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Smokejumper Magazine, July 2004

National Smokejumper Association

Chuck Sheley

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THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
JULY 2004

SMOKEJUMPER



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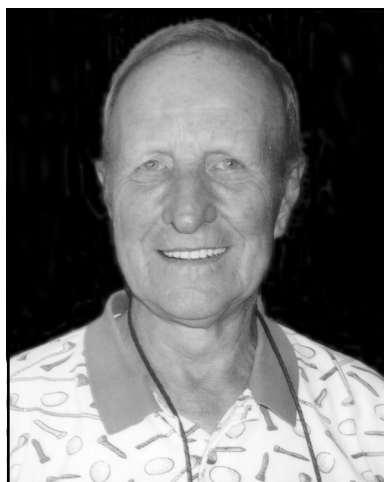
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Cover photo: Portrait of Ken Sisler with CMH. (Courtesy of Jane Sisler)



Message from the President



by **Ron Stoleson**
(Missoula '56)
PRESIDENT

THIS IS MY LAST COLUMN as president of NSA. Your new president, Doug Houston, will do a great job and I hope you'll give him the same backing I received these last two years. I really feel great about our outfit's energy and am particularly pleased with the turnout of excellent candidates that ran for the Board this year. Chuck said that this is the largest turnout we have ever had. Congratulations to those of you elected. Those who weren't should try again. We need a constant stream of members to step up to the plate and help us grow and prosper.

A number of things have been in the works, which are now beginning to come to fruition. Shortly, we expect to receive the final notice of our trademark's registration with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. This is important because no one can legally use a registered trademark without permission. Paying a fee can be a condition we require for such permission, which can help us financially! Several entities have previously approached us to use our logo for product sales.

The smokejumper display at the Evergreen Aviation Museum is

scheduled to be in place this month. Due to cost issues, it was delayed, but the decision was made to complete it and raise the money later. We would certainly appreciate your donations to this worthwhile project. Thousands of people every month will become familiar with smokejumping and your history, due largely to the display. Send your donations to **Dean Longanecker**, NSA treasurer, and he will forward them to the museum.

Although we have not yet achieved our goal of 200 life memberships, we are doing great and as of this writing (March) we have 123 life members with several others paying on the installment plan.

Lastly, **Chuck Mansfield** (CJ-59) is publishing a book in CD format. The topic is mega-fires and uses the Biscuit fire as an example of poor initial attack action and its consequences. Check it out on Chuck's Web site <http://www.CoyoteAerospace.com>.

So long and take care. I'll be seeing you on the trail projects or elsewhere. 🍄

Please Tell Us When You Change Address

The postal service does NOT forward your copy of *Smokejumper* when you move or leave home for an extended time period. It is returned to us and the NSA is charged an additional first class postage fee. With 30–40 returns per mailing it gets expensive and takes a lot of time. Please let Chuck Sheley know if you have any change in your mailing address. Contact information is on page three.

Smokejumper Awarded Medal of Honor

by Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

I've always wanted to know more about Ken Sisler (NSCB-57). He was a smokejumper who posthumously was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor after being killed in Vietnam—the sort of background that gets a person's attention. Getting information, however, proved to be very difficult. I was stonewalled, until I came across *SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam* (Onyx Books, 1998) and its companion volume, *SOG: A Photo History of the Secret Wars* (Paladin Press, 2000). Both are by John L. Plaster and recount the history of the Studies and Observations Group, a

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage	ANC	Grangeville	GAC	Missoula	M50
Boise	NIFC	Idaho City	IDC	Redding	RDD
Cave Junction	CJ	La Grande	LGD	Redmond	RAC
Fairbanks	FBX	McCall	MYC	West Yellowstone	WYS
				Winthrop	NCSB



Last photo of Ken Sisler August 1967. (Courtesy of Becky Sisler Wilson)

top secret covert operations unit of the U.S. military during the Vietnam War. Ken Sisler, it turns out, was one of its most prominent members.

Formed in 1964, SOG was steeped in secrecy; its members—an elite group of warriors that included Green Berets, Navy SEALs, and Air Force Air Commandos—answered directly to the Pentagon. SOG forces saw combat, took part in hundreds of rescue missions, and handled cross-border reconnaissance deep in enemy territory. More than 150 SOG members died in the war, and 80 more were reported MIA.

Bill Moody (NSCB-57) rookied with Ken and was able to make contact with Jack McKay (NSCB-57), who was probably closer to Ken than anyone else during that first fire season. Jack's remembrances provide key insight into Ken as a young man.

"He Was a Tough SOB"

Says Jack: "During our junior and senior years in high school, the North Bend Ranger District employed Ken and me on a suppression crew. Ken was from Dexter, Mo. We became close friends while on a fire on the Mount Baker National



Ken Sisler first fire jump 1957. Jack McKay in background. (Courtesy of Jack McKay)

Forest. Along with ten others, we hiked up this mountainside to the fire. It took us a day to get to the fire from the creek. When we got there, it was pretty well-contained. We were all exhausted from the hike and were not in any shape to do much fire fighting, anyway.

“After we had spent all this time and energy getting to the fire, we discovered that there were about ten smokejumpers already there. They were having what seemed like a picnic on a mountaintop. They were a real nice bunch of guys who told us about smokejumping and how to apply. These guys were like gods to Ken and [me]. About that time, a helicopter showed up and took the jumpers. What a deal! They fly off, and we are working a fire that is going out. Then it starts to rain, and we are soaked and still have to spend a couple days on the mountain before hiking out. That convinced us that there was a better way to spend a summer. Back at school, Ken and I applied for smokejumpers, and the next summer, we were off to Winthrop and a new adventure.

“Ken and I were partners on our first fire jump. I remember the fire was on Strawberry Mountain near John Day, Ore. It was a hot, bumpy ride to the fire, and I got airsick and barfed into my hard hat. It seemed like we flew around for hours trying to find that fire. I was ready to get out of that plane. It was a small fire and probably nearly out when we jumped it. On another fire later that season, Ken put one of his climbing spurs into his calf while retrieving his chute. We bandaged him up and took off for the five-mile hike to the road. He was hurt but held his own on the packout. He was a tough SOB.

“Ken was a friend who enjoyed a good time and was always looking for a new adventure. He always had a grin and could come up with a joke. Of course, he always joined us bucking bales on the local farms, going to the dances on Saturday nights, and tasting the local brew. He loved life and was on

his way to fulfilling his dreams of being on the leading edge of adventure.

“It is interesting how you recall certain things in life. The last time I saw Ken was on a weekend in late August in 1957. We were playing poker, and he was about to leave for Missouri. To this day, I recall that he lost a hand and said that he was ready to head home. He got up, went to his car and took off. I still regret that I didn’t walk out to the car with him to say a more personal good-bye. It is one of those things that sticks in your mind over the years. Whenever I’m at the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., I always look at his name.”

SOG’s First Medal of Honor

In 1967 Ken was a 29-year-old lieutenant with what Plaster calls a “reputation for innovation and daring.” In Laos as part of a SOG mission to gather cross-border intelligence, he was a reconnaissance team leader and on February 7 volunteered to help a platoon conduct damage assessment after a B-52 strike.

Writes Plaster: “... [A] half-dozen Kingbee helicopters landed the platoon on a heavily cratered Laotian [landing zone]. Minutes later, they were mass-assaulted by more than 100 [North Vietnamese Army] soldiers and almost overrun. Lt. Sisler realized that two of his [men] had been wounded and left behind. Racing back alone into the jungle, Sisler picked up one man and was running with him when the NVA launched a second assault, headed directly for him. Sisler ... pulled a grenade, attacked and destroyed a machine gun, and then killed three more enemy assailants trying to slip into the platoon perimeter. He went back after the second [man] and just got him out when another NVA attacked. All alone, Lt. Sisler counterattacked, firing his CAR-15 and throwing grenades.

“With all the SOG men around him killed or wounded, Sisler almost single-handedly had repulsed the NVA attack. Meanwhile, Sergeant First Class [Leonard] Tilley organized the rest of the platoon and brought A-1 Skyraiders within 50 feet of its position. But there was no place for extraction helicopters to land, so the SOG men had to move. A rocket-propelled grenade detonated near [Capt. Edward] Lesesne, and instantly he was almost bleeding to death. Tilley’s expertly directed air strikes at last forced the NVA force back, and the Kingbees and several helicopter gunships arrived. Ken Sisler stood to direct the gunships when a lone sniper’s shot cut him down. He died there.

“A year later, the young lieutenant’s widow, Jane Sisler, and her two sons, David and James, traveled to Washington to accept his posthumous Medal of Honor, the first awarded to a military intelligence officer.”

Plaster writes that while most Americans don’t know about SOG and the men who were killed among its ranks, these heroes are still remembered—Ken Sisler among them. “The largest memorial by far,” Plaster notes, “is the USNS *Sisler*, a mammoth ship large enough to transport an entire armored brigade, and launched in February 1998.” 🦋

Note: Additional information about Ken was received in a couple late e-mails which are included in the “Odds and Ends” column of this issue.

Watch Out for that Snag

by Ross Parry (Missoula '58)

In the fall of 1962 there was a late season fire northwest of Missoula. Our foreman, **Len Krout** (MSO-46), was thrilled to finally go on a fire and get away from his administrative duties. The 12-man crew contained a large contingent of overhead. **Hal Samsel** (MSO-49), **Lyle Brown** (MSO-54), myself and a couple other overhead were in the load with **Hugh Fowler** (MSO-47) being the spotter.

The fire was "going good" when we arrived due to strong winds. The area was heavily timbered and there didn't appear to be a good jump spot. However, up the ridge about a half-mile was an old burn of about 20 acres where the regrowth was about 30 feet and thick as dog's hair. It was like a cushion except for one very tall snag dead square in the middle of the area. Len consulted with Hugh, and they decided this was the best jump spot.

Hugh dropped the streamers and they sailed away. The area was so large that the strong wind didn't seem like that much of a problem to a load of experienced jumpers. Hugh, in his professional manner, told us where he would let us out and to be sure to avoid the snag in the middle of the jump spot.

Len was the first man in a three-man stick with Hal Samsel and myself. As we turned on final, Len turned to the crew and hollered, "Watch out for that snag!" After opening, I immediately turned into the wind and was blown backwards into one of the softest landings ever. The regrowth caught my chute and left me dangling about two feet off the ground.

I immediately headed for the area where I expected Len to have landed and arrived to find him dangling from the top of "that snag." It looked as though the top of the snag had gone right through the apex of his chute. Hal Samsel had arrived a bit before me and, while not actually rolling on the ground, was sitting down as he was laughing. He hollered up to Len, "Hey Len. Watch out for that snag!" Len was hugging the top of that snag with both arms and legs as he replied, "Samsel, you son-of-a-bitch, this in not funny."

We knew it was not funny as the wind kept billowing out portions of the chute threatening to break off the top of the snag. I was concerned that Len would not relinquish his hold long enough to make his letdown before the top broke. He was probably waiting for a lull in the wind. Finally, he let loose and made his letdown.

Lyle Brown had severely sprained his ankle on the jump but insisted on building line with the crew. We fought the fire all day and into the night and did a good job of containing the fire on the west side but the strong, consistent winds continued to spread the fire on the other side. By the next morning the fire had grown to project size, so ground crews arrived and we were released.

After retrieving my chute, I headed up to see what Len was doing. Hal arrived about the same time. There was Len grinning and holding a crosscut saw. "Okay, fellows, let's see how funny you think this is now." That snag had a DBH of about

four feet and Sam and I went to work. Len, true to his nature as one of the most energetic and hardworking smokejumpers ever, stepped in and took his turn at pulling that saw.

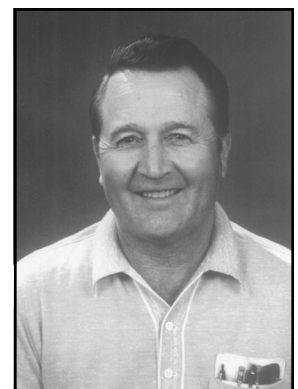
We stashed our gear in a designated spot and started down the mountain with Len leading the way. A ground pounder was lugging a case of cantaloupe that had been dropped earlier. Len asked if we could have a couple for the crew, but the pounder said that he wasn't supposed to do that. I personally felt that Len should have directed a few of us to get the cantaloupe but he didn't. We finally finagled a single melon that Len divided into 12 equal parts. I have never been a cantaloupe fan, but that slim sliver was the best melon that I'd ever tasted and it has been a favorite since.

We were directed to follow the main ridge for a mile or so down to a small access road. Len led off with Lyle Brown limping along just behind him. Sam and I were at the end of the line. As we headed down, Len suddenly took a sharp turn toward what looked to me to be a spur ridge. I stopped and asked Sam where he was going? Sam stopped and looked for a second or two, then said, "Ah, Len gets a little confused sometimes." I started off after the crew but Sam said, "Let's wait here for them; they'll be back." We sat down and Sam pulled out his makin's (he rolled his own) and I watched the saddle area where we supposed the crew would need to come back.

Sam rolled his smoke. "Yes sir, a few years back Len took a wrong turn and got hisself and his crew lost in the Salmon, by-gawd, River country for three or four days without food. They got gawd-awful hungry, so Len had them cook up all their leather shoelaces and they ate them in order to get a little energy." At this point I must have registered a little (or a lot of) skepticism because Sam said, "That's the by-gawd truth so-help-me-God. Len even got his story written up in one of them-there tabloid magazines. The title was 'To Hell and Back' or maybe it was 'I Jumped Into Hell and Came Back' or something like that and that's the by-gawd truth."

About then I could see Len leading the crew back through the saddle. I stood up and Sam snubbed out his smoke but remained sitting as we watched the crew march past us down the main ridge. If looks could kill (especially Len and Lyle), Sam and I would have been "by-gawd" dead. Sam and I fell in and we proceeded down the ridge. 🍷

Ross retired from the Forest Service in 1988 as a computer systems analyst. He can be reached at 2109 E 6075 S, Ogden UT.



Ross Parry (Courtesy of Ross Parry)

MILESTONES

"Milestones" was created to serve as both a "Hall of Records" for smokejumping and as a way to encourage you to write in with related stories. If you know of an event that relates to any of the listed categories or want to nominate someone, please send it in. You will be helping to preserve our history. The information below is an update and continuation from the April issue of the magazine.

Multi-generation jumpers

Father: Edward Allen (MYC-68)
Daughter: Shelly (Allen) Lewis (GAC-97)
Father: James C. Baker (NCSB-69)
Son: Patrick W. Baker (NCSB-82)
Son: Steven R. Baker (NCSB-88)
Father: Greg Beck (MYC-78)
Son: Jeremy Beck (MSO-98)
Father: Howard W. Betty (NCSB-48)
Son: Ned Betty (Canada-76)
Father: J. Charles Blanton (MYC-47)
Son: Richard J. Blanton (MYC-74)
Father: Philip Brollier (NIFC-71)
Son: Jacob Brollier (RDD-95)
Son: Justin Brollier (NIFC-01)
Father: Albert N. Boucher (CJ-49)
Son: Donald N. Boucher (NCSB-75)
Father: Don Colbert (NCSB-53)
Son: Dave Colbert (NCSB-88)
Father: John T. Cramer (MYC-63)
Son: William H. Cramer (BOI-90)
Son: Thomas W. Cramer (GAC-97)
Son: Jeffery S. Cramer (FBX-02)
Son: Dave I. Estey (BOI-90)
Son: Damon T. Jacobs (BOI-90)
Father: Alan J. Dunton (FBX-67)
Daughter: Melanie L. Dunton (MYC-99)
Son: Dave I. Estey (BOI-90)
Son: Damon T. Jacobs (BOI-90)
Father: Mark Gibbons (RAC-87)
Son: Jason Gibbons (RAC-03)
Father: Tom H. Graves (NCSB-49)
Son: Dave C. Graves (NCSB-86)
Father: George P. Honey (NCSB-40)
Son: Raymond Honey (NCSB-55)
Father: Glen A. Johnshoy (MSO-67)
Son: Ron E. Johnshoy (NIFC-88)
Father: Wayne H. Kaaen (MYC-68)
Daughter: Karin A. Kaaen (MYC-99)
Son: Kris Kaaen (MYC-03)
Father: Tom Kovalicky (MSO-61)
Son: John Kovalicky (MSO-88)

Father: Francis B. Lufkin (NCSB-39)
Son : Ronald F. Lufkin (CJ-60)
Son: Larry C. Lufkin (CJ-63)
Father: Michael M. Marcuson (NCSB-64)
Son: Michael J. Marcuson (Yukon-90)
Father: Terry McCabe (NCSB-58)
Son: Patrick McCabe (NCSB-91)
Grandfather: Verland Ohlson (MSO-49)
Grandson: Tory Kendrick (MSO-00)
Granddaughter: Mara Veale (MSO-01)
Grandfather: Clem L. Pope (CJ-46)
Grandson: Clem V. Pope (GAC-03)
Father: Fred G. Rohrbach (MSO-65)
Son: Kurt Rohrbach (MSO-03)
Father: William E. Selby (NCSB-61)
Son: Bill R. Selby (RAC-91)
Father: Glen H. Smith (NCSB-40)
Son: Ben D. Smith (MSO-64)
Son: Mike R. Smith (MSO-69)
Father: Donald G. Stevenson (MSO-55)
Son: Jeff Stevenson (MSO-89)
Father: Wayne Webb (MYC-46)
Son: Randall A. Webb (MYC-77)
Father: Harold J. Weinmann (NCSB-47)
Son: William A. Furman (NCSB-62)

Jumping at or beyond age 50

Bill Craig (MSO-66)
Leo R. Cromwell (IDC-66)
Thad D. Duel (MYC-56)
Andy Hayes (MSO-79)
Jeff Kinderman (MSO-75)
Jerry I. Ogawa (MYC-67)
Ron Rucker (RAC-76)
Bill Werhane (MSO-66)

Number of states jumped (practice and/or fire)

16 states—Mark Corbet (LGD-74)

Number of aircraft types jumped (on the job)

19—Greg Anderson (MSO-68)

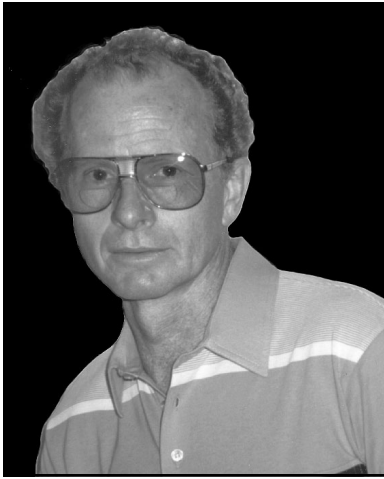
Oldest active jumper

57—Ron Omont (RDD-78)

Please send your information and marks to pegmark@juno.com or mail them to Mark Corbet, 1740 SE Ochoco Way, Redmond, OR 97756.



Sounding Off from the Editor



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

AS I WRITE THIS column, the April issue has reached most of your homes. The issue contains this year's election ballot for the NSA Board of Directors. Each year, four positions are open, each constituting a three-year term.

So far, the response has been extraordinary. I've already received more than 230 ballots, suggesting we might have a record year on our hands. Participation in past years has sometimes been so low we haven't met our required by-law percentage of votes, and the board has had to finish the voting process. A mere 66 people voted in 1999, for example, and though things improved in 2000 with 372 votes (a turnout that may have been helped by an election related feature in this magazine), I still think we can do better.

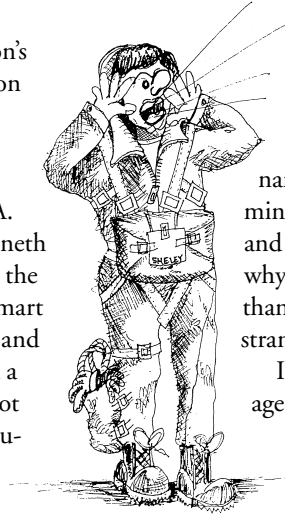
In addition to the terrific response thus far, something else is unusual this year. We have seven candidates running—quite a departure from the past, when we've been lucky just to find enough people to fill the four positions. As is usual with smokejumpers, all of this year's candidates are high-quality individuals.

Regardless of the election's outcome, I have a suggestion for the board: The three individuals not elected should be appointed to assigned jobs with the NSA. You might say our cup runneth over this year with not just the usual four but with *seven* smart people able to devote time and energy to making the NSA a better organization. Let's not pass up this unique opportunity to use them all; we will be a better organization for their involvement.

I speak from experience when I say I'm not sure the NSA has always known how to use people ready and willing to help. I personally found it pretty tough to crack the association's shell. I joined the board in 1997 and, frankly, found the NSA to be a very strange outfit. For one thing, at that time most of the board and *all* of the officers were from Missoula, a makeup I regarded as odd for a national organization. I also thought they were more than a little aloof.

Let me explain. Early on, I volunteered to help with the association's merchandising effort—a good job for me considering my background of more than 30 years as an athletic director raising funds just to keep programs going. There was no response, so at the 1998 meeting I extended my offer again. That time I received a limited response and proceeded to make up a merchandise line at my own expense. Another interlude of dead time transpired, and I considered forgetting the whole thing.

Then I received a call. I was told my plan would be on the agenda of the Executive Committee's meeting in Missoula. There was just one problem: The meeting was taking place the very next night. Because making that meeting would have



involved a 2,000-mile round-trip drive on my part, the situation was impossible. I'd seen my name mentioned in the minutes of previous meetings and couldn't help but wonder why I hadn't been notified more than a day ahead of time. What a strange organization!

I requested a place on the agenda at the next month's meeting and booked my plane tickets. I added more merchandise samples to my suitcase and expanded on my already lengthy presentation. A week before the meeting, I inadvertently found that the date had changed because a committee member was out of town. No one thought to tell me of the change! It cost \$50 to change my airline tickets. What a strange organization!

The day of the rescheduled meeting, I left for the Sacramento airport at 4 A.M. It was going to be a long day. I got to Missoula in the afternoon and caught dinner with **Jack Demmons** (MSO-50). I'd been communicating with Jack for some time, and he'd told me he needed help with his job. One of Jack's main areas of concern was getting someone to handle the difficult task of keeping track of membership. He'd made numerous appeals to the committee for help but had not yet received any.

The meeting started at seven that evening. I'd hoped to get an early slot on the agenda due to my long trip, but no such luck. The meeting wore on, and I resorted to chewing Excedrin to keep awake. Finally, I got a chance to present my merchandising plan to the committee. I said I thought the NSA was missing out on a source of much-needed revenue that could be tapped with an improved and expanded merchandise

marketing operation. After the presentation, I was approved to start my merchandising on a “trial” basis. Success! After more than a year of trying, I had been approved to do volunteer work for the NSA!

Then I threw out one more idea. I told them I’d seen a letter from **Monroe “Spud” DeJarnette** (MSO-49), who’d offered to help the NSA in any capacity. He’d received no response (familiar pattern?). I suggested we ask Spud to assume membership responsibilities and take some of the load off Jack. There was some hesitation due to the fact that Spud lived in California—how could we take NSA responsibilities outside of Missoula? I’m happy to report

that it really can be done; as it happened, Spud handled that job capably for several years.

The trip to the meeting cost me well over \$500 for an airline ticket, car rental and a motel room, but it was worth it—a small price to pay for the chance to make a difference. How much of a difference? The NSA recorded merchandising profits of \$3,264 from 1996–98. Since the start of the “trial” program in October 1998, an average of two orders a day, seven days a week pass across my desk. My latest report to the Board of Directors showed a *net* profit of \$73,202.

I haven’t done it alone. I’ve had some great help. Two years ago **Dr.**

Michael Steppe (IDC-61) let me tap the talents of his office manager, **Mary Ann Heintzman**, who handles the tedious jobs of packing, labeling and standing in line at the post office. Webmaster **Jon Robinson**, who came on last year, built the current Web store and handles my requests at a moment’s notice. More than 90 percent of our orders currently come from the NSA Web site, and we are reaching a market that is virtually limitless. I myself spend at least three hours a day on processing, tracking, ordering and inventory.

The moral of my story? Never turn down anyone who volunteers to work! 🐼

A Pioneer Remembers Wagner Dodge

Interview of Jim “Smokey” Alexander (MSO ’40) by James Budenholzer (MSO ’73)

On August 5, 1949, a massive blaze on Montana’s Helena National Forest overran and killed 12 smokejumpers as they fled, the first major catastrophe to befall the nine-year-old smokejumper program. More than 50 years later, the Mann Gulch fire remains one of the worst incidents in Forest Service history.

*The fire left three survivors, including crew foreman **Wagner Dodge**. Dodge had joined the jumper program in 1941, and by 1949 had mastered the art of fighting fire. He knew how to improvise, how to be part of a team, and how to relate to a buddy. He also knew a thing or two about survival, having learned hard lessons on the high peaks of the Washington Cascades and on the rugged terrain of the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana. Seasoned and knowledgeable, he was invaluable on a force that had become younger and less experienced since the war years. Yet even Dodge’s expertise wasn’t enough to save the young jumpers who died at Mann Gulch.*

*Jim “Smokey” Alexander (MSO-40) helped Dodge learn the ropes. A member of the first smokejumper force in 1940, Alexander spent a season with the soft-spoken Dodge in 1941, getting to know him perhaps as well as any jumper ever did. Alexander recently sat down with **James Budenholzer** (MSO-73) to share his memories of Dodge—and to reflect on what went so wrong at Mann Gulch.*

The First Fire with Wagner Dodge

by James Budenholzer (Missoula ’73)

Wagner Dodge joined the smokejumper squad in 1941. I first met him when he appeared out at the Nine Mile Remount, an old CCC camp west of Missoula, Mont., where we did spring training in 1941. Wag was a very quiet,

unassuming person, ... a “yup and nope” guy like John Wayne.

Dick Lynch (MSO-40) became the squad leader for Big Prairie, and I was his assistant. ... [B]oth of us made a decision to take Wagner up there. ... Big Prairie was way up on the headwaters of the South Fork, at the edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. It was only accessible by air or by foot or by horseback. They had a couple of three strings of mules in there and then horses, too. It was a big deal, because they had to supply all those lookouts and guard stations by mule.

We only made two fire jumps that summer. The first was far away, all the way over to Methow, in Winthrop, Wash., in Region 6, north of Lake Chelan. ... We flew in a Ford Tri-motor. It was a long flight. We landed in Spokane, refueled, and went on to Winthrop.

After we got there, they had a lightning fire about 20 miles north of Lake Chelan. They decided to jump two guys in there. This was now with a static line. So they chose me and Wagner to make this jump. I was the “old man,” meaning I was the only one up there from the first season in 1940. So they put me in charge of Wagner. They cranked up the Ford Tri-motor. It was getting pretty close to dark, and we got in the plane and went up there.

It was very rocky; the peaks [were] very tough. It wasn’t easy finding a jump spot. There was a cliff with a flat top that had to serve as a jump spot. We jumped at about 500 feet. I went first, and then they made two more passes. ... Then Wag got out, and we both made it safely.

So we went to work. ... We jumped almost right on the fire. ... We were really high, like around 9,000 feet. We were



Wagner Dodge 1943. (NSA File)

busy trenching this fire. We had to put a trench along the bottom of the fire to stop it from rolling. The problem they had with fires in the high Cascades was burning materials rolling downhill into the timber.

He was a nice, kind person, very unassuming, and he was a good worker, and he was savvy

about fire: He knew what he was doing. ... Wag and I talked all the time during the night, not much about personal background or his family, but more about how to put the fire out and how we got in there and how we were going to get out of there.

We got it completely out and stayed there that night. We slept in our jump jackets. He was a good helper and a good worker, and he followed orders, even though up there alone you are a team, anyway. Nobody's really in charge, just two guys getting a job done.

We left early the next morning, and we had to climb down these cliffs and crevices and get down into the timber line. We worked our way down to the bottom of this thing and struck a trail of sorts and walked towards Lake Chelan. We hit a logging camp that had good food and good beds, where we spent the night.

The next day, we walked into the Lake Chelan Ranger Station [and] spent the night, ... and a boat that comes up two, three times a week with mail and supplies came up and picked us up. ... We went down to the town of Chelan, where there was a pickup waiting for us that took us back to the Winthrop Ranger Station, where we rejoined the crew.

We talked about various things. ... [H]e liked the smokejumping and the fire fighting. I'm not sure which forest he came from; the first two years you came from a forest, but then after that people came from everywhere, like the conscientious objectors. I'm not sure what he did during the war. I'm sure he was from Montana. Then we came back to Big Prairie Ranger Station, and we worked trail while we waited for a fire call."

The Second Fire with Wagner Dodge

There was one other fire we all jumped on, the Dean Crick fire in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. In the middle of August, we got the call. They had brought an additional smokejumper crew in from Winthrop, Wash., from the Chelan National Forest to help us fight the fire. **Merle Lundrigan** (MSO-41) was the fire boss, with **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40) from Region 6 and **Dick Lynch** off the Flathead Forest, so we had a pretty big crew as far as smokejumpers were concerned, about 25 guys in there,

and Forest Service crews, too.

There [were] no roads; it was all mule or aircraft. At the end of the summer, when crews left out of Big Prairie in the fall, each guy was given the option of either flying out, or taking two days' pay to walk out. Most guys liked to walk out north to Spotted Bear, where the road ended. It was a nice trail.

Anyway, the Dean Crick fire was a lightning caused fire. It was a clear, beautiful day; the sun was shining. **Dick Johnson** came in with a Tri-motor, and within a half-hour we flew straight east ... to the Chinese Wall, which is extended on the west side of the Continental Divide, extending out about 100 miles. It was the dividing line between the Flathead Forest on the west and the Lewis and Clark Forest on the east, with lots of bears. About as rough country as you get in America. The cliffs were awesome as we flew in. It was kind of a humbling experience to look at it.

My crew jumped in first, early in the morning while it was still calm—not much of a wind, because we got there early enough. A second crew jumped at midday, when the winds had come up. They had problems.

All 12 jumpers from the crew I was with in Big Prairie got jumped in. Dick Lynch was the crew leader, so he did the spotting, and I don't remember the sequence. We just wanted to get out and get it over with. This was my fourth and final fire jump of 1941. We had a nice meadow to jump in, banked up a little.

The only [guy] I remember jumping, besides Wagner Dodge and myself, [was] Dick Lynch, who spotted himself and jumped in last. We were maybe about a quarter of a mile from the fire. The fire gear was dropped. I was the crew leader, and we headed to the head of the fire to try and knock it in the head and get a line around it and slow it down.

It was a hot fire. The fire line had to be cut in dirt [and] rock, and we got a trail down to mineral. We climbed up the spruce [and] cut the boughs—clean so there was nothing burnable. The wind kind of took off at midday, and [the] second crew jumped in later in the day, and that was when **Roy Abbott** (MSO-41) hit the slide rock and broke his leg. We had to carry him out. We were at it right into the night. [We] ate some rations. Ground crews were walking in from Big Prairie and Spotted Bear."

Emergency Exit Procedures

After we had the fire knocked in the head, we had time to talk, as guys do. We discussed a number of times the emergency exit procedures on fires. The discussions I had with Wagner Dodge also came later back at Big Prairie, often in groups of three or four, with guys who were much better trained than the guys who would lose their lives at the Mann Gulch fire. But that was later, when they were hiring 18- and 19-year-old kids who wouldn't obey his orders. But they panicked and headed up the hill and died.

See, in 1940 every guy had to have had at least five years of fire fighting or lookout work. The first year they had 100 applicants and chose 16, all pretty seasoned guys. Then,

after 1941, there were some light fire seasons, and the Forest Service started hiring kids. During the war, the conscientious objectors did the job, but as soon as the war was over, they couldn't stay because there were veterans coming back from the 82nd and 101st Airborne who wanted those jobs, who were tough guys. They were pretty good with the rifles, but [they] had no fire experience, so they weren't so great with the shovels. Pretty hard to control, too.

The conscientious objectors, who were experienced, wanted to keep the jobs, but they weren't allowed to. The vets and the kids were not necessarily the kind of people who would listen to Wagner Dodge when he gave orders. And Wag was so soft-spoken, not like me. I have a big bass voice that booms out, not that I have much to say. Wag had a soft voice, and even if he was the most knowledgeable guy, he wasn't the sort who would have an authoritative voice. You'd have to listen, want to listen.

We ... talked about ... when we went on that trip north of Lake Chelan. Coming off those cliffs, we both decided we could ... escape from a fire, because we had experience. We talked about going into a burn and scraping a spot down to mineral soil, because there's a lot of oxygen in soil, and you could breathe it, and a fire would burn over you.

With escape routes, the problem in the North Cascades was [that] the fires [ran] downhill, ... whereas in Montana, the fires ran uphill. So in [the] Cascades, you would trench a fire at the bottom instead of the head—otherwise, the fire would roll down the hill and get it started down below. In Montana, you'd line the head of the fire to rob it of fuel.

We were talking about escape routes. I had done that several times on big fires I was on in the late '30s. He ... agreed that that was the thing to do, and if the time came and he ever had a crew, he would instruct them to scrape out a spot. The ashes could be a little warm. We always wore gloves so you could scrape things away pretty good. [It was] okay to throw away the shovel; the Pulaski [worked] better. ... There are always low spots in a fire, [which] you could head for ... and find air to breathe—even if there was a lot of smoke in the air—by getting your face down to the soil. You never went up against a rock cliff, because that acted like a chimney flue. An experienced firefighter knows this, and the poor kids later didn't know of this. ... [T]hey didn't die of the fire; they died of asphyxiation.

"After the Dean Crick fire in 1941, I never saw Wagner Dodge again. Never talked to him, but [I] followed everything [we talked about]." 🦋

Forest Service Reunion in Portland, Oregon: September 5–9, 2005

The Pacific Northwest Forest Service Retiree Association invites you to come visit the Northwest in 2005 for a gathering of Forest Service retirees and friends to renew friendships, celebrate the "Outfit's" 100th birthday, see some of the scenery, visit some of our history, eat some fresh salmon, try some pretty decent wine and just have fun. So forget the umbrella, come early and stay late.

More information is available by contacting our Web site: www.oldsmokeys.org or dropping us a line at: PNWFSA, Box 5583, Portland, OR 97228.

Registration package will be mailed early in 2005, but don't wait, mark your calendar now.

The reunion will be from September 5 to 9, 2005, at the Double Tree Hotel, Jantzen Beach in north Portland on the bank of the Columbia River, across from Vancouver, Wash. The hotel is reserved for the week, is an AAA triple diamond, has plenty of parking, and is easy to reach from Interstate 5 and a short distance from Portland International Airport.

Prior to the reunion, there will be a special Lewis and Clark overnight tour to Astoria and Fort Clatsop offered on September 4, which will start and end at the hotel. A second tour with the same itinerary will be offered starting on September 9. The tour will be by bus and boat and will visit a number of Lewis and

Clark historic sites along the scenic lower Columbia.

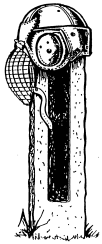
Reunion registration is all day Monday, followed by an evening social gathering, and *brief* welcoming ceremonies.

Tuesday is for day tours to a number of scenic places in the Northwest, including Mt. St. Helens, Columbia Gorge, Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood, Oregon wine country and the Portland Metro area. Complete information about all tours, including Lewis and Clark, will be in the registration package available in early 2005.

Wednesday is for renewing friendships and "mini" reunions of regions, stations, forests and other FS units such as fellow jumpers followed by a special dinner celebrating the Forest Service and its people.

Thursday is centennial and nostalgia day with a series of presentations about our history and accomplishments. Chief and staff will join us for this celebration. In the evening there will be an informal dinner honoring the people of the "Outfit" and their contributions to the nation and the Forest Service.

Friday is "good-bye" day after a buffet breakfast, and a short program launching the "Outfit" into its next century of service.



Off The List

We want to know! If you learn of the serious illness or death of a member of the smokejumper community, whether or not he or she is a member, your Association wants to know about it. Please

phone, write or e-mail the editor (see contact information on page three of the magazine). We'll take it from there.

Alman W. "Bill" Hegland (Missoula '48)

Bill, 83, died Nov. 24, 2003, in Lakeside, Mont., where he and his wife, Faye, had retired in 1980. He graduated from Plentywood (Minn.) high school in 1938. After graduating from high school, he worked for Red Owl store before enrolling in the Minnesota School of Business in Minneapolis. Bill then worked in an aircraft factory in California before joining the Navy in 1944 and finished his active duty on Guam. Upon his discharge, Bill attended the Univ. of Montana and graduated in 1950 with a degree in forestry. He then went to work for the Northern Pacific Railroad as a civil engineer until his retirement. Bill was an NSA member.

Frank E. Kibbee (Missoula '60)

Frank passed away Feb. 27, 2004, at his home in

Alberton, Mont., after a courageous battle with cancer. He was 69. A Havre, Mont., native, Frank graduated from Valier High School in 1952. He attended Western Montana College on an athletic scholarship, participating in basketball, baseball, football and track. He graduated with a B.A. in education in 1956 and was inducted into the WMC Hall of Fame in 1986. He was a Missoula smokejumper from 1960 through 1962, and from 1965 through 1970.

Frank taught in St. Ignatius for three years. The family moved to Alberton in 1959, where he taught and coached for 37 years. Frank and Betty Ann retired in 1996 and since then they had been traveling and keeping up with their grandchildren's activities. 🐾

Remembering Life Member Mike McCullough (Missoula '56)

by Tom McCullough (Missoula '53)

My dad was leaning over my shoulder pointing his finger at a window on a large cream-colored building. "Right there Tom, do you see that window?" I saw hundreds of square windows all the same size in neat rows and columns and I could not tell one from the other. It really didn't matter. The building was the Tacoma General Hospital. The day was October 6, 1937, and I had faith that somewhere in that mass of windows was Mother and my new playmate, Mike. I was two and a half years old.

There are two characteristics of Mike that I shall always remember.

- Mike was a tough guy—physically yes, but more importantly, mentally.

- Second was his love of family.

In retrospect I believe his physical and mental toughness was developed early on.

Somewhere around the age of twenty-one Mike folded up his pole and said to Bud, his fishing partner, "It's time I look for a job because if I don't my old man (dad) is going to break my dinner plate."

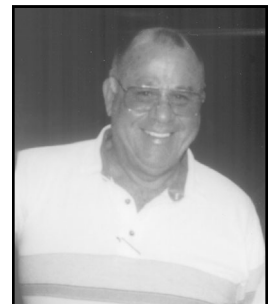
He found his work at Western Gear and soon he met and married Leslie, his wonderful and steadfast partner in life.

Together they shaped a family: Jodi, Mark, Malisa, Greg, Avery, Aerial, Autum (the A's), Grace and soon another yet unnamed. And of course a few dogs and cats and some horses. This family is their strength and Leslie is the rock.

In our teen years Mike outgrew me. Probably because he was usually first to the serving plate taking half and leaving the other half for the rest of us. This was generally okay but when we had company, Dad and I would see to it that the bowl of mashed spuds was passed to Mike last, otherwise there would never be enough for the company. He also became an avid outdoors man, the hunter-fisher.

Mike not only was bigger, he was tough. Physically yes, but more importantly mentally, which he carried with him to his last breath. I believe it served him well in life.

Mike passed away November 2, 2003. 🐾



Mike McCullough (Courtesy of Tom McCullough)



"Grass Fire" by Frederic S. Remington. Oil on canvas, 1908, (1961.228). (Courtesy of Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.)

The Tactical and Strategic Use of Fire During the Great Sioux War

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

As a resident of the Wind River Valley in Wyoming, I have studied our local history to become more aware of the culture, traditions and natural resource management implications passed on to us by our forefathers. Several years ago on a visit to Fort Robinson, Neb., I first read the diaries of two soldiers who fought in what has been termed the Great Sioux War. U.S. National Park Service Historian Jerome A. Greene documented these diaries in the *Nebraska History* magazine of winter 1997. Mr. Greene has completed a variety of works resulting in the published, edited and annotated diaries of U.S. Army soldiers and American Indians who fought in the conflict.

Through consultations with Mr. Greene, I have chosen to use excerpts from the diaries of William F. Zimmer, Company F, 2nd U.S. Cavalry; 1st Lt. Frank Taylor, Company I, 14th Infantry, and Private William W. Jordan, Company C, 14th Infantry. In addition, I have used accounts by Captain Anson

Mills who was the initial commander in the engagement at Slim Buttes and 2nd Lt. Alfred C. Sharpe who fought at Spring Creek.¹

The Great Sioux War of 1876–1877 provides a glimpse into the military use of fire by both American Indians and the U.S. Army. Early in the campaign, battles were fought on the Rosebud (June 17, 1876) and the Little Bighorn (June 25–26, 1876). The rapidity of these attacks made by either the Sioux (Teton Dakota Indians) and Northern Cheyenne or the U.S. Army and their Crow and Shoshone allies did not allow for the use of fire as a military weapon. Following these initial engagements, the Sioux and Cheyenne first used fire in a tactical manner to impede the movements of U.S. troops.

Within one year the army would employ fire as a strategic weapon. Colonel Nelson Miles ordered the use of fire to burn off available late summer, fall and winter forage to help press the "hostiles" back onto the reservation. The following excerpt

is taken from the Nelson Miles General Order of July 22, 1877.

When the commands turn west or back, should the Indians retreat toward the head of the Powder River, I wish the grass burned behind you in the whole section of the country, and the region of the Little Missouri left unsuitable for Indians or game.²

In "Frontier Soldier," Jerome Greene writes: "Obviously, the burnings by the troops were meant to destroy the grass upon which game—particularly buffalo—and Indian ponies could graze, thus precluding Sioux-Cheyenne use of these traditional hunting lands during the late summer and fall while promoting the necessity of their going into the agencies for survival."

Following are the pertinent journal entries in support of the tactical and strategic use of fire during the Great Sioux War.

July 30, 1876: Moved camp one mile down creek. Indians set fire to the prairie. Entire command out fighting fire until dark.

August 3, 1876: Marched all day through smoke of prairie fires. Weather hot. ... The whole country is one sheet of flames, from the valley to the mountain tops. (Private William W. Jordan.)

At this point in time the command would have been near the Tongue River on the east side of the Bighorn Mountains near the present town of Sheridan, Wyo. First Lt. Frank Taylor has a somewhat different account as to the origin of the July 30 fire.

Sunday, July 30, 1876: Moved about 1½ (miles) down same stream. Prairie fire started by embers left at last camp and threatened to reach us. About half of command turned out to extinguish flames.

In reading through the published journals of the Sioux campaign, it becomes apparent that either side could have started wildfires inadvertently as they maneuvered troops or warriors into combat positions. On several occasions, 2nd Cavalry troopers were ordered to be careful with their cook fires as they closed in on "hostile" Sioux.³

Even with the chance of accidental fire, it is apparent that many of the fires set by the Sioux and Cheyenne were started with the expressed intent of disrupting army troop movements. What is most important from a fire history standpoint is the size of the July 30 fire reported by Private William W. Jordan, and that it indeed served as a delaying action for the retreating Sioux and Northern Cheyenne combatants. Indian warriors engaged in combat had to provide for the movements of their entire villages of women and children. Fire was one of the best tools available in fighting a delaying action and appears to be effective when coupled with strike and withdraw tactics.

During the engagement on Spring Creek of October 15–16, 1876, Second Lieutenant Alfred C Sharpe of Company H, 22nd Infantry (Lt. Col. Elwell S. Otis Command) would write:

Finally, we reached the foot of the opposite side, and with a cry, we charged up the hill. The Indians then

set fire to the tall grass which was dry as tinder. The smoke was blinding and the heat intolerable, but rushing onward and upward, we gained the crest and again drove the villains before us.

Later at the Battle of Cedar Creek (October 21, 1876) the Sioux fired the ravines surrounding Colonel Nelson Miles and his soldiers. As the Indians retreated, they continually burned the prairie to successfully impede the soldiers. The fires grew so intense, that Colonel Miles was forced to halt and start backfires.⁴

In addition, the Sioux and Cheyenne traditionally set fire to the prairie as they moved their summer camps from southern Montana (Little Bighorn River) south to the Bighorns and then east to the Black Hills. By late August (during a dry year), the area between the Big Horn and Powder rivers was a "smoky, blackened wasteland."⁵ These fires were set to bring forth young grass early the next spring to provide abundant forage for the next year's hunt. Maintaining their traditional summer hunting grounds was a primary objective of the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne. A normal southwest flow would have pushed any Indian set fires to the northeast. This would have allowed the Sioux and Cheyenne to continue on their annual movements to the south and east. Also, it seems logical that any remaining game within the area might be forced to move in the same general direction as the Indians to stay out of the recently burned areas.

Numerous fires would have started naturally on a dry year. A single thunderstorm system could produce hundreds, even thousands of positive and negative lightning strikes. There is at least one soldier's journal entry that notes a lightning started fire that was quickly rained out. Others would have burned until their natural conclusion (additional rain or change in fuel and topography). Today, these fires would be called "prescribed fire" (human set fire for resource benefit) and "fire use" (natural ignition—lightning allowed to burn for resource benefit).

Whether the fires of 1876 were Indian **tactical, accidental, prescribed or fire use**, the end product remained the same for the army troops in the field. In General Crook's column, the soldiers marched through a blackened landscape denude of forage. Soon the infantry would pass the cavalry on their worn-out mounts. Then the horses were turned out to fend for themselves. Next they were shot, and finally the troops resorted to



Frederic Remington's "Among the Led Horses." (Courtesy of Sid Richardson Collection of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas)

eating their mounts for survival. The soldiers found it difficult to engage a well mounted enemy that could be seen at times just over the next ridge. Captain Anson Mills of Company M, 3rd U.S. Cavalry, recalled:

I, with my squadron, was rear guard and Crook ordered me to shoot all the played-out horses and we shot 70 that day that we found turned loose as we came along. About one-third of the cavalymen were afoot, and some of the officers were afoot, especially those who had taken no extra horses along.

Captain Mills, 1st Lt. Taylor and Private Jordan all served under the overall command of Brigadier General George Crook. The command's action has also been referred to as Crook's Starvation March. The march ended after winning a decisive victory over American Horse at the battle of Slim Buttes (September 9, 1876). As noted, by then, the soldiers were living on horseflesh until resupply could be brought up from Crook City in the northern Black Hills.

On October 26, 1876, General Crook's command went into winter quarters at Camp Robinson, Neb. Military action continued throughout the winter culminating in Colonel R. S. Mackenzie's victory over Dull Knife on November 25, 1876, and Colonel Nelson Miles' victory over Crazy Horse on January 8, 1877, at the battle of Wolf Mountains. After Dull Knife, the Northern Cheyenne Nation would no longer be a participant in the conflict.

During the summer of 1877, the army continued its campaign to bring in the remaining Sioux. Following are excerpts from the diary of Trooper William F. Zimmer, Company F, 2nd U.S. Cavalry:

August 27, 1877:The Indians have been setting fires in our advance, either accidental or on purpose, thinking they were doing right. Fifty men have been sent out to fight it to keep it out of our camp, which it is threatening.

August 28, 1877:Weather still warm. The fire was kept out of our camp. After dark it was a beautiful sight, which I have longed to see. The wolves made an awful row all night. They howled like fiends of hell in all directions.

August 29, 1877:Weather very warm. We made another early start and by 2 P.M. reached Tongue River and the wagons. Setting the grass on fire was continued.

Earlier, Private Zimmer had fought at the Lame Deer Fight (May 7, 1877). His 2nd Cavalry battalion would soon be re-deployed to cut off the escape of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce Indians. Private Zimmer would fight again at the battle of Bear's Paw Mountains (September 30–October 5, 1877). This final engagement would bring to an end the Nez Perce conflict and previous Sioux campaign.

It is apparent that the army had learned the lesson of destroying available forage for the enemy's horses. In 1877 the tables were turned as the army systematically used fire to remove forage from the landscape. The diaries are also clear in referring to the resupply of oats and grain for the army cav-



"On the Skirmish Line" by Charles Schreyvogel. Oil on canvas, 1900, (84.46c.2). (Courtesy of National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, Okla.)

alry mounts to keep them healthy. Of particular note is the pride that trooper Zimmer felt upon returning to Fort Ellis after eight months on the campaign trail.

November 5, 1877:I brought my horse in looking nearly as well as when he went out. There has been times this summer when he was poorer in flesh than now.

The Great Sioux War provides a sharp contrast in how two different cultures with diverse values and objectives utilized fire. The Sioux and Northern Cheyenne employed fire as a resource management tool and tactical weapon to disrupt and impede enemy troop movements. In contrast, the U.S. Army learned through campaign hardship to deploy fire as a strategic weapon and help force to conclusion the Great Sioux War.

The published diaries of soldiers on the campaign trail provide many insights into fire history, wildlife occurrence and the "natural world." These diaries are a must read for both the historian and the natural resource manager.

Implications for Management

Fire use during the Great Sioux War illustrates a historical type of wildland fire that has too often been overlooked: cultural fires. Today, federal agencies recognize three types of wildland fire:

- Wildfire, an unwanted wildland fire;
- Prescribed fire, a wanted wildland fire through deliberate human ignition; and
- Wildland fire use fire, a wanted wildland fire through natural ignition.

Cultural fires are, in effect, prescribed fires used by past cultures for various purposes. For example, wilderness areas on the Shoshone National Forest in Wyoming were managed with fire by the Sheepeater and Shoshone tribes and, later, by immigrant shepherds to maintain and improve habitat for big-horn and domestic sheep.

Yet the wilderness concept embodied in the Wilderness Act of 1964 fails to recognize the role that cultural fires played in shaping some wilderness landscapes. The notion of wilderness

as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man” (USDA Forest Service 1993) is predicated on an outdated belief: that American Indians had neither the means nor the desire to use technologies such as fire to shape landscapes to their liking.

Based on that mistaken belief, interagency wildland fire policy now prohibits prescribed fire use in wilderness areas. Fire managers must wait for natural ignitions, which might come somewhere or sometime when wildland fire use would pose too great of a risk of a fire escape. The wilderness resource might suffer as a result.

It's time to reevaluate the outdated thinking behind the prescription on prescribed fire use in wilderness areas. The use of cultural fires in wilderness areas during late summer or fall could allow fire managers to reintroduce fire at a time and place that will reduce the chance of an escaped fire. In addition, the use of late-season cultural fires could help the federal agencies build a more permanent and professional fire management corps.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank Jerome A. Greene, a research historian with the U.S. National Park Service, for his invaluable contributions to this article. In addition, the author wishes to thank Joan Zalenski and Jan Brenneman with the Sid Richardson Collection of Western Art in Fort Worth, Texas,

for their insights and assistance in securing permission for the artwork used in this article.

Notes

1. The supporting information for these diaries can be found in the following article and books published by Jerome A. Greene: “Chasing Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse” *Nebraska History*, winter 1997, vol. 78, no. 4; “Frontier Soldier an Enlisted Man's Journal of the Sioux and Nez Perce Campaigns,” copyright 1998 by the Montana Historical Society Press; *Slim Buttes, 1876—An Episode of the Great Sioux War*, copyright 1982 by the University of Oklahoma Press; and *Yellowstone Command—Colonel Nelson A. Miles and the Great Sioux War*, copyright 1991 by the University of Nebraska Press.

2. J. A. Greene, “Frontier Soldier,” *Army and Navy Journal*, July 22, 1877, p. 87.

3. *Ibid.* p.110.

4. J. A. Greene, *Yellowstone Command*, pp. 102–105.

5. J. A. Greene, *Slim Buttes, 1876*, p. 9. 🦋

Karl Brauneis of Lander, Wyo., is a forester on the Shoshone National Forest. He has served in a variety of fire positions from hotshot and smokejumper to burn boss and fire management officer. He is the author of several articles dealing with fire fighting from a historic and operational perspective.

The Big Delta Water Jump

by Barry Reed (Missoula '60)

There we were. Six of us in the Doug in a race track pattern making a streamer pass on a 20-acre tundra fire surrounded on three sides by small potholed ponds in the Naval Reserve near the Big Delta Area of Alaska in July of 1966. After the second pass, I noticed that we were about 300 yards east of the Alcan Highway and tourists were stopping to watch the show with their cameras.

A two-man stick was dropped. While they were descending we decided that the four of us left wanted to jump together since it was all jump spot anyway. I was first in the door watching the first two jumpers make their landings. “Look at that fool,” I said to the spotter, pointing my finger out the door. “He's going in the water! Nice splash!”

We were on final approach and exited the Doug on the spotter's

signal. The jump spot was on the downwind side of the fire on dry land between the water and the fire. I was planing into the wind and making good progress until the last 150 feet. There was a faster ground wind that pushed me backwards toward the water. Kaplush! I went in over my head and bobbed up on my back like a cork. Those pads in the jump suit around the joints and hips are really buoyant. Another person in the same stick also landed in the water near me and another landed three feet from the water's edge. Now there were two more fools in the water.

I unhooked one of the capewells, got out of the shroud lines, and used the frog stroke on my back to get to the shore about 10 feet away. I ruined a 35 mm camera in my rope pocket. Funny thing, the water was warm evidently from the long daylight period. I hauled in my

chute and spread it out to dry on the tundra. Later, a B-25 borate bomber dropped his load smothering the hot side of the fire that was not corralled by the water. It was one of the easier fires to put out with all of the water.

Another funny thing—no mosquitoes! Looking at the water surface, we noticed that there were a lot of surface oil seeps that killed them. So, 50 percent of us ended up in the drink. I often wonder if the oil companies will be allowed to drill for oil in that area. 🦋

Barry had a forestry degree before spending a stint with Air America. Upon returning to the states, he got a business degree and went to work for the state of Montana. About nine years ago he made a lateral transfer to his present job at Missoula Job Service. Barry can be reached at b-treed@msn.com

Seward Centennial Ultramarathon from Crow Pass to Seward

by Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)

Ultramarathon races are tests of stamina, endurance and determination. They are not for the light hearted; often, the races exceed 100 miles and times are measured in many hours and can extend into days.

The Seward Trailblazers promotes the establishment of a connected trail from Seward to Nome, Alaska, (a straight-line distance of about 700 miles). The club oversees and maintains the Iditarod National Historic Trail from Seward to Crow Pass (a distance of 125 miles). To help promote the trail, the Trailblazers sponsored a 125-mile ultramarathon race between Crow Pass and Seward on August 30, 2003. The race was an invitation-only event that had two teams of three people each. One was named Team Iditarod Geezers and the other was Two Jumpers and a Babe. Members of the teams were:

Iditarod Geezers

Fred Moore, Seward, Alaska
Roger Kempel, Anchorage, Alaska
Justin Moore, Soldotna, Alaska

Two Jumpers and a Babe

Clair LeClaire, Anchorage, Alaska
John LeClaire, Anchorage, Alaska
Jerry Dixon, Seward, Alaska

While planned for 125 miles, overflowing rivers forced the race to be shortened to 100 miles. The race involved a sequenced level of activity to cover the distance that taxed the stamina and spirit of the participants. The participants followed the following sequence of activities to cover the distance: run, bike, run, kayak, white water kayak, mountain bike, run, and mountain bike.

A description of the event follows:

0618 Girdwood Trailhead to Crow Pass

Claire LeClaire and Fred Moore took off running for Crow Pass when it was just light enough to see without a flashlight. They expected to run the six miles from the trailhead near Girdwood to Crow Pass and back in about 1.5 hours.

Fred started the first leg of his race even though the other two members of his team had not yet arrived. Just as he returned, running hard down the trail, the two (Justin Moore and Roger Kempel) arrived. Justin's truck had a rowing scull and whitewater kayak on top. Inside were a state-of-the-art mountain bike and a road bike. The Iditarod Geezers were prepared!

Justin was putting in his contact lenses when Fred arrived. "Hey, where is my team? I left Seward at 0330 to

drive here for the Seward Centennial Ultramarathon and, just like the past five days, it rained."

Justin and I discussed the leg we would bike from the Crow Pass Trailhead to Turnagin Pass and the Johnson Pass trail.

"It's Alaska's most dangerous highway. We have to bike through the Death Zone on wet roads during the busiest morning of the Labor Day weekend. What do you think?"

"Sounds good—let's go." Justin missed a calling—he could have been a smokejumper.

Our team, Two Jumper's and a Babe, was composed of Claire, her husband, **John LeClaire** (MYC-77), and myself. John and I were both McCall and Fairbanks smokejumpers. Claire is an elite ultramarathoner and mother of a two-year-old daughter, Aubrey. Claire finished the first run just two minutes behind Fred. Then I took off on my 10-year-old mountain bike that I would ride both on the rutted mountain road and the Seward Highway. I realized we were in for some serious competition when Justin took off on his mountain bike like he was riding in the world downhill championships. When he got to the paved road, he switched to his road bike and averaged 18 mph, including the section up to Turnagin Pass. I thought I was "trucking" to do 12 mph in that section. I was using the same tires and seat I used for portions of my 1,362-mile ultramarathon across the Rockies.

Even with all the traffic, Turnagin Arm is always beautiful. As I descended from the pass and onto the arm, a bore tide was coming in and beluga salmon could be seen in the water.

We biked past the Death Zone where six people recently died in two separate auto accidents. A shrine to the victims was placed on one side of the road and debris resulting from the vehicles' head-on collisions was visible at both locations.

After bicycling in sections of four Rocky Mountain states this past summer, I have formed some definite opinions about motorist courtesy-to-bicyclists. I give Oregon an "A," Washington and Idaho a "B," Montana a "C," and Alaska an "F" for courteousness to bicyclists. Essentially, in Alaska motorists always have the right of way; the most aggressive driver is right, and you just need to get out of the way or be wrong, dead wrong!

1000 Johnson Pass Trailhead

I arrived at the trailhead and found that Justin arrived 40 minutes before me. Claire took off in a hard run trying to catch Roger. This would be a 23-mile run to the fish hatchery on Upper Trail Lake.



L-R: Tyronne Donnelly, John, Aubrey and Claire LeClaire, Jerry Dixon. (Courtesy of Jerry Dixon)

I first met Claire when we competed in the Hope to Homer, Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic (AMWC) in 1997. The AMWC is a 160 to 230 mile race, depending on the route taken! Claire was racing with Angelica Castenada, the world's reigning triple iron-man champion. They were among the top finishers in the AMWC where, over the 22-year history of the race, less than half of those starting have even finished. During this past summer's race, four racers were rescued by helicopter.

At Upper Trail Lake, I paddled my sea kayak to a point of land 1.5 miles down the Johnson Pass Trail and across from Moose Pass. Justin and Fred were already there and had been waiting for Roger for about 40 minutes. I knew Fred and Roger were very competitive but Justin Moore, a Soldotna orthodontist, surprised me with his competitive edge. He was sitting in his rowing scull, ready to go, when Fred yelled that Roger was running down the trail. This is the last I would see of him in this race as he rowed quickly across Upper Trail Lake, through the connecting river and into Lower Trail Lake. He would then use his whitewater kayak for the Trail River portion and scull across Kenai Lake before the wind came up. Fred Moore ran the Iditarod Trail up the Snow River and over a pass to Bear Lake.

Roger completed the 23-mile Johnson Pass trail section in just four hours. The middle seven miles of the trail had not been cleared of brush and was a tangle of pushki, a noxious weed that can be poisonous if ingested. One hiker told me of walking through this section of the trail and getting pushki on his legs. His legs became infected and bothered him for years.

Roger and I took a few minutes to talk on the trail. His daughter, Nina Kemppe, is a four time Olympic cross-country skier and was scheduled to run this race. She only dropped out to leave for a graduate study program. Roger is in excellent shape. We talked of skiing and I told him of skiing for the University of Utah and Universite de Grenoble (in France). He told me that he enjoys skiing Alta;

I grew up in the Alta, Utah, area and next year will be my 50th year of skiing in the region. I also learned that he and his daughter climbed the same southern Utah mountains I have climbed. Following our conversation, Roger took off running while I waited for my teammate.

When Claire arrived, I kayaked across Upper and Lower Trail lakes, including the section of river between the lakes. The river water was high enough that I could sneak through on the left side. John pedaled his mountain bike though the trail section to Kenai Lake.

Claire chose to use her rowing scull to cross Kenai Lake. The wind rose to 12 mph and there was a two-foot "chop" of white water on the lake. Claire did not hesitate and started rowing across. Previously, we talked at length about safety and I suggested that she stick close to the eastern shore for safety purposes. A swim in frigid Kenai Lake without wearing a "dry suit" could be fatal. Claire, however, has years of ocean rowing experience in the Kodiak area and took the straightest shot across.

Claire was rowing strong as she arrived at Primrose and handed off the kayak to John. Like the mail runners on the historic Iditarod Trail between Seward and Nome, we were each carrying a letter and a vial of gold.

From Mile 12, I ran the trail that follows the Snow River and then onto Bear Lake. The Seward Trailblazers and the Forest Service have worked for years on this portion of the trail, and it is an easy section to travel. Regardless of how easy, I was tired and I could only stumble onward. Bear sign was everywhere and it kept me alert in spite of my exhaustion. One mile from the road at Bear Lake, my wife, Deborah, and son, Pyper, appeared on the trail. They came to join me in the run and Pyper carried the letter and gold for the final mile.

2110 We Finish!

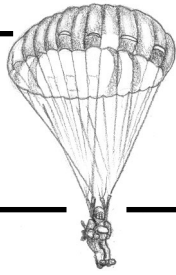
John biked to the Benny Benson Monument, and then the three of us pedaled down 4th Street, where a street dance was being held. A score of people came over and congratulated us for finishing.

During the last 11 years, I have been privileged to run ultramarathons across Alaska and the West. I have been fortunate to race with and against world-class competitors in the Hope to Homer, Dyea to Dawson, Nebesna to McCarthy, and Iditasport ultramarathons. The Seward Centennial Ultramarathon was a classic and a true test of endurance.

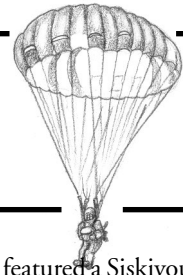
The teams' posted times were:

Iditarod Geezers	Start 0618 Finish 1930
Two Jumpers and a Babe	Start 0618 Finish 2110

[As a footnote, the Iditasport is an Alaskan human powered ultra-race with four different divisions: ski, bike, foot, and snowshoe. The trail is snow covered and packed down for winter travel. It is marked for both day and night running with brightly colored and reflective markers. The trail crosses wooded, rolling hills, and frozen rivers and lakes. There are three different courses—130 miles, 320 miles and 1,100 miles long! You take your choice. (ed.)] 🐾



Odds and Ends



by Chuck Sheley

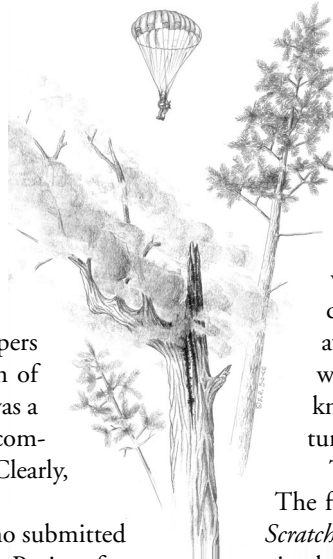
Jerry Dixon (MYC-71) writes: "During the summer of 2001 I was hiking across the Bob Marshall Wilderness and took a few minutes on a remote trail to fix a water bar where a rivulet was washing out the trail. When I ran into a FS ranger I told her. We talked for a moment and then she said, 'We have a crew of volunteer smokejumpers coming to work on trail.' She was obviously looking forward to seeing how much trail these retired jumpers could work. Actually hearing her description of the work they could do, one would think it was a DC-3 load of 20-something active jumpers coming to save the town from advancing wildfire. Clearly, these trail crews are doing good work."

Congratulations to **Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77) who submitted a write up on the Smokejumper Parachute Project for "Breaking New Ground" under "The New Century of Service." This program is tied in with the Washington Office of the Forest Service and the upcoming centennial celebration. Karl's work has been selected for a national poster to be out soon.

More of the "small world" syndrome recently popped up while I was editing an article for future publication in this magazine. **Gene Hamner** (MSO-67) flew with the Ravens in the "Secret War" in Laos. The Ravens were a very elite group of Forward Air Controllers who flew low and slow. In the article Gene mentions spending two days flying search and rescue for a downed C-123 (tail #6293) in northern Laos. That sounded familiar and after doing some research, I found out that was the Air American plane on which **Ed Weissenback** (CJ-64) was listed as missing and later killed. This was the first time that Gene had heard that there was a smokejumper on that aircraft. Ed was a kicker and the two had never met during their jumping days.

Mike Wheelock (CJ-76) is the owner of Grayback Forestry, one of the largest private wildland fire fighting companies in the country. One of Grayback's vans was involved in a fatal rollover a couple seasons back. **Chris Sorensen** (*Smokejumper* magazine writer) forwarded me a new item concerning the special and additional training that is being given the drivers at Grayback—training that focused on handling a big top-heavy rig in critical situations. In addition, "He replaced the dozen Ford Econoline E-350 Super Duty vans like the one in the rollover with Ford F-550 dual rear axle pickups retrofitted to carry 14 passengers." Congratulations to Mike and Grayback for taking steps to prevent future accidents.

Sometimes there is an interesting story behind the picture. If you visit our web store at www.smokejumpers.com, you



might have noticed that we featured a Siskiyou Smokejumper cap at an extremely reasonable price. Since the Cave Junction base has been closed since 1982, you might wonder why we even have this cap. One of the ex-Gobi jumpers, recently retired from the FBI, was working a sting operation on outfits doing counterfeit products e.g. designer jeans, etc. He was at a point where he needed something to give the "dealer" to duplicate. Having his Siskiyou Smokejumper cap available, it was the chosen article. When the order was completed, the shipment was confiscated. Don't know what happened to the dealer but the goods were turned over to the NSA. What a deal!

Thanks **Jerry Howe** (CJ-65).

The fall edition of the interagency quarterly newsletter *Scratchline* features several pages on smokejumpers obtained with interviews conducted at various bases. The newsletter can be viewed at www.wildfirelessons.net/Scratchline.htm. Each time I read about the BLM jumper policy of "first person in the door" as being the Incident Commander, I scratch my head. Could someone please show me any studies of successful corporations, businesses or the military where the command of a project is determined by the first person in line regardless of experience?

In 2002 NSA Board Member **Ted Burgon** (IDC-52) was killed in an ambush by "unknown" people while on assignment as a school principal in Indonesia. We have written and updated this story periodically in this magazine. The Associated Press ran a story today (March 4, 2004) with more: "Elements of the military have long been suspected in the 2002 attack. 'It's no longer a question of who did it,' a senior U.S. official said. 'It is only how high up this went within the chain of command'. The Bush administration regards Indonesia—the world's most populous Muslim nation—as its key Southeast Asian ally in the war on terror." I'm reading into that statement that Ted's killers will never be "found" even though we had a good idea who ordered the attack.

Got a short note from **Jim Cook** (NCSB-60) with his membership renewal. Jim is living in Charlottesville, Va., and has been retired for two years from the Virginia Dept. of Forestry. Jim renewed for five years with a note that it will save us postage and time instead of the annual notices. Thanks Jim.

In the January 2004 issue I wrote an article "Giant Killers—Bigger Than Hoosiers" concerning the 1947 Cornell College wrestling team. **Jim Beck** (MSO-75) writes: "From somewhere between the '50 what' and 'it's a small world,' my late father (Jug Beck) was (also) a member of Cornell's 1947 National Championship team. Although injured and

unable to compete, the knowledge and experience he gained working with coach Paul Scott and teammates Dick Hauser, Dale Thomas, Fred Dexter, Lowell Lange, Arlo Ellison, etc., provided a solid foundation for his career as a high school coach.

Thanks for the article highlighting these still rather esoteric pursuits. I gave copies to my mother who passed them on to the people she still has contact with who were associated with that team. I'm sure they appreciated the article as much as I did."

Roland Fisher (MSO-47) rejoined the NSA after a short break. Sent along a good note:

"It was 10:17 AM on June 26, 1947, when I left the Ford Tri-motor on my first training jump. **Krout** (Len) was spotting for our landing site near the old CCC camp at Nine Mile. I did my seven training jumps, a few fire jumps and two rescue jumps. One on August 20 for **Don Durland** (MSO-47) and another on August 29, for **Harold Hackman** (MSO-46). I still have my jump log and on occasion use the notes to reminisce days gone by. There was never a day I wasn't proud to be part of such a great gang."

John T. Davis (NCSB-66) recently joined for a 10-year membership that he is turning into a Life Membership. He retired as a school superintendent three years ago and is living in Ridgefield, Wash. He now plans to run for the state senate. If John is successful, he will become the second smokejumper in the Washington state Senate.

Jerry Dixon (MYC-71) is the guy who never stops: "I just returned from skiing 160 miles across the Alaska Range from Skwetna to Farewell Lake near McGrath. It was a grand page of mountain script and frozen river lore that I was again privileged to live. Dick Griffith (age 76) and I finally were able to fly into Skwetna after waiting four days for storms and started skiing on March 3. We arrived at Puntilla Lake just as the first Iditarod mushers were rolling in. Between there and Rohn 80 passed us. I had not crossed Rainy Pass since 1973 when I was in a jump ship headed to a fire."

Larry Lufkin (CJ-63) sent an e-mail (March 19): "Just heard that **Hal Ewing** (Pilot-CJ) was in the hospital with a stroke. He is home now and doing much better." Hope things are going better now for Hal. Here's a man who had a ton of respect from all the Gobi jumpers who flew with him.

From **Kim Maynard** (MSO-82): "Great article on Willie Unsoeld. He was my mentor at Evergreen. He was with my classmates when he was killed. Almost went with him but had to take my EMT test at that time. His son is a good friend still."

Had a good little get together with some of the Gobi jumpers this weekend (March 20) at **Tom Albert's** (CJ-64) place on the McKenzie River outside of Eugene. Tom is off to fly for one of those government organizations for a couple years. **John Robison**, **Troop Emonds**,

Wes Brown, **Gar Buck**, **Dave Oswalt**, **Garry Peters**, **Jerry Katt**, and **Stan "Clancy" Collins** were in attendance.

Once upon a time a fire call came in during a practice jump at a base where there were three pilots. It was rumored that the takeoff was delayed because two of the pilots were in the other plane taking a practice jump with the crew that day. Something this off the wall has to be a complete fabrication and a wild story doesn't it? Sure.

Tom Kovalicky (MSO-61) and **Pat Scheid** (MSO-58) forwarded a piece from *Jeep Owner Magazine* which was written about smokejumpers and seemed to feature the Redding base. Other than being titled "Hot Shots," and having terms like "letdown tape" and "shin pocket," it was a good piece. Featured one of **Mike McMillan's** (FBX-96) great photos. Take a look at **Chuck Mansfield's** (CJ-59) Web site for some interesting reading on the Biscuit fire and other white papers on wildland fire: <http://www.CoyoteAerospace.com>

John Blackwell (MYC-64): "My uncle, Hubert Blackwell, was among the CPS jumpers at Missoula in 1943-45. As a member of NSA I read with particular interest the article by Earl Schmidt ("A Good Pilot Saves Thirty Lives") in the April 2004 issue of the magazine. I'd like to make contact with Earl to see if he remembers my uncle Hubert, killed in 1953. Earl and my uncle would have jumped together for at least two years." I had met Earl four years ago at a CPS-103 reunion in Iowa and was able to give John the contact information. That group will be holding another reunion in Hungry Horse, Mont., July 12-16. It has been a pleasure to meet the men of the CPS-103 group. Their contribution to smokejumping was invaluable in keeping the program alive during the 1943-45 years. In my opinion their contribution has been long overlooked



by a segment of the NSA.

Got an interesting reply from John when I requested some more information on the death of his uncle: “My uncle, **Hubert Blackwell** (MSO-43), was killed in a logging accident in July 1953 working near Prospect, Ore. Hubert was bucking an old growth Douglas fir that he’d felled. Working on the downhill side of the tree, he was pinned by a log that got away. I’d like to attend the CPS reunion to meet people who knew my uncle, my childhood hero. I will be in France, however, riding Tour de France as an amateur, something I’ve done for the last four years.”

Got a nice note from **Doug “Hoppy” Hopkins** (CJ-62) who is now living in Oak Harbor, Wash. He has had total hip replacement surgery on both hips and says it has put a crimp in his racquetball but he’s getting better. Hoppy was our catcher on the town league—dominating softball teams that we had at Cave Junction.

Harvey Weirich (MSO-44) writes: “In the April *Smokeyjumper* issue I read about interviewing the pioneer smokejumpers. I sure hope this happens. I visited Lloyd Johnson at Fruitland, Idaho, the summer of 2002. When I walked up on his porch after 59 years he still recognized me. He insisted that I sit at his table with his wife, son, and grandson for the evening meal, which he had prepared. I remember him as a very fair and well-liked person during the 1944–45 fire season at McCall, Idaho, when I was a jumper. I want to thank you for the job you do on the magazine and the interest you’ve taken in recording the history of CPS-103. Last month I reached the big 80 and SJ has always been a very important special part of my life.”

On July 30, 2003, North Cascades smokejumper **Dale Longanecker** (RAC-74) jumped a fire on Little Vulcan Mt., located on the Republic District of the Colville National Forest. A first for Dale and for smokejumping, it marked his *700th career jump*. Congratulations Dale!

Bill Joyner (MSO-53): “I was recently watching a game show (*Lingo*). One of the contestants was asked what he did for a living. He replied, ‘I am a fire jumper. We parachute into forest fires and put them out from the inside out.’ I have been a NSA member for years and receive the *Smokeyjumper* magazine. I always read it from cover to cover. If ‘fire jumper’ was ever used in place of smokejumper, I must have exceeded my beer ration when I read that issue.” I agree, Bill. They must have picked this contestant from the unemployment office.

Jim Dawson (MSO-53) writes: “That was an excellent article on Willi Unsoeld. I knew his climbing partner, Tom Hornbien, from a distance when we overlapped by a year at the University of Colorado.”

Davis Perkins (NCSB-72) e-mailed: “Just wanted to say hello. I went to Boise to Steve Nemores’ retirement party. What a blast! Good to see many of the ol’ comrades!” Bet the party was a good one—wish I could have been there. Good luck, Steve!

Tom Tincoff (CJ-54) sent in an interesting story on the history of “The Finger” dating back to 1415. You mean it didn’t originate at Cave Junction? Tom is living in Royal Oak, Mich.

The cover feature article for this issue is about **Ken Sisler** (NCSB-57). This is another feature that took me over a year to put together. Initial help came from **Jack McKay** (NCSB-57) who was a good friend of Ken’s. That led to contact with Becky Sisler (sister) and, eventually, Jane Sisler (wife). Just a day before I was going to layout with this issue, I received two e-mails that I found very interesting and would like to include here:

“I heard you were interested in Lt. Ken Sisler’s activities in Vietnam. I knew him as a team leader in the Special Forces. He flew with me a couple of times prior to insertion on a Visual Recon of the area. I have only great things to say about the man, he was a true leader.” Stokes Tomlin

I e-mailed Mr. Tomlin back seeking more information and got the following:

“I was a Forward Air Controller (FAC) from July 1966–1967. I was in the Tigerhound ‘program,’ flying from bases in South Vietnam to Laos. I was based at Khe Sahn and later at a base north of Pleiku, Kontum. At both places, we covered the infiltration of the ‘SOG’ teams on the ‘Trail.’ Ken Sisler was one of the team leaders. I had the pleasure of taking him on a Visual Recon (VR) of the area they were to land in—this was in an O-1 Birdog. I also was able to watch him load his team onto the choppers—he was so very professional. We kept constant radio contact with the team while they were on the ground; we were always available for help—either with fighter cover or choppers to get them out. We, the FACs at Khe Sahn, always held him up as the example that other team leaders should follow.

“He was killed on a later infiltration, after I had rotated to Kontum—I guess it was there I formed the opinion that it is the best who die in war. I still remember the day I heard of his death. I was able to contact his son, an AF officer, about all of this, a few months ago—I hope I was able to relay how much I admire his father.”

Stokes Tomlin

Jerry Dixon (MYC-71) writes: “That was an excellent article on Willi [Unsoeld]. It shows the strength of the NSA magazine when there is an outstanding article on a world class jumper/climber and then one on a pilot that saves 33 lives, another on landing a C123 on Les Plains des Jars, and a summary of activity on every base!

“I knew Willi because in 1978 I was a struggling graduate student and called him many times to see if he would be on my graduate committee. He was effusive, engaging and obviously a bright and concerned teacher. Actually I had no idea then that Willi had been a jumper or I would have enjoyed talking about another connection we had. I actually did not hear of his death until I was on a ferry bound for Alaska in the spring and met one of his students who was on the mountain. He said that when the press came to find out what happened the surviving students gathered together held hands and sang a song they had learned from a remarkable teacher: “You can’t kill the Spirit, it’s like the mountain, Old and Strong, it goes on and on.” 🐼

Rescue Jump at Cooper Creek

by Gregg Phifer (Missoula '44)

By 8 P.M., Tuesday, July 31, 1945, Missoula smoke-jumpers had been flying for over an hour. Through the windows of the old, reliable Ford Tri-motor, we could see the evening sun peering above the mountaintops. Below us, the evening's haze gathered in the creek bottoms. Inside the plane, ten men (pilot, spotter, and eight jumpers) strained their eyes searching for the most favorable landing spot. We observed a broad smoke haze drifting lazily down the canyon from a few acres of fire burning near the ridge top.

Limited landing choices were presented. Tall timber stood thickly on the hillside below the fire. Opposite, there was a rockslide with huge boulders waiting to break errant jumpers' bones. Tall snags reached high from the green of the creek bottom with gaunt branches. Somewhere in the silent woods beneath our plane were eight jumpers, one seriously injured. Yellow streamers formed the distress signal, "L," in a tiny clearing beside the creek.

The Forest Service sent us to be the rescue squad. Some of the jumpers had already flown for six hours, five of them on an earlier flight over Wind River in the Nez Perce National Forest; only three men jumped on that fire.

The Hamilton Ranger Station called Missoula to report that a smokejumper's chute had caught over the top of an eighty-foot snag. The top of the snag broke and the jumper plummeted to the ground. Streamer signals communicated the seriousness of the accident to the plane and it flew back to Missoula for reinforcements.

Less than an hour after the jumper fell heavily to the ground, we were circling overhead searching for a landing spot. Where should we ... where could we, jump? The best bet seemed to be a narrow band of young green trees ("reproduction" in Forest Service lingo) on the slope opposite the fire. Most of us realized we were headed for landings in tall timber; we just had to keep away from the snags and rocks!

Squad Leader **Jim Waite** (MSO-40) spotted himself, giving thumb and forefinger directions to pilot Bob Johnson of Missoula's Johnson Flying Service. As Jim motioned with his arm and hand, our plane banked left, then a little right, and finally held steady. The palm of Jim's hand dropped to signal Bob to cut the motors. Jim jumped with **Ed Vail** (MSO-44) hard on his heels.

We went around again and three more jumpers left the plane. I was so busy watching them maneuver against the moderate wind that spotter **Frank Derry** (one of the original 1939 smokejumper crew) yelled to me to come back and hook up. I quickly locked my static line to the cable above the door. With very few directions from Derry, Johnson cut the motors. The Tri-motor dropped into a glide. One, then two men gone. Then, pausing briefly on the step, I hopped

into empty space.

The wind rushed by as I hung briefly in the evening sunshine waiting to feel the tug on my risers as my chute opened. Moments later I felt my chute crack open. My canopy still pulsated from the opening shock (never difficult in my experience) as I glanced up to check my chute. There was no lineover—all "A-OK."

Looking down, I quickly turned toward a little clearing from which someone flashed a tiny light. My chute came around quickly as I thanked the steering slots in my "Derry-Slotted" Irvin parachute. I pulled down on the front risers. One thousand feet up ... five hundred feet ... still headed directly for my small but beautiful clearing.

At about a hundred and fifty feet high, a down-canyon ground wind caught my chute and swept me swiftly toward the tall timber below the clearing. More lucky than skillful, I guided the chute into a tiny opening between two tall trees, barely wide enough for my inflated chute. I hit the ground moderately hard and got off my feet instantly. Hard landings were typical at higher altitudes. The Forest Service would have been proud of my "hit and roll" landing.

Ralph Spicer (MSO-44) hooked his heel in the crotch of a tree and hung head-down until we got there to assist. Other jumpers went through the letdown procedure after tree landings. One by one we gathered at the clearing and learned that the original crew had already carried **Archie Keith** (MSO-45) a half-mile down the trail using a make-shift stretcher. Two men from that crew came back to get the stretcher dropped by our plane to replace their makeshift carrier. Archie's injuries included a broken leg for sure and complications with his back. While none of us was certain, we knew his injuries were serious.

By the last gleam of daylight, we set up our SPF radio in the clearing and reported to regional fire control headquarters in Missoula what had happened and that we were going to tackle the fire. We set to work immediately and scoured the creek bottom for the fire packs parachuted to the original crew. All this time our fire blazed merrily on the ridge top above us.

An hour or more slipped by as we stumbled through thick woods trying to catch sight of the white cargo chutes in the dim gleam from our Forest Service headlamps. Now and again a falling snag broke the night's quiet or, the top of a tall green pine flamed (crowned out) with a roar.

Having finally located all the missing fire packs, we



Gregg Phifer (NSA file)

gathered at midnight in the small clearing. Once all were accounted for, we started up the hillside. Fighting treacherous footing and thick underbrush, we forced our way up the steep slope by the light of our headlamps. The rest of the night was devoted to building fire line. Toward morning, the fire cooled considerably, perhaps remembering that the worst burning period had been over for twelve hours and wasn't due to start again for another six. The job was repetitive: work and take five, work and take five. Work some more. Steadily, we used our Pulaskis and shovels to build fire line almost all the way around our fire. Then we returned to the clearing below and a 4 A.M. K ration.

We slept for an hour and a half, ate another K ration, and then, climbed back up to our fire. Finally finishing our fire line, we dug around several dangerous spots outside the line.

About 9 A.M. a Tri-motor flew over. We could see the jumpers inside and were sure they brought a Pacific Marine pump, but our squad leader, Jim Waite, refused both jumpers and pump.

All through the burning period (roughly between 10 A.M. and 4 P.M.) our fire burned hot. Somewhere in our three-acre fire, a tree or two crowned out almost constantly. All day we changed off carrying five-gallon canvas backpacks of water to put out, or at least cool down dangerous hot spots near our fire line. Others "fire-proofed" trees by cutting off their lower limbs so ground fire could not get a toehold and burn up the tree. In every way possible, we sought to keep the fire on the ground. If we succeeded, we could lick this fire! Twice, falling snags or rolling pinecones spread fire outside our line, forcing quick work to regain control. That night we bedded down in two shifts and snatched four hours of sleep.

Thursday proved anti-climactic. All day the fire burned quietly within our fire line as we plodded back and forth, mopping up with backpacks of water or shoveling dirt on hot spots. One after another we killed the smokes. Dirt and water, dirt and water, these are the twin allies of man in his battle against forest fires. We used our Pulaskis for chopping, and shovels for digging and throwing dirt. Occasionally we needed a crosscut saw to fell a tree or buck a downed log in two. So it went. By late afternoon our eyes were bleary and movements mechanical, controlled more by force of habit than conscious will. At 11 that night we fell into our goose down sleeping bags—we'd only had six hours sleep in the last sixty-four. We nibbled our last K ration "dog biscuits" as Squad Leader Jim Waite radioed Missoula with his request for three days' rations for eight men.

Friday morning our Tri-motor returned and dropped parachute after parachute with bundles of food, a stove, lanterns, and other equipment for a fire camp. This was a fine time to send in all this stuff, just as we thought we were getting our fire under control and preparing to leave! The plane helped in another way, however. The packer sent in by the local ranger saw the plane and followed it to our little "camp."

Six men began cutting trail so that the packer and his mules could get out with our parachutes, jump equipment,

fire tools, and fire camp supplies. **Gerhard Smeiske** (MSO-45) and I were working alone on mop-up when we heard a great roar and saw a tree just outside our fire line crown out. Our hearts sank even as we dashed to control the blaze. The other six jumpers heard the same roar and hastened up the steep slope. That spot fire gave us a hard three hours of work before we extended our fire line and put out the last dangerous blaze.

The next day, Saturday, two men patrolled the fire while the rest of us closed camp and built trail. That afternoon we finally killed the last sparks of the fire and hiked out through gorgeous scenery, soon reaching the long-unused Cooper Creek Trail. Civilian Conservation Corps men built it years ago and our crew had removed some downed logs as they carried out our injured jumper. By five that afternoon, we had hiked nine miles and reached the Forest Service cabin at Cooper's Flat. There we found food and a chance to wash up in the shallow, swift-moving creek. On Sunday, we hiked the last seven miles to Paradise.

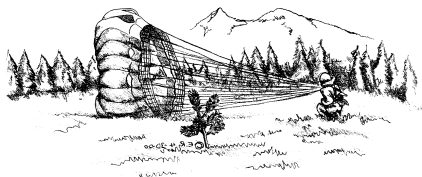
From Paradise, we rode a Forest Service truck to Magruder, Darby, and finally back to Missoula. There, at smokejumper headquarters, we learned that the fire had been the easy job. The really tough job belonged to the stretcher crew which spent fourteen difficult hours carrying the injured jumper over rock slides and tangles of windfalls (down logs) from the fire to Cooper's Flat. There eight fresh jumpers dropped in as a relief crew.

A Negro army doctor, Lt. Charles Burks of the 555th Parachute Battalion, which was assigned to fire fighting work, jumped in near Paradise (what a name!) to treat our injured jumper. His assistant, Corporal Benjamin Brown, and smokejumper **Jim Hain** (MSO-44) jumped with him. Reaching the closest road, they accompanied the injured jumper 130 miles in an ambulance to St. Patrick's Hospital in Missoula where he spent the next three months.

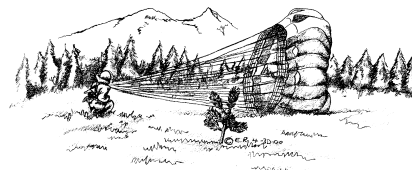
Don't think of Cooper Creek as a typical smokejumper fire. There really are no "typical" jumper fires. All are different. We never found two fires exactly alike in jumping or fire fighting difficulty—each presents its own problems. There were always differences in wind velocity, mountainous terrain, time of day, weather, forest fuel conditions, fire size, difficulty of finding loose soil or the availability of water with which to fight the fire, availability of a good jump spot, the possibility of using a marine pump, etc.

But in this case, twenty-seven jumpers—including twenty-three from CPS 103—dropped into the Magruder District of the Bitterroot National Forest in Idaho. None of us are likely to forget this fire on the ridge above Cooper Creek. We are happy to report that our injured jumper survived, but it was touch and go for a while. 🦋

By 1944 when Gregg joined the CPS/USFS smokejumpers, he had earned his B.A. from Pacific and his M.A. from Iowa. After release from CPS and two years teaching at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, he returned to Iowa for his doctorate. He joined the faculty at Florida State University in 1949 and retired as professor emeritus in 1994. Gregg currently lives in Tallahassee, Florida.



Checking the Canopy



by Tom Decker
(Idaho City '64)

Now a pastor in Long Beach, Calif., where there are still at least two DC-3s and a Ford Tri-motor plying the skies with their droning sounds!

The 20-pound Rock

NED Week, 1964, McCall, Idaho.

THE DROP ZONE WAS KNOWN only to the summer's training cadre. It was out of town far enough to make the hike back to the loft realistic.

When the DC-3 dropped us, the trainers were on hand to meet the new jumpers and to critique our every move from Allen Rolls to the packing of the "elephant bags." Apparently from a longstanding

tradition to play a joke on the NEDs, Ken Smith (IDC-55) stuffed a 20-pound rock into a pack. He did so with the complicity and urging of other old timers. The unsuspecting jumper with the rock in his pack walked a mile or so before he figured that his pack was heavier than normal. He stopped and unloaded the pack to find the big boulder down about 12" from the top. He quickly pitched it into the swift

flowing Payette River and vowed to get even with the guilty party.

Most of us have had a rock in our packs from time to time. They are the burdens of life and certainly harder to carry than a 20-pound rock. More often than not the weight grows heavier because we evade dealing with the problem or we ignore the tremendous resources at hand. Not surprisingly, we get at the rocks with hard work and determination. We've learned that life responds to those with get up and go. We also "get by," as the song goes, "with a little help from our friends." When all else fails, we turn



to God, hoping for deliverance, relief.

I remember three rocks connected with Jesus. He said that when someone abuses a child, it would be better if a millstone was tied around his neck and he was cast into the sea! He also called Peter a "rock man" for his bold faith. It was evident that Jesus

placed a high value on the faith of both adults and children. The third rock was the gravestone that covered the tomb of Jesus. That rock was rolled away on Easter morning, and with it went the fear of death.

So what rocks are you carrying? The rock of abuse? The rock of faith? The rock of victory? Check the rock in your pack! 🦋

Colonel Tom Decker recently retired from the U.S. Army and is now a part-time parish pastor at the St. John Lutheran Church in Long Beach, Calif. He can be reached at deckertr@earthlink.net

It Burned a Couple Jumpers

by Leonard Blixrud (MSO-53)

It was July 13, 1953, and James Dawson (MSO-53) and myself jumped a fire from the Travelair on Miller Creek, in the Lolo. Even though we could see a small smoke when we jumped, we couldn't find the fire when we got to the ground.

Jim and I went downhill working our way through heavy old growth and lots of down timber. After struggling

through that for over an hour, we finally saw the smoke. It came boiling up at us through the tops of the trees and sounded like a dozen locomotives.

We knew we couldn't stay there and there was no way we could go back up the hill. It was coming right at us and moving fast. We threw everything away and running to the right managed to skirt the flames. We were ex-

hausted!

After working our way to the bottom of the fire, we ran into some ground pounders. After remarking that the fire really blew up quickly, they said it also burned up a couple jumpers who were in front of it. I replied that was not the case as we were those jumpers. This was our first fire jump! 🦋

The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

March 2004,
Tampa, Florida

The National Fallen Firefighter Foundation (NFFF) convened a Life Safety Summit to support the reduction fire deaths. More than 200 fire and emergency service representatives from over 100 organizations attended. Invitees included the BLM, the USFS, Aerial Firefighter Industry Association, and the Wildland

Firefighter Foundation. The summit supported the United States Fire Administration's (USFA) goal of reducing firefighter fatalities by 25 percent within 5 years and 50 percent within 10 years. Participants were organized into six working groups to cover each of the major areas of concern:

- Firefighter health, wellness, and fitness
- Structural fire fighting
- Fire prevention
- Vehicle operation, apparatus design, and highway safety issues
- Training and general research
- Wildland fire fighting

Each working group reported their findings and recommendations, a summary of which follows:

- A cultural change must be implemented, whereby firefighter fatalities and injuries are not accepted as inevitable. This was a common theme for all working groups.
- Accountability for health and safety must be fostered on both personal and organizational levels throughout the fire command structure.
- Emergency operations risk-management requires a more structured approach than currently exists.
- A national research agenda should be established to develop new safety related technology and equipment.
- Currently available advanced technologies must be deployed as an important safety initiative.
- Other recommendations included: (1) investigating all fatalities, injuries, and near misses thoroughly and, (2) encouraging individual firefighters to stop any

unsafe procedure at any time.

The Firefighter Life Safety Summit may be held annually, supplemented with regional mini-summits for wider participation.

The Senate subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies oversees the Interior Department and U.S. Forest Service budgets. Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT) chairs the subcommittee. While the proposed FY 2005 federal budget will increase funding for fire fighting and forest thinning, Burns said more funding is required. Under the proposed budget, the federal government will continue to borrow from other accounts (e.g., the fire labs) to pay for fire fighting. Burns told Chief Forester Dale Bosworth and Agriculture Department Undersecretary Mark Rey, "While I support the proposed increase for fire suppression in the FY 2005 budget, no one should be under the illusion that this will solve the fire borrowing problem. In fact, if the fire season is anything like what we have seen in the last few years, the agency would still have to borrow hundreds of millions of dollars from non-fire programs."

A summary of the budget situation follows:

Activity	FY 2004	Proposed FY 2005	Impact
Wildfire Suppression	\$790m	\$908m	+15%
Hazardous Fuels Reduction	\$442m	\$475m	+7.4%
2002 Wildfire Costs (<i>actual</i>)	\$1,400m		
2003 Wildfire Costs (<i>actual</i>)	\$1,000m		

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) said the \$475 million for hazardous fuels reduction is far short of the \$760 million that was promised in legislation. Sen. Burns also criticized the proposed budget for cutting state, local and volunteer assistance programs by 42 percent, from \$132 million in fiscal year 2004 to \$77 million in fiscal year 2005. "This program provides critical funds to train and equip local fire departments," Burns said. "These local fire departments are often the first to respond to wildland fires and they provide vital help to the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior." 🦉



Historic Photo:
July 20, 1940: L-R: Jim Waite, Earl Cooley, Jim Alexander, Dick Lynch at Moose Creek R.S. Alexander and Lynch are making their first fire jump on the second smokejumper per fire. (Courtesy of Jim Alexander)

Veteran Smokejumper Still Chases Fires

by Jeff Barnard

The following article ran in many newspapers during the summer of 2003. Reprinted with permission of the Associated Press.

REDMOND, Ore. (AP) - Back when Mark Corbet started out as a smokejumper, his parents would ask him when he planned to get a real job.

Twenty-nine years later, at age 52, Corbet is one of the oldest smokejumpers in the country, taking a job once reserved for the original No Fear crowd, and turning it into a career.

"I'd say, 'Just one more year,'" said Corbet. "That's what I'm saying now, 'Just one more year.'"

When Corbet started, jumpers had to quit at 35, but now can stay until they're 57. For a column in *Smokejumper* magazine, Corbet tallied 22 who jumped after age 50, including one who was 50 for his rookie year. Corbet figures about a half-dozen of the 400 active smokejumpers nationwide are over 50.

"The generation of smokejumper that Mark comes from was the first to turn it from a seasonal job into a career," said Gary Atteberry, 34, in his eighth season as a smokejumper. "The foundation they built, we stand on it to make this a career for ourselves."

Corbet grew up in eastern Oregon. He worked in a lumber mill while attending Southern Oregon University, where he took his first parachute jump. He graduated from the University of Oregon with a degree in environmental studies. He worked fire for two years—first on an engine crew, then one of the first crews dispatched to fires in helicopters. That's where he got his first look at smokejumpers.

"They had these great big chain saws, I remember," said Corbet. "The stories they told and the gleam in their eye when they were talking about it, I thought, 'what the hell,' and applied."

A lot has changed since his rookie training in 1974 at the North Cascades base in Winthrop, Wash., where the

smokejumpers started in 1939.

His class ran in heavy jump boots and packed duffel bags loaded with rocks that left their backs bloodied. More than half the class washed out.

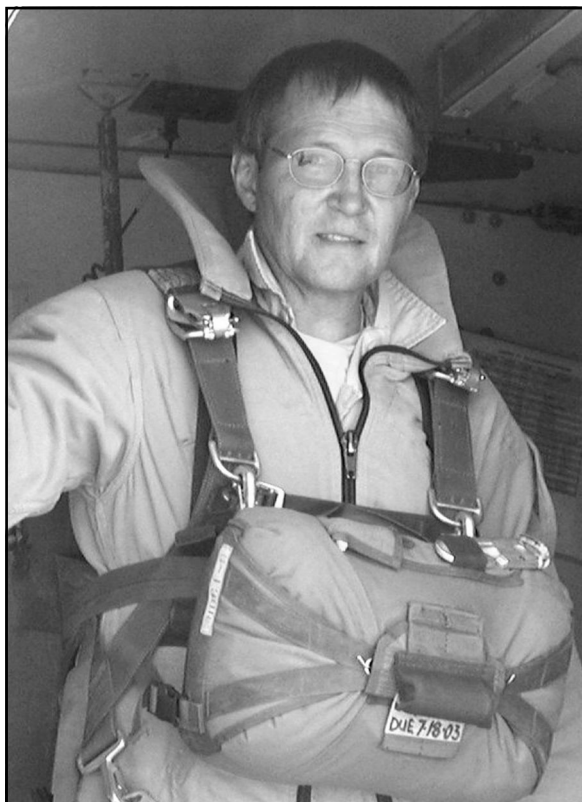
"My first packout, I thought I was going to die," he recalled. "I wasn't going to stop, but God, I couldn't hardly breathe fast enough."

Nowadays, with most recruits coming from elite hotshot crews, few wash out. A virtual reality simulator makes them better prepared for jumps. And the money is better, as much as \$50,000 a year.

As a squad leader training recruits, Corbet still weeds out a few who won't make it. He looks for people with the mental toughness to climb tall trees despite their fear, keep their heads in tough situations and keep moving when their bodies tell them to quit.

"It's kind of a cul-de-sac career. Once you get to a certain point, there's not a lot of movement," said Atteberry. "But it's addictive when you have the winter off and all you think about is coming back and doing it some more. I guess there are greater rewards than money."

Rewards like having someone pay you to jump out of airplanes, the knot of nervousness and expectation still there in the belly every time, because you can be killed or maimed if you make a mistake. Then there is the incredible range of people—bikers, teachers, prosecutors, chiropractors, foresters and surgeons—you call your brothers, even if some of them are



Mark Corbet (Courtesy Mark of Corbet)

women.

At 5-foot-7 and 165 pounds, Corbet might be the last person picked out of a lineup as the smokejumper, but he can still pass the tough physical test—seven pull-ups, 25 push-ups, 45 sit-ups, run a mile and a half in under 11 minutes, carry a 110-pound pack over three miles of flat ground and an 85-pound pack five miles over rough terrain.

"Older guys have proven it's not an age issue, it's not a strength issue, it's an endurance issue and using your head," said Atteberry. "Mark has jumped 650 jumps without injuring himself."

Not seriously, anyway. Forgetting to roll on impact, Corbet jammed his hip a couple years ago on a practice jump that was number 607, and was off the ready list for a day to give him time to see the doctor. He now has 660 jumps,

286 of which have been on fires.

His worst injury wasn't even on a jump. He tore his rotator cuff last winter loading cargo in an airplane.

That doesn't mean he hasn't had close calls.

Once, his parachute caught in a snag—a dead tree—leaving him dangling 80 feet above the ground. The snag started to fall, and when the parachute billowed, it caught in a pair of live trees nearby.

"They plucked me out, and that

old tree just went crashing to the ground," recalls Corbet. "I was just sitting there trying to get my voice back."

There were fun times, too. After setting out pumps and sprinklers and cutting fire line to protect some cabins on a lake in Alaska, Corbet and a crew of smokejumpers whittled baseball bats and golf clubs out of sticks to while away the time until the fire came.

One jumper even older than Corbet is Ron Omont, based in

Redding, Calif., who at age 56 is looking at his last season and wishing it didn't have to end.

"I didn't think I'd stick with it as a career, but here it is 26 years later and I'm still doing it," Omont said. "I just love the travel, seeing the wilderness country, and getting paid to do it."

Getting in shape gets tougher every year.

"But it sure is rewarding when it's done and you've caught that fire," said Omont. 🦋

LIFE MEMBER PROFILE

JIM ALLEN (NORTH CASCADES '46)

by Gary "Tex" Welch (Cave Junction '60)

BORN IN LIVINGSTON, MONT., IN MARCH 1923, Jim parents moved the family to Camas, Wash. Located just across the Columbia River from Portland, Ore., Camas was a paper mill town with a population of about 5,000, 2,000 of whom were employed in the mills.

Jim graduated from Camas High School in June 1941 and worked in a mill until the outbreak of WWII, when he started work in Portland's shipyards. He enlisted in the military in January 1943 and went through jump school at Ft. Benning, Ga. Jim was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division after earning his paratrooper wings.

During Operation Market Garden, Jim jumped with his unit into combat in Holland. The book and subsequent movie, *A Bridge Too Far*, documented Operation Market Garden. Later, he was injured by a grenade fragment in Bastogne, Belgium, and evacuated just prior to the city coming under siege during the Battle of the Bulge.

Jim was discharged from the army in January 1946 and returned to Camas and worked in the paper mill. Jim's mother asked how he liked working in the mill. He replied that he had never liked it. Thereupon, she mentioned that the Forest Service was looking for former paratroopers to train as smokejumpers. Jim thought he would like to try it.

Jim began his smokejumping career with the North Cascades crew in Winthrop, Wash., in 1946. At that time smokejumpers were stationed in Cave Junction, Ore.; McCall, Idaho; Missoula, Mont., as well as Winthrop. All rookies were trained at the Nine Mile Airport, outside of Missoula.

Upon completion of training and assignment to Winthrop, Jim quickly discovered a mentor—Francis "Pappy" Lufkin (NCSB-39). Jim and Pappy supplemented their Forest Service wages by trapping martin during the winter and selling their pelts to Sears, Roebuck & Company, earning about \$20 per pelt. The two split about \$800 for their three weeks work during that December. They hiked a trapline that was about 55 miles long, covering it four times during a three-week period wearing snowshoes.

Jim worked two seasons as a seasonal jumper in Winthrop



Paying the jump fines L-R: Ron Price, Jim Allen, Rod Newton, Joe Emory, Al Boucher. (Courtesy of Dick Farris)

in 1946 and 1947.

Two very important events occurred in 1948: his marriage to Emily, his wife of the last 55 years and, full-time employment with the Forest Service as a smokejumper squad leader.

In July 1953, Jim became Project Air Officer at Cave Junction, Ore., and held that position when I trained at Cave Junction in 1960. I have yet to find a better man to work for or with. Cave Junction had its share of esprit-de corps and I think we all still miss the times we shared at the Gobi.

In 1966, Jim transferred to Redmond, Ore., and finished out his career there, retiring in January 1976. Jim informs me that he plays golf three days a week and had just finished walking 18 holes the day of our conversation.

Jim and Emily have four daughters, Kathleen, Mary Beth, Nancy and Peggy. With eight grandchildren, Jim and Emily have traveled frequently during the past few years visiting the grandchildren and attending their graduations.

Jim's address is 2109 NW Greenwood Place, Redmond, OR 97756. 🦋



Items from the Fire Pack



Snag Broke His Leg

On the first fire jump we made in Montana **Roy Abbott** (MSO-41) got his leg broke. He hit a snag and the chute dragged over the snag and he broke his leg. It was a project fire with 18–20 jumpers.

George Honey (NCSB-40)

Keep Fires Small—Save Millions

Any of us who have been at this for any length of time can look back and pick several cases where we saved a fire with hard work which might have gone on and cost millions of dollars.

Wayne Webb (MYC-46)

Tough Rescue Jump

We had one other private plane crash in 1982 just off the North Cascades Highway. A Cessna 310 went in. Eight of us jumped to check for survivors of which there were none. It was a bad jump situation as we dropped right in the bottom of the rock slides and scrub timber.

Bill Moody (NCSB-57)

That's What Brought on the Slots

My brother made some changes in the chutes. We dumped out lots of cargo chutes and they were old rotten Army chutes. They'd split wide open and we discovered those chutes were the last ones to hit the ground. They came down slower than the ones that weren't split. That's where we got the idea for the slots. The chutes with the splits didn't oscillate but the other ones were swinging all the time. So that's what brought on the slots.

Virgil Derry (NCSB-40)

\$150 a Jump

When I went back East (after the

season), I was jumping and making myself a hundred and a half per jump as Santa Claus. I was landing in cranberry bogs which was just like landing in a tub of feathers.

Chuck Pickard (MSO-48)

Serious Trouble in Camp

We were headed back to Nine Mile following an all-night fire in the Lolo Forest. **Al Cramer** (MSO-43) asked if we could stop at the Hilander Brewery and get a case of beer. When the manager found out that we were firefighters, he told me to have them all (25) come in and have some beer. The manager had two-gallon cans that he would fill and the jumpers would pass them around.

The beer was real refreshing but it was also very effective on empty stomachs and some were beginning to feel those effects. About midnight (after we got back to camp) **Florence Wenger** came over and told me that there was some serious trouble in camp. I thought that someone was sick or something like that but she told me she had caught one of the jumpers with a can of beer and wanted me to go over to the dorm and straighten him out.

To satisfy **Florence**, I went over and explained the situation to the crew hoping for a 10:00 A.M. control.

I mentioned this incident to **Florence** several times in the years since and she informed me that she had changed some over the years and probably would not wake me up from a good sleep if the same thing happened again.

Earl Cooley (MSO-40)

Safety in Numbers

Phil Stanley (MSO-43) sent **Ed Vail** (MSO-44) and me to find an old Forest Service trail so that we could lead the group out the next

morning. We got a mile or two from the fire and walked into a small clearing. There, at what seemed to be 15 feet up a tree, were fresh claw marks where a bear had marked off his territory. We did a quick U-turn and rejoined the group at the fire.

Dick Flaharty (MSO-44)

Close-Knit Group

After my training at Nine Mile, I was assigned to Cave Junction, Oregon. I was one of about 18 greenhorns. The foreman was **Jack Heintzelman** (CJ-43). The staff also included two good cooks and we ate like kings. At the end of the 1945 season, we were a close-knit group.

Chalmer Gillin (CJ-45)

No Sheltered Position

I was indicted into the Civilian Public Service in May of 1942 and recall when the Missoula project was introduced. After initially being hesitant, my feelings turned around. Yes, that is for me. I am not in the CPS for a sheltered position.

Louis Goossen (MSO-43)

Changed the Course of History

On August 6, 1945, while fighting a fire on Horse Mountain, word came over the radio that an atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. As the only professor on the crew, I was asked to explain what was an atom bomb. As an economist I could tell them nothing, but we all knew that a terrible weapon that killed over 100,000 people had changed the course of history.

Albert Gray (CJ-45)

Need a Headline

I was drafted at age 18 into WWII and went into the CPS largely due to the teaching of my parents. I joined the smokejumpers

and felt honored to be a part of this group to help preserve this great wilderness. After the war I went back to Ohio and tried to live a good Amish life but soon I left and didn't go to any church. I was drafted into the Armed Services in 1950 and shipped out to Korea. After returning in 1952 I joined the Mennonite Church, got married and formed a land clearing company that we owned until 1981 when we sold it.

Jonas Hershberger (MSO-45)

I Could Always Identify with Minorities

In my early educational experiences, I remember feeling a part of a minority group (Mennonite) that was not entirely accepted by the larger community. This has always caused me to identify with all types of minorities whatever their background. I did deviate from Mennonite norms by persuading my mother to allow me to play football. As a smokejumper in 1945, I did not

want to jump out of an airplane but I needed to demonstrate that I had not taken my alternative service to escape danger.

Ivan Holdeman (MSO-45)

Money Saved

Our small crew of six jumpers jumped nine fires that summer (1940) and a \$30,000 savings was projected.

Earl Cooley (MSO-40) 🇺🇸



Smokejumpers.com: NSA on the Web



by Jon Robinson
WEBMASTER

Reunion 2004

One of our main focuses of late has been to support the Reunion 2004 project. The reunion committee provided several suggestions, including a countdown feature and main stories, which we hope have helped get the message out about this seminal NSA event! We trust publish time finds that effort a success!

A year for the new web project!

Can it be a year since we launched the new smokejumpers.com? My how time flies! We thus have a unique opportunity to look back at our achievements so far and to look

forward to future progress.

The Store

<http://www.smokejumpers.com/store/index.php>

With a full 12 months under our belt, we show well over \$22,000 in store sales since the new site's launch date of late last March! Close to a \$10,000 increase from the revenue from the previous year. At an average of over \$1,800 a month the new store compares quite favorably to the previous year's average of approximately \$1,000 a month. A very promising start indeed! But we're hoping to do even better as more people learn about us and come to trust us as the place to go for smokejumping goods.

For March this year we did \$2,400 in store. This also bodes well for the fire season, as last year we averaged \$1,000 in April and May 2003, as we got up to speed. We're bound to be moving up, and we're looking for the smokejumpers.com store to continue to show growth as a major revenue source for the organization.

The Image Gallery

http://www.smokejumpers.com/image_gallery/index.php

While launched in July, the Image Gallery has seen more than 15,000+

visits and has now grown to seven sections with the addition of the Retirements Album. We added this to accommodate Steve Nemore's retirement pictures and hope others will choose to share their events with the smokejumper community. Also look for a Reunion 2004 section soon!

The Forum

<http://www.smokejumpers.com/forums/>

The forum has bogged down a bit as of late, but hopefully fire season will see renewed interest. One reason for less usage also may be that several experienced jumpers have spent time answering wannabe questions with great expertise. This type of participation is another great example of what an open forum can contribute to a community.

I suspect that many perspective smokejumpers visiting the site with questions may be getting answers by simply visiting the Smokejumping FAQ section and reading. Starting in December 2003, it has already registered over 2,000 views. Anyone in the smokejumping community who fields such questions, may wish to point their charges to <http://www.smokejumpers.com/forums/viewforum.php?f=15> as a fine start at providing answers to those interested in the profession. 🇺🇸

McCall and the Coin Flips

by Denis Symes (McCall '63)

Murry Taylor's (RDD-65) book, *Jumping Fire*, mentions the penchant of Rod Dow (MYC-68) to flip coins to determine an outcome. One story relates to flipping for a large pot of money at the end of the season—winner takes all. I do not know the origin of the flip, but it was prevalent at McCall in 1963 and was often referred to as “heads out.” We flipped for just about everything. The following describes the rules of flipping and several examples:

The Rules

- All would gather around in a circle with coins in hand.
- Each person in turn would flip his coin, which would have to land on the ground—no catching it.
- If the coin came up heads, the person was out of the flip and would step out of the circle.
- If the coin came up tails, he was still in and would have to wait his turn for the next go-around.
- The last person to flip a tails would have to do whatever the flip was about.

Examples of Flips

- When the fire danger was sufficiently low, crews were dispatched to the Paddy Flats area to cut trees for fence poles and posts, and to Thorn Creek to peel, dry and treat these poles for use as fences on the Payette National Forest. At the Thorn Creek Guard Station, there was a soft drink machine. At the time, soft drinks cost 15 cents each. At the morning and afternoon breaks, we'd gather around for a heads out flip to see who would buy the drinks.
 - On an August afternoon, I lost the flip for drinks and had to buy for all 24 jumpers (OK, the odds were only 23 to 1 that I'd lose, but someone had to lose!).
 - The next morning, I lost the flip for a second time and had to buy again (the odds: 23 times 23 or 529 to 1).
 - That afternoon, I lost for a third time (now the odds of this occurring were 23 times 23 times 23 or 12,167 to 1—a real long-odds streak of bad luck!).
 - I was certain that I could not lose again and was confident that the following morning's flip would certainly give me a free drink, but I lost for the fourth time in a row (23 times 23 times 23 times 23 or 279,841 to 1)! The four losses cost me \$14.40 at a time when a can of Coors cost 75 cents.
- When riding in a pickup, three could ride in the cab and the others would ride in the back on wooden benches. The most senior guys got to ride in the cab, but when there was a space for a junior guy to ride up

front, we'd flip to determine who got the comfortable seat.

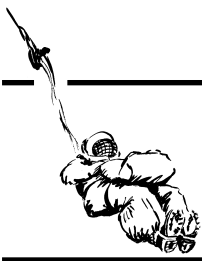
- Once at Paddy Flats, Glen Hale (MYC-57) had a different idea for entertainment. The second to last heads had to climb up a 30' tree while the last heads had to cut the tree down. The guy in the tree couldn't move until the tree started to fall; then he could get down as best he could. I don't remember who was the climber or the cutter, but it was interesting to watch. No serious injury occurred but I only remember it being done once. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea.
- There was a wire fence corral at Thorn Creek that was used to hold Forest Service pack mules. For several days during the 1964 season, a bull was kept in the pen, and I don't recall that he was a happy camper. Glen Hale had the bright idea that the loser of one of the soft drink flips should cross the corral on the way to the soft drink machine. When the loser climbed between the barbed wire strands, the bull took notice and watched him walk about halfway across, at which point he charged. The hapless guy took off and ran as fast as he could to the fence, fell on his side and rolled under the lowest strand of wire. It was not too close a call, but he could hear the bull gaining on him.

If anyone knows of the origin of the flip, it would make good reading to recount it. Whose idea was it originally and when did it start? 🐾

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John Rassmussen (MYC-59). (Courtesy of Denis Symes)



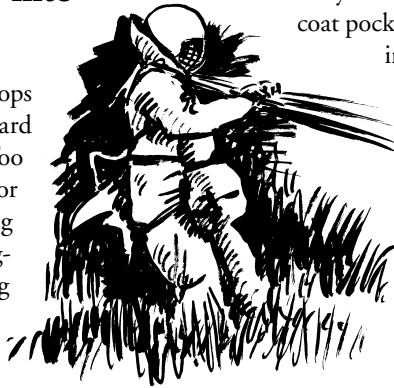
Blast from the Past

Forest-Fire Fighters Parachute into Treetops

Popular Mechanics, 1940

Flying firemen who drop right into the treetops with specially designed parachutes are to guard western timberlands against the fire menace. Too frequently a small fire breaks out far from road or trail and spreads into a conflagration covering thousands of acres before the Forest Service rangers can reach it. But with airplanes carrying firefighters and equipment right to the blaze, it can be quelled before it is too big to control.

Experiments are being conducted in the Chelan National Forest near Wenatchee, Wash. The fireman goes aloft wearing a canvas and sponge-rubber suit, a "cage" helmet and neck protector, ankle supports and other guards to protect vital parts of the body in the parachute jump over rocky or wooded terrain. Selecting a strategic spot, he first jumps overboard a kit containing shovel, ax, flashlight, matches, two day's emergency rations and water, map, compass, first-aid kit and perhaps a radio set. The ranger's parachute permits steering and a descent at fourteen feet per second or slower. With his protective garb he can come down



safely in a dense forest, using an emergency rope in his coat pocket for descending from treetops if he is snagged in a dangerous spot.

Thanks to associate member Ken Morris for forwarding this article.

Blast from the Past

Missoula Sentinel, August 1943

Major General William Lee of the Army Air Corps recently told the world that the Forest Service parachute training assignments and experiments had stepped up or speeded Army parachute developments by six

months.

He is an officer who knows more than most about it, as in 1940 he was in Missoula with the original parachute jumping experiments in this region. Alaska sent a Coast Guard detachment to serve as an auxiliary squadron while learning the details of jumping in all its phases. They will return home this fall to be ready for rescue work through the north.

Various regions of the United States have assigned their officials and men to training at Seeley Lake and Nine Mile, working with the Forest Service jumpers. ♣

TWO BOOKS—ONE TO BUY AND KEEP—THE OTHER NOT

by Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)

THE BOOK OF GOBI, SISKIYOU Smoke-jumper Base 1943-1981, is a wonderful book and a great read. Not only does it give a vivid history of this great smokejumper base, it does it in the voice of so many jumpers. When you read Eric "The Black" Schoenfeld's (CJ-64) account, it feels like he is there talking to you. Tom Albert's (CJ-64) "International Night" makes me wish I could have started a few years earlier. After reading Chuck Sheley's (CJ-59) "Recollections," I understand why the Gobi jumpers got way into volleyball. And now I know who took that classic photo of Mick Swift (CJ-56) in the tree with his chute billowing that is not only a

lasting image of the Gobi but of smokejumping itself. Part of the Gobi legend was that when you showed up you surrendered your 100-foot letdown rope for a 150-foot length and if you hung up in a really tall tree, two from the Gobi would climb it; one on each side of the tree linked with two ropes.

This book radiates character like its colorful cover. It documents the exploits of young jumpers who are close to the wild heart of life and living their dreams. It is a gem.

One of the world's great mountaineers, Willi Unsoeld (CJ-50), as well as astronaut Stuart Roosa (CJ-53), who flew a spaceship around the moon, were Gobi smokejumpers. As long as there is a free republic and

young men and women are sent to fight fires, the Gobi will be remembered as a place where outstanding jumpers trained and flew to fires across the West. This book documents it.

Book of Gobi available from Stan Collins, 1312 Jeppesen Ave., Eugene OR 97401 (\$15.00).

At the other end of the scale is: *A Season of Fire* by Douglas Gantenbein.

Gantenbein demonstrates how the fire fighting community has its work cut out for it when it comes to getting accurate information to the public. He says of 1950's jumper operations, "Their success rate was fabulous—a single 'stick' of a dozen smokejumpers nearly always had the

fire out by the day after landing.” It would be good to think it was that easy, but read real jumper accounts and we know that was not the case. We all jumped two or even three man “sticks,” so we know what that is, but 12 men? He is confusing a “stick” with a “load” and that is just the beginning.

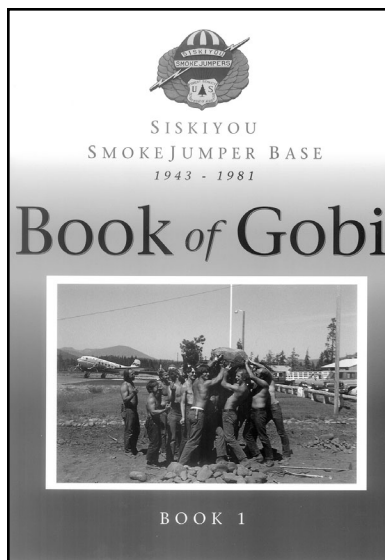
The same paragraph he goes on to say, “The crews were confident, if not cocky. But they were also surprisingly ignorant as to the true nature of their adversary. Fires those days tended to be small, a few acres in size, and easily caught. ...”

Then he describes the Mann Gulch disaster. To imply the brave men that died in that disaster were “cocky” is ridiculous. Gantenbein’s quote from an *Outside* magazine article about the book has a kernel of truth but again is surrounded by absurd statements. “A good place to start cost cutting is smokejumping. They’re brave, motivated, charismatic but they are far too expensive for the service they provide.”

At least he got three parts right. Here is my answer: smokejumpers have proven over six decades that they are the most economical way to fight fires and they have saved the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars that otherwise would have been spent on project fires that once were considered a “failure” but now (read **Jim Veitch**) are an opportunity. I credit the NSA for not only documenting our history, but for being a strong advocate for the smokejumper program.

Here is what should happen. The head of the Forest Service and BLM should contact every base manager and ask, “What is the maximum number of jumpers your base can support and still operate at the level we have come to expect?” Then they need to say, “How can we support your operations to the fullest?” That is the way to save the taxpayer money. As Chuck Sheley has so clearly pointed out, stop one Biscuit fire (remember that jumpers were available) and you have paid for all jumper operations for years.

Jumpers at McCall said they were



The Book of Gobi, Siskiyou Smokejumper Base 1943–1981, available from Stan Collins, 1312 Jeppesen Ave., Eugene OR 97401 (\$15.00).

stunned by Gantenbein’s book as they had gone out of their way to give him a first class tour and answer questions. If he had done his research carefully, how could he write, “Smokejumping took off in the 1940s when much of the West was inaccessible by road. That isn’t the case anymore, and these days jumpers often float down within sight of an Interstate Highway? ...”

I jumped during two different decades and never once floated down in sight of a freeway. Even if there is a road nearby it still might well be the most expeditious way to man a fire, especially if it is on top of a mountain.

He goes on to say that since smokejumping was invented for “wilderness fires” and those are the ones that “should be left alone,” the program should be ended. While I agree there are many areas where fire should again take its natural role in wilderness and roadless areas, big fires don’t stop at boundaries. The forest fire plans need to be clear and unambiguous. When suppression is called for, the jumpers should be called first if they are the quickest resource.

Mr. Gantenbein says that helicopters are way more efficient and cost effective. I remember in

1972 during my second season at McCall talking with a Vietnam veteran helicopter pilot. He told me, “As soon as the war is over, you jumpers will be out of business. There are so many combat tested pilots that will be released to fly helicopters on fires, jumpers will no longer be necessary.” Clearly, he was wrong. Jumping has evolved to meet new challenges and the program is stronger now.

During the summer of 2002, I traversed seven mountain ranges in four states. **Jeff Fereday** (MYC-70) and I hiked from Chamberlain Basin to Big Creek across a section of the RNR wilderness. It is an incredible mosaic of different aged forests and burn patterns. Central Idaho is an area I have been fortunate to visit for 40+ years and I well remember when any fire, even in wilderness, was fought. That has changed and the jumpers have adapted. Yet, under the right conditions, fires can start in wilderness and burn down towns.

Certain people who build homes surrounded by forest need to take responsibility for their homes. Nonetheless, as long as there are assets to protect and fires to manage, smokejumpers will be on the front line. As has been so clearly documented in *Smokejumper* magazine, all you need is to stop one Biscuit fire disaster and the cost for the entire program would be covered for years!

Last winter I took my family “down-under” where I did a study on the Australian White Ibis. While we were there, New South Wales and other states were engulfed in flames. Five thousand homes were destroyed, national parks and forests incinerated, and tragically, many firefighters and civilians died. The Sydney airport was smoked in and closed for days just before we were scheduled to leave. Then among all the bad news of fires torching the capital and incinerating even their planetarium, one article lit up the night and caught my attention, “American smokejumpers have been dispatched to fires across Australia.” 🇺🇸



Touching All Bases



Beginning with the October 2004 issue, this column will feature one photo per jump base to accompany base reports. All written material and photos are welcome for review. Please follow style guidelines for names, bases, and years rookied. Send material to Mike McMillan (FBX-96) at spotfireimages@hotmail.com. Please e-mail photos at highest resolution, or mail in print form. For a mailing address or more info, please contact Mike.

Alaska Base Report

by Mike McMillan (Fairbanks '96)

The Alaska smokejumpers plan to welcome six rookie candidates on April 26. They are: **Greg Conaway** (Smokey Bear IHC), **Ben Dobrovolny** (Midnight Suns IHC), **T.J. Gholson** (Idaho City IHC), **Brandon Hobbs** (Chena IHC), **Chris Pahl** (Chena IHC), and **Kip Shields** (Silver State IHC). As of this writing their fate is unknown.

Lead Rookie Trainer **Ty Humphrey** (FBX-98) relayed his account of a chilly jump refresher course held for two Alaska bros in late January. Preparing for pending “drogue-test” jumps, **Gary Baumgartner** (FBX-88) and **Tony Pastro** (FBX-77) suited up in two feet of snow at the AK units near the Chena River, ready to go through the paces. Ty couldn't recall the exact temperature, but he's sure it was “colder than normal.” Walking from the berm back to the tower in their jumpsuits was a real chore. “Pastro tried it once but it was way too tiring,” Ty reported. Resourceful **Togie “Big Country” Wiehl** (FBX-91) proudly came to the rescue with his Polaris 800 and trailer sled. Zipping down the cable to the berm, the two jumpers simply unhooked their risers and rolled themselves onto their sled taxi—still clinging to their haul-back ropes. Flat on their backs, they were shuttled to the tower's stairs to roll off and repeat the process. “It was funny lookin',” concluded Ty.

Regular refresher training begins on April 5 and 19.

Missing from our jump list in 2004 is **Scott Hocklander** (FBX-99), on a Disaster Assistance (DASP) detail in Washington, D.C. **Andrew Parsons** (FBX-03) will serve as a squad boss with the Diamond Mountain IHC in 2004. **Paul McGuire** (FBX-02) is taking a year off to build his house in Humboldt, Calif. In an unofficial poll, crew consensus on the color was mostly green. **Bob Schober** (MSO-95) is healing from an off-season injury. We're also rooting for **Chris Silks** (FBX-91) to make a speedy return to the list.

The Alaska bros will miss **Jim Veitch** (MSO-67) this season—and though he'll go through refresher training this spring, his chances for another fire jump are slim—he's



committing full time to the air attack roster. Veitch has served as a leader among smokejumpers throughout his career. He left jumping for 16 years to pursue a military career, returning to Alaska in 1999. He easily passed BLM's “high standards,” and regularly walks the 45-pound pack test carrying 200 pounds or more.

Veitch has few imitators. Regarded as “the father of the ram-air system” for BLM jumpers, he helped shape the direction of smokejumping on many levels. To gain some perspective (Jim rookied the year I was born), I spoke to **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65), longtime smokejumper and author of *Jumping Fire*, about **Veitch's** contribution to smokejumping. “**Veitch** has got the technical capacity and exper-

tise, but more importantly, he's shown administrative guts in developing and maintaining the square parachute system for smokejumpers,” said **Taylor**. “**Veitch** also provided leadership during the BLM's return to jump status after the tragic loss of **Dave Liston** (FBX-98) in 2000. **Veitch's** personal courage embodies something extremely important to smokejumpers. Without that, we'd all turn into a molten mass of brownnosing bureaucrats,” **Taylor** added.

The Alaska bros look forward to calling up Air Attack **Veitch** on the radio in 2004.

According to a prediction by **Rob Allen** (FBX-93), “We just may see the mother of all fire seasons in Alaska this year.” Thanks, Rob.

BLM Boise Base Report

by Grant Beebe (NIFC '90)

It's been a busy off-season for us. Our first refresher got underway in January, so that we could do some dummy drops and evaluation jumps for a modified drogue chute. The drops and jumps went well, so we're field-testing the new drogue this season. For the test jumpers, refresher meant bundling up for some chilly first jumps.

In February, a group of Boise and Alaska jumpers headed south to Coolidge, Ariz., to test jump a new static line ram-air system. This weeklong evaluation went well, the system functioning as promised: openings were soft. The downside of the system was the tendency for the jumpers to twist up after opening.

It's now April, and we're less than two weeks from the beginning of rookie training. **Brad Bolen** (Boise BLM), **Brian Cresto** (Sawtooth IHC), **Gabe Donaldson** (Ruby Mountain IHC), **Jerran Flinders** (Bonneville IHC), **Beau**

Kidd (Idaho City IHC), and **Ty Taber** (Malheur N.F.) are set to start training as the class of 2004. **Paul Hohn** (MYC-00) has taken over as the lead rookie trainer.

Rich Zimmerlee (RDD-95) was selected into our prescribed program manager position. His assistant position is on the street now, as is our in-house fire trainer. **Mike Tupper** (FBX-85) has been on detail to Las Vegas as the BLM's FMO. **Hector Madrid** (MYC-88) has been detailed to the Idaho state BLM Office as the state AFMO while Idaho selects a new FMO. **Jim Shultz** (MYC-98) has just accepted a job in Othello, Wash., as a FWS AFMO. Jim's departure will be a loss to us here, but getting jumpers into the fire management pipeline in FMO-type positions helps us in the long run.

Steve Baker (NCSB-88) is making another run at jumping. **Frank Clements** (NCSB-88) has transferred to us from NCSB, bringing with him a bucketful of qualifications and experience. He'll be going through ram-air rookie training this spring.

Our headcount is 85, and jumpships (4 Otters) remain steady, despite budget crunches. Our jumpers remain busy doing prescribed fire work and details during the shoulder seasons, experience that makes them both more valuable smokejumpers and more viable candidates for their next jobs. Rx work also has the spin-off benefit of exposing jumpers to customers who might not normally order us.

Grangeville Base Report

by **Robin Embry** (Grangeville '85)

A short recap of the 2003 fire season: Grangeville jumped fewer than average fires, but recorded their highest number of jumpers per fire since our record keeping began in 1951. The problem wasn't lack of fires, (the Clearwater/Nez Perce zone experienced 358 fire starts), but the fact that the bulk of the fires started in a two-week time frame, limiting opportunity for quick suppression and stretching resources thin.

In an effort to bring more smokejumpers into the region, Grangeville requested and received a detail of 10 BLM Alaska jumpers from Aug. 9 through early September. The Alaskans were easily accommodated into our program and were greatly appreciated for their excellent attitudes and work ethic. Mixed-load operations were conducted with no problems or hitches. We believe most of the Alaskans enjoyed their stay, as some of them had to be pried out of here in September. (And they built us a nice bench—Thanks again!)

Grangeville smokejumpers put in over 9,000 hours of work on various work projects across the nation when they weren't stomping out fires: prescribed fire in the Southern Area and Region 1, timber, pine cone collection, space shuttle recovery, and APHIS tree climbing in Chicago were just some of the projects we worked on. **Marge Kuehn** (RAC -91) committed to a season long detail as AFMO to the Moose Creek District of the Nez Perce Forest and **Brian Ahshapanek** (GAC-90) detailed to the Fire Use Training Academy (FUTA) in New Mexico for a month.

For the 2004 season, Grangeville will be staffed at 30 smokejumpers. **Randy Nelson** (GAC-87) accepted the base manager position in December, vacated by **Jerry Zumalt** (RDD-70). Jerry moved just down the hall and is the new aviation officer on the Clearwater/Nez Perce Fire Zone, vacated when **Jon Foland** (MSO-68) retired in January '03. **Robin Embry** moved into the operations foreman position, and we are currently trying to fill the loft foreman position. **Brett Rogers** (GAC-92) accepted the new training foreman position in September '03, and has already proven his value to the program many times over. **Brian Ahshapanek**, **Brett Bittenbender** (MYC-88), and **Kelvin Thompson** (GAC-95) all accepted squad leader promotions in September also. **Walt Currie** (MSO-75) will be coming back for what we believe will be his final season before he retires, but you can never be sure with Walt. (Never say never, Walt!).

Grangeville filled five PSE 6/10 appointments in February. Three of the appointments went to Grangeville jumpers **Winston Willis** (GAC-01), **Gabe Cortez** (GAC-02), and **Clem Pope** (GAC-03). In addition, **Isaac Karuzas** (RDD-01) joins us from Redding, and **J.P. Zavalla** (MSO-95) returns to smokejumping from the Los Padres N.F. We will be training two detailers this season: **Jason Junes** from the Clearwater N.F. and **Jason Gibb** from the Nez Perce N.F.

Leading Edge Aviation will supply a Twin Otter aircraft to Grangeville again this year. **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52) and **Nels Jensen** (MSO-62) shared pilot duties last season and we hope we are lucky enough to have them again this season, although rumor has it that Leading Edge is concerned about all the salt in the cockpit corroding their aircraft.

In mid-March, **Randy Nelson** participated in static line deployed ram-air training in Silver City, N.M. Randy is part of the evaluation group that will be looking at parachute candidates with potential to satisfy both BLM and Forest Service smokejumper needs. The purpose of the training was to familiarize Forest Service jumpers with ram-air equipment, rigging procedures, exit techniques, and canopy manipulation, so they will be able to participate in canopy evaluations in October. Randy is the only smokejumper base manager making canopy evaluation jumps.

Grangeville sent six smokejumpers to Mississippi and one to South Carolina again this winter to assist in prescribed fire activities. In mid-April we will be sending a six person detail to the Idaho Panhandle Forest for six weeks of hazardous fuels reduction (burning and thinning). **Andy Lane** (GAC-00) is currently detailed as a fuels technician to the Slate Creek District of the Nez Perce Forest.

McCall Base Report

by **Eric Brundige** (McCall '77)

Personnel changes are the big news in McCall this spring. Unit Manager **Neal Davis** (MYC-69) retired after 18 years in that position, and **John Humphries** (MYC-79) has retired from his position as training officer.

Currently we have **Larry Wilson** (MYC-84) in place as acting training officer and **Joe Brinkley** (MYC-98) as his

assistant. **Rick Hudson** (BOI-73) is our acting operations foreman with **Jeff Schricker** (MYC-98) as his assistant. Longtime smokejumper pilots **Eldon Askelson** (MYC-66) and **Marc “Cap’n Andy” Anderson** have followed the road to retirement as well. **Shelly “Allen” Lewis** (GAC-97) is on a one-year detail to the Council RD in a fuels/NEPA position and **Rob Berney** (MYC-95) has taken a job on the Tongass

The Smokejumpers Lament

by **John Hawk** (Missoula '51)

Composed after the 1951 season to be sung to the tune of “The Cowboy’s Lament.”

As I jumped out oer the hills of Montana,
As I jumped out oer Montana one day,
I spied a smokejumper wrapped up in white nylon
Wrapped up in white nylon as cold as the grave.

Come sit down beside me and hear my sad story,
The jumper did say as I planed to his side.
Come sit down beside me and hear my sad story,
For I’m a smokejumper and know I must die.

It was first down to Murrels and then to Old Spider’s
Mamies and damies, the night stole away.
A call came at midnight, We left in the morning.
And I was not ready, it’s needless to say.

We sighted the Flathead at four in the morning.
The dawn was just crossing the Missions you see.
We soon saw smoke rising there on the mountain.
And way down below was the river Kootenai.

I jumped just at sunrise. My chute tumbled open.
I looked up to check it. Line over the top.
I pulled down and snapped it. But fell all the faster.
I reached for my scabbard; the knife had, then dropped.

I started to pray, boy. I would not deny it.
I pulled right, and left, the chute fell as it would.
I soon ceased to worry. My fate was before me.
The snags seemed to reach just as high as they could.

I soon fell among them; the chute caught and faltered.
Twas all my own doing, I want you to know.
I fell to the ground with nothing to stop me.
But now that you’re here, I am ready to go.

And folks just for pleasure, I’ve added this measure.
We packed him out safely. He’s living today.
I would not deceive you, beguile or mislead you,
We’d jump into Hades for overtime pay.

NF, working on Prince Rupert Island. **Dave Crawford** (MYC-93) has resigned, temporarily we hope, to do database work for a company in Iowa. We are hoping to have pilot vacancies and key smokejumper overhead positions filled by fire season.

McCall will have the fleet back again this year, Twin Otters J-41 and J-43, and the turbine DC-3, J-42. The group assigned to be R-3 bound reported for refresher training on March 29, and is expected to head to Silver City in early May. April 26 is our next refresher, for about 30 jumpers, including overhead. Another group of 20 refreshers and the 6 rookies (NEDs) begin training on May 24. Our last refresher session begins June 7. We are expecting to have our standard number of 70 jumpers for the 2004 season.

Springtime projects include burning details to northern Idaho and Colorado, and tree climbing in Chicago. As conditions dry up in Utah, we plan to re-open the Ogden spike base, likely in mid-June.

Hope to see lots of you in Missoula at the reunion.

Missoula Base Report

by **Wayne Williams** (Missoula '77)

As in past winters, Region 1 jumpers participated in dormant season burning in the National Forest of Mississippi. Throughout the winter and spring, there were a total of 15 jumpers involved and 40,000 acres burned.

Missoula will host refresher training this April for 80 jumpers, with participants from Boise BLM, Grangeville, McCall, Winthrop, and West Yellowstone. Later in the month, 16 U.S. Special Forces troops from Fort Lewis, Wash., will go through rough terrain jump training.

The Silver City Crew is slated to head south the first week of May. As in past years, the crew will be made up of jumpers from Regions 1, 4, 5 and 6. Missoula will be the host for operations.

Region 1 is looking at a rookie class of 15. Out of the 15 positions, 12 will be detailers from national forests throughout the northern region.

Redding Base Report

by **Nate Hesse** (Redding '01)

Well the fire season will be knocking at our door if these high temperatures stay around. It’s neat to see the jumpers trickle in to the base, catching up on winter work, news, stories and/or travel.

This season, first refresher will commence on March 22. On April 5, seven new smokejumper candidates will begin seven weeks of training with the goal of becoming a R-5 jumper. Five temp hires and two detailers will join us for rookie training.

The Redding smokejumpers had successful winter training, burning, climbing and instructing in Sacramento at the apprenticeship program. The loft is working on incorporating the new extra large fire shelters in our current P.G. bags. We are working on developing a new pack that would suit our needs by mid-season.

Congratulations are in order for **Greg Fashano** (RDD-

99), a proud father of a baby girl born on Dec. 15. There must be something in the Redding water because (hotshot captain) **Luis Gomez** (RDD-94), **Geoff Schultz** (RDD-01), **Shane Boxrz** (RDD-03), and myself tied the knots with our brides this past winter. Still another rookie bro of mine, **Casey Ramsey** (RDD-01), was engaged to Karen over the winter. Congrats to them.

Adam Lauber (RDD-99) traded his Piper Cub for a Para-glider to help hone in some manipulation skills.

Already some jumpers have been out on assignment, **Steve Franke** (RDD-87) and **Rico Gonzalez** (RDD-99) just got back from Guam and Saipan where they conducted S-212 power saw classes for the local crews.

Don't be alarmed if you see a Cobra helicopter lurking on a fire near you, **Stan Kubota** (RDD-88) is going to be flying around with the rebuilt Cobra helicopter equipped with high dollar IR cameras and computer imaging, not to mention the slick new Forest Service paint job. Don't be afraid to talk to Stan about the fire watch capabilities, just don't ask to sit in it, you'll need level three clearance.

Ron Omont (RDD-78) is using his keen networking skills in landing himself a job working for the NCSC fire cache after his mandatory final workday with the jumpers. It'll be good to have Ronbo within yelling distance if something goes wrong in Para-cargo. **Dan Hernandez** (RDD-85) will be leading two fortunate jumpers down to Silver City this year to detail till the rains hit. Pray you boost Redding on a Thursday, so you can catch Dan play his sax at blues night.

We are getting **Karl Johnson** (RDD-95) back from his two years of active duty in Operation Enduring Freedom, I'm sure we'll be hearing some interesting stories at the warming fire. Finally, Loft Foreman **Tim Quigley** (RDD-79) took part in ram-air training in New Mexico, to work out details regarding a universal canopy for both BLM and Forest Service.

Redmond Base Report

by Gary Atteberry (Redmond '97)

Lessons learned at RAC over the winter:

Rob Rosetti (RAC-01) has a really fast snow machine. **Dirk Stevens** (RAC-91) is not so good at riding said snow machine after proper fueling (Dirk, not the machine.).

When hearing that **Mark Hentze** (RAC-00) is traveling to a far away place, assume he may not make it or that you'll receive quality e-mails from a completely different side of the planet. South America is not South Africa. Close, but not quite.

Josh Cantrell (MSO-97) has a car that is faster than the Redmond police. Apparently though, they have radios in theirs to make it easier to catch Josh. **Jeff Robinson** (RDD-86) learned about the building permit process in Deschutes County. Guess you need one.

One of the bros on his own, **Wayne Risseuw** (RAC-90) learned that carrying a log on his shoulder while walking on ice isn't such a good idea. One dislocated shoulder and a trip to the ER helped emphasize the lesson learned. We learned

if you wrap a riser under **Tony Loughton's** (RDD-83) arm, something bad happens upon exit and opening.

Gary Atteberry learned to always use the appropriate assumption, "I thought you did it" or "I thought he lit it."

It's April and the grips of winter have loosened in central Oregon. There are probably a few surprise snow days but for the most part, the sun is out and the melt in the mountains has begun. And what a melt it'll have to be before we get a fire season up high.

Record snow pack for last winter dominated recreation for the bros at the base. But now drip torches are being dragged across the land again, refresher starts this week, and most of the bros are back to work.

Some major changes have occurred in the last few months here at RAC. Longtime Loft Foreman **Mick Brick** (RAC-76) retired. Mick has enlightened us for years on "how it is." Rookies from now on will never know the wisdom that spewed from Mick's mouth.

The loft job is now unoccupied, the super efficient government way of hiring has it keggered up in some sort of Human Resources process. We've been told for weeks now it will be flown soon. Until then we wait.

Also leaving us this winter was **Base Manager Dewey Warner** (RAC-75). Dewey accepted a permanent FMO position in the Las Vegas area, and currently the position is open. We here at RAC are looking forward to a new manager to be named within the next few weeks.

Another overhead issue worth mentioning is the new "smokejumper position descriptions and upgrades." For years, the Forest Service has been battling to upgrade smokejumpers. Here at Redmond we've been slightly successful. All of the upgrades have been approved, but due to budget issues, only the base manager and foreman positions will see a change this year. Our foremen are now GS-11s, and the base manager will be a GS-12. Spotters will remain GS-7s for now, and veteran jumpers will stay at the 6 level.

However, **Mark Gibbons** (RAC-87) and **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) both got nice new desks.

In January, **Ron Rucker** (RAC-76), **Atteberry**, and **Corbet** joined others from all bases and MTDC in Arizona for the testing of modifications to the FS-14. This was part of an ongoing testing process for the Forest Service's canopy. The weather was great and everyone got at least one jump out of the deal.

In late February, **Tony Loughton** and **Tony Sleznick** (RDD-92) headed to Silver City for ram-air training. A part of the joint parachute committee. Slez was down as the on site EMT. Unfortunately he was needed. After performing several jumps successfully, **Loughton** was not so successful. Upon exit and initial opening the long riser of the MC-5 canopy somehow wrapped under Tony's arm. The opening of the canopy obviously was going to create a problem for Tony with one of the risers under his arm. It did, dislocating his shoulder. His good one, at that. Tony bore through the pain and successfully manipulated the canopy, making the jump spot. Slez then had to reduce the dislocation on scene. **Loughton** is doing great now, no pain

and almost a full range of motion. We expect him back at 100 percent soon. We pretty much have to hold him back now.

Our regular detail to South Carolina has continued through this winter also. The first group, **Dirk Stevens**, **Justin Wood** (RAC-01), and **Tony Loughton** spent most of January and February on the Francis Marion. Weather was marginal, hardly any fires and just a bit of burning was the report when they returned. The next group: **Mark Gibbons**, **Ron Rucker**, and **Gary Atteberry** arrived in late February and stayed into late March. The swamps were much more profitable for them. About 10,000 acres burned and plenty of wildfires.

Refresher starts this week and most of the bros are back in town. We're looking forward to one more group going to S.C. and R-3 detail to start soon. **Slez** is getting married to his long time girlfriend **Colette** in late April. And **Rob Rosetti** and his wife **Marie** are celebrating the birth of their son **Andrew**. Congratulations!

The future at RAC holds a lot of changes for us, a new base manager, new loft foreman, position upgrades—we're all excited.

We're crossing our fingers that there's a lot of lightning and the snow pack keeps the fires manageable.

West Yellowstone Base Report

by Charles Wetzel (West Yellowstone '92)

At the time of this writing, there are still a couple of feet of snow on the ramp but it's melting fast, and we're starting to gear up for the fire season that will soon be here.

There are a few changes in personnel this season. Our loadmaster **Marty Mitzkus** (WYS-99) accepted a job on the Black Hills NF in Sundance Wyo., as an AFMO. Former West jumper **Audrey "Dusty" Rixford** (WYS-01) accepted a job on the Gallatin NF as an aviation dispatcher in Bozeman. **Cindy Champion** (MSO-99) is taking a leave of absence this season to set up a massage therapy business in Northern California. **Jennifer** (MSO-01) and **Mark Belitz** (WYS-01) are expecting a baby some time this summer so Jen is looking for some non-jumping detail work for the season. This will be the last season for **Base Manager Greg Anderson** (MSO-68) due to mandatory retirement age catching up with him.

Brian Wilson (WYS-98) spent two weeks this winter teaching at the SAC Academy. **Carlos "Cheech" Trevino** (WYS-92) traveled to Mississippi for a four-week prescribed fire detail. Next week we will be sending a couple of folks to Red Lodge, Mont., for burn prep work and the first week of April will be sending a couple more to Michigan for more of the same.

We are not doing a lot of hiring this year, just picking up two rookie detailers and a couple of transfers from MSO, which will bring our numbers to about 22 (which includes one NPS employee from Yellowstone NP). We are also expecting 4–8 BLM detailers, as in years past, when the season starts heating up.

Our jump plane will again be a Dornier 228 from Bighorn Aviation on the fourth year of a five-year contract

and from July through September an Aero Union Orion P-3 air tanker will be based here.

North Cascades Base Report

by Matt Desimone (Redmond '97)

It's been an eventful winter and spring here at NCSB, with a number of personnel changes at hand. Base Manager **Steve Dickenson** (La Grande-78) has taken a position at the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center in Portland, Ore., where he will function as the new emergency operations manager. During his tenure here at NCSB, Steve helped to accomplish many things, including improvements to our facilities, position upgrades for the loft and training foreman, acquisition of top-notch equipment, and bolstering of the training budget. More than anything, though, Steve looks after the happiness and safety of his crew.

Squad leader **Frank Clements** (NCSB-88), a longtime fixture here at North, has taken a job with the Boise BLM jumpers. Frank's hard driving attitude, skills and passion for the job will be sorely missed. High-five and best of luck to both of these bros.

In the interim, **John Button** (NCSB-75) has taken over the helm as acting base manager. John has been working diligently to acquire position upgrades for the crew, and continues the effort to obtain funding for a new and greatly needed paraloft.

Over the winter and with no forthcoming announcement, **Darren Belsby** (NCSB-86) got hitched to Grangeville jumper **Sarah Berns** (GAC-02). Shortly after the ceremony, Darren headed south to Silver City, N.M., to take part in the Forest Service ram-air training group. Darren is currently being detailed into the GS-9 training foreman position. **Sarah Pierce** (NCSB-99) has also taken the plunge into matrimony during the off-season. Her return to the base for this year is not yet known. **Simon Friedman** (NCSB-99) has recently completed basic training with the U.S. Air Force and is entering pararescue school. We don't expect Simon back in the near future.

Stuart Hill (NCSB-99) is hanging up his fire boots and opting for a change of career in central Oregon.

With the recent changes in overhead, **Matt Woosley** (NCSB-84) has been detailed as the GS-9 operations foreman, with **J. P. Knapp** (NCSB-96) and **Matt Desimone** (RAC-97) again detailing as squad leaders.

April 19 marks the date of early refresher for the returning crew. On May 17 rookie training will begin. We expect to hire four rooks, and their training will be combined with the Redmond new hires here at NCSB.

We anticipate Captain Kevin McBride's and copilot Butch Hammer's return with Jump 07, a CASA-212, parked on the ramp.

One final outstanding note was a celebration for **Dale Longanecker** (RAC-74). Dale made his 700th career jump last fall, onto a two-manner in smoke reddened dusky light over the Okanogan National Forest. Longanecker is at 700-plus now, and still going strong! Respect to Dale. 🍀