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Smokejumper biographies for 1949 rookie class, A-H

National Smokejumper Association

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1949 Rookie Class A-H

Robert James Bennett (Missoula '49)

Bob died August 5, 1949, in the Mann Gulch Fire along with 11 other jumpers from Missoula. He was born March 18, 1927, in Paris, Tennessee. He joined the Army after high school and served in the Army in Japan and Korea attaining the rank of staff sergeant upon his discharge in 1946. Bob was using the GI Bill at the University of Montana where he had completed two years in the forestry program.

Otto Black (Missoula '49)

Otto was born March 6, 1927. He was a Missoula smokejumper in 1949 and 1950. He had three fire jumps in '49 and none in '50. Except for smokejumping, Otto lived in Louisiana his entire life. His wife, Lois L. Black died in 2008. He is 97 years of age and lives at 2087 Spring Dr., Haynesville, LA 71038-5517. (2021)

Howbert W. Bonnett (Cave Junction '49)

Hobbie, 88, died April 29, 2019. He was raised in Sacramento and graduated from the University of Idaho with a degree in forestry. Hob spent 36 years with the Forest Service in positions from Timber Management, District Ranger and retiring as assistant to the Forest Service Chief of Administration in Washington, D.C. After retiring, he moved to North Carolina where he ran a computer consulting business. Hobbie jumped at Cave Junction during the 1949 season.

Albert N. "Al" Boucher (Cave Junction '49)

Al died January 7, 2022. He was born October 4, 1928, in Joplin, Missouri, and moved to Medford, Oregon, in 1943 and graduated from Medford H.S. in 1946. Al joined the Navy out of high school and was stationed in Oakland, California. After leaving the Navy, Al returned to Southern Oregon and got a job as the cook's helper at the Cave Junction smokejumper base in the summer of 1948.

The following season he was hired as a smokejumper and rookied in 1949. Following the 1950 season he was recalled to the Navy during the Korean War and was stationed in Japan through 1951. He returned in 1952 to jump at Cave Junction and continued through 1954. In 1955 and 56, Al operated the Shell Gas Station in Cave Junction. He returned to jumping in 1957 and remained at Cave Junction until 1964 when he transferred to the new Redmond Air Center as the smokejumper foreman. He made his last jump on his 40th birthday in 1968.

Al continued at Redmond until 1971 when he moved to Ogden, Utah, to become the regional dispatcher for Region 4. In 1974 he returned to Oregon to be the Assistant Fire Staff on the Mt. Hood National Forest until his retirement in 1978.

Following retirement, he and his wife Ruthie moved back to Redmond due to their love of Central Oregon. Following Ruthie's death in 2016, Al continued to live in Redmond until 2018 when he moved to Hillsboro, Oregon. Al always liked to remark that he lived longer in retirement than he did working for the Forest Service.

Albert R. Bowman (Missoula '49)

Albert died December 1, 2007, in Kernersville, N.C. He was a retired lieutenant colonel U.S. Marine Corps and served in Korea and Vietnam. After serving in the Marine Corps, he was employed by the Department of Education in New Mexico. Al jumped the 1949-50 seasons at Missoula.

Walter George Brafford (McCall '49)

Walter, 88, was born July 17, 1927, in Corbin, Kentucky. He was a smokejumper at McCall, Idaho, during the summers of 1949, 1954, and 1955 and had 26 fire jumps in addition to his training jumps.

Walt was a pilot for Trans World Airways for 30 years. In retirement he lived in Tucson and Marana, Arizona. His date of death was sometime before 2015.

Lloyd J. Brown (Missoula '49)

Brownie worked for the Sula RD on the trail crew and as a lookout for four seasons before applying for the smokejumper program. In one of his stints as a lookout, he saw the jumpers in action and figured it was better than walking into the fires. The 1949-rookie class was large (71), but he remembers **Leonard Piper** and **Henry Thol**, who were later killed at Mann Gulch. He spent six seasons as a jumper (three as a squadleader) and working in the logging industry during the off-season. Lloyd has an impressive 28 fire jumps plus one rescue jump over the six seasons.

Brownie said that he handled all aspects of logging during his 42-year career and retired from Boise Cascade in 1992.

In a 2004 interview with *Smokejumper* magazine, Lloyd remembers a fire in the Salmon River area where they jumped four jumpers to handle two fires. When they were done, they walked to a lookout and were helicoptered. The chopper was working a 48-jumper fire nearby. When those jumpers were taken off their fire, a 48-passenger bus showed up to

transport 52 jumpers back to Missoula. The four jumpers (including Lloyd) from the smaller fires had to ride in the luggage racks for the trip home. That was the bad part. The good part was only those four were asked to fill out timecards for the return trip since they did not have a seat in the bus.

James F. Browne (Missoula '49)

Jim jumped at Missoula 1949-50 while attending Montana State Univ. He was on the roof detail at Hale Field and watched the Mann Gulch crew depart. Jim had six fire jumps in '49 and two in '50.

Jim was a Marine Corps pilot in 1952 flying Corsairs and Panthers. By 1956 he was a pilot for American Airlines until 1987. In 1959 he bought 120 acres at Pablo, MT, and planted 23,000 Christmas trees.

"My wife, Patricia, and I spend spring, summer and fall residing on the Swan River five miles east of Bigfork, Montana. We winter in Dana Point, California. We have a son and two daughters, six grandchildren and one great granddaughter."

Wilbur "Mick" Burke (Missoula '49)

Mick Burke, 73, died Nov. 26, 2000, at the Mercy Medical Center in Redding, California. Born in Oregon City, Oregon, September 18, 1927, he was a Forest Service smokejumper out of Missoula from 1949 through 1954. Mick moved to Shasta County, California, in 1955 from Kalispell, Montana. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II and worked as a surveyor for the California Department of Transportation.

Roy R. "Dick" Carpenter (Missoula '49)

Dick died February 4, 2007, at his home in Dillon, Montana, after a short battle with cancer. He served as a paratrooper in the Korean War and jumped at Missoula from 1949-54 and the 1960 season. Dick worked in the timber industry before working 36 years for the USDA Animal Damage Control in Montana and Alaska. He moved to the Dillon area in 1967 and was a regular spectator at the area wrestling matches watching sons and grandsons' wrestle. Dick was known to the Beaverhead County ranchers as the "Government Trapper."

Donald R. Casagrande (Missoula '49)

Don was born July 31, 1929, in Butte, Montana. He was a Missoula smokejumper in 1949. Don worked in Chicago, Illinois, and after retiring, he moved to North Myrtle Beach, North Carolina, to enjoy his boat at Coquina Harbor. He died in Butte, Montana, on July 26, 2013.

Richard James Conklin (Missoula '49)

Richard, 48, died of a heart attack December 11, 1978, in the Kalispell, Montana. He was born February 2, 1930, in Williston, North Dakota. He attended school in Butte and graduated from Carroll College (Helena) and the University of Montana Law School. Richard jumped at Missoula 1949-53 and 1956 while attending school. He was an Army veteran of the Korean War and practiced law for 18 years in White Sulphur Springs and was Meagher County attorney.

James H. Delano (Missoula '49)

James, 68, was born June 20, 1925, and died April 4, 1994, in Billings, Montana. He jumped during the 1949 season and had four fire and eight practice jumps.

Paul Wade Dennison (Missoula '49)

Paul, 78, died March 16, 2001, in Missoula, Montana. He was born February 27, 1923, in Clarksburg, West Virginia. His occupation was listed as carpenter and US Forest Service. He jumped at Missoula 1949, and 1951-57.

Robert "Bob" DeZur (Missoula '49)

Bob jumped at Missoula 1949-52 and at Grangeville in 1954. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Mathematics from the University of Montana in 1953, and a Ph.D. in Mathematics from the University of Oregon in 1957. Bob was a Professor of Mathematics at San Diego State, Washington State, and the Univ. of Wyoming before working as a research scientist for Marietta Corp.

Prior to becoming a smokejumper, he was in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, stationed in Japan, 1946-1948. His career work involved being a Data Analyst of Satellite and Weapons Systems, US Defense Contractors, and Software Engineer/Tester, Apple Computer. He retired from State University of New York at Delhi in 2010 at age 82, where he was an Adjunct Mathematics Professor. Bob is currently living in Oneonta, N.Y. (2021)

Eldon E. Diettert (Missoula '49)

Eldon died August 5, 1949, along with 11 other Missoula smokejumpers in the Mann Gulch Fire. He was an honor roll forestry student at the University of Montana. Eldon was called away from his 19th birthday

luncheon to go the Mann Gulch Fire. He was born August 5, 1930, in Moscow, Idaho.

Frank R. Dotz (Missoula '49)

Frank died February 22, 2007, at his home in Missoula. He grew up in Ronan, Montana, where he attended high school and played football and basketball. Frank was dispatched to a two manner just before the call came in for the Mann Gulch Fire in 1949. He owned Dotz Pianos for over 40 years.

Joseph "Joe" Farrell (Missoula '49)

Joe, 86, died Jan. 6, 2013, in Bismarck, North Dakota. He served two years in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, then attended the University of Montana. Joe was called back to active service in 1950 and served one year fighting in Korea. He jumped at Missoula in 1949 and did not jump the day of the Mann Gulch tragedy in which 12 smokejumpers, many of whom were Joe's friends, died. Joe had a 35-year career with Montana-Dakota Utilities Co.

John L. "Jock" Fleming (Missoula '49)

Jock, 87, died December 5, 2015, in Taos, NM. The son of an Army Colonel, he grew up in the Philippines, Liberty Island and Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. Jock graduated from Colorado A&M (now CSU) with a degree in Forestry in 1951. He jumped in Missoula during the 1949 season.

Drafted into the Army, he served in Korea where he earned the Korean Service Medal with two bronze stars, a U.N. Service Medal, and a Combat Infantry Badge. After his discharge he returned to Taos where he has lived for the past 65 years. Jock worked for Pot Creek Lumber before starting his career with the USFS, retiring in 1982.

After retiring from the USFS, Jock worked 14 seasons at Taos Ski Valley, training and managing lift operators.

Thomas Harry Graves (North Cascades '49)

Tom jumped at NCSB 1949-50 and 1953. He is 90 and, at last information, is living in Winthrop, WA. Tom was born on the family ranch August 6, 1929, in an area his grandfather homesteaded in the late 1890s. He graduated from Winthrop H.S. in 1947 and over the years worked as a horse packer and smokejumper, built trails, and logged for the USFS. He ran Pasayten Pack Trips until 1981 and operated Chewack Enterprises, building fences, running snowplow trucks, and fought wildfires.

Tom was in the US Army 1951-52 during the Korean War. He was active in the American Legion and the annual '49er Days celebration where he and his wife, Fae, served as Grand Marshall and Grand Lady of the event in 2013.

Warren Short Hall (Missoula '49)

Short, 81, passed away December 19, 2004. He was a WWII veteran and graduated from Colorado A&M in 1950 with a degree in forestry. Short made his first fire jump August 3, 1949, just missing the Mann Gulch crew by two spots on the list.

He spent most of his 30-year career with the US Forest Service on the Cibola N.F. in Region 3 specializing in timber management.

Short retired and moved to Dallas, Oregon, where he bought five acres and built a A-frame and lived there until his passing.

William "Bill" Hamilton (Missoula '49)

Bill, 85, died Jan. 29, 2014, in East Wenatchee, Washington. He joined the U.S. Army after graduating from high school, qualifying for jump school, and eventually becoming a paratrooper in an Airborne battalion.

Bill attended Wenatchee Valley College and transferred to Washington State College, and after earning his bachelor's degree he studied law at the University of Washington. He formed the Hamilton, Lynch & Kuntz law firm and later served as municipal court judge for 15 years. Bill also owned apple and cherry orchards.

After retiring from the legal profession, Bill moved to Carson City, Nevada, in the late 1980s to help a friend launch a business; he remained there until returning to Wenatchee in 2001. While in Nevada, Bill volunteered to help build water collectors for bighorn sheep and other wildlife. He also coached and judged youth debate teams. Bill jumped at Missoula during the 1949-51 seasons.

George B. Harpole (Missoula '49)

NSA Life Member George Harpole died April 8, 2021, in Clifton, Colorado. He was a rookie smokejumper in 1949 and jumped during the fire seasons of 1950 and 1952 to help pay his tuition to earn a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Montana. He had 11 fire jumps over those three seasons. Later he earned a master's degree in Forestry Economics from the University of California at Berkeley.

George then spent 25 years working for the U.S. Forest Service as a Forestry Conservation Economist in Berkeley, California, and Madison,

Wisconsin, followed by another 25 years as an independent consultant focusing on the creation of Stewardships in the forested areas of New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado.

His focus as a consultant was related to the fire mitigation removals and utilization of small diameter trees and flash fuel materials by the way of creating Stewardships that could be contracted with the Federal, State and/or private forest authorities. George formally retired at the age of 85 upon the publication of his co-authored Department of Agriculture Research Paper (General Technical Report 236) entitled "The Evolutionary History of OSB Board" published in February or 2015.

William G. Henry (Missoula '49)

After a nine-year battle with renal cancer, Bill died November 20, 2001, at the Veteran's Hospital in Santa Clara, California. He rookied in 1949 and jumped through the 1951 season. Bill spent most of his life employed as a pilot, flying many years for the Wyoming Department of Wildlife.

Robert W. Holmstrom (Missoula '49)

Bob died August 16, 2017, in Billings, Montana. He was born in Garden City, Kansas, March 29, 1928, and attended a one-room country school near Red Oak, Iowa, for six years. Bob completed grade school and high school in Redmond, Oregon, graduating from high school in 1945 and, following graduation, joined the US Navy. At the time he enlisted the war with Germany had ended and his naval career was brief, and he was discharged from the Navy in August 1946.

After his discharge, he enrolled at the University of Montana. While in Missoula, he was a smokejumper in 1949 and 1951 with 11 fire jumps. He graduated in 1952 and earned degrees in business administration and law.

Following graduation from the University, he worked for two different oil companies in Billings, Montana. He practiced law in Billings until he was appointed District Judge in March, 1984, and served in that position until retiring in December 1997.