I completed my first turn, I was down about 1500' and the 'people' on the ground all seemed to be the same color—brown. I decided these weren't people, they were horses. By the time I finished my second turn and was down to about 1000', I finally figured out that these were cows—lots of cows, about 40 of them and they were all walking toward the big X in the middle of the field.
Forget about heading for the target, stay away from the cattle. I turned away from
the target and headed for an open area in the field. The cattle turned with me!
Every time I made a turn, the cows made a turn. By now I had yelled out every
word I knew, and made up a few of my own. But this didn't work.

There was nothing but cows under me. It seemed that every cow in Oregon was in
that field. By the time I was down to about 50', I knew that I was going to land on
one. I put my feet together, heels down, and I nailed one on the left side just
below the spine. It went down and I bounced off. I can see my parachute flutter­
ing down and cattle running in every direction. I landed flat on my back and had
all the wind knocked out of me. Jim Allen had failed to give us instructions for
cow landings.

Gasping for air, I got to my hands and knees. Orville Looper came up and said,
"Get up! Damn it, you're not hurt," and then kicked me in the ribs. I was trying to
get my chute off when Ernie Nicholson came up and said, "Don't worry, Don, I'll
run that bull off." What bull? There it was, about 30' away, head down, pawing
the ground, and about the size of a locomotive. It was really bent out of shape,
too.

I had heard that dairy bulls could be dangerous, but that Hereford bulls were doc­
ile and friendly. I don't think that this guy had gotten the word. Ernie took a
couple of steps toward the bull, waved his hands, and said, "Shoo! Shoo!" The
bull was not impressed and started to shake its head and snort. Ernie, who will
never make it on the rodeo circuit, said, "You're on you own. I'm out of here." By
now I had gotten my capewells open, my harness off, and I was right behind Ernie
as we beat a very hasty retreat, thinking, "Where the hell is Looper when you
really need him?"

Looper was right. I wasn't hurt, but it seemed like a tough way to make $1.40 an
hour.

I made another 40 or 50 jumps before the USAF and a wife brought it all to a halt.
With a few exceptions, the memories of those jumps have faded, but I'll never
forget that second jump.
No other base could compare with Cave Junction. What makes the Gobi so special? One big factor was the size of the crew. CJ was one of the smaller and more isolated of the bases. You also have to say that the Project Air Officers did a great job in selecting the crew over a period of years. I've often wondered how Jim Allen selected such a quality group of individuals and characters. One reason is that Jim went on the recommendations of the jumpers who were working at the Gobi. They would find new rookie candidates. No one wanted to recommend anyone for the job who was going to fail or who was not a top-notch individual.

I really like to see the successes that the jumpers have achieved in later life after they left the Gobi. From climbing Everest, flying around the moon, being ambassador to the Soviet Union and in general being contributors to the fabric which makes the United States the best country in the world. I feel that there is something missing in the current "professional" smokejumper that we had as individuals for whom the Gobi was just a part of our development and not our whole life. I've always liked it when I hear that key positions in management are filled with former jumpers. It's great to see the guy flying jumpers having been one once.
If we Gobi jumpers have been successful in other endeavors, just about all of us can trace it to habits and attitudes developed at CJ. Besides teaching, I spent 34 years with the Forest Service, working in the later years with fire crews in California. All of my people were ready to start work at 8:00 with tools, lunches and boots on. The rest of the organization was sitting at the coffee table around that time. Concepts like starting work on time, working hard the full day and taking a menial task and doing it well started with many of us on the Gobi.

In the early 60s, playing on the softball team was not an option. With Cliff Hamilton at 3rd, the Jumpers dominated the league. The “Brand X” softball team was started so that we had everyone involved. However, we couldn’t find a bat large enough to look natural in Larry Welch’s hands. And it was said that the Peters brothers were hired strictly for their athletic ability.

The “rising sun” Gobi made its first public appearance on loft-stenciled t-shirts made for the Gobi Athletic Club and the track meets in Medford. With the Moseley brothers and Johnny Kirkley we had all the speed available from the state of Alabama. Throw in Jerry Schmidt who was All-America in Cross Country and we probably could have ventured to Eugene if time allowed. The Peters brothers almost won an 880 race by switching places halfway through until noticed by the guy on the PA system.

How do you get an upper body workout and still have a great time? Answer—you play pushup volleyball for a measly five pushups for points lost. Sound easy? Try losing 3 games in a row 20-5.

I remember Dee Dutton’s first year on the Gobi. One morning volleyball was particularly intense. The name-calling was very creative; people were being verbally sliced so that Zoro couldn’t have done better. Besides the tremendous number of pushups being done, the side bets for beer and money were getting to Las Vegas standards. Being a P.E. teacher this was great. There are times when a class (jumpers in this case) gets into the zone and it gets too good to stop. We played past the normal one hour and right up to 10:00. I could see the window at the main building and pictured Dee looking out. He probably wondered when we were going to work.

I figured that once you get into the groove you need to run with it. 10:00, time to quit and get to work? Will I get fired at noon? What the heck—cool aid break and back to the court. Lockwood was bleeding from a spike that had gone through the net and landed in his face. At least we didn’t have any injuries similar to the one that had downed Mick Swift a couple years earlier when he fielded one of my excellent digs with his gonads. This was too good to quit. Terry Egan was in top
form using the "Redmond Shuffle" to the best advantage of the opposing team. We quit in time for lunch!

I think that a volleyball game showed the attitudes we had going on at CJ. The government has improved in their use of the jumpers in the last 30 years. No longer do they keep their top firefighters "prisoner" to a base and save them for fire that never arrives. It always amazes me that the Forest Service kept us in reserve for those infrequent lightning storms. Any coach knows that you figure out how to get your best players in the game even if it means playing a new position. But we sure would have missed 5,000 pushups and the ability to take and receive verbal abuse from some of the best people that we ever met in our lives.
Mt. Baker, a name that struck fear in the hearts of all flatland jumpers. After flying about forty-five minutes out of Intercity, Dick Board and I could see smoke rising from a peak in the Mt. Baker National Forest, just west of Ross lake. The peak looked like an upside down ice sickle with a few shrubby, stunted, and skinny trees growing near the top. Other than a tiny flat space on the top, the peak was damn near straight down on all sides and Dick and I had been selected to rescue those poor damn trees.

We hooked up, got in the door, and made the normal NCSB two man stick into a jump spot only half big enough for one of us. Needless to say, we were rubbing shoulders when we landed because missing the spot meant landing one hell of a long way away. The top of the peak was about fifty feet in diameter, solid rock, and had a view to die for.

The fire wasn't much. Just a few smoldering needles trapped in the cracks in the rock. All we could do was to make sure it didn't spread and to conserve our energy for the next big fire. One the third morning, I got up about eight, and since we were running low on water, I started walking around the top looking for a way to get off the peak. After making a couple of trips around the loop and not finding a good way down, I decided to wake Dick and to see if he could do any better. Dick was one of those guys who could sleep anywhere, anytime, as soundly as anyone I have ever seen. I was getting tired of trying to wake him when off in the dis-
tance, the sound of a helicopter arose. It was one of the old Korean war vintage Bell Helicopters that looked like a bug and had a motor only half as big as it needed. It circled and landed on our patch of rock.

The pilot waved at me and raised one finger, which I took to mean either he didn't like me or he wanted to fly one of us at a time. I decide he meant the latter. Since I was the only one up and dressed, I grabbed my fire pack, threw it on the litter rack, climbed in, and buckled up. The pilot revved the copter up and took off. We flew about fifteen feet and landed. "We're just about too high to fly, I think," the pilot yelled. He revved it up again and we made another fifteen feet. After doing this three or four more times, we made it to the edge where he wound it up tight, jumped the copter over the side, and started fire-balling down the side of the mountain. I thought immediately of the cowboy, astride his horse that jumped off a cliff, who pulled on the reins and yelled, "WHOA, YOU SON OF A BITCH, WHOA !" as they were falling. I felt like I had just climbed into a plastic bubble and someone had just thrown me out of an airplane. Those short, shrubby, skinny trees that we had just saved whipped by my feet faster than I liked. After about a quarter mile, we had enough flying speed to pull away from the mountain and we cruised northeast to the north end of Lake Ross. We landed in the backyard of a Forest Service guard station that was right on the Canadian border. "Stay here and a boat will pick you up sometime this afternoon," the pilot yelled as he took off to get Dick. Half an hour later, he was back, let Dick off, and disappeared into the distance.

Well, we waited and waited, and after a couple of hours we figured that the boat wasn't going to get there until it was damn good and ready. Dick said, "We might as well take a trip to foreign soil and see what we can see." So off we went up the road to Canada. About a half mile from the USFS guard station, we came upon an unmanned Canadian guard station, complete with a faded Canadian flag flying on an aged lodgepole pine flagpole. Dick thought for about a second before he said, "I could really use that flag to decorate my room back at the Gobi." So, down it came and he folded it up and put it into an old paper sack he found in a garbage can. We looked around for awhile and then walked to the US side. As we approached the guard station, Dick spotted the US flag flying from the guard station flagpole. He suddenly felt the need for a pair of flags for his room.

Just about then the guard, who had been elsewhere earlier, showed up lonely and needing to talk to somebody. Dick asked me to distract the guy until he had time to get the flag. Well, that was his chance to talk, and he did, with an unbelievable concentration. I was listening with one ear and with the other I could hear the
squeak, squeak of the pulley as Dick pulled the flag down. The guard talked the whole time it took to get the flag down. When he finished his narrative, Dick had the flag in his sack and garnered a handful of dead weeds to decorate his sack, like an old dried up bouquet.

That was when we discovered that the guard was really interested in weeds. He spotted Dick's bouquet and started a discussion about the sex life, life cycle, and any other thing he could think of for each weed in the sack. And there were a lot of them. The guy went on and on. Dick had to pretend that he was interested, because he didn't want to be discovered. After what seemed to be hours, the guard started to wind up his lecture just about the time we heard a rumble coming down the road from Canada. Suddenly, into view came a USFS truck with a trailer and a big shiny new cabin cruiser. Our ride had arrived and saved us from any more lectures.

Ross Lake looks like a Norwegian fjord in the Swiss Alps with lots of cliffs going straight up from the water, broken every once in a while by a canyon where a creek flowed into the lake. At the south end of the lake is Ross Dam and below that is Diablo Lake and Diablo Dam. Above Ross Dam was a Forest Service guard station complete with a bunkhouse, all on floats, and a private resort also on floats where fishermen could rent boats.

After a couple of hours sailing the serpentine 20–25 miles, we arrived at the floating guard station about dusk. We found it full of other NCSB jumpers and district pounders. All of the bunks had been taken, so we started looking around for a place to sleep. The only place we could find that was out of the way was in the new boat. We dined on a hearty meal of C-rations, rolled out our bags, and settled in for the night.

After having slept for what seemed like hours, I was jostled awake when the boat started rocking and swinging about. I sat up and peered over the gunwhale. Our boat was being stolen by some people I didn't recognize. Dick awoke and together we watched the thieves tow us to the resort and tie the boat out of sight of the guard station. We could hear their low conversation and laughter as they pulled their prank on the Forest Service guards. When they tied the boat up, they came to look it over and realized that we had been hijacked along with the boat. They laughed like hell. They invited Dick and me into the resort where they broke out a bottle of Kentucky bourbon and we proceeded to imbibe and tell a lot of lies. After an hour or so, the party slowed, so we crawled back to bed and went to sleep.

BLAM, BLAM, BLAM! Dick and I popped out of bed and saw the Forest Service guys had discovered the boat missing and had come looking for it with a shotgun. They woke everybody up and so we all had to get up and go back in the resort,
break open another bottle, and think of a whole bunch of new lies. It was well after midnight when we got back into bed mellow, happy, and sleepy.

The next morning we were driven to Bellingham and flown back over the Cascades to Intercity airport to prepare for our next adventure. On the way back, Dick told me that one day he would give me those flags that he had stolen.

As couple of times each year, I travel the North Cross State Highway that was built a few years after our trip, and each time I pass Diablo Dam, I remember the fire jump above Little Beaver Creek and say to myself, "Dick, it's been 40 years, where the hell are my flags?"
Part of what made the Gobi special is what made jumping special to everyone, regardless of where they jumped. That was a group of guys (old days) who had the requisite skills to keep themselves and others going in a high hazard situation, and have fun doing it. Some had more of the skills and some more of the humor, but all had enough to get the job done.

Years after jumping, I took a psychology class wherein the professor discussed the mental health of different professional groups. He said the best mental health was enjoyed by pilots because their task was so clear and the standard of success so evident— you either crashed or landed successfully. I think that was the great charm of jumping, only more so. Every jump was unique and might require you and your jump partner(s) to demonstrate a new skill or character trait. You either got the job done and got out according to plan, or you didn't. If you were fortunate and hit a busy season and jumped with a bunch of guys, you came to know their strengths and weaknesses more surely than you would ever know those of another coworker for the rest of your life.

And yes, there certainly was a Gobi pride and uniqueness. One example that sticks in my mind was a fire that Owen Riffe and I were on with fourteen Missoula guys. Owen, in addition to having a razor wit, was extremely bright. We were faced with a very long (10-12 mile) downhill pack out which generated the predictable grumbling. Owen and I lit out at a breakneck pace, then stopped ahead, where we proceeded to discuss the local flora. When the Missoula guys came puffing up, we
Making the Gobi Special

took off again and repeated our little game, along the way adorning our hard hats with flowers. At the end our feet were as badly blistered as anyone else's, but we gave no sign of discomfort that would ruin our ploy. We were doing a little jumper head game to convince them that CJ jumpers really were different, and just a little bit tougher.

And if I had to pick one thing that made the Gobi special for me it would be Jim Allen's leadership. Ever after, I told every one that I ever worked with and now tell people in my retirement, that he was the best boss that I ever had. Not the sweetest, and certainly not the softest, but incredibly gifted at taking a group of cocky young men, unknown to one another, and making them an effective team. I once interviewed for the chief of planning at the California Dept. of Forestry. I had listed on my resume that I had two years of jumping and the Director asked me where I had jumped. I told him CJ and he asked if I knew Jim Allen, whereupon I launched into a stirring testimonial. I soon found out that Jim had fired him. I didn't get that job. I probably wouldn't have liked it anyway. Jim and I have had a good laugh about it.
The crew numbered about twenty-five. They came from all walks of life and from all parts of the country. Most were college boys trying to work their way through school. Jumping was an excellent seasonal job, as the fire season usually started about the time college let out & ended in the fall about the time school started again.

On a good fire year (lots of fires), the crew might travel anywhere from Alaska to New Mexico, but most of our time was spent in the Northwest—Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Northern California. Although the jumpers were all different from each other because of previous environments, nearly all shared a common thread. There seemed to be a certain quality in all the men that chose to do this kind of work.

There is some kind of bonding that takes place between people who must place their lives in each other's hands that would not develop under normal conditions. Most of the jumpers became very close friends due to this bonding and THE common thread of a search for adventure.

Most of the fires the jumpers were called to fight were caused by lightning. To be close to the fires when they started, the jumpers would fly wherever lightning storms were forecast and stand by for a fire call.

This constant travel and never knowing where you would be the next day played havoc with any long-range plans, including having a date.
Twenty miles up a steep switchback mountain road from our home airstrip was a cave that was a tourist attraction. Approximately the same number of young women worked in the lodge, coffee shop, restaurant, and bar at the caverns as there were jumpers at the base. The girls were required to live in a dorm and were not allowed to leave the cave area. The jumpers kept the road hot between the two spots.

The land around the cave was so steep that most of the buildings were built in a notch cut in the mountain side. The girls’ dorm was such a building, and the girls learned they could jump from the steep mountain side, land on the second story fire escape, crawl in a window, and not have to be in at the evening curfew when the dorm doors were locked. You can’t even sit on the side of a steep mountain without sliding downhill every time you move. Those cave girls could, in the dark of night, navigate those steep mountain trails at a full gallop and locate every flat rock in a mile area. The cave women were part guide, part mountain goat, mostly good looking, and all a godsend to some lonely boys that sometimes went as much as a week or two without seeing more than one other human being, much less a good looking female.

On one visit to the cave, another jumper, myself, and a couple of cave girls made our way undetected to the parking lot via the back mountain trails. Curfew time for the girls came and went. My date and I went back, said goodnight a few times, and she leaped gracefully from the mountainside onto the fire escape and disappeared through a window her roommate had opened for her. I made my way back just in time to see my comrade opening the car door to let his date out of the car. They had both been partaking of the devil’s brew and, unbeknownst to him, she had passed out. When the car door opened, she spilled fluidly onto the parking lot. He would have been doing good to have navigated that trail by himself, much less carrying a one hundred thirty pound unconscious girl. Even if he had accomplished that, he would still have to jump, carrying her, to the second floor fire escape.

He hadn’t thought of all this and decided to carry her back. He put both of his hands under the small of her back and lifted. She was completely limp, and folded backwards. The buttons on her blouse popped undone from stem to stern.

My friend knelt down beside her in the light of a full moon and clumsily buttoned each and every button. During this whole episode, my usually talkative friend could only say, “Goodness----goodness----goodness gracious,” and then repeat himself. After more than two hours, she finally came to, and this was a great relief for two scared boys. We finally got her back in her dorm, and we got back to our job just in time not to be late.
Mick Swift, the Snakeman

ike a lot of my fellow smokejumpers at Cave Junction in the early 1960s, I saw Mick Swift as one awesome guy. He was only 1-2 years older than I but, with his woodsmanship, he emulated every trait I thought Paul Bunyon must have had. He possessed a John Wayne level of manliness tempered with great wit and intellectual skill equal to any of my college professors. He also had a way with women that many of us observed and talked about with great envy. To say the least, I was very proud to be affiliated with Mick Swift and to be serving as a CJ smokejumper on the Gobi with him.

However, Mick had at least one weird quirk I will never forget. He loved live rattlesnakes. During one of the summers I was at CJ Mick kept a cage with at least two live rattlers in it next to his bed in the base barracks. He was always playing around with one or the other. Once he told me that he loved his rattlesnakes and loved his women but his snakes were the more trustworthy.

On September 3, 1963 Mick jumped a fire called the Shallow Mountain Fire, about 10-20 acres (see aerial picture), which was on the Conconally Ranger District of the Okanogan NF. Along with Mick was Jim Roberts, me (Jerry Schmidt), Gil Boundy, Charley Mosely, Butch Hill, all from CJ and DickWildman and ? Holmes from NCSB. The two NCSB jumpers were first on the fire. Next was a load of four from CJ, Mosely (1) and Hill(2) on one stick and Boundy (1) and Schmidt (2) on the
second stick; Percival was the spotter; Cowan was the pilot. The third load brought the last two from CJ, Swift (1) and Roberts (2), Boucher was the spotter and Williams was the pilot. Most of us were working on the fire when Swift and Roberts jumped and we did not think much about their dissent until we heard Mick’s voice yelling and cussing just before he landed in the only tree within 80 miles of anything. This is the fire where I took the picture of Mick sitting in the top of an old Yellow Pine giving us the Gobi while we heckled him for making such a great landing. Mick had acquired a new pair of boots and before we left NCSB he had instructed us, from CJ, to lay out our chutes for him to land on so he could avoid scratching his boots. So the heckling was extra special. Some people say this picture exemplifies smoke jumping.

While hiking out from this fire Mick caught a rattlesnake and put it in a lunch bucket loaned to him by a local groundpounder. The Okanogan NF is in northern Washington and our CJ Base was in southern Oregon, which meant we had about a two-hour plane trip home. At the NCSB airport, Mick put the snake in a small cardboard box and brought it along. About half way to CJ, “Ol Ralph” also known as “Crash Williams”, our pilot discovered that there was a live rattlesnake in a flimsy cardboard box on his plane. He made an unscheduled stop at The Dalles, Oregon, and made Mick debark the twin beech, go around in front of the plane and release the snake where he could see it crawl away. We had never seen “Ol Ralph” show such emotion except on that day for that reason. For a long time thereafter “Ol Ralph” was leery of and perturbed with Mick and I don’t blame him.

Another Kind of Fire

In June 1963, while on a project assignment at the Galice Ranger Station, which was located along the shore of the Rogue River, I, along with four other jumpers, got a fire assignment of an unusual variety. Our project was to put new shingles on the Ranger Station warehouse, a building large enough to house several trucks and a workshop and a large supply storage area. We had worked on this project for a day or two and were making great progress when one afternoon the Ranger’s wife came running over to the warehouse screaming for us to come with her to help with a house fire one-quarter mile down the Rogue. The road along the Rogue River above the Ranger Station was closed due to a small landslide that would take a couple of days for heavy equipment to remove and rebuild the road surface. This landslide was located between the local fire station and the burning house. We were the only people who could help and the fire was not far away downstream.
from the Ranger Station. We jumped into our truck and sped down the gravel road until we came to a small wood frame house situated below the road halfway to the river about 100 feet away. Smoke was smoldering out of all the openings and cracks of the attic. A 73 year old man, named Mark, who was disabled with a very low stoop (extreme forward bend), was outside the house down by the river trying to get his pump started. Two of us ran around the house to size up the situation while the other two went to the river to see if they could help with the pump. No one could get the pump going, so we started looking for buckets. We went inside the house and climbed up into the attic to see if we could find the fire. The smoke was so dense in the attic we could not see a thing. We climbed up on the roof and chopped a hole in the roof to see if we could somehow get to the fire. In doing this we discovered that the roof, and later we learned the whole house, was insulated in the walls with wadded up newspaper. Finally, we decided that we could not suppress this fire, but we could salvage things from within the house. We all immediately entered the front door and started hauling furniture, clothing, books, appliances (including refrigerator), and everything that was not nailed down out the front door and up the dirt walk toward the road. As we began to do this the fire broke from a smolder to a roaring flame in the attic and roof area. We kept hauling. A few moments before the attic floor collapsed to the main floor, we had proudly hauled out the freezer which was the last thing we could find. We even had the old man's bed, stove, and large record player out and up by the road. As far as we could tell the house was empty. It took a total of about 20 minutes for the house to burn to the ground. Soon after, reinforcements arrived along with some neighbors who had some ideas of how to secure Mark's belongings and provide him with temporary shelter. He wound up in another old cabin along the river about a half-mile away.

Mark had a large garden and proved to be an excellent cook. The night after the fire Mark hosted a big party for everyone who helped him. We had corn and other vegetables with some great pie.

After about 4 or 5 hours with this old man and his fire and we could see there were neighbors present who were going to take care of him. We returned to the Ranger Station. About a day or two later we were called back to the Gobi and on the jump list.

**Running the Rogue**

In early July 1963 six other jumpers and I embarked on an adventure down the mighty Rogue River. The man who initiated this trip and arranged for the two
rubber rafts was Ron Gardner from California. Ron had a two-person rubber raft and he had borrowed a four-person raft. There was official raft space for six of us. However, there were seven of us for the trip. Ron also had a wet suite to enable him to leave the raft anytime we needed to download. I had never been in rapids or had any knowledge about whitewater. Except for Ron most of the other jumpers had about the same level of knowledge and expertise. Obviously, we were all on a steep learning curve and boy did we soon learn. I was one of the five in the four-person raft. The other four were Hal Ward, Cliff Hamilton, Doug Hopkins, and Ron. We had four paddles and everyone had a life vest, thank God! I cannot remember who was in the two-person raft. When we hit the first little spot of whitewater I remember taking one paddle stroke with water up to my armpit and the next stroke I got nothing but air. Wow! What an experience. We were bucking and rocking and rolling and rising and falling and swimming. We were soaked from the beginning. For a long time we made out OK. Occasionally someone would get tossed overboard or lose a paddle but we always recovered and recuperated our paddling operation and resumed our trip. We went through rapids and waves and over waterfalls that ranged from 3 to 8 feet high. There was one fall where we stopped unloaded and hiked down to met our raft because it might have been 15 or 20 feet high. Fifteen miles into the trip we came to a strip of whitewater called Horseshoe Bend. Halfway around the bend we hung up on an exposed rock that tore a large hole in the bottom of the raft. We lost two paddles. I can remember standing on the rock with some of the other guys with the raft around us. For a while we could not get the raft off the rock but with a lot of grunting and heavy lifting we finally got it to move and made the rest of the Horseshoe Bend segment riding backwards and sideways with two ineffective paddlers. As soon as we could get to the shore we decided that 3 of us, Doug, Hal and me, would walk or run the rest of the way as there was only enough room for two paddlers in the big raft with the ripped out bottom. We were ten miles from the pick up point and there was a trail parallel to the river. So on that Saturday in July 1963 we ran the Rogue only some of us ran a major part of it with our feet on the trail.

Ron did an excellent repair job on the raft bottom using tire repair material and returned it. I do not know how the owner received it.

Taking this trip was a ball. We saw great country with beautiful scenery and one of Zane Gray's cabins. We were wet and cold most of the way but we did not really notice that much nor did we care.
What made the Gobi memorable? It was the constant squeaks and squawks of the hog chain that fed the Rough and Ready wigwam burner across the road. And the ever-present specks of burned sawdust from the wigwam burner that snowed on the base every day. It was the snake farm next door, until a midnight arsonist visited the place and burned it to the ground. It was those late night hamburgers at the little restaurant next door, a place that was visited so often that someone built a special set of steps to get across the fence. It was the weekend runs to Seats Dam to bask in the hot sun and perhaps view the local honeys. It was the runs around the short loop down the power line or around the long loop on Airport Road to stay in shape and kill time. It was going to a drive-in movie and sneaking a couple of jumpers through the gate in the trunk of the car. It was a bunch of jumpers driving to the Oregon Caves, only to be thrown off the property by Mr. Christensen just for laughing at the midget ranger who jumped over the fire or for chasing the girls. And getting an ear full from Jim Allen the next day because Christensen called him at 2 AM to complain. It was drinking beer, eating pickled eggs, and playing pool at Bill's tavern in Kirby. By the way, how many jumpers remember that the real name of that tavern was "The Ritz." It was drinking beer and playing pool at the Sportsman Tavern in downtown CJ or carousing at the Chit Chat across the street. It was the Jumpers or Brand-X teams
Remembering the Gobi

playing softball at the high school field, and almost always winning. It was a bunch of jumpers driving to Grants Pass to partake of Abby's pizza. It was listening to the mosquitos buzzing around the bunkhouse room on those hot CJ nights. It was glass taping up jumpers and dumping them in the Gobi. It was a jumper catching a rattlesnake and keeping it in a box in the dayroom. In other words, it was a place that had character. But mostly it was the fun of being around a bunch of guys who enjoyed working together and playing together. I really miss those days. They were the best days of my life.
Trips to North Cascades

LARRY LUFKIN

'63

Trips to Winthrop were always interesting because very few of the North Cascades crew knew I was related to Pappy Lufkin. The only Winthrop guys who knew me were my old high school friends or a few older jumpers. Most jumpers know that Pappy Lufkin was respected and feared, mostly feared, by the jumpers who worked for him. He was known to get pretty nasty if he caught someone screwing off on the job. One jumper left his harness at a fire and the Old Man made him drive back and walk in to the fire, all on his own time, and retrieve the harness. Another jumper hid in the loft and took an afternoon nap. He didn't know the Old Man caught him until he got his paycheck and discovered he was short four hours of pay.

Invariably, a trip to Winthrop would result in a bullshit session in the loft between the Winthrop and CJ jumpers. And, as often as not, a Winthrop rookie would start bitching about something the Old Man had said or done. Not wanting to spoil the moment, I'd stay in the back and say nothing. The fun began when one of the older Winthrop jumpers would point me out and ask if the rookie knew me. Of course, the rookie knew I was someone from CJ, but usually acted as though there was nothing to worry about. At that point, John Gordon or one of the other Winthrop guys would tell them that that Old Man was my dad. You have never seen unadulterated fear til you've seen one of those rookies in that situation. I saw a couple of guys turn almost white and most couldn't talk for a few minutes. We would all have a good laugh after which the rookie would go to the bunkhouse and clean out his shorts.
International Night at the Gobi

TOM (GRAVITY) ALBERT '64

The year 1967 was not unlike most years in the Pacific Northwest. Up through mid-July we had average action but nothing to brag about. One evening in mid-July I asked the guys in the day room if anyone was interested in going to town for a beer. No takers, so I asked a second time, again no takers. "Well the hell with you guys, I'll go by myself." On the way into town I was debating whether to go to the Chit Chat for a drink or the Sportsman for a beer. It was after 8 pm so the sidewalks were rolled up. The Jump Gods were with me that night and I chose the Sportsman.

Parked and walked into the pub and there were just 4 people, three very attractive ladies, and a guy sitting at a table by the bar. So, minding my own business, I sat at the bar near the table. They were conversing in English but with distinct foreign accents. That was reason enough to move over to the table and ask where they were from. The guy left. It turns out they were on a low budget tour of the U.S. and the participants were young secretaries and teachers from Europe and Canada. They slept and ate on the tour buses which had stopped in C J for the night en route to the coastal highway.

I asked, "How many are on the tour?" One answered, "Twenty." "Twenty ladies like you three!!?" "Yes, (hesitating a second) are there any guys in this town?" the one from Belgium asked. "Yew, I know where there are twenty guys like me (not
bragging on myself, but I did have hair back then) and I can get them here in 20 minutes.” To which she replied, “Great, I will get the girls here.” With that, I asked Pat, the owner of the Sportsman, if I could use his phone. He wouldn’t let me, bless his sole. Pat was odd that way.

So, I ran down to the corner pay phone, put a dime in, and called the day room. Jumping Joe Neison answered and I excitedly told him, “There are 20 beautiful ladies in the Sportsman. Get the guys and come down.” The bastard hung up on me. I reached for another dime and didn’t have one so ran back to the Sportsman and got change. By the time I ran back to the phone I was out of breath but called again. Jumping Joe Neison answered. I adamantly told him, “Don’t you dare hang up again, Joe! There are 20 beautiful gals here and you get the guys and come down, now!”

I returned to the Sportsman and there WERE twenty beautiful girls sitting there. I explained that the guys were on their way. The sight must have dazed me a little as the events that followed are a little fuzzy, but I will relate them as best I remember.

Can you imagine! Jumping Joe must not have believed me. I don’t understand why. It is totally within the realm of possibilities that there could be 20 beautiful girls in Cave Junction just dying to meet the jumpers. This hadn’t happened in the history of the base but still, you’ve got to admit, it was possible. I know Jumping Joe and the guys did not explore that option and wrongfully thought I was just giving them a cock-and-bull story with the sole intent of getting them down to have a beer with me. This led to one of the funnier things that happened on this night.

I was moving from table to table meeting the ladies and assuring them the guys will be here any minute when the front door blew open and in rushed Jumping Joe with 4 or 5 of the guys in trail. Joe had a roll of glass tape in his hand. They were going to rush me, take me down and tape me, drive me back to the Gobi, and through me in the gorge. When he saw the bar full of beautiful ladies, he stopped dead in his tracks, mouth open. The 4 or 5 running guys bumped into him in sequence, just like the Laurel and Hardy movies. You had to see it to believe it.

After Jumping Joe substantiated my story, the guys rushed down making the drive to town in record time, even Lufkin’s Hudson. The party was just getting started when Pat announced that the bar was closing. Hell, this was too good to be true so, needless to say, we pooled our money and bought all the beer we could, loaded the ladies and beer into the cars and drove to the Gobi. It was around midnight now. The party moved to the day room. The whole crew was participating except for one new guy. He wouldn’t get out of bed. He did eventually come to the party
International Night on the Gobi

carried out on the shoulders of some of his fellow rookie class members in his underwear.

One thing led to another and the party moved to the loft where the ladies were introduced to our jump wares. Several plus were suited up and, yes—you guessed it, we ended up at the units. Finishing up my career as a bureaucrat, the implications of what could have happened chill me today but at the time, hell, what can I say. We had a grand ol' time. The girls were getting “E” ticket rides and having the time of their lives. We, needless to say, were also.

Around 4:00 AM we took the ladies back to their busses and returned to the Gobi and picked up all the beer cans. Delos, our PAO, called us in the next afternoon and related a story he had heard in town about a wild party at the base. We assured him it was just a “townie” rumor and there wasn’t anything to it.

That night was like a dream. Twenty beautiful ladies in Cave Junction who were ours and ours alone. Maybe it was the Twilight Zone? No, not so, it did happen. Well, they went on their way and we went on with the summer. August brought numerous project fires to the region. We got smoked in. The season was not one you wrote home about, but the international girls did write and told us their night on the Gobi was the highlight of the tour. So... it was not a dream. Looking back, a good season on the Gobi.
It was during a small bust in August, 1966, that Garry (with 2 r's) Peters and I, Tom Albert, were possibly the last 2 jumpers on the base. A fire call came in for the Gold Beach District of the Siskiyou, so we got the call. Terry MeWhinney was the spotter. We got to the fire and it turned out to be a gigantic Doug Fir snag that was putting out a little smoke but not much. Terry was a rookie spotter that year, so Garry was intently “assisting.” The degree on that “intensiveness” will become vividly clear as you read on.

We were in N141Z, The Beech 18 that we got from Region 4. It was the one with a parachuting Smokey Bear painted on the nose and the damn thing didn’t have a step. I always hated that plane because I never mastered the no-stop exit and almost always ended up with twists. This day was to be no exception.

There was not a defined jump spot so it was decided to drop us in the timber close to the snag. I’ll never forget it. Garry was sitting in the door with his helmet off, watching the streamers. I think we made 2 streamer runs after which it was decided to go live with single-man sticks. This is no bull, we were turning final and Terry had his head outside a little cut out area behind the door (there was no spotter window in this airplane). Garry was in the door hooked up, also with his head partially outside the door. As we turned on to final, I grabbed Garry’s shoulder to get his attention and asked, “Aren’t you going to put on your helmet?” “Oh shit,” reaching for his helmet. He put it on and out he went. Now I don’t know
whether or not he would have gone out the door without his helmet, but maybe I shouldn't have said anything, then we could tell his twin brother Larry and him apart.

Garry landed down hill from the snag. I got in the door and out I went on the next pass. I have never twisted so much in my life, before or after. I had seven of the tightest twists I had ever seen. As luck would have it, I was driving down hill away from the fire. I was hanging there not untwisting and the ground was getting closer and closer. I even tried to grab a guideline and pull it through the twists but to no avail. I finally kicked my body around and untwisted less than 500 feet above the trees. I was totally disorientated but the main task at hand was to get me and the chute to the ground if at all possible. I saw a small hole in the tree canopy and drove to the edge of it. Yes, I know we were taught to cap a tree if it looked like we were going to hang up but as all of us know, Bull Shit. So I decided to attempt a spiral turn into the hole and try to make it to the ground. Just as I entered the hole, I saw a big branch sticking out in the hole and well, I am going to relate what "I" felt happened though it is a little farfetched.

I knew the chute was going to hang up on that limb. Now here is where it gets weird. I felt like I had stopped descending. Looking down, I was still a hundred feet in the air so I looked up to see how well I was hung. At that very instant I started down again, so I remember saying to myself to get off my feet as fast as I can and roll down hill to minimize the injuries that were bound to result from the fall. The chute reopened (or maybe never collapsed and the momentary "stop" was just adrenalin pumping, magnifying time). I descended uneventfully to the ground.

I didn’t have the foggiest idea where I was. All I knew was the burning snag was up hill from where I landed. Luckily, having become adapt at “brush” jumping in southern Oregon and Northern California, I carried a roll of engineering tape in my leg pocket and started marking my way as I climbed the hill to find Garry and the fire. About halfway up the hill, I passed Garry’s parachute and gear. Anyway, we found each other and the fire.

That snag had to be 200 feet tall, 8 foot in diameter, and had all its bark and widow makers all the way to the top. The tree was cat-eyed, thankfully on the side-hill part of the tree. I don’t know why, but we only got a 24 inch bar chainsaw. We had no radio which was common in those days. I don’t remember if we had any bigger saws left at the Gobi or if Garry decided he didn’t want to pack one of those heavy bastards out. Anyway, there we were with that 8 foot diameter tree and a 24 inch bar.

Well, to make a long story short, we whittled and beavered on that tree for two and a half days, leaving holding wood on the up and down hill sides. You could
literally see right through the tree (remember, it was cat-eyed). Hell, we were afraid to cut anymore. That tree was perfectly balanced. Garry and I must have run 1000 yards on the final attack on that snag. We double wedged it and each time one of us hit the wedges, the tree made the cracking sound and off we ran because there wasn’t much wood holding the tree and we weren’t sure which way it would go. We must have repeated this cycle 10 or more times before it fell.

One would have thought we knew what we were doing as the tree fell perfectly side hill. Now wouldn’t you know it, after 2 and a half days of whittling, beavering, and wedging, there wasn’t a bit of fire or heat in that tree. It was out cold. Oh well, that’s the way it goes.

After all of this, it was time to retrieve the gear. Garry said, “Tom, I don’t have the slightest idea where my chute is.” Well, this was too good of an opportunity to not take advantage of so I didn’t mention passing his gear on my way up the hill. “Garry, I tag lined mine so help me get it and then we will look for yours.” He was almost wringing his hands worrying about his chute. I asked, “Garry, does your father still have the gas station in Lakeview?” “Yew, why?” “Well Garry, maybe he will let you work there if we can’t find your chute.” This really got him going. Remember, in those days if you didn’t come home with your chutes, you kicked the can down the road. About that time we passed his chute and I asked, “Does this look like yours?” He almost kissed me until he figured out that I knew where his chute was all the while.

We had a nice little pack out and returned to the Gobi. Mrs. Peter's Boy went on that year to the U.S. Air Force and became a fighter pilot, spending two tours in Viet Nam. It wasn’t until he got tired of saluting that he returned to fire fighting, this time as a smokejumper pilot. Garry is now retired, well, semi retired, and has a beautiful place in the San Juan Islands in Washington State.
The Gobi, what is it? It is the nick name for the base called the Siskiyou Aerial Project, later the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base. It was the smallest of the primary U.S. Forest Service bases. This probably was one of the keys to the tradition that developed. We were small, quaint, and not in the headquarters limelight. This allowed the succession of Project Air Officers (PAO) to hold a looser reign that enabled the crew to develop the hard work, hard play ethic that endured throughout the existence of the base. Bottom line, the Gobi was the Gobi because of the crew.

I was first introduced to CJ in 1963, when a crew of jumpers came to the Galice Ranger Station to perform project work. Cocky bunch of bastards who had little to do with us district pogues. Our District Ranger, Don Woods, loved the jumpers and considered himself one of the recruiters for the base. Hell, he treated them like the Gods they thought they were.

Don would select a few from his summer crews to "interview" with the PAO. Mr. Woods was very selective as he only endorsed people he felt would make the grade. Anyway, he had three of us go to the Gobi one Saturday morning (on our own time) to interview with Jim Allen. We had no longer gotten out of the car when the siren blew. I will never forget that day. It was a typical fire call. The guys helping Cliff Hamilton and Chowwabby suit up. The engines on the ol' Twin
Beech firing up. And all the guys issuing the good luck “salute” to the departing jumpers as the plane sped past the loft on its takeoff role. Think about it, to a non-jumper want-to-be, can you imagine anything more exciting?

Let’s face it, those exciting moments were relatively few and far between, especially in the earlier days. Yes, this is what we lived for but that wasn’t the essence of the Gobi. It was the fun we had together, laughing, kidding, and challenging one another:

- Watching Lou Groza (Lou Wayers) eat in the mess hall. Heaven forbid getting between his fork and the food.
- The smile that came over Cliff Hamilton’s face when some big logger in the Chit Chat asked if anyone here was tough enough to step outside with him.
- The “soft encouragements” that Chuck Sheley uttered to his teammates when they were losing the volleyball game.
- The beleaguered anticipation the rookies felt waiting for Farinetti to come back to the barracks late at night from one of his excursions to town. Trooper Tom and Gar-Buck were the usual targets.
- Practice jumps and the jump pot.
- Handing out the 150 foot letdown ropes to the booster crews.
- The Gobi Gorge, don’t screw up or have a birthday. Any excuse, ANY.
- “Shopping” at the Gobi Store for your Ditty-Bag items.
- Sitting around the lawn on the warm evenings joking and BSing.
- Getting up in the morning swearing that you weren’t going to town tonight, only to change your mind that afternoon. But, just for one!
- The laughter: Emett Grijalva’s one-liners, Ron-the-Mac’s chuckle.
- Tom Smith’s Gobi haircut.
- The Peters twin’s boxing match at one in the morning on their 21st birthday. And don’t forget the track meet. Almost pulled it off.
- Constructing the jump tower. “This piece goes here.” “No, no, no, it goes there.” “Bull Shit!”
- Watching lightning strikes at night with excited anticipation.
- Paychecks after a bust.
- The Rookie party.
The Gobi Charisma

Oh, and the practical jokes. Glued tennis shoes to the floor. Doors tied closed. Night before the first rookie jump rituals. One time I stashed a six-pack of beer behind a bush along side the road. Rubisow, Ron-the-Mac, and a couple of others were in the car with me. As I approached the location, I started sniffing the air, "Do you guys smell that?" "What are you talking about," they answered. I passed the beer, stopped and backed up still sniffing, stopping abeam the beer, got out and retrieved the six-pack from behind the bush. They almost fell out of the car.

I can go on and on. There are as many stories as there are Gobi stones. All of us recall and savor those little endeavors; some we'd like to forget, most we remember with a little chuckle or a silent smile. Our aggressive reputation on the fire line was only part of what made the Gobi the Gobi. It was the in between times that made up the "charisma" of the Gobi. Damn, it was fun.
What Made the Gobi Special?

ERIC "THE BLAK" SCHOENFELD '64

• More-or-less daily volleyball games during 2nd half-hour of daily PT.
• One-man fire packs (with personally-chosen groceries).
• Having an almost-private airfield.

During a couple of busy weeks in August of 1972, Intermountain Air supplied us (at ??? cost) with a DHC-6 (aka, Twin Otter) jumpship. Until then, our usual jumpships had been USFS-owned B-18 (aka. Twin Beech; aka, C-45) and an aging, contract-provided DC-3 (aka, Gooney Bird; aka, C-47).

Most of us were—after comparative observation—quite pleased-with/favorably-impressed-by the turbine, 3-engined DCH-6s performance as a jumpship. Unlike the Twin Beech or the DC-3, the Twin Otter had fully-reversible propellers; i.e., it could taxi (into a parking position) in a backward position.

Pilot (EH) backs (empty) Otter to within a few feet of the Warehouse/Loft loading dock(s), pours the power on, and (with plenty of room to spare) executes a cross-runway take-off. Those of us watching were definitely impressed.
"The Colonel" (aka, JF)...former US Army airborne dude.

He ran the parachute loft when I arrived at CJ in '64. At that time CJ had two female (sisters) employees. Alice B was the lady who—quite efficiently & competently—(often) answered the telephones, supervised a summer-season clerk, typed many of the usual "personnel-action" forms, and who harrassed us when we (per usual) failed-to-enter plausible (or any) numbers in the unusual boxes on our—much despised—fire-action-report forms.

Glena M spent WWII as a parachute packer for the US Army Air Corps. Her (parachute-packing and sewing) knowledge and abilities were considerable...and a real asset to CJ's loft operations.

Rumors suggests that (initially) both Alice & Glenda felt a bit of pity for the Colonel's (poor) wife M. Rumor also suggested that, after Alice & Glenda met the Col's wife M, their sympathies reversed; and, they felt sorry for JF who, around '65, left CJ to become a motorcycle cop for the California Highway Patrol. During the 60s, a common (an rather universally accepted-as-plausible) Gobi saying was, "Any work in the shade is better than any work in the sun."

Rigging parachutes was just about the only plausible 'work in the shade.' Most 2nd-year jumpers dutifully rigged their 20 "practice packs" (to be inspected by "The Colonel"...or—during his rare absences—by one of the other senior riggers). The aspiring parachute rigger could only put his packed parachute "on the shelf" (for use by whomever)...after 20 such practice packs had been duly dissected, inspected, and criticized for variations from 'perfection.' According to lore of your, (in '64), 2nd-year guy B became a bit frustrated by the Colonel's nit-picking non-consistency and chose to conduct a little experiment: B took one of the Colonel's packed parachutes off the shelf, finagled the packing card and tape labels, and presented it—as his practice pack #15—for the Colonel's inspection. The Colonel noted numerous discrepancies. He concluded by saying that—if it had been attached to a live jumper—B's practice pack #15 (actually one that the Colonel had put on the shelf) NEVER WOULD HAVE OPENED.

B (and the others who were "in-on" that deception) had great difficulty suppressing their) giggles.

An Oregon Journal Article.

In '65 or '65, Portland still had two daily newspapers. Sometime in June of those years, a reporter from the long-defunct Oregon Journal arrived at the Siskiyou Aerial Project (as it was known in those days). He watched, interviewed, and took
the usual notes... on ordinary paper. As printed a week or so later, the Journal's feature article was good for a few giggles:

-- Rookie obstacle course made Marine Boot Camp seem like a Brownie Foot Race.
-- Our "square-jawed" foreman (Mick Swift) had shoulders so broad that he needed to "ease" them though doorways. (For the duration of that summer some of us—much to Mick's annoyance—occasionally asked him if he'd had any recent problems "easing" his shoulders through doorways).

**Mid-60s and Just One.**

During lulls in the fire season, just after supper, a few of us might go to some local tavern(s) for "just one beer." Cliff Hamilton's "pink pig" (an old Ford station wagon) was the oft-chosen method of transportation. More than likely, we'd have (at least) "just one beer"... at each of the half-dozen or more taverns between the California line and Kerby; and, we'd only begin-to return-to the Gobi after every tavern in the valley was (at 1:00 AM, in those days) "Closed." More than likely, a Taquila bottle was under the shotgun seat of the Pink Pig; and, more often than not, it was "activated" and passed around a time or two. Miraculously, we survived each and all of those very early AM drives... without the slightest injury.

But, when we arrived at the Gobi, the fun was NOT OVER. Various—approx 10-inch DBH—P-pine trees grew between the "new" barracks and the training units. During sober daylight, I'd never have been able to steer an automobile through the "loop" route amongst those pine trees (while honking the horn at regular intervals). By headlights-only, it was—despite mere inches of clearance on either side—much easier... even for a guy who was (measured by blood alcohol percentages) "certifiably drunk"... The Gobi Charisma

During the later-tha -morning volleyball game, a few opportunists attempted to direct lobs and/or spikes at those of us who had been participants in such late night/early AM imbibing activities. Oddly, we seemed to manage to return such hits just as well as the guys who were not suffering from hangovers.

**The Umpqua National Forest**

(1966) 360° of trees:

During the mid-60s, a fire jump on the Umpqua NF was often a "tree-up" jump into what now would—if it were still that way—definitely be termed "old growth" forest.
The mandatory jump story:

Around '65 (may have been '66), 4 of us (myself, J Robison, Chuck Sheley, and [perhaps?] Chuck Mansfield) are spotted out of the USFS Twin Beech...with intent-to land at a "postage stamp" (Umpqua NF) ridgetop clearing which was probably the result of a bit of blow-down during some-years before-freak of winter weather.

Robison & I are jump partners. Our trusty FS-5A parachutes deploy in the usual manner; but, neither of us can see a sign of the jumpspot. For lack of any other clues, I randomly choose to begin a right turn and I continue that right turn for almost a full circle...before the jumpspot is in my line of vision. (Years later, Robison still re-called my-under canopy-comment that All that I could see was trees & more trees...in all directions.) Once we saw it, steering to the (ground at the) jumpspot turned out to be relatively easy.

(1972) "checkerboard" pattern of Clearcuts:

After a few years ('67-'71) of doing other stuff (mostly spending 4 years in the US Air Force), I returned to the Gobi for the '72 fire season.

Any trip to (standby at) either Redmond or Tokatee airfield involved overflying most of the long axis of the Umpqua NF. During a mere 5 years, the main hazard of landing a parachute on much of the Umpqua had changed from (i) hanging-up insecurely to (ii) ground-collisions with large stumps and or cull logs.
Mamas, Don’t Let Your Sons (or Daughters) Grow Up to Be Smokejumpers

TERRY EGAN

In four years of jumping and fifty jumps I made two without gear. Both were simply awful experiences. In 1967, I got detailed to Missoula along with “Jumping Joe” Neison. We did two fires together, but then he got to go back to Cave Junction. For some reason Missoula folks, with their mile-long jump list, came to the conclusion that I was one of them so I ended up staying 26 days and “maxing out” during the trip. Apparently the Fair Labor Standards Act wasn’t even a blip on anyone’s radar screen back then.

I’d had three jumps out of Missoula and was in the loft inspecting cargo chutes when the call went out for 16 jumpers (a Doug load) to jump a fire in a logging show on the Clearwater National Forest. In my planeload were a squad leader and a jumper from Redding. Not being from Missoula we had bonded as “outsiders” do in a new place. The jump was a piece of cake and I don’t think anyone hung up because all of the trees were on the ground.

I felt rather naked without a fire packet or even a Pulaski, but the fire boss, a young forester, assured us all would be provided. We had landed at the top of a ridge and the cutting unit extended down the ridge into a gully, bordered on one side by the
Clearwater River, not far from a ranger station. The forester was obsessed with saving as much timber as he could so he dictated the tactics. Specifically, he had us team up with a crew of Tortuga Indians from the Southwest who were short, Apache-looking men who impressed us as tough professionals. The forester then directed us to dig line midway down the ridge in order to save at least half of the timber in the cutting unit. Our Redding squad leader patiently explained to him that a better tactic would be to build a strong line at the bottom of the ridge and burn back up the ridge, but this really good idea was summarily rebuffed. The forester acted as if the timber on the ground was his personal property. Maybe it was, but it was clear to us that we weren't going to save the downed timber using his tactics.

Nevertheless, an order is an order so we proceeded about halfway down the ridge and started digging hand line. It quickly became obvious that the forester saw us smokejumpers as the storm troopers who would lead the Tortugas and some local crews in the building of hand line. But even storm troopers have their limits. As the fire burned down the ridge, it burned the underbrush that had been holding back the downed logs of the cutting unit. Before long, we were jumping out of the way as logs came rolling down on us. One Missoula jumper did a mid-air pirouette as a log came down on him and he back flipped over it in a pretty good imitation of a "Fossbury Flop." Another Missoula jumper was carted off the fire when a rolling log injured his knee. The Tortugas were good fire fighters, but they hadn't signed up for this nonsense and their grumbling became more audible. Their Forest Service Liaison explained that the only thing that was keeping them on the fire line was their tribal pride.

By this time, we had been on the fire for about eight hours and we were running out of water. We also had no food. The Redding squad leader finally had enough and he climbed half a mile up the ridge to air his complaints with the fire boss and almost passed out from dehydration and exhaustion. His complaints were somewhat attended to by the Fire Boss because an hour or two later we got a meal: a canteen of water and a cheese sandwich. I almost cried thinking of the wonderful food in a Missoula standard pack. At this time Missoula was experimenting with freeze-dried foods that were incredibly delicious compared to the standard Forest Service rations. On a previous fire I had a breakfast of Canadian bacon, French toast, and home fries. Dinner was sirloin tips with gravy and egg noodles. You just popped them in some boiling for about twenty minutes and you had a meal, if not fit for a king was at least good enough for a baron or a duke!
As it began to get dark, we realized we had lost the fire, even if the fire boss didn’t. Burning logs, released from the confines of burned brush, were rolling down on top of us and our hand line was powerless to stop them. The only thing that could stop them was the bottom of the ridge, where we had first suggested building our fire line. Unfortunately, the forester/fire boss still wouldn’t listen, so we would make a hand line, only to have burning logs roll through it. We’d drop down the ridge and start another line only to lose that one too. Worse, the fire went into standing timber where it began to crown and roar like a freight train.

We fought the fire into the night and the next day until the late afternoon, when the forester pulled us off the fire. The fire had forced us to the bottom of the ridge near the Clearwater River, so he led us across the river through a deep ford. I was behind a jumper, up to his chest in the cold water, struggling to hold his chain saw high over his head to keep it dry. Emerging from the cold river we were sopping wet and it was approaching nightfall and the temperature was falling rapidly. We quickly reached the Ranger Station and were parked out in a field and issued paper sleeping bags. Sleeping on the ground in wet clothes produced, in our exhausted group, seemingly instant chest congestion and head colds. Having used and abused us, the forester released us back to Missoula the following morning.

By now, I had been on the road for twenty-six days, most of it on fires, and I was exhausted. I wanted to go home to the Gobi so I sidled up to one of the squad leaders and reminded him that I was temporary help from Cave Junction. He looked rather astonished and said “You are?” I assured him I really did know where I belonged and could he please get me back there.

I caught an F-27 Friendship from Missoula to Portland and then one of the last DC-3’s United was flying from Portland to Medford where I had a great time flirting with the flight attendant. I was really looking forward to a rest, but that was not to be as we flew in to Medford in the middle of a lightning storm. I was picked up at the airport by my erstwhile Missoula traveling companion, Jumpin’ Joe, who informed me that the base was pretty well jumped out so not to plan on going anywhere.

Thus ended one of the most miserable and certainly one of the most dangerous fires I ever fought - - except for that one near Redding where the rattlesnake almost got me, but that’s another story.......
My first fire jump really sold me on being a smokejumper. Since I was in sorry shape and hadn’t passed my PT test, another jumper in the same condition and I were not on the jump list after we finished training in July of 1965 and when a fire bust came in and hit the coastal range. Very soon the base was jumped out and Jim Allen, Project Air Officer, didn’t have any choice but to jump us.

I got paired up with squad leader Garry Peters for a fire on Horseshoe Bend of the Rogue River. The spotter was Mick Swift and the pilot was John Cowan. As we approached the drop zone I was busy looking out the window since flying was new to me. This was my ninth flight and I still hadn’t made a landing yet - just one skydiving and seven Forest Service jumps. I had a pretty good look around by the time Mick waved us both into the door. The jump was pretty uneventful and I landed without hanging up. During training, I had quickly figured out that those who could steer a parachute didn’t have to climb trees and I hated climbing trees. Garry, however, was not so lucky and hung up about 75 feet. He got down very quickly and just in time to see our fire packs come out of the plane. One of the fire pack’s parachute malfunctioned and we watched the pack go sailing off into oblivion. That was Garry’s pack. My landed a short distance away. The five-gallon water can came next and it hit on a rock and broke open. The climbing spurs, which were free fallen, landed bang on in the drop zone.

Taking stock we had one fire pack between us, one canteen of water, and probably two days of rations. Not a problem. We went off to fight the fire. It was a small
one, probably a couple of acres, but it provided us with a bit of a challenge in controlling it. By the end of the day we had consumed all of our water, but had the fire mostly lined and under a modicum of control. We ate some of our rations and Garry went to sleep in my paper sleeping bag and I went to sleep in the bomb chute that had been attached to my fire pack. It was a miserable night. I was extremely cold because the bomb chute provided no warmth or insulation at all and I was very dehydrated. I think because of the dehydration I was hallucinating and all night long I could actually hear the Twin Beech coming with water. The night passed all too slowly. In the morning, I remembered that, prior to jumping from the Beech, I had seen a patch of green on the hillside not far from the jump spot. I convinced Garry to let me go look for it.

It didn’t take long before I came across a patch of ferns and grass that spoke of WATER!! Sure enough, there was a natural spring in the center of the green thicket. Plunging my face into the water, I must have drank my weight in pure, cold, spring water and filled the canteen for Garry. Now that we had plenty of water, the issue of us controlling the fire simply wasn’t in doubt. We put out a panel marker that read “P” and before long a spotter plane came along, saw our signal and wagged his wings in reply. Later in the afternoon, the Twin Beech came along and dropped bladder pump that really put us in control of the fire. Except for the fact that our groceries were running low, we were stepping in very tall cotton, indeed! That night, both Garry and I slept in the paper sleeping bag. I can’t remember what was said in the morning, but it must have been straight out of the John Candy movie Planes, Trains, and Automobiles.

We now were in the third day of the adventure. Although I hated climbing trees, I felt that as a rookie, I needed the practice so I volunteered to get Garry’s chute out of the tree and he very graciously let me. The retrieval was relatively uneventful as Garry lounged around on the ground proffering advice and encouragement. We then ate the last of our food, checked the fire again and went to sleep.

The next morning we had a final walk around the fire, packed up equipment on G.I. surplus backboards, and got ready to leave. The prospect of climbing up a mile to the top of the ridge was not too encouraging so we decided to go down to the Rogue River, about half a mile below. Just before we got to the river, we came to a rustic hunting or fishing cabin. No one was home nor did it look like anyone had been in residence for a while. However, it did look like it had been used so I convinced Garry that the law of the wilderness would permit us breaking in. I didn’t have a clue what the law of the wilderness said, but I was hungry and must have made a convincing argument because Garry went along with it. We found a cedar shingle that could be pried off a wall without damaging anything and voila!
We were in! Better yet, we found peanut butter and crackers, which we quickly consumed and which, to this day, is one of my favorite snacks. Before we departed I left a dollar and note with my name and address at the Gobi as well as explanation of why we broke in. It must have been okay with the owner because I never heard anything further.

We then headed off to the river where we dropped our equipment on a sandbar. Garry explained to me, with the wisdom of several years of smokejumping, that the base would send a helicopter for us and with that he walked down river to wash. About half an hour later and guy and a girl in a river rowboat came up to the sand bar and asked me if we were smokejumpers. I said we were, and he explained that he was Dave Waters and the girl was his daughter Anne, and that the Forest Service had paid him to take us downriver to Marial. I shouted out: “Hey Garry, the helicopter is here” and before long Dave was deftly maneuvering us down the river pointing out various flora and fauna. There were huge salmon spawning in the clear river. We saw a family of river otters nattering at each other as they slid down a six-foot mud slide into the river and then back up the slide again, then down again, over and over. We saw majestic eagles soaring in the sky on air currents streaming up the river.

The trip down the Rogue was over far too quickly. Before long, Dave had landed us at Marial where the ubiquitous Forest Service pickup awaited us. We thanked Dave and his daughter and headed back to the Gobi. That marked my first real adventure. Since then tramped the mountains of Eastern Washington teaching survival to aircrews. I’ve walked the Chagres River Trail in Panama being hunted (in friendly fashion) by Choco Indians. I’ve fished from a junk in the South China Sea. I’ve also sipped mate with Mapute Indians in a remote region of Chilean Patagonia where I helped rescue eleven British trekkers who got lost high up on Volcan Hudson. In short, I’ve had a life full of wonderful adventures, but nothing can compare with the fire jump at Horseshoe Bend.
I think there was a definite Gobi attitude and set of values. One was a serious attitude about work. Although we played hard, we took our jobs seriously and tried to give a good day’s work. When I was deployed to Missoula, for example, I saw a lot of jumpers with fishing reel tubes tied to their equipment -- something that just wouldn’t have been tolerated on the Gobi.

Another value that was clearly expressed was that there were two things you could never come back from fire without: your chutes and your jump partner. You simply didn’t get separated from either. Because a jump partner was such an important commodity, other jumpers had various ways and means to testing your “true grit”. If you had any kind of emotional chink in your armor, you could expect at least one other jumper to be there with some sort of a psychological screwdriver widening the hole! Speaking of widening holes, any t-shirt with a hole that would admit two fingers was considered far game and would be ripped off your back if you weren’t paying attention.

Part of it was that we were young, in excellent physical shape, well educated, and had a heck of a lot of spare time on our hands. That left plenty of time to figure out various ways to “RF” your buddy. To “RF” your buddy in spectacular fashion was to earn laurels, improve your standing in the tribe, and become the stuff of a
The Gobi “Tude”

legend that was repeated around many a two or a three-man fire camp. A good case in point was when my rookie class was in training in 1965. Mick Swift was the foreman and he felt that we rookie pups needed to learn a little humility so he took us on a five-mile run around the base. Five miles was nothing and our pack of rookies easily bounded over rock and shrub, hardly breaking a sweat. Mick figured that what we needed was another dose of humility so he took us around for a second five miles. We were starting to get a little nervous at this point, but the pack was intact and still scampering after Mick, that is until the ninth mile. At this point, Mick hit us with another dose of humility by running backwards faster than we were running forward. By now the pack was strung out and our tongues were lolling out the side of our mouths, the sweat rings under our armpits meeting at the buttons of our shirts. At about the nine and a half mile stage, Mick decided to finish us off with a coup de grace. He reached into his pocket, still running backward, and took out a pack of unfiltered Lucky Strikes. Firing up a cigarette with his Zippo, Mick’s face showed pure contentment as he took drag after drag and watched one after another of my rookie class fall into the dirt. I think three or four of us finished the run and I wasn’t one of them.

Another value that we had was an unbridled belief in our own superiority. We were certainly superior to “ground pounders” who legged their way to a fire. We did, however, acknowledge that our moment of glory ended after 45 seconds and from that point on, we were pure mule. We were also superior to other jumpers who only jumped with a 100-foot letdown rope, whereas ours were 150 feet long. We were superior because we jumped the Umpqua National Forest with its incredibly tall Douglas Firs. We were, to put in humbly, zipper-suited Sun Gods!! Convinced of our own superiority, we were truly shocked and not a little dismayed when women didn’t swoon as soon as we identified ourselves a smokejumpers. I introduced myself to the woman who is now my wife of 30-plus years with: “Hi! I’m Terry Egan, hero smokejumper” (or words to that effect). Her reply was: “That’s nice. What’s a smokejumper?”

As jumpers, we tended to pair with a preferred jump partner, even if we didn’t jump with him that much. Lonny Oswalt has been my best friend for 37 years, ever since he taped my ankle, which I sprained on my fourth jump. Of course, he didn’t bother to shave the leg first, which made the removal of the tape a true adventure in pain. I did, however, have the opportunity to pay him back over the years because he visited me just about everywhere I was stationed in my 20-year Air Force career. When I was commander of an installation in the Bahamas, he came to visit and soak up some sun and local culture. I drove him in to Freeport in the middle of squall that dumped tons of water on the town. Squalls passed through
the Bahamas very quickly and before long, the sun was out again. What was still there was a lot of standing water and as I drove through a large puddle, the engine of my staff car quit. I explained to Lonny that since I was a truly august personage, i.e., the commander of an important installation in the Bahamas and since I was in the uniform of an officer of the United States Military, I had an image to maintain. Therefore, would he kindly push while I steered the car out of the really large puddle? He would, and so he gamely put his shoulder into the car, slogging through the muddy water while I encouraged him with shouts of “faster, Lonny, faster.”

The Gobi experience helped shape my life and initiated a quest for adventure that took me to four continents and a score of countries. I think the Gobi “Tude helped to shape a work ethic that sustained me through my previous career and is doing the same in my current one. I think the Gobi developed in me a work ethic that embraces teamwork, self-reliance, proactive searches for problem solutions, concern for others, quality production, and a firm belief that work should be fun. That is what I remember of the Gobi “Tude.”
If only my Grampa had told me the correct saying. He told me over and over again “Never take a wooden nickel!” No matter how hard I searched, I never found a wooden nickel. If only he had told me “Never take a wooden Indian!”

Once upon a time in a galaxy far, far, away...my buddy and I were part of a booster crew sent to back up the jumpers at Redmond. We had scored a candy late afternoon two-manner in the Three Sisters Wilderness, had spent the night, heaped on the oats, and were back at RAC late the following afternoon at the bottom of a rather lengthy jump list. The odds were not in our favor of scoring another jump on this trip, so we decided to head to town and pound down a few reindeers. We hitched a ride into town after work with one of the local jumpers, who under no uncertain amount of persuasion by either of us, would stay and have just “one.” He dropped us off at the Pastime Tavern and made a hasty retreat.

Well...it’s amazing how time flies when you’re having fun, and, in retrospect, I guess we were having “fun”. At any rate, it was “last call” and the Tavern lived up to its name and it was “Pastime” for us. We really had two choices: walk or hitch a ride back to the base.

As we stumbled out the door and headed for the main road back to RAC we came face to face with two wooden Indians in front of the Cent-Wise Drugstore on Main Street in downtown Redmond. They were magnificent. One was a Chief about six feet tall with full headdress and adorned in war paint. The other was a Squaw. She
Siskiyou Smokejumper Base

1943 - 1981

Book of Gobi

BOOK 1

was about five feet tall and carved out of a single piece of wood. I don’t remember how or why the idea came about, but it became evident that we just had to have one of those Indians. Since the Chief was chained to the concrete, there was but one choice...the Squaw.

We picked up the Squaw and proceeded to carry her down Main Street for several blocks and then down the highway to RAC for another several blocks. By this time we were exhausted and had to stop and catch our breath. We decided to wait a bit and see if some kind soul would pick up two stranded jumpers and their newly acquired friend. So we proceeded to hitch a ride to RAC. We stood by the side of the road proudly displaying the Squaw directly between us. Not that there was a heavy volume of traffic at that time of night, but damned if anybody would stop and pick us up. Suddenly it became clear, we would need to hide the Squaw by the side of the road and then when a vehicle stopped, we would just ask if it would be okay if our “friend” could also have a ride. Go figure...it worked like a charm. We had no sooner hid the Squaw and put our thumbs back out, when a pickup truck stopped and offered us a ride. We subsequently asked if our friend could accompany us and the response was “No sweat!” We had it made in the shade. We cruised in the back of that pickup taking in the summer sky and giggling all the way back to RAC. At the driver’s suggestion (a rather accommodating individual), we hid the Squaw behind a clump of bushes across the road from the jump base at the entrance to the County Landfill. It was perfect!

The next morning we were informed that we would be sent home and we proceeded to borrow a pickup truck from one of the local jumpers to retrieve our booty. Needless to say we had been hosed! The Squaw was nowhere to be found. We searched behind every bush and tree for a half-hour with no success. It was at this point that we became even more stupid. We each made a solemn oath to the other that the next time one of us was sent to RAC, we would bring home the Squaw.

So...the following season, I was sent to back-up the Redmond Jumpers and again scored a cherry jump in the Three Sisters Wilderness Area, bagged plenty of oats, and returned to find myself at the bottom of a rather lengthy jump list. Only one thing to do...

I clued in a jump buddy as to my need to visit the local drug store and he managed to convince two friends of the female persuasion to drive from Bend to RAC to pick us up. They were laboring under the delusion that they were about to enjoy a night on the town. In reality, they were about to become accessories after the fact to Grand Theft Indian.

They arrived at RAC in their shiny black VW Beetle. It was at this point that it became apparent that logistics were to be a problem. We left RAC and proceeded to the
Redmond City Pool where we climbed the fence and proceeded to go skinny dipping. After being unceremoniously escorted from the premises by the local police, we headed for the 86 Corral where we proceeded to dance and drink the night away. As the bar closed in the wee-wee hours of the morning, we asked the girls if they were up for a little adventure. They said sure and so we asked them if we could stop by the Cent-Wise Drug Store so we could pick something up. They were a bit apprehensive, probably assuming we were in search of condoms or God knows what at 2:00 AM at a Drug Store that was surely closed. We asked them to let us off in front of the store and to circle the block a couple of times. As they drove off, we proceeded to carry the Squaw around the store and into the alley in back of the store. As we carefully stood the Squaw up in alley, it became apparent that she was not wearing the appropriate attire to blend well into her new surroundings. Lacking anything better (including brains or imagination), we found an empty garbage can and put it over her head. Now it was perfect. Just a garbage can with wooden legs and a large round wooden base in the alley. It couldn’t have blended in better. We proceeded to return to the front of the store where we awaited the return of our two assistants. Unbelievably, they returned. Go figure...

We got into the VW Beetle and proceeded to begin the process of persuading our assistants into becoming full-fledged accomplices. They were in no way easily persuaded, but at 2:00 AM with two raving lunatics in your VW Beetle...what the Hell! They pulled slowly into the alley and even slower as we approached the rather amusing sight of the Squaw covered rather clumsily with a garbage can. It was only then that we noticed that we had conveniently stashed her at the rear entrance to the Redmond Police Station. Not a problem. We would just have to be a bit careful not to arouse any suspicion.

Well...it became readily apparent that this Squaw was not accustomed to riding in any part of a VW Beetle. No matter how hard we pushed. No matter how hard we shoved. No matter what the hell we did, it was to no avail. You can’t stuff 150 pounds of wooden Indian into the back seat of a VW Beetle. By this time our accomplices had become all the more apprehensive of our antics. They were actually beginning to make noises like they were scared and wanted to leave, but we somehow assured them that everything was under control. Finally, in a last desperate move, we managed to get the round base of the squaw into the back seat and proceeded to lay the passenger seat down, roll the passenger side window down and stick the Squaw’s head out the passenger side window. It was a stroke of genius!

Somehow we managed to fit all of us into the interior of the vehicle with the Squaw and proceeded to make a hasty escape down the alley and back to the jump base. We proceeded to drive out to the back of the loft and onto the tarmac and
down the taxiway. At the end of the taxiway, we managed to extricate the Squaw from the VW and place her in the bushes. It was at this point that our female companions, without even a goodnight kiss, drove off into the dark of night never to be seen or heard from again. What a bunch of wussies...

The next day, we were informed that a DC-3 from the Gobi would be in to pick us up around 1500 hours. It was perfect. The DC-3 arrived punctually and we loaded our gear and proceeded down the taxiway. It was at this point that we informed the pilot that we had a small package to retrieve at the end of the taxiway and it would be extremely helpful if he could turn the tail of the plane at a 45 degree angle to the loft so as to block their view. He proceeded to comply with our instructions and we hopped off the plane and hoisted the Squaw aboard. The folks in the loft noticed the plane sitting at the end of the taxiway and radioed to inquire if there was a problem. The pilot responded that they were just "checking something out". He continued that "everything checked out AOK" and we proceeded to begin our trip back to the Gobi.

When we arrived at the Gobi, we obtained a couple of elephant bags from the loft and with one over the head and one over the feet, carried our "guest" to the warehouse where she fit right in with the rest of the cargo. That night, a couple of us secreted her out of the warehouse and transported her to my buddy’s house. He wasn’t home, so I stashed her in his chicken coop and left the premises. The next day I inquired if he had found the "present" I had brought him. He was mystified. I told him to look in the coop that evening after work. Well...the next day he was frantic. It was a state of sheer astonishment and admiration buffered by a good dose of panic.

Well...days turned into weeks as an investigation into the Grand Theft Indian turned up no leads. Through the process of elimination, and the fact that the last individuals to steal the Squaw were jumpers from CJ, all indications were that the Squaw was purloined by CJ Jumpers. You just gotta’ hand it to law enforcement. What a flair for the obvious.

Anyway...my buddy finally caved (an appropriate verb to describe the actions of a CJ Jumper). The Squaw showed up one morning proudly standing guard on the steps of the Admin Shack. Everyone on the base was in awe, except for those inside. In that I was obviously not "inside", I cannot, with any certainty, vouch for what transpired from this point on...Suffice it to say that a flight was "arranged" and the US Forest Service Twin Beech was used to transport some "stiff" to RAC.

In retrospect I can only apologize to those on the "inside" who had to suffer the humiliation of my idiocy. If only my Grandpa had told me not to take any wooden Indians...although when I pass the Cent-Wise Drugstore in downtown Redmond, I still get a little twinge...
Delos Dutton
PAO 1966–1974

Dee, like his predecessor, understood his surroundings: the importance of training, the importance to work and grow the Smokejumper unit, and the staunch allegiance he fostered in his jumpers.

I arrived at the Cave Junction Base in April 1966 to replace Jim Allen who had transferred to Redmond to become the Air Center Manager. This was a big step for me because I hadn’t been in charge of a base. I had come the Aerial Fire Depot at Missoula Montana and had worked up through the smokejumper ranks to become assistant to the base manager. I had grown too old to make parachute jumps and my boss was making arrangements for me to take over the R-1 Fire cache with a promotional transfer.

When I saw the vacancy announcement for the Siskiyou base, I applied for the position and I was lucky enough to get the job. It would have been hard for me to watch the jumper operation which was just across the airplane parking ramp from the fire cache.

The first time I jumped out of the Cave Junction base was in 1952 when I was on a detail from Missoula, on 7-31, I jumped the Potter Mt. Fire. It was a 4-manner on the Umpqua NF. It was a neat place with very large trees. Louie Banta and Bill Clarke from CJ and Charles Simons and I from Missoula made the jump. We were spotted by Cliff Marshall who was the base foreman and we jumped out of the Johnson DC-3.
When I transferred to CJ in April 1966 I found that it was a great little base and was in good condition. Betty Stoltenberg was the clerk and she had just transferred there from the Siskiyou SO, replacing Alice Vahrenwall. Alice had transferred to the SO to become the fire dispatcher for the Siskiyou Forest.

Jim Allen had been in charge of the base since 1953 and he was well liked. I knew this was going to be a hard act to follow. The spring crew members who were on duty at that point were Dick Wessell, Terry Mewhinney, Tommy Smith, and Gilbert Boundy. They were working in the parachute loft with Glenda Marchant.

Fire season came early that spring, and on May 11th, we had just completed jump training when Wayne Spencer, the dispatcher from the Illinois Valley Ranger District, arrived at the jump spot and said I have a fire request for you. After he convinced everyone that he was serious we returned to the base, and the men suited up and took off for the Rancherie Creek Fire. Pilot John Cowan and spotter Dick Wessell dropped Tommy Smith, Terry Mewhinney and Gilbert Boundy on the fire.

The spring rookie training got off to an unusual start because of a fire bust that lasted 4 days. The instructors would leave when the siren went off to spot or jump on a fire and the rookies were left wondering what to do.

We started the season with one Twin Beech and got our second one on around the middle of July. Hal Ewing was the pilot and he was an ex-Navy jet fighter pilot. He soon became the very best smokejumper pilot in the business.

We had a good crew of smokejumpers. I had worked with smokejumpers for 13 years and I thought I knew all the tricks they could play, but this crew would teach me a few new ones. I was a hard headed old man and my clerk Betty would tell me that the men didn't know when I was serious or just joking with them. I told her that they did not have to know that.

The smokejumpers tend to compete with district personnel so we worked very hard to gain a good working relation with them. This was very important because they were the people who could order us for a fire jump or they could ignore us. Chuck Sheley was a good public relations man, so we sent him out with a person of his choice to visit with fire personnel on the forest in our protective area. They helped create good will and provided us with a closer working relation with the people we dealt with.

The Regional and Forest policy was for the jumper base to have men available to jump on fires, but the decision on how to man fires was left to the Forest. We were told not to go out and drum up business so all we could do was work to gain a closer working relation with the people we were dealing with.
Delos Dutton

The jump base manager worked with direct supervision from the Forest Supervisor and it was essential to have a good working relation. To accomplish this, I accepted extra work and volunteered to become the Forest Safety Officer. This made it possible for me to develop a close working relation with the Rangers and this made it possible to gain extra project work and fire jumps. On one occasion I took the Illinois Valley Ranger out to inspect a fire that our jumpers had just jumped on. It was the Red Snag Fire and Chuck Sheley and 9 men were on the fire. With Sheley in charge I knew they would attack the fire aggressively. We rewarded the crew with a little refreshment.

The forest in our protective area had a large volume of fuel and it was important to have a good fire retardant drop to help the jumpers with their initial attack. We worked out a deal with the lead airplane pilot, Gar Leyva. When we arrived over a fire we would ask where is the retardant aircraft and when Gar arrived over a fire he would ask where are the jumpers. After that we would hear Gar say many times, "Where are the jumpers?" This was a very effective way of getting more fire jumps.

The Forest Service was very conservative and poorly financed. Our base had enough money for the summer months and was programmed to close up shop when the rains came. Fires could occur after that but the fire danger would be low and the district could take care of them. Some of our men needed a longer period of work so we found projects for them and the men became available for the late season fires.

The ranger districts had a large back log of logging slash that had to be burnt so the area could be replanted. Our men prepared these units so they could be burnt and were available to do the actual burning. Over the years, our men would burn many units. This was a good work experience for them and was very profitable. The Six River Forest had a well financed project to restore an area that was covered with alder trees and brush. Farinetti worked on this project with a crew of our jumper and they gained a lot of experience with power saws and had a longer work season.

Our pilots were very helpful in gaining extra work. Hal Ewing and Arthur Murray worked out a project where we were used to drop grass seed and fertilizer on the
large burned areas on the Wenatchee Forest. We used Twin Beech aircraft and spent several weeks on the project with our men gaining a lot of flying time. This project was in the protective area of another smokejumper base. We took their airplane and pilot but didn’t take any of their smokejumpers.

We were always looking for more fire jumps and one example was the July 10, 1968, Kerby Peak Fire. That day we had only one Twin Beech aircraft and Fred Krause at the Rough and Ready sawmill ordered smokejumpers for this fire which was burning on one of his logging sites. Ewing was dispatched in 165Z with a load of jumpers, and Fred said he was headed for the fire and to keep the jumpers coming. After the third load Betty asked if we should call Fred to see if he still wanted more jumpers. I told her we were busy and to keep quite. Finally Fred called and asked how many jumpers we had dropped on the fire. When we said 20, he was quite for a moment and then remarked that would be enough. Mewhinney jumped in charge of that fire and Dick Wessell jumped in the last load. The unusual part of this story was the fire was on private land and we had no authority to man such a fire. Fred should have gone through the ranger district with the request. The accounting people in the SO were excited until I told them we would charge the fire off to training if the sawmill people refused to pay the bill.

The forest in our protective area had a large volume of fuel and it was very important to attack them with a controllable size crew. We had been using two Twin Beech aircraft and had a hard time controlling a few fires so we went to work to get a larger aircraft. On 7-11-68, we received our contract DC-3 and the Gobi would never be the same after that. We were just in hog heaven. Ewing accepted it but when asked how he liked flying the Doug, he replied it was just like dancing with Bob Tokarczyk which probably meant that it was not very maneuverable. To make matters worse the aircraft belonged to a turkey hatchery and was used to deliver baby turkeys, but it was clean and in good condition. We started out hauling 16 smokejumpers but later would cut the load to 12 when we started receiving aircraft that were not in good condition. We always flew with a full load of jumpers even when we were dispatched to a small fire. And we would drop enough jumpers to in sure that the fire would be controlled.

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The Gobi would have a series of first time accomplishment with our crews such as the following.

a. Our smokejumpers were the first men to jump out of the Beech-99, and they did this in R-8 and out of the Siskiyou Base. This aircraft gave us speed and range with a 6-man load.

b. Authorization to fly on any fire that was within one mile of the Siskiyou National Forest and to jump a controllable size crew without a smokejumper request.

c. First base to use fire line explosive in R-6 and have a storage building built for it.

d. The CJ base always gave more practice jumps than other bases, but we would increase that by jumping at least once every 10 days.

e. Established a smokejumper operation in R-8 and made the first fire jumps in that region. When we needed reinforcements we would order them from all the bases in R-6. Over the six years of operations, 775 fire jumps would be made to 126 fires, and nearly 100 different men would make fire jumps there.

f. Over the years of operation the Gobi had sent jumpers to other Regions to reinforce their base and jump on fires. The difference was, we would do it more often and we would do it in more places. We doubled the number of states that CJ jumpers had jumped in and they would fight more fires away from the home base.

g. Make parachute training jumps into water. We jumped into a lake when other bases were doing their water training in a swimming pool.

h. The Quinn Martin TV Production made a picture for their FBI program at Grants Pass and on the Rogue River near Galice. Pat McNally and Roddy Baumann made the parachute jump for the program from our Twin Beech 166Z. Dick Bassett was the pilot and Gary Mills was the spotter.

i. Stuart Roosa visited the Gobi in June of 1972, with his family. He had fond memories of the base from his 1953 jump season. Stuart
was the command pilot on Apollo 14 that had delivered Alan Shepard and Egar Mitchell to the moon surface.

j. CJ had the record for the longest flight to a California fire but we would match this with a direct flight on 6-25-74 to the Squaw Basin Fire in Utah. Gregg Schmidt in Beech 99, 13R with Gary Mills as spotter, Wes Brown, Gary Thornhill, George Custer, Gary Dunning, and Gary Buck, made the flight. Wes jumped the fire but the rest of the crew had to wait until the next day to jump because of the wind. This was a large back country fire and over 50 men had jumped on the fire.

k. On 6-1-67 we sent 4 riggers to Alaska to rig parachutes. Dick Wessell, Larry Lufkin, Tom Emonds, and Gary Buck made the trip. Hal Ewing in 166Z took the men to Seattle where they boarded a Pan American flight to Fairbanks, Alaska. The men returned on 6-30.

l. Over the years the Gobi base had large rookie classes each year. We would change that and would become the first base to have only one or two rookies.

The CJ base had several good repeat performance on trips away from the base.

[1.] On 6-21-71, we sent 10 smokejumpers to Alaska for a 23 day trip where they made 35 fire jumps. The following men made the trip and their fire jumps are listed after their names. Dick Wessell 2, Ron McMinimy 4, Pat McNally 5, Gary Mills 3, Bob McCray 3, Walt Congleton 2, Roddy Baumann 4, John Robison 4, Mike Russo 4, and Ralph Rhodes 4.

[2.] On 7-2-73, 6 smokejumpers were sent to Alaska. Ray Farinetti, Pat McNally, John Robison, Gary Thornhill, Larry Welch and Allen Owen made the trip. They made 12 fire jumps and were mixed in with other jumper on 7 –fires.

The Siskiyou was a good productive base and we had men with a lot of talent. They did an outstanding job of preventing the fires they jumped on from escaping and becoming project fires. I enjoyed working with these men and enjoyed my work at the Gobi.
I was talking to some Gobi pals about what made the Gobi special. We started telling funny stories and I’ve heard most of them but it surprised me that after this long, they told me some I had never heard before. So, if I haven’t heard them all, then maybe there are more I haven’t heard, either.

Trying to maintain the basic theory that says, “Don’t mess up a good story with the truth,” here are a couple that stand out in my memory. Actually these stories are true.

First to name some special people and things that I can’t forget. The Gobi, conversations between Pup and Mouse, Gobi parties, volleyball, congo bars, Mick Swift, crew meetings, Dunn Dunn, Hunker Day, Uncle Al, the Gorge, Gobi photos and movies, 4th of July tug of war and bat races, Seats Dam, Big Loop, The best fires- Briggs Ranch, Utah (Squaw Basin), Hog Fire, Tool Box Springs, etc, etc, rookie parties, lasting friendships with the most special people and their families, Gary Sharp, wrestling matches with Willi, making bets with Oz, Mrs. Peters boy, GBR and F-Troop, and Gobi spirit.

Some years it seems like you end up jumping with the same jump partner over and over again all season. This particular year was like that. Walt Congleton was stuck with me. No matter what, he couldn’t get rid of me. First, we jumped a couple of two- manners on the Siskiyous and then we jumped a fire on the Fremont. After
the fire we were taken to Redmond. The lightning storm had hit parts of the Winema, Fremont and Umpqua National Forests. Walt and I were the only two jumpers left at Redmond. Walt was #1 and I was #2. The foreman came down to greet us when we arrived. He briefed us of the fire situation. The DC-3 was out and we would use the Twin Beach.

We were tired but we went down and made sure our jump gear was ready. We grabbed a bite to eat and started to walk around. Walt was usually more restless and curious than most. We toured their loft for comparison and walked around their ready room. We noticed how they packed their cargo. We looked around their offices and dispatch. We walked around the building and finally ended up on the apron near the Twin Beach. We looked inside the plane and walked around it. Walt walked around the plane twice, then stared at each engine for awhile. He walked back and forth between the right and left engine. He looked at me and said, "The left engine has a blown jug." I asked what that meant, Walt said that the left radial engine had a blown cylinder. We went over to look at it. He showed me that oil was dripping down from one of the cylinders. He said, "We have to tell them right away."

I followed Walt into dispatch. He told the foreman that the Twin Beach had a blown jug. The foreman said to hold on a minute. He came back to us and said, "What!!!" Walt repeated what he said about the blown jug. The foreman smiled and looked skeptical. He said, "How did you determine that the cylinder was blown?" Walt said, "The cylinder was leaking oil." The foreman remarked that the plane was ready to fly and we shouldn't worry. Walt said that the plane should be grounded. The foreman repeated to us to relax and not worry about it. Walt said that no one should fly in the plane. The foreman was pissed and told us to go back to the ready room. The foreman told us that you will fly in the plane. Walt said, "We're not going in that plane." I did not have the confidence to refuse to get in the plane but Walt did. I just decided that I believed Walt. The foreman became more irritated and threatened us. He was so angry. Walt didn't budge.

The foreman finally said, "Look, what if I sent the pilot out there and had him check it out? Would that make you feel better about the plane?" Walt said, "Yes." The pilot, foreman, Walt and I went to
Remembering the Best

the plane. Walt showed them the blown jug. The pilot looked at the cylinder and then took off for a minute and returned with a mechanic. The mechanic and pilot shut the plane down. The foreman said nothing to us. Within 20 minutes we were on our way back to the Gobi in a Cessna 180. They rewarded Walt for being aware and observant by sending us home. They could have kept us and we would have been the first two jumpers out of the DC-3 when it returned.

Part 2

Later on we jumped a fire on the Umpqua. Gary Thornhill (G.T.) was fire boss. Gary Dunning (Dunn Dunn), M.A. Owen (Mouse), Steve Baumann (Pup) and myself were the crew. For the Umpqua, it was really a pretty easy jump. The Umpqua had very tall trees. The fire was fairly easy and un-eventful. District personnel had us gather up our gear and we loaded in a Forest Service crummy and started back to Cave Jct.

On our way back to the Gobi, a typical conversation occurred with Mouse doing most of the talking and the rest of us barely staying awake. At one point there was a lull in the talk and Mouse said to me, “Hey, Joe Buck, isn’t it about time that your girlfriend showed up?” I told Mouse that she was coming up next week.

My girlfriend (Marie) was finishing up her student teaching and then she was going to drive up. I told them that Marie was bringing her sister Annie with her. It was quiet for a minute. Then I made a big mistake. I turned to Pup and said, “Hey Pup, would you like to have a date with Annie?” I should have mentioned this idea privately to Pup.

Mouse and G.T. started in, “You know Pup, she’s a rea-lll dog.” “You ain’t fixing me up with no dog, Joe Buck!” Pup yelled, “I-I-I ain’t no dummy you know. Ol’ Pup wasn’t born yesterday!” I told Pup that I was trying to help him out. “Hey, Joe Buck, how stupid do you think I am?” Mouse started laughing and told Pup that he was a perfect match for Annie. G.T. said Pup that he was the best dummy for this match made in heaven. “You guys think that Ol’ Pup slept through kindergarten, don’t you?” retorted Pup, “I ain’t falling for this one, I got a reputation to protect!” Mouse said, “The only reputation you got is that you’re a big dummy.” “O-o-o-h no Joe Buck,” said Pup, “I see this one coming a mile away. You ain’t going to slip this one to Ol’ Pup.” I told Pup that Annie was pretty. Everyone in the cab started yelling and screaming at Pup. The Forest Service driver thought we were all nuts.

No matter what I tried to say, Pup wouldn’t believe me. Pup assured everyone that he was way too smart to get hosed on this one. I kept trying to assure Pup that this
was a good deal. Pup said, "What a crock, Joe Buck, I-I-I ain't no dummy, you know." Ten minutes after we returned to the Gobi, the whole base knew about the proposed date between Pup and Annie. For the next week Pup took a ration of shit that rivaled about anything I 'd ever seen. There was no slack for Ol' Pup. Every­day it just got worse. The more I tried to assure Pup that this was a good deal, the more he got suspicious. Day after day, poor Pup got harassed. Finally on the morning that Marie and Annie were to arrive, we had a hotly contested volleyball game. Pup's harassment had reached a new torturous level. Marie and Annie drove up in a convertible and stopped by the volleyball court. They got out of the car. Pup turned green. I was the only one that felt sorry for Pup. I had been his friend all the way through. I had been rooting for him. Pup didn't believe that, and that hurt.

We greeted Marie and Annie. Pup disappeared. I coached Annie on how to go easy on Pup. He had had a hard week. Lord knows that our Pup did step into this one, but he was our brother. We had to take care of him. That was the first priority. He had suffered enough and anything more would have been too much. We all walked into the mess hall. Pup sat at the table so that he could be as far away as possible from Annie. The brothers were still giving Pup a bad time and, with Annie in the room things only got worse. Annie got up from her table, I begged her not to confront our Pup. She walked over to his table and stood right above him. Pup tried to crawl under his plate, but there was nowhere to hide. She stood there staring at him, making him feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. All eyes were on Pup and Annie, and there was no sound in the room. Finally Pup looked up.

Annie said, "So you think I'm a dog? Well, you're no PRIZE."

The mess hall exploded with laughter. The guys could barely breathe, they were laughing so hard. Annie and Marie laughed until they cried. It took about five minutes for everyone to stop, but nobody wanted to eat, the food had become cold.

This time Pup turned red. Everyone thought it was over. Everyone but Pup. He finally stood up. He motioned for everyone to stop laughing. He waited and waited for everyone to quiet down. Since Pup has enough personality for about ten people the brothers wanted to hear what he had to say, Pup's comments were priceless.

Pup said, "I may not be a prize, but I am a CATCH!"

He made an unbelievable face when he said the word "catch"! It was his face that killed us, he looked like a little mischievous boy with a red nose and twinkling
eyes. This time the whole place exploded for twice as long as it had for Annie. Dinner was shot, the few guys that were trying to eat had food coming out of their noses!

No one gave Pup a bad time after that. At least not for a day or two. It was an INCREDIBLE comeback.

Experiences like these with these amazing friends made the Gobi a special place.
Mick Swift was one of the smartest guys I’ve ever met, and for sure he is the Greatest Natural Born Leader I’ve ever dealt with. Any time there was ever a problem or a complicated situation every head and every eye turned to Mick. It was just assumed he would have the answer, period. I served under some great leaders, and had great leaders who supposedly worked for me, but no other human ever approached what Mick radiated. He was as strong as a bull, low key, modest, and his manner, well, it worked like this. All who met him, they were flat screwed from then on, because they had no choice.....they simply had to like him.

When I was a rookie back in 1966, Mick was already over in Laos heading up cargo kicking operations with Air America for our splendid little war over there. At first all I heard were Mick Swift stories. He was a Legend. He was always spoken about with fun, but always there was this unspoken respect and admiration that somehow got tacked on by all who spoke about Mick. I jumped the next summer of 67, by joining the Marines. They gave me the summer off to jump one last season. In 68 I stopped by the base during rookie training, as I was heading to my tour in Vietnam, and I was still hearing stories about this character named Mick Swift.

Three years later, as I returned from the war, I stopped by the base. It was a weekend and I ran into the pilot, Hal Ewing, who said, “Hey, Troop, Mick is back, let’s go over and have you meet him.” So, I met Mick. He was even more than what had preceded him as rumors and reputation.
After Vietnam I returned to the base. The early seventies brought us to the Eastern Appalachian Mountains. Mick was running things back there, and at first he did most of the spotting. I guess I have to tell you that Mick, above all his other skills was the greatest spotter I ever saw. The winds over the Appalachians!!!! Those mountains back there created the most challenging spotting and jumping situations that any of us had ever seen.

When Delos became the Base Manager in Cave Junction, he went back there with a gang of outlaw jumpers from C.J. and made it jumpable country. The big hair raising facts were that you either had to consistently jump in winds that were way past the envelope of safety or you would end up passing up the majority of fire jumps. So the agreement to go back there and jump included the idea that we’d have to jump fires, that normally would be turned down out West. Otherwise the whole thing would not work. It would have been ideal country to jump with a ram air or square chute, but really extra difficult country with those old round chutes.

Mick was a real student of the changing dynamics that went on aloft. You’d see him in the back of the Doug calmly smoking a camel. He studied the fate of drift streamers, as they shook and danced in the wind. He would watch the ground, study how it all played its part in layers, currents, and channels aloft. Like no one else he understood what the drift streamers told him. He wasn’t generally looking for open fields, he found little pockets where he could get the streamers to pile up in, as they hit the ground. If the streamers were laid out fast and long, as they hit the ground, it was a dead give-a-way that jumpers would be hammered in backwards.

What he’d do, is find an inert place to put you. A sheltered spot, that nullified the strong winds aloft. He had this gift to look past the obvious and search out little holes behind knolls and in between cliffs where there was quiet air, soft air. These were unlikely jump spots, but he had this unreal ability to talk to the jumper in the door; paint a clear picture, explain everything to unfold during the jump. It was always mesmerizing and an interesting story. He’d also look right inside you. He could tell if you understood what he had painted for you.

He also was a master at picking up on fear and uncertain vibes that came out of the face masks of the crew who were not used to jumping out of an aircraft in different and unusual circumstances. He had these little tricks. The first thing he’d do was kiss the helmet of the first jumper. Get everyone in the plane laughing, and greet the jumper in the door with a confident, fun, air of confidence, that all will be well. This unexplainable manner relaxed everyone in the plane.
His story in the door erased fear and uncertainty. With a minimum of words he’d explain exactly what the wind was doing at the different levels of elevation. He’d orient you clearly to the jump spot, then show you where he was going to let you out. He would then give you a total rundown of what you were going to experience out there, always watching, to see, that you really were understood it all.

Usually we had to jump much, much higher to make up for the wind ride and the terrain. He’d explain why it appeared so unusual, and that you needed to pass over the ridgeline or some such thing, and he has to let you out further away to allow you to clear the ridgeline. Then when you were on final, he’d say something like this will be a most fun and memorable jump, be sure to raise your feet as you pass over that ridgeline, and drop into the next and final valley. Get ready cowboy!! Go Gettum.

The only guy I’ve ever seen Mick get mad at is me. He told me once he had gotten into a fist fight with Delos Dutton when they were both young squad leaders on a fire up in Montana. Later, when Mick got back from Laos, Delos was running the Gobi. He rolled back in as a straight jumper and basically took over as the foreman, and Mick and Delos were the best one, two team anyone ever saw. It was sort of like Lewis and Clark. Two tough guys with extremely different temperaments and skills that complimented each other. They really respected and liked each other. Swift was the great communicator with the troops, and Delos knew how to work the system and get good deals for the guys.

I’ve seen Mick deal with big surly guys. Never did he ever get mad, but he knew how to physically show his power and he always ended up top dog. He never hurt anyone but he could wrestle them to the ground and get them to the point where they really figured it out—that they were messing with the wrong guy. In the end Swift always respected those who he had run ins with. Typically, those guys ended up being true friends of Mick. He was the classic warrior who always knew how to deal with opposition. Used incredible discretion and only used physical power when everything else failed.

Back to Mick getting mad me. You have to realize, I’m the kind of person who’d drive the Pope crazy. Well anyway, one morning I show up for work, and things are bustling. Some BLM mining engineers were out in the Kalmeopsis Wilderness Area, one of them fell, and had a suspected broken leg. He needed to be packed down some rough terrain to where they could send in a helicopter and get him out.

Before work, Mick was running around organizing a rescue operation. He was hand picking an elite group of jumpers, and didn’t want to use the jump list. I was
at the top of the jump list, and I wasn’t one of the guys Mick was picking, so I was bummed out, but still I jumped in to help everyone get into their gear. It was one of those rush, rush, rush things.

I was standing beside the Doug, safety checking everyone’s gear as they were climbing into the plane. The pilots had the plane running and as the last jumper climbed up the stairs someone asked, “Hey, who’s spotting?” No one knew who was spotting. Well, who in the hell is assigned to the Doug…to spot? Word came from the office, that Mick was the spotter assigned to the Doug. I looked at Mick and asked, “Are you spotting, jumping or both?”

Mick flinched, as he realized he indeed was supposed to be the spotter. I looked around, all the squad leaders were in jump suits. Oz was standing there, and I joked, “Hey Oz, want to spot?” He put his head down shaking it, no. The plane started moving, so I said, “Hell, I’ll spot.” Mick helped me into the plane, we pulled in the stairs on the roll, and we were off. Mick had given the pilots the map showing them where Tin Cup Creek was and where the target location was.

We were about five miles out when Mick said, “Troopy get the radios and give me one and spread them out.” I went back to the tail section to dig them out of the spotter’s kit, only no spotter’s kit. OK Mick, what did you do with the spotter’s kit?” That’s when Mick got mad at me. “You mean you didn’t get the spotter’s kit?” “No Blankety-Blank-Blank radios, No blankety-blank streamers,” Mick had everything he could do to keep from decking me, and he started stomping up and down the airplane.

Nobody had ever seen him so mad. The entire plane felt awful. I went back in the tail section and dug down the sides of the boards trying to find some old streamers that may have fallen out of the spotters kits of old. I came up with 3 old ratty, beat up streamers. A couple of them were wet and sort of welded together. I tried to unravel them and to see if they might be made to roll out if and when I was to throw them out of the plane. The next thing I learned was that the head phones to the pilots didn’t work, nor did the lights that gave the most basic of all communications between spotter and pilots. None of us knew the pilots, as they had just flown in from Redmond. When Mick learned about the zero ability to communicate to the pilots he got even madder.

We were almost there and I went up to talk to the pilots to try and work some sort of deal out via hand signals or what ever. It was clear the entire plane load was distraught as they saw the body language of Mick, the true leader of this little world inside the DC-3. Here we had perhaps the greatest plane load of good keen jumpers anyone could ever ask for, and everything was going wrong.
We got to the spot, and I picked out an area on a little knoll that looked like a stand of small reprod in great scheme of the rugged Kalmopsis Wilderness of the Siskiyous. I threw out the first streamer, and it was an odd looking thing out there with water spots all over it. Someone yelled, “Hey Mick what’s with the pok-a-dot streamer?” There was no smoke out there like on a fire, and the pilots had put the plane in a flight pattern that really was not good for seeing the streamer. Then they headed off with the streamer behind us like maybe we were heading back to the base. Mick started yelling at me, as if I knew what they must be doing.

I made my way to the front of the plane and tried like crazy to get oriented and to get the pilots to try to help me stay oriented. It was clear they just had no idea where the jump spot was. Somehow we came around back to the same reprod area. I had two streamers left and was starting from scratch. Mick was yelling at me about something and I ignored him, desperately trying to find some sort of land mark. I said some sort of weird thing regarding the squirrely wind where the two draws came together near the jump spot and Mick seemed to get madder still.

I looked out and found a log on the ground that I thought I could hopefully find again and use as a land mark as Mick kept saying something to me in anger. I dropped the streamer over the log. I looked up at Mick and just said, “Eldo, I’m trying to spot here, and you’re not helping me!” Mick blinked his eyes, looked at the crew, and saw that they were all worried about what was going on between us in the back of the plane. Swift, leaned over and planted a big kiss on my helmet in his most melodramatic way. From anger and frustration to total support about something they did not understand. The entire crew burst out laughing, and the grim atmosphere in the plane changed to some kind of fun situation.

Mick and I watched the streamer together, and he said little things that made me laugh. He had handed me an old card that laid out the old leg pocket signal streamer codes that were used before we all had radios. He was going to check each jumper personally and send someone down to the creek and sand bar to let me know if all was OK. We came around on final, and as I signaled the plane to go left or right the entire crew played in the role to get the signals up to the pilots.

It was now so easy. That last streamer went exactly where we wanted it in the center of the reprod. By this time Mick was sitting in the door and we were laughing and joking with each other about the whole thing. And the entire crew was
ready and up for this jump. He was first man out, and led the crew in a great rescue operation. When he got back he came straight for me, grabbed me in one of his great bear hugs and said, "Good job spotting Troopy." The point of this whole thing was how influential Mick was at altering the wills and mind sets of everyone in that aircraft with simple little tricks that only he could pull off. He had this real ability to affect the entire situation and spirit of an event.

Whatever I could say, it would always end up being not enough to describe the man to his full measure, he's truly one of a kind, a classic. I consider the time I got to spend with Mick Swift, as one of the great, great treasures and total honors in life. Just to have hung out with a man such as he. What a deal. I guess my request for the hereafter is that someone will dump half my ashes out over the Green Wall in the Kalmeopsis Wilderness to sort of be in the same area as my pal Mouse. The other half of those ashes ought to be dumped out under, Mick's favorite old Cedar
smokejumping was the best and most influential job that I ever had! Being selected to train and jump out of CJ was a dream come true. The jumps were all uniquely different and varying in the challenge they presented, but for me the most memorable part of my smokejumping career was the GREAT people who I worked with and the wild and crazy activities that occurred after hours!

The years produced fond memories including the following—
Steve Odell, Jerry Katt, Huggy Bear (Gary Sharp) and I decided to drive to the Redding Base one weekend during rookie training and steal the Gobies they had accumulated, which we did. We were very proud of ourselves and trying to prove our "worthiness" to the old timers! Took their clock and painted it so that every day at 10:00, they got the "Gobi."

**The Gobi Vehicles:**
- Larry Lufkins "TRT" got a good workout night of the teachers' base tour.
- Louie Wayer's car with a capewell hood closure strap and having to back up the hills because the automatic transmission couldn't pull a hill forward.
- Eric the Black's station wagon that sounded like a DC-3 coming in. We actually had a load of jumpers suit up, thinking the Doug had landed, when it was actually Jennifer bringing Eric's lunch out one day.
Jennifer bringing Eric's lunch out one day.

• John Robison's VW had to fart before reaching highway speed.

• Then there was the flatbed truck that I believe was Bob McCray's initially. We would throw a couch on the back and head to the Frontier Drive-In and take in a movie. Which reminds me of the "self censoring" the folks that ran the drive-in provided the customers.

• Car races around the compound—after sufficient amounts of alcohol had been consumed—that such activities seemed like a good idea. The night that Zander had to come out to the base way late when a few laps were in progress and tried to flag down the violators....who thought he was encouraging them to victory!

Ray Zander's going away party and the subsequent misfortune of the Snake Farm catching on fire and burning to the ground. By the way, great job of handling the ambulance, Ray!

The time Steve Odell and I were in Redmond backing up their base and decided to hitchhike to Bend and catch a movie one evening. Had no problem getting there but couldn't catch a ride back, so we decided to hop a train that was obviously heading to Redmond (and would surely stop there....). Well, it didn't, and on and on through the night. We knew that the crew was to return to CJ the next AM, so going off into the night on a freight train was not a good plan. The train finally stopped about 4 AM near The Dalles on the Columbia River (a very long way from Redmond!). We were freezing cold (T-shirts and shorts) and had no money. We finally hitched a ride back to Redmond and ran all the way out to the base just in time to hop on the DC-3 that was already running and headed back to CJ. Somebody asked, "Where the hell have you two been? We've been looking all over for you." To which, we replied, "Don't even ask."

I don't think a day has gone by in the past 35 years that I haven't drawn from my training and experiences gained during time spent as a Smokejumper. We learned team work, consequences of bad decision making, how to play nice with each other, how to have fun and when to get down to business. They were the best of times....
What Made the Gobi Special

Skip Bunn
'67

It has been 35 years since my first arrival at the Gobi but I can remember it as though it were yesterday.

When I first drove up, I saw this big fella (Gary Buck) who looked like Tarzan, climbing this very long rope upside down. Then I saw this other fellow (Steve O'Dell) doing back handsprings and back flips off the lawn. I thought to myself, "What on Earth have I gotten myself into?" If all these smokejumpers are like this, I might be in the wrong place.

I was very fortunate that I made it through the training program. Besides the training and fire jumps, the things I remember and miss most are the most fantastic group of guys I have ever encountered in my entire life. They were all so strong and athletic, fun loving, honest, smart, and dedicated to their work.

It just so happened that I jumped with Trooper Tom Emonds on my first and last fires and several in between. On my final two-man jump in a very remote area, I spent five days with Troop and walked many miles covering a lot of terrain. I got him to tell me about his life and he kept me thoroughly entertained with stories about his exploits all over the world.

One day Troop came to my 5th grade classroom just outside of Redding, CA. It was just after my first season of smokejumping. I let Troop have the class all day. He stood before a large world map and traced his way from the Atlantic all the way around the world to the Pacific Coast, including his first year as a smokejumper. In every country, he would tell the class stories about his experiences and the people he met. I thought he had told me all of his stories on our last five day packout.
What Made the Gobi Special

But on this day, every story was different. I'll never forget that day. It was the only time in my 22 years in the classroom that the kids did not want to go to recess, the bathroom or lunch, fearing they might miss out on one more of Troop's stories. I only wish I had a video and recorded that whole day.

If it had not been for smokejumping, Troop and I would never have met and everything else I experienced that summer 35 years ago would never have existed for me. Life would not have been half as meaningful for me if not for smokejumping. My only regret is that I was only able to jump one season. But that one season was the most wonderful three months I've ever had and with the greatest guys I've ever known.
The Ol' Static Line Trick

PAT McNALLY

'67

We were having a Show Me jump for some aerospace people from Southern Oregon State Collage. We were jumping from the old Twin Beech into one of our practice fields and I secreted a D-bag and static line into the cargo area in the tail of the plane. I must have been first out the door, because I remember the other guys sitting there, waiting their turns to jump. The spotter was BG (Lufkin) and he had his head stuck in the spotter's window lining up on the final when I retrieved the fake static line and clip.

I positioned the line around me to hand him when he looked up to hit me for my exit. When he raised up to hit me, I just looked at him and said, "Hold this!" His eyes went wide and he just looked back at me. "Hold this!" I said louder. And he continued to look at me with big, wide eyes. Of course, we were cruising right by the spot by now, and I knew I was already late for my exit. So I tossed the clip at him and bailed out. I missed the spot badly, but I was laughing so hard I didn't really care. I couldn't wait to talk to the guys in the plane to find out what happened after I went.

The story went that BG grabbed the line and pulled back so hard that he went right on his butt just as the real static line came down tight. Gottcha GB. All he could do was get up and pull my real static line back in.
This and the next story are about the 1974 Squaw Basin Fire in Utah. The stories are placed consecutively to provide the reader with the fullest narrative of the fire.

Most Smokejumpers remember one or two fires in their career as being especially traumatic or eventful in some way. This one has stood out in my mind for the last 28 years. This is a true story and, yes, they almost killed us, but the fire was located in a very beautiful area and there was plenty of good fun and positive memories, too. In talking to others who actually were there, like G.T. (Gary Thornhill) and W.B. (Wes Brown), their recollection of the events may be slightly different than mine. We generally agree on most of the basic events.

On June 24, 1974, most of the Gobi Jumpers and friends went to Gary and Kathy Thornhill’s house for one last good evening party. Since Gary and Kathy had the best parties, the turn out was strong. This one was especially fun and I didn’t return home until at least three the next morning. I fell asleep immediately and was awoken at somewhere between 3:15 and 3:30 by none other than G.T. and Mack Truck. They informed me that I had the privilege to get on a plane right away and to fly to some hellish place in Utah and to defend a pristine forest. Since almost every year we fly over to Utah anyway to fight one hellacious forest gobbler, I took them seriously.
Mack Truck beat me on the head until I promised to get out of bed. I couldn't believe these guys were going around waking up hungover citizens like me for the fun of it. You gotta be shittin' me. Don't these guys ever sleep? How could these guys be standing here 'cause I can't even get my eyes open. They're a lot tougher than I am.

I finally stumbled down to the loft and found they were telling the truth, "Oh my God, I'm calling in sick." Wait, I can't call in sick 'cause I'm already here. Normally I'm sure after one look at me, they wouldn't have wanted me to be part of the team, but in this case the other guys looked just as screwed up. Within a half an hour or so we took off. Gary Mills as spotter, Greg Schmidt as pilot, and 6 jumpers-Wes Brown, Gary Thornhill, Gary Dunning, Dain Smith, George Custer & me.

By late morning on the 25th of June, we woke up and we were looking out the windows of the Beach 99. We looked at the fire and couldn't see any roads. It looked like a pristine primitive area. Pilot and spotter decided that we would fly into Vernal, Utah, to refuel. We returned to the fire and it was starting to spread. Smedley lined up the plane for the first pass and Millsy prepared to throw the first set of streamers. After many streamer attempts we all knew that the wind was squirrelly and that there was too much of it. The plan was to drop Wes Brown as a test dummy and if he lived then they would drop more dummies. Personally, I was just glad I wasn't the first dummy to go. Fortunately W.B. landed and lived. He suggested to Millsy that the jump was way to windy and Millsy decided to spare us. We were taught that smokejumpers always jumped with a buddy but W.B had just jumped a one-maner. In a hungover kind of reverence we all thanked Millsy for his astute common sense.

We flew back to Vernal to refuel again and we were almost out of drift streamers. That night we made streamers in the motel room. The next morning we were out at the crack of dawn on our way back to the fire. We reached the fire and through more streamers near where W.B. had landed. W.B. had hooked up with a few jumpers from another base who had jumped earlier under equally windy conditions. There was still too much wind down in the valley, so Millsy decided to try a new jump spot up on the ridge; the jump spot was about 11,000 feet. I had hurt my foot on the last jump so I steered for the lake to get a soft landing. Better to be wet than broken. We gathered together and took off for the smoke. We found W.B. several hours later and continued up the west flank of the fire until sometime in the night we rested.

We continued up the west flank of the fire the next morning but by 11:00 winds kept fanning the fire making everything more difficult. About 1:00 the Fire Boss
called W.B. and ask that he send jumpers to a spot fire about a quarter mile north of where we had been working. W.B. sent G.T. with a radio and Gary D, myself, Dain Smith and George Custer to the spot. We reached the spot easily and started to work. W.B. kept 12 jumpers with him working another spot fire.

The winds increased and it became nasty. G.T. looked at us and said, "I don't like this." He called W.B. and both agreed that our situation looked more precarious. We were supposed to be at two spot fires outside the perimeter of the fire. It felt like we were in the middle of the fire and surrounded by it. Both G.T. and W.B. called the Fire Boss and said "Hey, it feels like we're in the middle of the fire." The Fire Boss condescendingly told us we were fine. He wouldn't put us out there if it were too dangerous.

After 5 minutes, W.B. and G.T. called back again and repeated to the Fire Boss that we must be in the middle of the fire. The boss told us we were okay and to relax. After 10 minutes, G.T. and W.B. repeated the same call to the Fire Boss. The Fire Boss was pissed. He didn’t want to listen to a bunch of whiny smokejumpers. He finally suggested to send up a helicopter to check our position and then the pilot could assure us we were not in danger and that would shut us up and make us quit whining. The pilot flew over us and looked around for a minute and said, "Shit, those guys are right in the middle of fire!" The Fire Boss panicked and told the pilot to land and pick up both G.T.'s and W.B.'s crews. The pilot assured the boss that it was impossible to pick up any of us and said, "Those guys are screwed..."

At that moment G.T. yelled, "Let’s run to the river!" W.B. said on the radio, "We're going to the rock slide!" Interestingly enough the Fire Boss didn’t have one suggestion at this point. We ran as fast as we could. We made it to the river before the fire did. W.B.'s crew made it to the rock slide. After about 20 minutes, the Fire Boss called the pilot and asked him to pick us up. The pilot said no way. The fire was an inferno, and he couldn’t get near it. We laid in the river. The sound of the fire was probably just as bad as the fire itself. The trees crowned out and the flames seemingly rose hundreds of feet.

After about 45 minutes, the Fire Boss called us and told us to come to fire camp. G.T. told him that we would have to walk through 80-100 foot flames to get to the
The boss repeated his request and G.T. repeated his answer. It was a stand-off.

Every time the Fire Boss asked, we looked at each other and said, "What an idiot. This guy got us into this mess in the first place. Now he's trying to kill us again!" After about an hour, we started to regroup with W.B.'s crew. The whole area looked scorched. Nothing could live through that.

The Fire Boss was slightly embarrassed and decided to give us a day off the next day. Since everything was blackened and scorched, we laid in the ashes and got a high altitude sunburn. That night we walked to a nearby lodge and got tanked. Gary Dunning (Dunn Dunn) came back in the night and walked over to me, stepping on my face. He whispered to me, "Hey, Joe Buck, can you float me a loan?" I couldn't answer him cause he was standing on my face. After a minute, he collapsed beside me. The next day we were sent out to the north side of the fire. We marveled at the beauty of the area. The fire had done a lot of damage, but there were still some areas that hadn't been damaged. The fire had slowed down some this day and we worked on with a slow steady pace. Dunn Dunn and I took a break about 2:00 and were eating a snack and listening to the radio transmissions. The Fire Boss ordered more supplies and they were bringing them by pack train. A firefighter called the Fire Boss and said that he was trying to get the burros through to the fire camp but flames were still bad news on the south side of the fire. He couldn't get the burros through the fire line. The Fire Boss told him to take them Squaw Basin Fire, Version 1 up around the east side. The firefighter told the boss that they had already tried that. The Fire Boss told him to try it on the west side. The firefighter said we tried that too. He said that the flames were too high. The Fire Boss paused for a minute. He said there's only one thing left to do. We'll get some smokejumpers down there and those guys can lead those burros through the flames. Dunn Dunn looked at me and said, "Holy, shit he's still trying to kill us!" The Fire Boss said again, "Those smokejumpers can take those damn burros through the flames." That night Dunn Dunn, G.T., W.B., and I all headed for the lodge. We had to get prepared for the next day. No telling what kind of shit assignment we would be getting tomorrow.

The next day was uneventful, lots of mop up and back to the fire camp. We were starting to relax a bit. The Fire Boss hadn't sent us on any death assignments in at least 18 hours. We were sitting there and Dain Smith runs over and says, "I stole a great, big, delicious ham!" We devoured this thing in minutes. We thought we were so cool. Dain was my hero. He stole a whole fucking ham! We finally got back at the Fire Boss. We were singing Gomer Pyle songs and we all hated him. Then a jumper walked over and said that someone had stolen a ham from the
Squaw Basin Fire, Version 1

mess tent and everyone was worried because it had gone bad and they were afraid someone might be poisoned. The next half hour we spent barfing up the ham so we could come out alive. At least we had the satisfaction that we had finally gotten our revenge on the Fire Boss. We knew who was going to turn out a real
This jump story was born outside Vernal, Utah, on the Ashley National Forest on June 25th, 1974. The name of the fire was Squaw Basin.

The fiasco started when my wife Kathy and I had a party at our house in O'Brien. I awoke way to early the following morning to the scream of the telephone. Like an idiot I answered the phone and it was Delos Dutton. Delos wanted to know how many guys were still crashed out at my place, because we had a fire call. I went from room to room and found a few and reported to Dee that we would head in the direction of the base. I kissed my wife good-bye and said I would probably be back by evening, because the fire was on the Umpqua. That was my first mistake.

Because I thought we were headed to the Umpqua, I was not concerned with packing a lot of stuff for a long stay. The first thing that struck me as we pulled into the Gobi was that the door was on the Beach 99. As we stumbled up the steps of the loft, I was met by our spotter Mother Mills. I asked him why the door was on the plane and he said, “It’s a long trip to Utah.” WHAT!!!!?

Sure enough, we loaded onto the airplane and away we went. There is no better sleep than that sleep enjoyed on an airplane in a hung-over state of mind. Time flies and before you knew it, we were landing in Vernal, Utah. We took the door off, did those minor adjustments to make the plane jump ready, and away we
went again. Wes Brown was the first jumper up, and as we approached the jump spot we were all relieved to see a beautiful ten acre meadow. As we began to approach the spot we talked about directions to fire camp and the fact that there were other jumpers from other bases already on the fire (when it was all said and done, 50 jumpers).

By the chutes on the ground and in the surrounding trees, we could see that there had been some wind on the ground. As we lined up and made our final approach for streamers, everyone was attentive and eager to see what was going on with the wind between the plane and the ground. The streamers went out and Hal banked the plane around so we could see the streamers as they made their way to the ground. Problem was, we couldn’t find the streamers. Again and again, we threw streamers and banked to one side or the other to see where they were going. We were all amazed that we could not get a set of streamers into the jump spot. We had to trade off watching them because you could only see the streamers from time to time.

After many attempts, and I do mean many, we managed to get a set into the edge of the Meadow. Wes Brown got in the door. I am sure Wes was thinking the same thing that all of us were thinking, “It doesn’t look good but my ability as a chute manipulator and my vast experience will allow me to outsmart the wind.” Wrong! Wes was definitely at the mercy of the wind. He was headed completely away from where the streamers had landed, and it took him for ever to get down. As I remember, he landed in a tree outside the jump spot and quickly radioed back for us not to put anyone else out. We of course stayed until he was on the ground and hooked up with the other jumpers.

Upon our return to Vernal, we made a quick check of equipment and found that we only had three or four sets of streamers left. The folks there at Vernal set us up in a motel and we quickly set off in search of a store that would carry crate paper and whatever gauge wire it was that we used to weight the streamers. We found a craft store and purchased the necessary supplies to create streamers. Of course on the way back to the motel, we purchased other supplies necessary for an evening of streamer making.

We took measurements from one of our remaining sets of streamers, laid out our materials on the bed, and circled up to develop a plan of attack. After a short deliberation and conclusion that priorities must be set, Gary Dunning made several trips to the ice machine to fill the bathtub and create a Gobi beer cooler. After several hours of cutting and taping we had enough streamers, hopefully close enough to the proper size, to replenish our supplies.
The next morning, bright eyed and bushy tailed, we loaded back on the airplane and headed back to the fire. As I remember the winds were calm and our streamers made it accurately to the spot. We all jumped and had no misfortunes manipulating to the designated area. All was well and as the airplane flew off, I’m sure none of us imagined that this was just the start of what was, for me, the most miserable, unorganized, worthless piece-of-crap-fire that I had or would ever be on again.

Understand that this was a beautiful area. Lots of meadows with grass, large timber, a creek running through the middle of the valley bordered on both sides with white birch trees. This place was so nice that it was of course designated a “Wilderness Area,” (no chain saw, no vehicles, and of course no common sense). We were taken to fire camp where we located Wes Brown and immediately started giving him crap about not being able to manipulate to the jump spot. Wes informed us that the daily routine was to march out with the other 24 jumpers each day and mop up until about 2:00 in the afternoon and then when the winds came up to abandon the lines and return to base camp. None of us believed him but sure enough we followed this routine for several days.

Now to set the scene you must understand that this particular forest had not had a wildfire for seven years, so the actual fire experience on the forest was not as high as one might want. Example: Where should we put Fire Camp? “Ow, I don’t know Bob, how about we drive as close to the fire as humanly possible and set camp up there.” “Great idea Jim, you are the Head of Recreation, you should have a clue what you are talking about.” “Look Jim, this is the end of the road and luckily for us there is a BAR, this will be a great place for the Main Fire Camp. That way when guys come in from being chased off the line, they can have a beer and relax. This will work out good because we will take the chumps off the clock as soon as they step into camp. They will be happy fire fighters.”

It is time that we take a look at who exactly was on the fire from the Gobi. Myself, Wes Brown, Gary Buck, George Custer, Dain Smith, and, last but certainly not least, Dun Dun (Gary Dunning). Great group for fighting fire. Lots of experience, hard workers; however, not the crew that you turn loose at the bar every afternoon at 4:00. For those of you that know these folks, some are a little scarier than others when it comes to the consumption of alcohol.

So life goes on in this unbelievable hell hole for what seems three weeks (actually more like three or four days). One morning we get up, grab our initial attack fire tools (Pulaski and Piss Pump, remember, Wilderness Area - no pumps in that creek in the middle of the fire), and we head off on our five mile hike to mop up and line, where the fire had jumped containment the day before. Come about 1:00 PM a helicopter comes flying over and informs us that there is a spot fire
down below our line and would a couple of you chaps scamper down there and relieve that spot of its flames. Not a problem for us, we are Smokejumpers, you know. So off we go, myself, Buck, Custer, Smith and, yes, Dun Dun.

It should have been a tip off when it took the five of us 45 minutes to line a 40-ft by 40-ft spot. The wind would blow from one side and then, in the snap of a branch be coming from the opposite direction. We had to bust our butts to corral the damn thing. About the time we got it lined and beat down with our handy piss pump, the Line Boss came whopping back over. I informed him that the wind on the ground was beginning to create some problems and might he want to whop on down to the river and see if there were any more of these pesky little spot fires. Not a problem he informed me. After a few minutes we heard, "Jumper Portable, Jumper Portable this is the Line Boss." "Yes sir, this is Jumper Portable." "Yes, you might want to gather your men and head up the river, the fire has in fact spotted out ahead and it has also jumped the river and it appears to be burning back at your ass at an incredible speed." Those are probably not the real words he used being an experienced Line Boss and knowing appropriate radio protocol.

I can remember suggesting that we would just head back up to where we came from and him hinting that there was no way in hell we would make it back up there in time. Comforting. So off the merry band went down the hill to the river. There was no real concern at that time, we were just pissed at the jerk for having us go down there in the first place.

When we reached the river there was a meadow on the other side that was about a hundred foot in diameter. So being experienced Smokejumpers, we decided probably that would be a better place than standing at the edge of the timber. Again we got pissed at Mr. Line Boss, because we were going to get our damn jump boots wet crossing the river. I can remember that some of the guys took their boots off and pulled up their pants and waded across the river. Spirits were still light and we didn’t really think we were in any kind of a tight spot at that time.

It was about this time that Mr. LB came back on the radio and suggested that we walk up the river about 200 yards and through this narrow, heavily timbered chute to safety. It was also at this same time that we started hearing this low whoosh, whoosh, whooshing sound that resembled an old steam engine way off in the distance. Being experienced Smokejumpers and carefully trained to scan the surrounding area when we were in the airplane, nobody could remember seeing railroad tracks in the vicinity. This is the time that a certain amount of concern started to creep into our camp. At the same time we started getting radio calls from Wes Brown in his most calm voice asking if we were OK and basically asking if we had a safe place to ride this son-of-a-bitch out. I told him I thought so and was he
OK up where he was. He reported that they were in the middle of a huge rock slide and they were going to be fine.

I got ahead of myself a little there. Back to LB and his suggestion to walk up the river. I politely inform LB (I remember it as politely) that there was no way in hell we were coming down through that chute and we would be just fine where we were.

He felt maybe I didn't understand where he was talking about going, so he volunteered to set the chopper down and show us where to go. They came whirling through the smoke and set the chopper down right at the top of the chute. LB jumped out and started waving his arms. He didn’t do that very long, because it was about that time we could see the timber starting to explode behind the chopper, coming up through the chute of trees lining the river. Old LB decided it was time to go and quickly jumped back inside the chopper and away they went. I'm really still amazed that dumb shit didn’t burn up right then and there.

So by now, we are starting to get a grip on where we are and just how hot, high, and fast things are starting to happen. We can look up the river and see the timber crowning out just like in the training films. We are all in the middle of the meadow now and ash is starting to fall, and we can see the actual smoke level descending on us. Being a smokejumper of some experience I looked around and counted heads to make sure we were all still accounted for. We appeared to be one short and it gave me some concern because things were becoming pretty hairy, very quickly. I asked who was missing and as everybody looked at each other we all said out loud at the same time “Dun Dun.” We all started yelling for him. Off in the brush we heard this Bambi like reply, “I’ll be right there.” We all looked at each other in amazement. In the midst of this tense situation, Dunning decides he needs to take a dump. He was either more scared than we were or not nearly as scared as we were, I’m not sure which. After tidying up, Dun Dun was back with us and things got strange.

I’ve been around tornadoes and understand the calm before the storm. As the fire moved towards us it got dark and it was like the flames would take a big breath before it took its next run. During those breaths it seemed as though it would get
quiet, the smoke level would drop, and the heat would become intense. We all found ourselves lying in the middle of the meadow on our stomachs facing each other. You would look at the guy next to you and an ember would land on his fire shirt and start it on fire. Which came as quite a surprise to us after being told by Uncle that these were “fire resistant” shirts. Everybody was slapping spot fires out on each other's backs and shoulders.

Right before the fright-and-flight theory went into full mode, I tried to stand up and survey the area and it felt like somebody hit me in the back of the head with a shovel. The heat was so intense about four feet off the ground that I found myself flat back down on my belly. Being an experienced Smokejumper, I remembered the river that we had crossed and just yelled, “The river!” and everybody was off like a shot to the river. We didn’t have to go more than 30 yards or so and we were there. I remember seeing these guys that had just a few minutes before taken their boots off to cross the river diving head long into the cool water. Understand the river at that point was probably no deeper than three feet, so nobody did jack knives or anything.

Time gets real strange during a situation like that. I couldn’t tell you how long it was from the time we all found ourselves on our bellies in the meadow to the time that the fire burnt over us and we were able to stand and look around. What I think I do remember is seeing Gary Buck stretched out diving into the river. A gold hard hat floating by me. I crouched in the water with my face pressed up against the river, holding my hard hat on the side of my face that was toward the river, because it was still that hot. For some reason I can also remember seeing newspaper headlines, “Smokejumpers Die On Fire In Utah.” That has always kind of bugged me. Now if Doug Beck would have been there he could have taken one hell of a picture of these guys lined up crouched down in the river with some really cool flames and crap going on in the background.

After the fire burnt over us and the air cleared, I can remember standing up and looking around. Everything was covered with black ash. Logs that were sticking up out of the river were burning. Our meadow was completely black. There weren’t a lot of flames left, the head of the fire had moved on and it was almost calm where we were.

Our first concern was for Wes Brown and the guys up on the rock slide. It was about that time that they radioed us trying to find out if we were OK and to tell us about the outstanding fire storm they had just witnessed. Neat. And then came that voice from heaven, but real soft and not nearly as demanding as before, “Jumper Portable, Jumper Portable this is asshole or LB, I mean.” LB suggested that we go ahead and return to Base Camp. Thinking that was a hell-of-an-idea we hiked five
miles back to camp. On the way we discussed what a swell guy we thought LB was and what he ought to be doing for a living. Now if I was LB, I would have remembered some outside shitter that needed inspecting on the other side of the forest and headed for the high country, but nooooo. Who is the first guy waiting to shake our hands as we come into camp. You guessed it. As he stood there with his hand out and we all filed by with our hands in our pockets, I heard Joe Buck say the rudest thing I have ever heard him say to another man, “Asshole!”

We all started howling, because we knew how pissed Gar must have been to say something that harsh.

For some reason that evening after dinner everybody thought it might be a good idea to slide on over to the Fire Camp Bar for a refreshment. And we did. It didn’t get that bad, not nearly as bad as they said it did.

The next morning one of the Camp Lords came by and suggested that if anybody was not feeling well or had any kind of injury today would be a good day to stay in camp and lick their wounds. My hand went immediately up, and I suggested that I would like to pass on my opportunity to go out and get my ass burnt up again. I waived bye-bye to the boys as they trudged off down the trail. They reminded me of the Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. As soon as they were out of sight, I headed for Bar Camp because I could have sworn I saw a pay phone the night before (or it could have been a slot machine, it was sort of a blur). Sure enough I rounded the corner and there it was, a phone. There was a short line of folks waiting and that reminded me of a couple of convict movies that I had seen.

I made my way to the front of the line and called the Gobi (collect of course). I got hold of Mills and told him to get us the hell out of there. I didn’t care what he had to do but get us the hell off this piece-of-crap fire. He told me they would do what they could, but we all know how that goes. I had faith that Mills would do something, so with my attitude uplifted I hung up the phone.

I made my way over to the heliport and hung around until I had a chance to talk to the pilot. I told him that if he was going to make any runs by where we had jumped that I would love to catch a ride with him and retrieve the jump gear that was scattered around. He said he would check and before long he was dropping me off in the meadow that had started all this crap. My plan was to gather as much as I could (our six sets first, of course) and stack them in the middle of the meadow so, if they did decide to let us go, we could get the hell out of there before they could change their minds. The helicopter picked me up that afternoon, I took as much gear as the pilot would allow, and we returned to Fire Camp. The pilot said whenever he came by he would pick up the gear and return it to camp. Even better.
The guys returned to camp that evening and we were delighted to hear that evening that they would be releasing us the next morning. After dinner we figured we should go over to Bar Camp and have a beer or two to celebrate getting the hell out of there. As usual things didn’t stop with a beer or two. I do remember jumpers throwing empty beer cans through the swinging doors, out into the main fire camp communication center. I’m guessing the overhead might have noticed it, too.

The next morning they retrieved the remainder of the gear and told us they would be picking us up by nine that morning. At 11:00 they ran us all out of the bar (we are talking 50 jumpers) and loaded us on three big stake side trucks with benches in the back. Hell, we didn’t care. We were all drunk anyway. They drove us straight to the airport and we went from the cattle trucks to a DC3 and were out of there in a matter of hours. I don’t remember what the route home was, and it doesn’t matter. We were out of Utah, everybody was OK, so we left the way we started—hung over.
There I was, a rookie on my first fire jump. A timber one to boot, with Pat McNally. You never know what can go wrong after all you've been supposedly taught as a rookie until you look back.

My first fire jump was in the middle of nowhere, with a lot of trees, a little smoke, but no meadow, no open area for a jump spot. I was a bit nervous, not sure where to land. As I got in the door for the second pass of the Beech Craft, I asked the spotter, "Where's the landing zone?" As the spot was coming up fast, the spotter, sensing my discomfort, finally said, "Just follow Pat down." That sounded reassuring. So I did.

Matter of fact, I was so intent on 'following Pat down' that I landed in the same tree with Pat. Pat, who was hung up, probably made the fastest letdown in base history. Thank goodness, knowing I was a rookie, Pat didn't hold our two-in-a-tree stunt against me.
Mooning was not a part of my social behavior before I came to the Gobi. But for Mouse it was a practiced mannerism.

A group of us were being flown back to the Gobi after a fire somewhere on the eastside. We loaded up and the Doug taxied to turn for a take off. We noticed that a young, clean-cut couple had stopped along the strip and gotten out of their car, undoubtably to watch our departure. They alternated from hand-in-hand to arm-in-arm, taken by each other, a beautiful day, and our take off from their back country Eden.

As we taxied, waves were exchanged between the jumpers and the couple. We definitely had their attention.

Someone suggested to Mouse that we leave them with something to remember. It didn’t take much and Mouse assumed the appropriate position in the open jump door, while the remaining jumpers presented complementing vertical smiles pressed to the adjoining cabin windows.

As the Doug took off, someone turned to witness the couple’s reaction. He reported that hands raised to wave us off dropped as quickly as their expressions as the Doug roared past.
We all roared too, but with laughter. All but Mouse. He turned, chewing his nails, and with downcast eyes and all apparent remorse said, "I can't believe you guys made me do that." Sure, Mouse.
The Gobi had fine pilots. The best was Hal Ewing. Competent, professional, honorable. And not above putting us in our place.

We were returning from Redmond. A Doug load, unsuited, gear stored toward the tail. As we approached Crater Lake, we got the idea to move slowly and quietly toward the cabin, then quickly run to the tail. We'd surprise the pilots with the erratic weight shift.

We ran in unison to the tail. Hal easily corrected for the weight change. We stood, laughing like hell and looking down the length of the cabin to see Hal's face peering back at us.

The next moment the Doug dropped in altitude. We all became weightless and floated in the tail amid our stored gear sacks and reserve chutes.

I remember floating in air without any directional control, turning and drifting toward the open jump door, looking out into Crater Lake. Wooo...

I can still see Hal's smile after we all settled and looked forward: Wise Guys.
I came to the Gobi after jumping several seasons at another base. Until about this time, it had been uncommon to transfer from one base to another. The Gobi openly welcomed jumpers who had trained elsewhere. And I think that willingness strengthened the Gobi.

I was unsure of the Gobi as I retrained that first season. The base was a small scratch of land bound by an airstrip on one side and a highway and working mill on the other. No beauty of a facility.

It didn’t take long to be accepted, though. I knew I belonged one day during retraining. We were finishing the afternoon on the shock tower, practicing exits. I found myself the last jumper on the tower. Sitting on the edge of the platform waiting to exit, I realized that the foreman was going to take this opportunity to talk to me alone. Christ! Just like McCall, I thought. They get you alone, defenseless (suited-up), without corroborating witness and then threaten and intimidate you.

And here was the foreman, a rumpled hulk who could effortlessly clear any obstacles in his path. I had throughout retraining stayed away from him. Not initiating talk. Made as little eye contact as possible. Preformed without controversy,
You’re OK without announcement. Jesus! He was after me. Going to kick my butt off the platform.

“How do you like it here so far?” And I was home free—or maybe Gobi free. Something was quickly conveyed by Mick’s manner to say, “Hey, how ya doin’ kid? You’re OK.”

Simple, heh. But that was the Gobi. The unexpected, which would continually occur to re-affirm that we were each a part of the Gobi and that there was faith in each of us as a credible person—a member of the “brotherhood,” as Mick would say.
When my brother Bob and I were little, maybe 5 or 6, one day Dad was burning oak leaves in our yard, and Bob started running through the smoke, yelling "I'm a smokejumper! I'm a smokejumper!" I wasn't too sure what that was, but it sounded good, so I did it too. We grew up next to the highway between Wilderville and Wonder, Gobi Rats know where that is. We didn't know any jumpers, but we knew about them somehow. They were rumored to be shady characters. I must have been 7 or 8 the day I jumped off the garage roof with an umbrella. Raised on cartoons, I truly believed that would work, and I was shocked when I hit and folded up so hard. Didn't know anything about doing a roll.

When Bob finished school, he worked a season for the State Forestry, and a year later he was jumping at the Gobi. Some school buddies and I drove out there one day in June to watch them train. Bare to the waist, the rookies ran out to the training units in boots and Levis, gearbags on their shoulders. They looked tough as nails. The other jumpers had given the rookies Mohawks. After a week or so in the hot sun the rest of their hair was cut off, so they had burnt red heads with white stripes down the middle and that looked pretty stupid.
I rooked in '72 in Winthrop, Washington. Fine base, Winthrop, the birthplace of smoke jumping. Lots of pride. Hard, aggressive firefighters. That summer the Gobi (we called it "Cave") jumped the base out on the Briggs Ranch fire, down in Silver Creek, and a Doug load was sent down from Winthrop to man the base. We stayed at the brand-new Junction Inn. They had frog legs on the menu.

Next day or so the Gobi guys were back, so we flew back to Winthrop. When we took off the Gobi guys were huddled around Mouse next to the runway and Mouse was mooning our departure. Crew B.A.s were a customary salute in those days, and the Doug's windows were filled with "pressed-ham-on-glass."

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That September the Gobi got lightning and we were back and jumping small fires right away, mostly in the upper Applegate. Mick was our spotter in the Twin Beech. These guys had been busy for a few days. Mick had a face full of whiskers and a breath on him like a dead skunk. He also had plenty of his amused grin and friendly pat on the back. I dug Mick.

The shortest jumper on the Winthrop crew was Bob Curtis, a good jumper and a natural card. We called him "Punkin." As it happened, he partnered up on a two manner with Mouse. I bet it was funny when the district guys went in to pick up the big, bad jumpers and out came Punkin and Mouse. They were short, but they were stout. I guarantee it was an entertaining trip off the mountain.

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I heard about a cool trick my brother pulled on a fire that I always hoped to copy but never got the chance. He'd jumped an easy two-manner with Thornhill, who was hung over and took a nap. When Thornberry woke up, Bob had dug a ditch from a creek, around the hill to the top of the fire, and was flood irrigating.

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I jumped at six bases and always counted the Gobi as my favorite, because it felt like home. Certainly not for the jump country. Actually it was fun being casual and confident about our tall timber, brush, bees and poison oak when visiting jumpers were appalled.
I miss the Gobi. I miss Seats Dam and Nina Mickey's fried chicken. I miss beating up Joe Buck every day.

The best part of smoke jumping was, and remains, the people. The characters, the fun. If the fun's not coming fast enough, jumpers will endeavor to create fun. Jumpers like to laugh, and we laughed a lot. Compare that to any job you've had. We were lucky. We were blessed with that part of our lives.

Thanks guys.
Everyone Was Claimed by the Gorge

MIKE HARDY
'76

The Gorge was the waterway that feed the mill pond across the highway at the Rough and Ready Mill. The tradition of the Gorge is part of the Gobi Mystique. And indeed, 'Everyone Was Claimed by the Gorge,' whether it was an initiation, an attitude adjustment, or a right of passage.

A typical summer at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base included hours of picking up Gobi stones and chucking them in the back of a truck. At break time one day, Wes Brown wanted to gorge Thornhill for mocking the crew which had been picking up Gobi stones around the flagpole. Mills was gone and Thornhill was acting Project Air Officer, spending his day in the air conditioned office.

It was my day off, but I was hanging out. At lunch, Thornhill made me refill the platter of corn when I had taken the last cob. He was pimping me and he didn't even eat any corn from the next platter. So at afternoon break, I was in the day room seeing if there had been any action before I went for a swim. No one else wanted to get Thornhill, but it sounded good to me. Brown got the tape—the moral fiber of the base—and we made our move.

Thornhill thought it was a joke that grey-haired Brown and skinny Hardy were trying to take him down with no other help. Pretty soon Thornhill, who was the base's most imposing physical specimen with all those muscles, was tiring. Brown, the wrestling coach, was wrapping him up in tape. We carried his immobilized mass to the Gobi Cart outside the door. It was so humiliating being overpowered
and rolled into that miserable mud hole. The rookies did it to me a couple of weeks later. Everyone was claimed by the Gorge eventually.

I took off to hide out on Rough and Ready Creek for the rest of the day, before Thornhill got free of the glass tape. That afternoon with the work party back at it by the flagpole, Thornhill announced over the intercom that the crew could spend the rest of the day at the Pizza Deli if they gorged that devil, Brown. No one raised a hand, because our action had been just.
What made the Gobi special? Wow! What a question. That question instantly sinks to the core of my being and floods me with emotion that in public would be embarrassing.

I only jumped for two years at the Gobi. I rookied at Redding in 1987 and closed the Cave Junction base in 1980 with Troop and Mouse and Joe Buck and the rest of the Gobi crew. I'm damn proud of my association with Redding but if I had to compare the two bases, Redding was straight and CJ was cool.

What made the Gobi special? It was many things, it was many people, it was many years (the history of CJ is awesome), but in one word it was SPIRIT. Misfits, malcontents, oddballs, we all found a home on the Gobi. There were little guys like Mouse and me, and there were big guys like Troop and Joe, and there was everything in between. We came together to do a bang up job. CJ jumpers can march in any parade with anybody.

It was Spirit that made the Gobi special and it was the spirit of the Gobi that got it closed. Those Forest Service 'big dogs' don't want Smokejumpers who think, let alone speak. They solved the problem by closing the base in the name of cost cutting. Cost cutting! I have to keep from swearing here—but I can't do it. F- that s-. Suspend the bombing for one day (you pick the war) and CJ could be open today.

I would like to thank anyone who had anything to do with the selection process that picked me from the roster and gave me a chance to take my humble place among this awesome group.
He was what?... Oh, yea! We were all altar boys, too... We all drank as if the same Spirit.

So there I was. Fire on the left, fire on the right, fire in front, fire behind! So I decided to escape, left the Parish Council Meeting and went back to the rectory to write this.

Being (probably) the only ex-smokejumper priest in the world made for some interesting experiences. There's some message in there about separation of Church and state. I arrived at the Gobi on a Friday. Somebody pointed to the barracks and said, "Wait till Monday." Only one other guy (whose name will not be given for reasons, which will become apparent) was there. For two days we drove around, saw the caves, etc. He talked. A lot. He also seemed to like to drink beer as he drove, which made the 60-mph trip down the winding road from the Caves interesting. Sunday night, we were sitting in the TV room watching something when he must have run out of things to talk about. I won't go into all he told me those two days, but it was considerable. Considerable. At this point he said, "So what do you do?" I said, "Oh, I'm in the seminary studying to be a priest."
I was one of them

I'm not sure it's possible to accurately describe the color he turned, something like dead chickens might be close. His jaw was somewhere down near the floor. After regaining some composure, his first words, said rather haltingly, were, "I used to be an altar boy."

Then there was the time I was gainfully employed by Wes Brown on that concrete bridge in the Gobi Botanical Area. That was truly a "good deal." Anyway, milking it for all it was worth, I was standing in the muck of the irrigation ditch, mixing cement and slowly fixing stones when somebody from the office called over the loudspeaker for me to come and give a tour to visitors. My place on the list had come up. Put out somewhat that anyone would dare interrupt the essential work I was doing, I went over to the office and gave the tour, dressed only in a pair of muddy cutoffs, sodden tennis shoes, and spattered with cement. During the tour they looked at me a little funny, so in the end I apologized for being a mess and asked if there were any questions. "Why did they call you 'Father Floch'?": I had acquired that name shortly after getting to the Gobi and was so used to it I hadn't even noticed when I'd been summoned, "Hey, Father Floch, get your butt over to the office for a tour."

Also after I got certified and starting packing chutes, it was somewhat disconcerting to find otherwise pagan smokejumpers picking among the packed chutes for one packed by "Floch." Makes you nervous to think the credibility of faith depends on a little piece of nylon you folded

On a good day, I weighed about 135. The minimum weight for jumping was 130. Always tried to get weighed wearing a lot of clothes. But some days after training in the Gobi heat in those jump suits, I would find I had lost 7 pounds of water and weighed 127. Sometimes I could go for a long time without..."going." Finally I got one of those mega-ounce cups at the drive-in and spent the evenings drinking as much water as possible. On one jump I was paired with Wes Nicholson. I jumped first. He hit the ground at least 500 feet below me, and after I hit the ground I was dragged by the updraft uphill, over the back end of parked pickup, finally catching on a stump.

I never did like flying, even less so after seeing what the Forest Service provided for ships, and to this day would prefer if the airlines would give parachutes. Much rather jump out of them than land in them. That time we came back in the 99 without jumping, and whoever was flying decided to take a look at some elk didn't help any. I distinctly remember being pressed against the fuselage wall while looking out the door straight at the ground. Then there was the time the engine went out...did anyone ever tell anyone about that?
The best fire I was ever on? While dropping streamers, you could feel the heat every time we passed over it. The fire was at the bottom of really steep clear-cut, just getting started. We jumped the whole load on top of the ridge. 12 or 16, I forget. Grabbed the tools, left the chutes and jump gear. We walked along the ridge then down through the trees at the edge of the clear-cut. About halfway down, the fire got going, racing up the hill. It sounded like constant thunder. It was magnificent. When it was all over, the only thing we found left of our gear was one D-ring. Always nice when you don’t have to pack anything back.

The worst fire I was on, although the scenery was terrific, was in the Trinity Alps Wilderness. We jumped onto a rocky, steep slope across the canyon from the fire. Nasty place to land but no injuries. As I remember, we fought the thing through the night and sometime the next day the ground-pounders arrived. We packed up. Bags were especially heavy with chainsaws (Wilderness Area, remember? No mechanized equipment...grrrr!) 20 feet down the trail I stepped on a pebble and sprained my ankle real good. Tighten bootlaces. It was a 7-mile pack out. At the end was this long climb up a mountainside to a parking area. Some idiot managed to get a bucket of ice water to torture me. The foot just exploded when the boot came off. Crutches for a week. I remember finally assuring somebody I was okay and taking the step test in the office to prove it. Nobody wants to be off the jump list for long! Did fine, back on the list. (Although Swift and Dutton did have funny smiles on their faces.) When I got back to the barracks, I screamed.

The only other injury I remember was once running in the morning down the airstrip. Enjoying the scenery, I tripped (how can you do this on flat surface? It's enough to make you believe in Gobi demonology!) and shredded the skin off both palms. I think they put some extra abrasives in the surface because that strip was so short. Wanted to be sure the planes could stop in time. Worked mostly. Anyway, I bled all the way back and went into the loft to find a First Aid Kit, hoping no one was around. Wes Nicholson helped me put some bandages on. I'm sure we were both thinking, "off the list?" The only remark he made was, "You know, I think this cold spell is gonna last at least another week." It did. No one noticed. I learned a lot from Clancy!

As I was driving away the end of my last summer, making sure I was far enough down the road they couldn’t catch me, I yelled back, "You know, you guys never did manage to wrap me in glass tape and throw me in the ditch!" When I was ordained to the priesthood in Spokane the next October, a contingent from the Gobi attended (yeah, they were in Church. I have pictures!). After the reception, they took me out on the lawn, wrapped me in glass tape, and doused me with Gobi water from USFS canteens. I think Gar Buck poured!
I Was One of Them

Well, these are just stories. What made the Gobi special was the strange characters and their friends who inhabited the place every summer. And I thank God I was one of them. David and his kayaks, Pup, I can't see mushrooms without thinking of Doug Beck, Gar Buck and Troop make me think of log houses, Cernick and the Arrowhead Broken Axle run to E. Oregon, The Koyama kids, the Portagie Baitcutter, the Umpqua Death March, that picture Mouse always carried in his wallet, spitting snoos into someone's pop can during a meeting, forgetting my flight helmet (O, the shame of it!), Rocky and Mick mixing it up on the lawn, the Olympic run of Laws vs. Owen, the Gobi Waterwheel....

Memories of those days, not all of which are fit to print, are some of the best of my life. Thanks guys! God bless you all! (You too, Mouse and DunDun!)

Back to the fire. (Things were safer at the Gobi!)
THE SISKIYOU SMOKEJUMPER BASE was started in 1943 with an 11-man crew. They were trained at Seeley Lake, Montana, and returned for the summer. Jumpers were dropped on six backcountry fires where they proved the feasibility of smokejumping by reaching fires in an hour or less that had previously taken a day or more of hard travel. The base was enlarged to 25 men in 1946, and in 1948 they started training their own jumpers.

Today the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base consists of a Project Air Officer, a Foreman, 4 squadleaders, 24 jumpers, and 2 pilots. Twin Beech aircraft are used for jumping and cargo dropping. They carry 4 jumpers and their equipment or 100 pounds of para-cargo. Jumpers are usually airborne within 10 minutes after a fire is reported, and can be jumping on a fire 40 miles away in 15 minutes. DC-3 aircraft are also used. They carry 16 equipped jumpers or 25 passengers.

During fire season at least 8 jumpers are available for immediate dispatch to fires, and the others are on 2-hour call. When two-thirds of the jumpers are dispatched for fires, help is requested from other bases. Sixty-two jumpers were dropped on fires on one day's operations after one lightning storm.

Visitors are welcome anytime. The base is manned 7 days a week during fire season, generally from July 10th to September 10th, and on 5 days a week for the remainder of the year.
PHOTOS AND RENDERINGS

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