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National Smokejumper Association

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THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
JANUARY 2006

SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



by Doug Houston
(Redmond '73)
PRESIDENT

FIRST OF ALL, THE board of directors and myself would like to thank Chuck Sheley for all of the work that he did with the merchandising of the NSA product line. I know he spent hours and hours taking orders, boxing and shipping, and making numerous trips to the post office. His efforts made thousands of dollars for the NSA and have really helped sponsor the magazine and NSA projects. Merchandising has now been turned over to Western Heritage and can be linked to on the smokejumpers.com website by clicking on "Store." Take a look and have your credit card handy. Secondly, the board and my-

self would like to thank Jon McBride and his group of volunteers who completed miles of trail maintenance throughout the western U.S. Jon has done an exemplary job, spending many hours working with funding, agency project representatives and volunteers to pull all of the logistics together, now expanding into Alaska and Colorado. The NSA thanks you, Jon, and all of the volunteers. It really is a true representation of what smokejumpers are all about with the "can do" attitude.

The board of directors has three meetings scheduled for 2006. The first is March 4, Reno, followed by June 17, Cave Junction, and October 7, in Wenatchee. I mention this because there is always a social gathering after the meeting at each location. We just met in Redmond, Oregon, and had a social attended by about 60 people including David "Skinny" Beals (NCSB-46) and Karl Petty (RAC-71), both of whom are battling cancer. It's a great time to come out and see some of your old jumper buds and meet others. So, mark these dates on your calendar and make the journey. You won't regret it. Until then, the door is yours, you're hooked up, and the whole world is a jump spot. If you're mis-spotted, don't blame the spotter. 🍄

Elections for NSA Board of Directors

Chuck Sheley-Election Committee Chair

The Board of Directors is the governing body of the NSA and meets two times a year to conduct NSA business. The meetings are held at various places in the Pacific Northwest. The terms of four members of the BOD will expire July 1, 2006.

Even though you would be obligated to two meetings a year, it is important to remember that you can be a valuable working BOD member regardless of where you live. In the day of e-mail, a functioning board can work with its members spread across the U.S. If you have ideas and are willing to roll up your sleeves, please consider joining the NSA work force.

Election timeline and procedures:

1. Jan.-Feb. 15, 2006, fill out personal information sheet. Must be in my hands by Feb. 15.
2. Personal information on each candidate inserted into the April issue of *Smokejumper*.
3. Ballot sheet inserted into the April issue of *Smokejumper*.
4. Ballots must be received by May 20.
5. New board members to take office July 1st-election results published in the Oct. issue of *Smokejumper*.

Please call, write or e-mail for your filing papers. My contact information is on page three of this issue. The time to act is now! 🍄

Intercity Airport and the Flood of 1948

by Ed Summerfield (North Cascades '47) with the help of Jim Allen (North Cascades '46)

The devastating 1948 flood in the Columbia Basin damaged the smokejumper camp at the Intercity Airport. Located on the Methow River, the camp is now called North Cascades Smokejumper Base.

At the beginning of the season, I usually rode a Greyhound bus to Pateros where the Methow River flows into the Columbia. From there the Methow Valley Stage Line would take me to Twisp, and I would make my way over the last four miles to camp any way I could.

In 1948 I got off the bus in Pateros only to find out that the highway up the Methow was closed. Every bridge between Winthrop and Pateros had washed out. So, it was back on the bus to Okanogan, where the Chelan National



The remains of the loft after the flood. (Courtesy Ed Summerfield)

NSA Members — Save This Information

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Smokejumper magazine

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

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

Forest Supervisor's Office was located. Lucky for me, someone was going to Twisp over Loup Loup Pass that day, and I was able to catch a ride to camp at the airport.

On arrival, the first thing I noticed was that the loft was gone. Flood waters had washed away the bank under the loft and it went into the river. That summer there were a few stories about Francis Lufkin and Jim Allen throwing equipment out the front door of the loft while the bank was crumbling beneath the other end of the building.

Recently I asked Jim Allen what had happened. Here it is, in Jim's words:

"Emily and I were married on May 11th and the flood occurred at the end of May. Francis called Emily and me at home late in the evening and told us that he had been out to the jumper base and the river was washing away the bank near the loft and the kitchen. It looked like the loft was about 'to go.' Francis, Emily and I went to the base in the Forest Service truck and we decided that Francis and I would empty the loft and Emily could start packing the dishes, etc. in the kitchen in case the river began to undermine it.

"Francis and I loaded the parachutes into the truck, then the sewing machines and then the miscellaneous equipment. I am not sure what we did with the packing tables, but probably moved them away from the loft and the river. All the time we were in the loft we could hear the ground giving away under it and by the time we got the building completely empty, it was actually beginning to 'teeter' over the river. It wasn't too long after that when the building went over the edge. It broke into pieces on the way down the bank and, when it hit the river, was swept away. Pieces of it could have ended up in the Columbia



Jim Allen gets ready to spot a load of 1948 NCSB rookies. Bill Eicher is closest to camera. (Courtesy Ed Summerfield)

River and as far away as the Pacific Ocean. Emily and I moved out to the airport and stayed there until the river went down and the kitchen and other buildings were no longer in danger.”

Encroachment of the river into the camp on the riverside of the airstrip was an obvious hazard, so construction was soon started at the new camp on the other side. Parachute rigging took place at one of the local Ranger Stations until the new loft building was completed. 🍄

Ed graduated from the University of Washington in 1951 with a forestry degree. He went into the Navy during the Korean War and served 21 years until his retirement. After getting his master's degree in forest management he worked for the Washington Department of Natural Resources, retiring in 1996. He can be reached at 1202 Rogers Ct. SW, Olympia, WA 98502.

New NSA Life Members since January 2005

Thanks for your support!

<u>#</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Base</u>	<u>Year</u>
129	BLAKELY	A.D. (DAVE)	MSO	1961
130	ENGLE	ROBERT D. (BOB)	MSO	1979
131	FLACH	CHARLES L. (CHUCK)	MSO	1968
132	GORDON	JOHN G. (JACK)	MSO	1964
133	HALL	STEVEN J. (STEVE)	MSO	1970
134	HOWE	JERRY W.	CJ	1965
135	HUNNICUT	TOM	RDD	1978
136	MONTGOMERY	BRUCE A.	IDC	1965
137	NELSON	DAVID K.	MSO	1957
138	SHERWOOD	TODD R.	MSO	1976
139	TURNER	BARRIE	MSO	1959
140	WILLIAMS	JERRY T.	RAC	1972

You can find a listing of the first 128 Life Members in the January 2005 issue of the NSA Smokejumper Magazine

Walter Rumsey's Statement Twelve Years After Mann Gulch

Walter Rumsey's 51-year-old son, Steve, lives in Colville, Washington, where he and his wife run a bookstore and publish a magazine. In February 1961, his Dad wrote the following statement concerning his recollections of the events of that day in 1949. Steve and the family have given permission to print this statement. Walter Rumsey perished in 1980 in a commuter plane crash near Omaha.

The Mann Gulch Fire

On August 5, 1949, 14 [15-Ed.] Forest Service smoke jumpers jumped over Mann Gulch, a small tributary of the Missouri River north of Helena, Montana, to put out a forest fire.

Fighting fire has been one of the important jobs of the Forest Service since its organization in 1905. The smoke-jumpers were organized after World War II [actually started in 1940-Ed.] to parachute fire fighters into remote areas before small fires became big ones. Often a small fire got out of control before men going in on foot could get to it. This fire, which was started by lightning, was to become the worst tragedy in the jumpers' history.

We took off from the Missoula airport at 2:00 p.m., in a converted DC-3. There were 15 [16-one jumper became airsick and didn't jump-Ed.] of us plus the spotter, the man who chose the jump spot and told us when to leave the plane.

We arrived over the fire about 3:15 p.m. The air was bumpy and rough. The fire was smoking up and we could see the dull red flames chewing away at the green timber. The fire looked small from the air, maybe 10 or 20 acres. We knew that a smoke chaser had been sent to the fire the day before from a nearby ranger station, but we had no way of knowing where he was.

The plane circled the fire two or three times while the spotter and **Wag Dodge** (MSO-41), the foreman, discussed the situation and decided on a jump spot. Most of us were airsick from the long flight over, and we could hardly wait to get out of the plane. The jumper next to me (**Merle Stratton** MSO-47) was so sick the spotter wouldn't let him jump. Considering what happened later, I'm sure he never regretted it. I was next to the door and jumped in the first group of three with Wag Dodge and **Bill Hellman** (MSO-46). Our target was a large opening in the scattered pine trees that covered the mountain on the north side of Mann Gulch. We knew there was a stiff breeze blowing before we left the plane because of the way the fire was burning and as we drifted down we turned our parachutes so our backs would be to the wind. In this position we could see where we were going to land and guide the parachute accordingly.

We all three landed hard on the rocky ground. We began



Walter Rumsey 1949 (Courtesy Steve Rumsey)

picking up our gear as the other jumpers floated down. After the last man had jumped the spotter began dropping the fire-fighting equipment, water, and supplies. Our jump area was on the north side of Mann Gulch and across the fire, which was burning near the ridge on the other side of the canyon. We gathered up our supplies and piled it together. Each man was assigned tools, and we left the jump area in single file and headed for the fire.

The fire had spread in the hour it had taken us to get organized, and the wind was blowing briskly towards us carrying the smell of smoke and heat. We reached the bottom of the gulch and, while the rest of us waited, Dodge and two others went up near the fire to locate (**Jim Harrison** (MSO-47), the smoke chaser who had walked into the fire the day before. Harrison had seen us jump and was making his way down to meet us. After meeting Harrison and getting his report, we regrouped and Dodge led us on a gradual climb back up the north slope of the canyon going west. This gradually brought us out of the canyon and up to where we could see the fire burning on the other side. The fire was burning fiercely and we could hear the roar of the flames.

We were going in a westerly direction down the gulch toward the Missouri River. The plan was to get behind the fire, which seemed to be moving in an easterly direction as the wind gave it momentum. We continued this course for several minutes, but it was rough going with our equipment through the rocks and brush. As we got higher up out of the draw, the brush gave way to a scattered stand of Ponderosa Pine and dry cheat grass.

At this point we could see that the fire was spreading very fast and was becoming dangerous. We continued down the north side of the gulch, hoping to get around behind the fire where it would be safe to go to work. However, it soon became apparent that the fire had jumped across the gulch ahead of us and was now burning on our side of the draw between us and the Missouri River. Dodge immediately told us to drop our tools and gear and to follow him. At this point, some of us were getting a little nervous about the situation.

I pitched the cross-cut saw I was carrying into the brush

and made my way up to the head of the line where I could hear further instructions from Dodge. The wind was increasing and the roar of the fire made it increasingly difficult to hear ordinary conversation. Dodge made a right turn up the mountain toward the ridge and we all followed in single file.

Many of the jumpers were as yet unconcerned and had not discarded their tools as Dodge had instructed. One jumper was taking pictures of the fire with his small camera. Another was carrying a five gallon tin of water on a backpack. I asked him why he didn't put it down so he could travel faster. He said he figured we would need it later. I didn't argue but made my way up to about three or four men behind Dodge. We were all struggling up the steep slope at a fast walk, but there was no panic.

As we worked our way toward the ridge, I noticed Harrison had stopped and was sitting down resting against a tree. Sweat poured from his face. He was still wearing his heavy smoke-chaser's pack. It was the last time I saw him. **Diettert** (Eldon) (MSO-49) was just ahead of me in the line, carrying a shovel and pulaski. I told him to give me the shovel to carry, as I had discarded my tools. He handed it to me and I leaned it against a large pine tree and hurried on.

The fire was catching up with us. We were all practically exhausted from our hurried climb up the mountain side, but now we increased our pace through fear. I think we all knew the danger we were in now. The fire seemed to be behind us and to the left, and we could smell the smoke and feel the heat. Hot ashes began falling around us. The head of the line had nearly reached the partial protection of the rocky ridge top, but some of the men were still several hundred feet behind.

The fire was upon us now, and Dodge realized we all couldn't make the ridge in time. He motioned and yelled for us to gather around him as he explained his escape plan. I was near enough to see his lips moving, but I couldn't hear his voice as he shouted to make us hear above the terrific roar. He knelt and lit a fire in the tinder-dry cheat grass at his foot. He had stopped in a clearing in the trees, and the fire he lit with his cigarette lighter quickly burned out an area several hundred feet long. His plan was for all of us to get into this burned-out area ahead of the main fire and so save ourselves. His shouted orders were lost in the roar of the fire, even to those of us who were close by.

I remember thinking what a good idea Dodge's escape fire was and I also remembered how a fire often stops, or at least slows down, when it reaches a high ridge. I thought if I could only reach the ridge I would be safe, and if I couldn't reach it,

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Walter Rumsey 1980 (Courtesy Steve Rumsey)

I could always duck back to the left into Dodge's burnt-out area and save myself. I looked back now and saw three men silhouetted against a sheet of red flame. I didn't look back a second time.

There were four of us now, **Sallee** (Bob) (MSO-49) ahead of me, **Diettert** on my right and

Hellman on my left. I couldn't see Dodge anymore because of the smoke. We raced for the rocky ridge only a hundred feet away. **Diettert** fell away to the right and out of sight. **Hellman** disappeared in the smoke to the left as **Sallee** and I scrambled to the top of the ridge and down the other side.

It seemed we were covering 15 feet at every step. I tripped and fell headlong into a currant bush, hardly caring whether I got up or not. **Sallee** paused and looked back for a second and I got to my feet. On we went, only now we were going down hill on the other side of the ridge. The smoke was so thick we could see only a hundred or so feet ahead. The ridge had slowed the fire but only for a minute.

We ran on not knowing where to go or what to do, when suddenly looming ahead of us in the smoke was a rock slide several hundred feet long and perhaps 75 feet wide. We stumbled into it exhausted and gasping for breath. "If this slide isn't big enough to protect us, it's too bad because we can't go another step," I thought to myself. We lay there for two or three minutes watching the fire come towards us. It was nearly 6:00 p.m., and we could see the red circle of the sun through the smoke.

The fire burned towards us from three sides now, which helped explain the amazing speed with which the fire had trapped us. The fire had not just been behind us as we struggled up the hill. Creating its own draft, like a giant furnace, it had swept around us and come in from both sides!

We saw a form staggering through the smoke ahead of the flames. It was a huge buck deer exhausted and with his lungs seared by the hot gases and smoke. He slumped to the ground a short distance from our sanctuary in the rocks and died.

In the meantime, the fire had reached the slide, and we took off our T-shirts and wrapped them around our faces to keep from breathing the smoke. The rock slide was on an open mountain slope, covered mostly with grass and sage brush with only a few scattered pine trees. Due to less fuel, the flames were only 8-10 feet high and, although small, the slide was large enough to protect us. We huddled in the rocks close to the ground as possible until we realized the fire had passed us and we were safe. Although we could feel the hot air from the flames, we had no trouble breathing. The smoke began to clear

and we discussed what we should do next. I'm sure we were both about half hysterical. We decided we would have to let the ashes cool a little before we tried to get back to where Dodge had lit his escape fire. We were sure that some of the other jumpers had made it to Dodge's burned-out area.

As we talked, the fire swept around us and moved north, leaving the scattered trees burning like torches all around us. It was dying down south of us, and we began picking our way back through the burning stumps and ashes. Suddenly, we heard a call from below us on the mountain slope. We yelled back and heard again a weak cry for help. We hurried off in the direction of the sound, but it took us several minutes to locate the caller in the smoke.

It was Bill Hellman. He was alive but badly burned. We laid him on a long flat rock to keep his burns out of the ashes and soot. There wasn't much else we could do. All of our first aid supplies were discarded on our flight up the mountain and we had only a little water. We gave him a drink and made him as comfortable as possible. We couldn't answer his questions as to the fate of the others.

Suddenly another shout and form loomed in the smoke. It was Dodge. He had heard our shouting and had made his way to us. His eyes were red with smoke and he was covered with dirt and ashes. He had laid flat in his burned-out escape fire and the main fire had passed over him. Very few words passed between us as the impact of the tragedy sunk in. Bob went with Wag to look for other survivors and I stayed with Hellman. They soon returned to tell us that the other men were beyond help.

Since Bill wasn't able to walk, we decided that Dodge and Sallee would go for help while I stayed with him. They left us a pint canteen of water and a can of white potatoes, which, was all the food and water we had between the four of us. They had a tough time finding their way down to the Missouri River in the dark. The trip took them several hours, but our luck changed when they reached the river. A fisherman passing by in his boat heard their shouts and took them to Hilger Landing where they telephoned for help.

In the meantime, Hellman and I waited on the mountain. Bill was having a hard time finding a comfortable position. He couldn't stay in one position longer than a few minutes. He was frantically thirsty, but I knew it would be hours before help arrived, and I tried to ration the water to him. It was almost dark when Wag and Bob left, and Bill and I prepared to wait through the night. Sleep was all but impossible for either of us because of the cold. We talked about our families, trying to pass away the time. He told me about his wife and their new baby boy. His burns didn't seem to bother him much, as long as we could find something to talk about. Our water was gone by midnight. Bill asked me to try to find my way back to the supplies and see if there wasn't water there. I hated to go because I was afraid I would lose him in the dark but he insisted, so I started back up the ridge in the general direction of the jump area. It was slow going through the rocks and burning trees and logs. I made my way to the top, hoping I would be able to see about where we had landed. It was no use. All I could see were millions of red pin pricks of fire in the black night as the tree stumps burned themselves out. I knew I could

never find the supplies in the dark and, if I had, we learned later that the water cans had burst from the heat of the fire.

I found my way back to Hellman by shouting and following his answering yells. By now it was two or three in the morning, and I opened the can of potatoes hoping that Bill could drink the salty water they were packed in. He managed to drink most of it and then slept a little. It was a long night.

At the first crack of dawn, I started for the Missouri River with the canteen to get water for Bill. It was rugged going down the steep slopes and over the rocks. I had gone nearly half a mile and was resting on a rock watching the thousands of still burning stumps. As I watched, some of the burning stumps far below me seemed to be moving! They were moving up the hill and they weren't red, they were white! I nearly fell off the rock in excitement and as I shouted, the lights stopped. The rescue party was soon beside me, and I was drinking from a cool water bag. We continued up the slope and found Hellman. A doctor gave first-aid and they carried him down to the river on a stretcher. He was soon in a Helena hospital, but his burns, plus the long night on the mountain without treatment were too much, and he died a few days later. [Both men actually died later the same day—Ed.]

The Mann Gulch Fire burned on for several days and eventually destroyed 5000 acres of forest and rangeland. The summer of 1949 was a bad one for fires, but untold thousand of acres were saved because the jumpers were able to get to the fire before it got out of control. Occasionally, the circumstances associated with forest fires gang up on man's feeble efforts and get the upper hand. Man Gulch was one of those fires. 🔦

My Sunshine

Nothing on this earth compares
To sunlight dancing from your children's hair.

It melts the heart; that incandescence—
The special gift of adolescence.

There's no treasure shared by husband and wife
That could ever surpass the gift of life.

Each child reflects sunshine in their own way,
Fulfilling your life day by day.

Those days in the sun will never fade:
Walking your toddler into first grade.

Or handing your "teen" the keys to the jitney;
Accepting a collect call, "Dad come get me."

Then on to college to do their thing,
Facing the world and trying their wings.

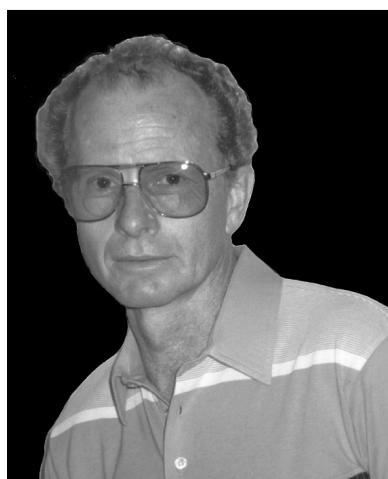
Your love goes with them as life unfolds,
Whether failure or success in reaching their goals.

To enjoy the sun; some head south with their spouse,
Not missis and me, we just tan in our house.

—Hal Meili (Cave Junction '52)



Sounding Off from the Editor



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

As I'M SITTING around the table in the training room at the Redmond Smokejumper Base (Oct. 2005), I'm amazed at the talent that we have volunteering to govern the NSA. It's been a long time since we have rotated back to Redmond since our meeting early in 2000. There have been big changes in Oregon smoke-jumping over the last 40 years. We used to man Redmond as a spike base from Cave Junction with six jumpers sleeping on cots in the hanger. Now Redmond is an Air Center and the Gobi is a piece of history.

Going through the lengthy agenda makes for a long day for these volunteers who keep this organization on the straight and narrow. It is truly a labor of love as all expenses incurred are by the board member at no cost to the NSA.

NSA President **Doug Houston** (RAC-73) ramrods the meeting with Past President **Ron Stoleson** (MSO-56) providing guidance. Doug was Base Manager at NCSB before his retirement, and it is good to have someone with his connections to

current jumper operations on the board.

Charlie Brown (IDC-56) starts off with the Treasurer's report. Past NSA President **Larry Lufkin** (CJ-63) and **John Helmer** (RDD-59) did an extensive evaluation of our multi-year membership obligations. Charlie's report is detailed, and it looks like we are on top of our income and expenses as never before.

John Helmer follows with the investment report. We have finally broken out of the mindset of passbook savings accounts. We are using John's expertise and 40-year background in the business to return 20% on a portion of our funds. John is handling the NSA account at no charge to the organization.

We take advantage of our board again as **Larry Lufkin**, retired government audit supervisor, volunteers to run an audit on our books.

Life Membership Chairman **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) reports that we are now up to 140 Life Members. This membership is very important to the future of the NSA. This money is not touched but invested and the income is used for the daily expenses of the NSA. Please consider becoming a Life Member at some point in order to keep us viable for years to come.

Membership Chairman **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) reports that we are at 1715 members but need to keep actively recruiting to stay at this level. We have over 1500 smoke-jumpers in the database for whom we have no address. We need some members to do "people searches." Can you help? Fred is stepping down and **John McDaniel** (CJ-57) will be handling the job by the end of the year. We owe Fred a real big "thanks"



for his work in this key position.

NSA Historian **Larry Longley** (NCSB-72) reports on a new smokejumper video produced by **Steve Smith**. It will be marketed to the networks. Fingers crossed that we will realize some income. We know Steve does outstanding work. He's one of a kind.

Doug handles the Trail Maintenance Project report from **Jon McBride** (MSO-54). Under Jon's leadership

the program continues to grow. Be sure to check out the insert in this issue for signups for the summer of 2006.

Joe Stutler (MSO-71) reports on the status of his project to get corporate advertising as a way to fund *Smokejumper* magazine. Joe has had 37 years working in fire and is using his many contacts. If he can pull this one off, we will owe him more than a pat on the back.

All this time our next President, **John Twiss** (RAC-67), is asking key questions and making valuable suggestions. No wonder John has recently been appointed as director of law enforcement and investigations for the U.S. Forest Service. Wow! NSA President with an office in D.C. John is our connection with our new merchandiser, Western Heritage from Colorado. After six years, I'm relieved to turn over that job to someone, a professional business operation in this case.

Mark Corbet (LGD-74) is the only active jumper on the board and is hosting this meeting at the base. Mark has been jumping for over 30 years with over 300 fire jumps without injury. He has probably done more research on the Triple Nickle smokejumper operation than anyone.

At the far end of the table NSA Secretary **Dave Bennett** (MS-61) has been working steadily throughout the meeting. Dave does an outstanding job in this position. He never seems to get a break at the meetings. Always something to record; delete the excess words and

record the bottom line. This is the toughest job in the room. Dave looks in great shape. We all hope that his enthusiasm will go on forever.

Well, now you have been to an NSA Board Meeting. You can see that this is a working board. Each

person has talents to bring to the job. Do any of you have the willingness to contribute and keep us running strong? You have a pretty good idea of what we're doing. Drop me a line or email if you are interested, and I'll connect you to the proper person. 🙏

Fire and Ice: U.S. Jumpers Tour Russian Bases, Warm to Russian Hospitality

In 1984, Bruce Ford (MSO-75) and Wayne Williams (MSO-77) embarked on a winter trip to what was then the Soviet Union. They tried to contact the Russian smokejumpers while in Moscow, but they had little luck. As tourists off the street, they were allowed little access due to the Cold War atmosphere of the time. In 1990, a Soviet delegation from Avialesookhrana, (Aerial Fire Protection Service, or AFPS hereafter) came through Missoula, and Bruce, who was jumping there at the time, tagged along as a translator. In 1991, he traveled on his own to Russia and got to know people in the fire organization. After transferring to Fairbanks in 1992, he started working regularly with BLM and Forest Service exchange programs, and he's traveled to Russia several more times since then on both official and personal visits. In January 2005, Bruce and Bob Schober (MSO-95) returned to Russia and spent a month visiting jump bases. This is Bruce's account.

Queuing up to the door of an airplane is all in a day's work for a smokejumper. But it's January and minus 15 degrees Fahrenheit outside. The jumpers in front of you are 14- and 15-year-old boys and girls, many on their first jump. The 17-year-olds already have several jumps under their belts and sit nonchalantly waiting their turns. That's because this is Russia, and being tough is all part of growing up. With a throaty roar, our bi-wing recip AN-2 (nicknamed "Annushka") had seemed to levitate in an instant to 3,500 feet. A vast white sea of fields and forest stretched to the flat Siberian horizons, hummocky bogs sleeping frozen under a snowy mantle.

Bob Schober and I are here as guests of Vadim Seryoshkin, head smokejumper at the Tyumen base, just east of the Ural mountains in Siberia. We are midway through a month-long whirlwind tour of jump bases from the Finnish border to the Sea of Japan, visiting old friends and making many new ones. Vadim had come to Boise in 2002 with a group of Russian jumpers to observe BLM rookie training. We had also met and worked together several times in Russia, and I had for too long neglected his standing invitation to visit the Tyumen region.

Vadim—tall, courtly, and silver-haired—is a former Special Forces jumper who recently compiled a smokejumper-training manual for AFPS. He has been a smokejumper since

1972 and worked in Mongolia for three years in the early 80s, helping establish a smokejumping program there. At gatherings of Russia's head jumpers, he is one of the "mammoths," as old salts are termed, and a calm, gently humorous, ameliorating presence in the often heated discussions among these notoriously strong personalities.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, severely limited budgets have forced AFPS to creative extremes in financing jumper training and operations. Refresher jumping and rookie training are often done in conjunction with local skydiving and sport-flying clubs. Cost-sharing is beneficial for all parties. In Soviet times, these aviation clubs were ubiquitous, and kids barely hit their teens before they were up parachuting and learning to fly small acrobatic planes like the Yak-52. It was to just such a reconstituted club that Vadim took us on this bright, frigid January day.

He had offered us a chance to jump the new smokejumper canopy, the Forester-3. It is a piggyback ram-air canopy, drogue-deployed, with the main canopy on top. The reserve canopy is identical to the main. Bob and I underwent the mandatory medical exam; a licensed nurse had to approve us for jumping by taking our pulses and blood pressures. We had loaded Bob up in a Yak-52 to go up and do some loops and rolls, when someone came running out and said that anyone who wanted to jump should get chuted up. That's how I wound up on a load where everyone seemed to be older than 50 or younger than 20. I guess everyone in between is too busy working for a living. Jumping in the cold is not so bad; as with most jumps, you are so occupied you forget the freeze until you make it to the ground. I just enjoyed the quiet at a couple thousand feet above a fairytale land sculpted from ice.

A Visit To Pushkino

We had arrived in Moscow in mid-January and gone directly to Pushkino, where the central base of AFPS is located. Roughly Russia's equivalent of NIFC for aerial fire attack, it's the coordinating center for the 24 regional bases located across the country. The system currently employs about 1,500 smokejumpers and 2,500 rappellers (all jumpers are also cross-trained to rappel). In recent years, they have begun to acquire their own

aircraft and as of 2003 had 102 fixed-wing craft and helicopters. Because of a recent government reorganization, AFPS works under the Ministry of Natural Resources and coordinates closely with managers and ground firefighting forces of the various federal forests spread across Russia's vast taiga. Of Russia's nearly 3 billion acres of forested land, only 1.8 billion are protected from fire; a large portion of that is accessible only by air.

AFPS has participated in technical exchanges with many countries, including the U.S. In 1976, **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57) and other fire managers went to the Soviet Union and in turn hosted Soviet fire managers in the U.S. the following year. This initial exchange bore fruit in the form of several technical innovations on both sides. In 1990, Dick Stauber, the Forest Service rep at BIFC, initiated a new round of exchanges, which soon became centered in the Forest Service's Region 4. Throughout the 90s, jumpers from McCall went to Russia, and Russian jumpers and other fire people came to McCall and the Salmon-Challis National Forest, and served with the Logan and Boise hotshot crews. In 1997 and 1998 there were all-Russian hotshot crews (with some U.S. overhead) working out of Moyer helibase on the Salmon-Challis. Fire managers from both sides participated in the exchanges. BLM Alaska exchanged official delegations in 1992-3, and the first Russian jumpers came to work in Alaska in 1994. Later in the 90s, the exchange became BLM-wide, and several groups came to work out of Boise.

Eduard Davidenko and Andrey Eritsov, central figures with the international exchange and technology-development programs, met us in Pushkino. They have both been to the U.S. and other countries numerous times. Eduard was part of the delegation that hosted Bill Moody in 1976. He also worked in Cuba and Mongolia for extended periods, helping establish fire-protection programs. Andrey has jumped fires in Alaska and the Great Basin and worked on hotshot crews in the U.S. He recently returned from Iran and when we saw him was getting ready for a two-month detail in Europe.

Pushkino is a suburb about 30 miles northeast of Moscow's center, positioned at the abrupt edge between city and country. A short walk from the central base takes one to tall pine forest and agricultural fields. There is a forestry institute in town, surrounded by vast parks of pine, larch, and birch. AFPS's three-story, medium-size building houses a lean-and-mean organization where everyone knows everyone else. They keep close contact with all the far-flung bases under their purview—no easy task; when they come to work in the morning, folks nine time zones away at the base in Chukotka, against the Bering Strait, are getting ready to leave for the day.

With only month-long visas, Bob and I knew we couldn't dilly-dally if we were to get all the way to Vladivostok and back. After a brief tour around Moscow, we decided to head by train to St. Petersburg and to the Northwest base in Petrozavodsk. A night train got us to St. Petersburg, where we were met by Valeriy Belov, a researcher at a local forestry institute whom I had met in Missoula in 1990. He put us up in an apartment at the institute and introduced us to E. S. Artsybashev, a well-known fire researcher. I'd used Artsybashev's book on fire behavior and control as the initial source for a list of Russian fire

terms I'd been compiling for several years. He is currently trying to push an extensive program of prescribed fire in Russia.

On To Petrozavodsk

We spent two days in St. Petersburg, known as the "Venice of the North." It is a city of palaces, ornate cathedrals, and bridges spanning the numerous branches of the Neva River delta as it flows into the Baltic Sea. One would need months to see a fraction of it. Another night train got us to Petrozavodsk, where we were met by Dimitry (Dima) Kulakov and Valeriy Korotkov. Dima came to Boise to observe rookie training in 2002 and wrote a report that was praised as the best anyone had brought back from the U.S. Valeriy worked with the Redmond Hotshots in 1994 and Elko Helitack in 1999. He was once the head jumper here, but he now devotes nearly all his time to his passion: photography, both still and video. Nearly all AFPS publications and yearly calendars are graced with his photos, and he has filmed many jump videos with a helmet-cam.

The Petrozavodsk base is one of the regional aviation centers for AFPS fleet aircraft, which include AN-2, AN-24, AN26, and MI-8 helicopters. Their fire protection extends all the way to the Murmansk region, far above the Arctic Circle at the border of Norway. The southern region along the Finnish border is known as Karelia, a land dotted with innumer-



Trainee with head jumper before first jump in Vladimir (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

able lakes that constitutes their principle jump country. Petrozavodsk itself lies on the shore of Lake Onego, the second-largest freshwater lake in Europe. Only Lake Ladoga, near St. Petersburg, is larger. In summer all manner of biting insects swarm, but when we were there the lake was a vast, frozen plain, the forest accessible only by skis or snow machine.

The base headquarters itself is a three-story building on the outskirts of town. As with most bases, the principle departments are administration, finance, aviation, dispatch, and logistics. Several people hired exclusively as drivers are associated with the motor pool. The base manager and main administrators generally come from the ranks of pilot-observers, a sort of flying FMO. Alexei Schedrin, the assistant base manager, gave us a tour. Alexei speaks excellent English and worked in the U.S. in 1998 on an all-Russian hotshot crew, spending nearly a month on Florida wildfires. Members of the jumper/rappeller cadre have their own offices and areas for equipment storage and maintenance. Among these is a little workroom for maintenance and repair of automatic activation devices, or parachute AADs. At many bases, the “*priborshchik*” who does this is often an old jumper in the twilight of his career, and his workroom seems to attract those seeking to get away from the hubbub. Cozy and cluttered, walls festooned with racy calendars and 30 years of photos, it’s where you go to have a leisurely lunch and BS with friends.

Important Decisions Should Be Made Twice

A word about vodka, the Russian lubricant of friendship. It is *de rigueur* at meeting and parting and is accompanied by a plethora of traditions that make its consumption a rather humane and civilized affair. You drink toasts with friends, not alone, and must eat something after each shot, preferably sitting around a table loaded with ample food. As it generally goes, the first toast is to friendship, success, etc.; the second follows so quickly that “a bullet can’t pass” between the first and second. If women are present, the third is to women, and the men may drink standing. If it’s a guy gathering, the third is to fallen comrades, drunk in silence with no clinking. The fourth is to the hope that no one will have to drink the third toast to any of *us*. And so on. The last is “*na poshoshok*,” or a “walking stick” for the road. As Bob and I were continually arriving and leaving over the course of a month...well. Some ancient sages held that all-important decisions should be made twice—first soberly and again while drunk. Only thus could weighty matters be considered in all aspects. Many Russians would certainly concur: weigh it once with the head and once with the heart.

Meeting The Rookies

Returning to Moscow, we headed directly to Vladimir, 100 miles or so to the east, to observe jump training for rookie pilot-observers. These kids either had graduated or would soon graduate from forestry institutes. New recruits are given a six-to-eight-month course at Pushkino in fire behavior and suppression, flight navigation, and other procedures of aerial fire detection and suppression. They are also trained as spotters for smokejumpers and rappellers, as this is another of their rou-

tine duties. Each rookie pilot-observer must also complete five helicopter rappels and two parachute jumps. Though operational jumps and rappels will not necessarily be part of their further duties, this gives them some empathy for the firefighters they will be working with.

When we arrived at the airport in Vladimir, the 20 rookies were packing their chutes for the first jump the following day. They had spent the previous week learning to pack the round PTL, a pilot’s emergency chute now also used for training rookie smokejumpers. It is packed in a sleeve and is equipped, like all smokejumper chutes, with an automatic activation device set to open the main after four to five seconds, falling under a drogue chute. Of course, you are supposed to deploy the main yourself before the AAD pops. A fresh-faced crowd of early-twenty-somethings, the rookies were supervised by several experienced smokejumper squadleaders and a couple of their own number who had previously worked as smokejumpers. One of these, Volodya, had jumped for five years in the Vladivostok region and was moving into the pilot-observer ranks for enhanced career opportunities. A gruff and quietly efficient guy, Volodya was disgruntled that he was not getting any jumps out of this, as he was considered already experienced enough. Relegation to packing instructor was already giving him second thoughts about his career path. It put me in mind of Richard Widmark in *Red Skies of Montana*.

Anatoly Perminov, who had come on a jumper exchange to Boise and Alaska in 1999, oversaw the whole chute- and rappel-training operation. A former pilot-observer himself, as well as a sport-jumper, he now is the lead smokejumper for AFPS. His ready laugh and easy-going manner belie a predilection for strict discipline and meticulous attention to detail. As the rookies finished packing their chutes, he would call them in for oral exams on parachuting fundamentals.

The following morning, we piled into a sawed-off bus stacked high with parachute bags, rookies, and jump-spot equipment and set off for a large field several miles from town. The wind was chill and brisk, lingering at the edge of the five-meters-per-second maximum speed allowable for a first rookie jump. Soon after we arrived and began setting up a windsock and radio equipment, an AN-2 with the first load of rookies droned into sight and circled, throwing two sets of streamers that drifted into a little village beyond the edge of the field. After a few more circles, the plane descended and landed on skis in the broad, snow-covered field. It roared up to us in a blizzard of whirling snow and stopped. The spotter and first load piled out to consult on the wind speed. We had been getting gusts on the ground of up to eight or nine meters per second, so Anatoly elected to wait a bit to see if the wind quieted. As we stood, stamping our thick fur boots on the snow, a horse-drawn sleigh pulled up along the road, presenting an anachronistic contrast to the waiting airplane and bus. From the smell, I guessed it was hauling manure.

A Storied City

In an hour or so, the plane and first load took off to throw some more streamers. These also wound up on the villagers’ roofs, and Anatoly decided to scrap the jump for the day. This unexpected free time gave us an opportunity to see something



Bob Schober, Yuri Yushkov (WWII paratrooper/smokejumper), Bruce Ford. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

of Vladimir, a city founded just over 1,000 years ago and one of the “golden ring” of ancient cities around Moscow famous for their domed churches and monasteries. Designed as a fortress, it was built on a high bluff above the confluence of two rivers. Batu, a grandson of Genghis Khan, came here with a Mongol army in 1237 to reconnoiter. He returned in February 1238 when the frozen swamps and rivers allowed better maneuvering and besieged, stormed, and burned much of the town. Some of the city gates and churches predate even the Mongol depredations. The Assumption Cathedral, finished in 1160, perches at the highest point of the escarpment, and its golden domes are visible for miles about. When Vladimir was Russia’s principal city in the 13th and 14th centuries, her tsars were crowned in its nave. Anatoly and Pavel Arsyonov, the local head jumper, showed us a square in front of the cathedral where they once did an exhibition jump. The wind was stiff and the spot tight, but no one hung up on the domes and spires.

Triumph!

The next day, we returned to the jump spot and set up our equipment. Besides a tall windsock and an “X” target panel, there was a loudspeaker system and several sets of portable radios. Each jumper would wear a leather helmet with earphones hooked to a radio. Pavel, the head instructor on the spot, could talk them in by radio or, failing that, chew them out by loudspeaker. Jumping in snow-covered fields, Russian

jumpers often eschew jumpsuits for heavy coats, gloves, and fur boots.

Anatoly deemed the winds acceptable. The AN-2 skied off in a billowing white cloud, climbed to 1,000 meters, and threw streamers. The village was spared falling paper today, and soon the first chute bloomed out. This was Vasya, the biggest guy in the group and the “wind dummy.” (The Russian slang for first guy out is “*na myaso*,” or “meat.”) He landed a couple hundred yards away to great cheers from his colleagues. With good reason, trainers the world over choose huge fields for initial jumps. Despite Pavel’s best efforts at steering them, some got beyond his control through muffled radios or pulled wires, and some were probably too far away even to hear the loudspeaker. But they all remembered to land into the wind and came trudging back through the snow in one piece, grinning triumphantly. The lone female rookie, Elvira, showed up her peers by coming closest of all to the target panel. There were insufficient chutes for all three loads, so repacking commenced immediately on green canvas panels stretched out on the snow. Packing your chute in temperatures hovering barely above zero is not a task for the faint of heart, but then again, this is Russia, and adversity is a thing to revel in.

The bus ride back would have been familiar to anyone who has made or witnessed a first jump: laughing, backslapping, and recounting that one jump story over and over.

From Vladimir, we rode the train to Tyumen and after three or four days with Vadim headed on to Krasnoyarsk, in the

heart of Siberia and also part of Russia's most active fire region. There we met Yuri Yushkov, one of Russia's true veteran smoke-jumpers; he was a paratrooper in World War Two, and he jumped several times behind German lines. He started smoke-jumping in Novosibirsk in the early 50s, when they would still climb out on the wing of a two-seater PO-2 to jump. We also encountered the most frigid temperatures yet: minus 31 degrees Fahrenheit. Still, it was nothing like bygone days, say the old-timers; Siberia has been getting warmer lately. The Krasnoyarsk base had just acquired 60 brand-new Forester-3 chutes, and the jumpers were busily packing them for making the mandatory three wringing-out jumps on each canopy.

Time was catching up with us, and in order to make it to Vladivostok, we opted to forsake the trans-Siberian and flew directly there.

On The Edge Of The World In Vladivostok

Giorgy (Gosha) Kuzminikh, our host in Vladivostok, is something of a legend among his fellow head jumpers across Russia. He is a man who pushes the limits of the Russian language, spinning and twisting it into startlingly new and incredibly funny forms. Gosha is a wordsmith, and he draws on a deep fund of literature, history, and myth. As a non-native speaker, I can understand only a fraction of his metaphorical output. He also has several thousand jumps and is one of the most experienced parachutists in the system. We jumped a string of fires together in the Great Basin in 1998, and I had the opportunity to see the bright light of Gosha's wit illuminating some of the absurdities of our own culture and fire scene.

Vladivostok is the San Francisco of Russia: all hills and bays. It is headquarters for the Russian navy's Pacific fleet. Japan lies just across the sea, over which comes a flood of used cars, all with right-side steering wheels. They find their way from Japan into Siberia, even into European Russia, and Gosha is a point-man for many jumpers looking to buy good cars at reasonable prices.

Gosha also has a host of buddies in sport and military jumping. One of these is Andrei, who works as a para-rescue technician at the airport and had access to an MI-2 helicopter we could use to jump. Gosha just happened to have two Forester-3 chutes available and set us to packing them for use the following day. We stretched them out on tumbling mats in the base's gym, and Gosha walked us through the packing procedures. Like virtually all non-sport rigs in Russia, it is deployed by a static-lined drogue and equipped with an AAD.

Gosha and his wife, Natasha, rousted us out of our beds at 6:30 in the morning and poured tea down us. On her way to work, Natasha dropped us off at the base, where we met Andrei, loaded our gear, and set out in his van to where we could meet the helicopter in a field. Andrei told us of his work as we drove. He has around 3,500 jumps, and like virtually all men in Russia, served in the military. As a para-rescue technician, he deals mostly with incidents on the water—boats capsized in storms and the like. Autumn through spring, many people get into trouble on the ice, falling through or getting stuck on floes.

Vladivostok sits on a peninsula between two bays, virtually surrounded by water. Rounding the head of the eastern bay, we passed through the town of Arseniev, named for the military explorer who 100 years ago or so mapped the Ussuri River region to the north. He had as a guide a phenomenally woods-savvy native hunter named Dersu. Arseniev's account of his travels and adventures with Dersu became a classic, and Dersu came to be considered the archetype of man living in tune with nature. Kurosawa, the great Japanese director, made a magnificent film from the story called *Dersu Uzala*. In book-on-tape form, Arseniev's tale was immensely popular one winter in the sewing room in Missoula, helping keep me and several others sane while manufacturing endless PG bags.

Gravity Did Her Usual Job

Winding through woods that were just beginning to catch the first breath of spring, we finally came to where the helicopter awaited us in a snowy field. A crowd of kids, mysteriously out of school in the middle of the day, had gathered around. We chuted up and got our checks, and Gosha gave us a quick exit lesson at the helicopter. Russian smokejumpers exit skydiver-style, diving out headfirst and arching to stabilize. The cabin we piled into was surprisingly roomy for a little ship, stripped of all accoutrements but a static line cable.

As with the AN-2, this machine seemed to attain altitude instantly. Andrei threw a set of streamers. He was filming it all with a helmet cam, and we all mugged for the camera, making a brave show of not freezing our butts off. One pass at a stately 60 to 70 knots, and out we all went. Andrei zipped in and about, filming us. I had jumped a Forester-3 chute about three years earlier at a winter overhead refresher in Siberia, but this was a totally different beast. Since then, they had added an extra cascade to each steering line and straightened the canopy's trailing edge. Accustomed to our rather doggy smoke-jumper canopies, I could actually scare myself with this one. It had a lot of zip, and a pronounced flare for landing. Gravity did her usual job, and we arrived at terra firma with thoroughly frozen fingers but otherwise intact and happy. It was the first helicopter jump for both Bob and me.

All this required celebration, so we found a store and acquired a very large bottle of vodka, which we toted along to a little roadside eatery. As it was Bob's first jump in Russia, our hosts plunked a jump pin in his shot glass. His task was to catch it in his teeth while downing the shot, avoiding swallowing the thing. To hurrahs all around, he succeeded wonderfully.

This effectively capped our trip, and it was time to start on the reverse journey. A month sprouts wings when one is in good company, and that of Russian jumpers is without peer. This space allows for only a taste of this vast land and of the generous, hospitable people who live there. It has been a delight for many of us who have taken part in these exchanges to discover a parallel universe, a smokejumper family on the other side of the globe, different and yet so very like us. 🙏

In the future, we hope to bring you more stories about Russian smokejumping, from its history and development to tales from the jumpers themselves. At its peak in the 70s and 80s, AFPS had over 4,000 smokejumpers. That's a lot of jump stories.

Conversations at the Flame

by Chuck Pickard (Missoula'48)

The Flame was a quiet bar, not a neighborhood establishment. It was frequented by a variety of patrons: local ranchers from the valley, loggers, cowboys, some tourists, and a few smokejumpers. The bartender wore a white jacket and carried a small towel on one arm. He was all business. He exercised control and gave good service. His name was Cliff, and he was a gentleman.

The "line" this night was made up mostly of smokejumpers, some of the best looking, most knowledgeable and experienced jumpers that Forest Service Region 1 had yet produced. **Fred Barnowsky** (MSO-42) was the quiet, tall, no nonsense guy. **Jack Wall** (MSO-48), freckled, always a grin, a good soldier type, sipped a beer. **Garfield Thorsrud** (MSO-46), known as "Gar", held a G ball. Gar was of Norwegian birth, or was it Swede? "Viking" fitted him better. **Max Allen** (MSO-48), the "whittler," sat on his stool. Max and **John Scicek** (MSO-49) were two of the best pole/tree climbers around. Both had worked high line for the power companies in the off season. The talk was about a new jumper boss coming to take over. "The Federal Building screwing things up again," someone said. **Bob Crowe** (MSO-46) was on the end. "Barefoot Bob," we called him. At Nine Mile he was always barefoot and rode his old Indian motorcycle that way. Bob really shouldn't have been there this evening: the rumor was he was in love with a girl from Bonner. Crowe spoke with his gravel voice, "Wonder how Cooley will take another new boss?" Wall ordered another beer. Allen slid off his stool and dropped a few quarters in the slot machine. Mechanical machines then, no press buttons, real "one arm bandits." Max got two cherries, four quarters back and got back on his stool. Cliff served up more G balls.

Fire danger was low and so far it had been a quiet season with only a few fire jumps. Project work at Dixie came into the conversation. "Yeah," another said. "High Pocket Higgins can't wait for the jumpers." Understand the Dixie Ranger District is a very remote place, north of the Salmon River, and hemmed in by mountains. One on the line remarked that he had the thrill of his life on his first trip to Dixie. "I flew down in the Ford with four others to build a bridge across Crooked Creek. Slim Phillips was the pilot. No one should ever land a plane on that so-called air strip, it's only 400 feet long, but Slim dropped the Ford on the ground. Then Higgins puts us down the creek in a white tent to build the bridge. We went up the side of the gulch and cut down two 12-inch cedars, peeled one and started on the second when the first one, slick as it was, started sliding downhill. There was no stopping it. It went through the tent and drove itself into the creek."

Most of the crew that evening had also been to Dixie and the conversation turned to flying out of Dixie. When Slim was at the controls he would lock the breaks on the Ford, power

up all three engines to max, release the brakes and jet off. To gain altitude he would fly into a nearby box canyon that had a rock pinnacle sticking up, do a wing over, bend the Ford around the rock and fly out. Many jumpers kept their eyes closed.

The ranger on the Dixie District, Higgins, was from the old school. He wore a standard Ranger Stetson, badly stained, and his name came from the fact he was all legs. His belt line was some 12 inches higher than an average man. I guess the Forest Service types in the Federal Building knew they had a winner down there with Higgins in charge. Some five miles down the truck road from the ranger station was Dixie, Idaho; population 9 people.

Fred asked if anyone had ever met "Buckskin Billie" down at Dixie. "We surely did," someone said. "It was while doing the bridge thing at Crooked Creek. **Steve Henault** (MSO-46) was with us that time. Steve turned one day and almost fainted; there stood Billie staring at him. Billie introduced himself and we all sat down for a break. Billie had hiked up the trail from the Salmon River to have words with Higgins." Billie came from a good family back east, decided the family business wasn't for him, came west and settled along the Salmon. He built a shack, planted a garden and became self-sufficient. He was not unlike many others who chose the Salmon country to escape civilization, hunt for gold, or run from the law.

"I wonder how the crew at Castle Creek is doing?" another asked. "That ain't a bad place compared to Dixie. Mansfield and Ed Eagan took the crew down there last week," Barnowsky said. "**Fred Brauer** (MSO 42) asked for volunteers, so those two volunteered." "Who went over to Red River?" Crowe asked. "No one yet, but someone is going to Moose Creek this week." Gar spoke up, "How come I never get picked for those juicy jobs?" Fred grinned and answered, "Because you're an important person, Gar."

Someone mentioned that **Al Hammond** (MSO-46) and **Wag Dodge** (MSO-42) were going to stay at Nine Mile and work the air strip above camp. **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) and Brauer are hanging close to the loft to receive the new project boss.

Gar sat staring at the red and white neon lighting on the back bar. It resembled a fire. "What's the problem, Gar?" someone asked. It turned out Gar had a plan to go mountain goat hunting that fall in the Missions. Almost at once the question of the grizzly bears came up. Grizzlies always caused some Oh Oh's for smokejumpers on fires there. "Those mountains belong to the bears," another said. "And remember what happened to Jack Nash when he hunted one fall up there. He ended up shooting two grizzlies just to get out. He got both with that old 30-40 Krag rifle he always hunted with. He never went there again." Gar, the Viking, said nothing. "How you

gonna get the goat out, Gar?" Barnowsky asked. "On my shoulders," Gar answered. Gar was going to get a Johnson pilot to fly him in, pick a jump spot and bail out. Gar was trying to figure out a way to pack his rifle without causing a tangle. The experts on the line hashed this out, back and forth, and it was decided Gar should saw off the rifle stock and tape what was left to his leg. Wall had another beer. Cliff mixed another round of G balls, stared at Gar, said nothing, and moved down the line. A few strangers came and went.

In comes (Wild) **Bill Carver** (MSO-47). "Hey, you guys.

I met two nice co-eds at the U who need dates. Who wants to go?" Gar turned around and said, "Like the uglies you had last week?" No one got up. Another pleasant evening was spent at the famous Flame Lounge in downtown Missoula.

At 7:00 the next morning at the Nine Mile camp, Wall and Allen, wearing their white aprons, could be seen standing in the doorway of the mess hall. Effie Brown, the cook, and her husband, "Brownie," the bull cook, were getting ready to feed breakfast to 75 jumpers. Everyone else was on the field doing calisthenics. 🐻

Tragedy At Moose Creek

by Roland Pera (Missoula '56)

Somewhere around noon of August 2, 1959, we got a two-man call for a fire in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area. **Bob Reid** (MSO-57) and I were soon suited up and flying southwest, not having any idea that this would be a fire jump that would never be forgotten. Before we took off, I do recall being told that our walkout would be a whopping 27 miles. We jumped mid to late afternoon, cut down a snag, and had the fire well under control by dark.

I imagine that we could have begun our walkout the next morning, but probably trying to squeeze in a few extra hours of overtime (did anyone ever do that?), we commenced our pack-out about noon the next day. We got our gear to the trail by early afternoon and were ready to begin our walkout.

Did I say that the walkout was a 27 miler? We carefully perused the map and noted that if we walked down the creek a couple of miles, we could cut off about 10 miles. The designated route required us to climb 1500 feet to a lookout and then back down to the same creek from where we started. The more we looked at the map, the more appealing the alternate route became.

We decided that we would give it a try, and if it was a mistake, we would stop, eat some crow, turn around, and use the trail to the lookout.

We started down the creek and found that the going was surprisingly easy, at which point we congratulated ourselves on our brilliant decision. After a mile or so of easy going, our luck ran out. The creek snaked through a canyon, and it was no longer possible to walk beside the creek. At times we walked in the creek and other times, where the current was too swift, we climbed 50 to 75 feet above the creek, carefully picking our way and praying that we would not slip and fall. Why didn't we turn around per our original plan? First of all, we were probably too stubborn, and after negotiating canyon walls, we realized we would have to do the same thing if we turned around. In addition, we felt that the trail was very close.

We finally arrived at the trail, feet and boots soaking wet, but miraculously unhurt. We thought we could reach the

trail in half an hour. It took more like two and one-half hours. It is a well-established anatomical fact that a part of a young man's brain does not fully develop until his mid twenties. It is the part of the brain that is reserved for judgment, or making good decisions. I was 23 years young and

Bob was a few years younger. Perhaps a couple of years later we might have collectively made a better decision.

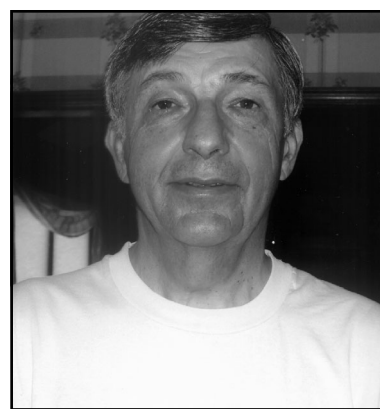
An hour or so was spent drying out. It was now five or six p.m. and time to hit the trail for an 18-mile walk to Moose Creek Ranch.

The trail was fine allowing us to make good time; however, around midnight we were pretty tired having spent much of our energy foolishly walking the creek. About that time we came upon a cabin. Fortunately, it was open and we crashed for two or three hours. Then it was back on the trail. We arrived at Moose Creek Ranch in time to smell the bacon frying and the coffee brewing.

After a wonderful breakfast and a shower, we tried to catch a little sleep but were soon awakened and told to get our butts over to Moose Creek. A Ford Tri-motor was bringing in some cargo and would take us out to Grangeville.

Moose Creek is an easy four mile walk from the Ranch, so we arrived late morning and waited by the runway for the Ford to make its appearance. I was sitting on the ground, leaning against a tree about 75% asleep, but I do remember hearing the plane coming in.

The next thing I remembered was the sound of the motors revving up and a second or two later, the sickening



Roland Pera (Courtesy R. Pera)

sound of a crash. The plane was attempting a landing around 11:00 a.m., too late for a Ford or a Doug. The pilot later said that the windsock was almost limp on his flyover.

Apparently, a small tailwind came up after his flyover which was enough to cause the Ford to run out of runway on its landing. The pilot tried a ground loop. That was the engine revving sound that I remembered hearing. The Moose Creek Strip in 1959 was totally unforgiving. Once the plane touched down, it was committed. A mountain loomed not far from the end of the runway.

About the time I heard the crash, I opened my eyes and saw the plane and saw it immediately burst into flames. **Ron Stoleson** (MSO-56), seated right by the open door, was the first out and suffered minor burns. The next thing I recall was the sickening sight of two people, **John Rolf** (MSO-57) and **Gary Williams** (MSO-59), rolling on the ground, clothes aflame. Bob and I immediately swung into action and put out their fires. We pulled them away from the wreckage and began tending to them. Bob took care of Gary and I tried to do what I could for John.

It was obvious that they were both horribly burned but having had no experiences with burn victims, I naively thought that when a doctor arrived they would both be okay.

Gary was burned the worst of the two and died within an hour or so. He was conscious and able to do some limited talking with Bob. John was 50% to 75% lucid and spoke quite a bit. Having a musical background, I spent some of the time singing to him. At one point he asked me if I knew "Down By the Old Mill Stream." He also asked me several times if this was a bad dream.

A doctor from Grangeville arrived by plane around three-o' clock and after Gary died. I was still in deep denial as to the eventual outcome for John. The doctor gave John a shot of Demoral and took me aside to tell me that his burns were such that he didn't stand a chance. John was put on the

plane and taken to the hospital in Grangeville, where he died around six o' clock.

The pilot, Bob Culver, had crawled out of the window and was burned, but not seriously. He did, however, spend five days in the hospital. The FS official, Alva Blackbery, crawled out after him and had burns on his back. Compared to John and Gary, his burns appeared minor, but he died four or five days later. Apparently he had a lot of allergies that prevented the use or rendered ineffective the usage of various medications. Ron Stoleson, the most fortunate of the five, still spent two days in the Grangeville Hospital.

Three of the five people, who had the misfortune of being aboard the Bob Johnson Ford Tri-motor N8419 on August 4, had their lives tragically cut short. John and Gary were the 18th and 19th jumpers to lose their lives in the line of duty.

As an epilogue to this saga, on August 6th or 7th, 1999, almost exactly 40 years after this terrible event, I received a phone call at 11:30 p.m. on a Friday evening. We were both asleep, but Betty answered the phone and said it was John Rolf. I was more than shocked, but indeed it was John Rolf, a nephew of the John Rolf that was killed. I had sent John's parents a letter after the accident and the letter was kept in the family. John apparently located me on the Internet and had to call me immediately. He told me that he was only four when John died, and it made an unforgettable impression on him. Also, John (smokejumper) had been in the military and had some savings that he left to his two nephews (his will was orally given to Bob as he lay dying). John (the nephew) told me that this money later helped him go to college. I talked to him over an hour that evening. He wanted to hear every detail of the accident.

Life takes many twists and turns and is replete with many ironies. This was the plane that was going to pick us up. I am reasonably sure that didn't soak in for a few days. Ron



Tri-Motor Moose Creek 1959 (Courtesy R. Pera)

Stoleson happened to be sitting by the door of the plane and escaped with minor burns. John was seated by Ron, so he was also near the door. They were seated with their backs against a chainsaw box. None of the three was wearing his jumpsuit which would have slowed their exits from the aircraft and, ironically, might have given them protection from the flames. Why John did not make it out remains a mystery. Ron Stoleson said that after the plane caught on fire, he immediately dove for the open door but had to contend with a burning tree that was partially blocking the door. Perhaps, John, noticing the burning tree, made a fatal mistake in attempting a different exit from the burning craft. His exit was made through a separation of the fuselage. Bob recalls that John made some comment about being slowed by the plane's cables. Gary was seated on some

cargo closer to the front of the plane. The few seconds that it took to get over the cargo and through the opening in the fuselage was still too much time.

John and Gary exited the plane in a matter of a few seconds. As I previously wrote, the elapsed time from when I looked up and saw the fire start and when I saw the two rolling on the ground was only a few seconds. If the fire had waited for perhaps five more seconds, it is doubtful that there would have been fatalities. For a bit of ironic coincidence, this accident occurred within one day of exactly 10 years after the Mann Gulch Fire that killed 12 jumpers.

Just as certain eventful days are etched in all of our memories, I can unequivocally say that this day will always be remembered by me as though it happened only a few days ago. 🦉

A Tragedy Creates a Dream

by Bill Fogarty (Missoula '57)

School used to start the day after Labor Day for many schools in Ohio. It was on that Tuesday in 1949, Miss Hoose, our new seventh grade teacher, read us an article from the *Akron Beacon Journal* about the Mann Gulch Fire. From that day on, I was in love with Miss Hoose, but of even more importance, I knew exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up. I read every book I could find on the West in the Akron Public Library. I joined the Boy Scouts and reached the rank of Eagle for the outdoor experience. I played every sport our high school offered because I knew I would have to be tough and in shape. At the end of my junior year, at the age of 16, I cajoled my parents into allowing me to take a Greyhound bus from Akron to Tacoma so I could work for the Washington State Division of Forestry on a fire suppression crew.

I had a beautiful summer of fighting fires, brushing roads, digging culverts, breaking-up beaver dams and learning more than I can tell from the old retired loggers that supervised us. Fortunately, I had a pretty great set of parents. They made certain I returned to Ohio for my senior year, a year spent mostly

looking out the school windows and wishing I was somewhere in the West. I graduated at 9:00 and was on another Greyhound bound for Tacoma and the Kapowsin suppression crew at 11:00. That fall I entered the Forestry School at the University of Montana and that winter applied for a job with the smokejumpers and was accepted that spring, a seven-year dream had come true and perhaps the proudest and happiest day of my life. Four years later, a bum knee received on a practice jump forced a drastic change to my chosen life style, perhaps the worst day in my life.

Mann Gulch was a tragedy, without a doubt, but its influence on my life was tremendous. Not a day goes by that I am not proud to have been a smokejumper, not a day goes by that I don't think of the many fine men I was so fortunate to work beside. I managed to achieve that seventh grader's dream. I'm not sure that I managed to grow up. 🦉

Bill Fogarty trained at Missoula, 1957, New Mexico crew in 1958, first Alaska crew in 1959 and Redding in 1960. He graduated Kent State University with B.S. in mathematics and M.Ed. degree.



Bill Fogarty (Courtesy B. Fogarty)

Bill taught high school mathematics and biology, plus coached football and track for eleven years; served as Headmaster for the Firestone Plantations School in Harbel, Liberia, West Africa; served as teacher and in curriculum development for the U.S.F.S. Cispus Job Corps Center and as a high school and elementary principal for eleven years, prior to retiring from the public education. He is currently living in Aberdeen, WA and can be reached at: bkfogarty@comcast.net

The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

IF ANYONE EVER deserved the Forest Service Heroism and Emergency Response Award, it is smokejumper **Ron Rucker** (RAC-76). On July 21, 2005, around 5 p.m. with the temperature 105 degrees in Las Vegas, Rucker, smokejumper **Marge Kuehn-Tabor** (RAC-91) and contract pilot Jonathon Stairs took off from the North Las Vegas Airport to conduct reconnaissance on fires in southern Nevada. Rucker was training Kuehn-Tabor as an Air Tactical Supervisor. According to witnesses, the 1964 Aero Commander became airborne and then crashed nose first ending upright on the runway. The nose and cockpit were severely damaged. Tabor-Kuehn was sitting in the co-pilot's seat with Ron Rucker seated behind them. After the crash, Ron Rucker escaped through a hole in the aircraft, thinking the pilot and Marge Kuehn-Tabor were both dead. He got away from the plane and with both engines still running, he went back and extricated Kuehn-Tabor and dragged her to safety. Then he returned and attempted to rescue the pilot, who was entangled in the wreckage and critically injured. This entire incident was captured on

video by various Las Vegas television news helicopters and the footage is compelling. When I saw the video, I began to wonder where the North Las Vegas Airport Crash-Fire-Rescue vehicles were? After checking with a firefighter, who is also multi-engine rated pilot, I learned that while the North Las Vegas Airport is the 56th largest airport in the country with over 600 takeoffs and landings a day, the airport is not required to have its own fire department because the airport does not serve any commercial airlines. The airport is protected by the City of North Las Vegas Fire Department. Fortunately, the Aero Commander did not catch fire. The Fire Department was able to extricate the pilot with the engines still running and, after some delay, an A&P mechanic was brought to the scene to shut down the engines. After pilot Jonathon Stairs and Marge Kuehn-Tabor were packaged and on their way to a Las Vegas Hospital, rescuers realized that Ron Rucker had also been in the crash and suffered a dislocated toe, extensive bruising and various sprains and strains. I wish everyone involved a speedy recovery, and a big tip of the hardhat to Ron Rucker for saving two lives in the finest tradition of the smokejumpers. In 1981, Ron was involved in the rescue operation after a Hawkins and Powers C-119 crashed on the Koyukuk River in Alaska. The full story of that accident can be found on the NSA web site at <http://www.smokejumpers.com/history/koyukuk.php>

Senator Max Baucus, D-Mont, has signed on as a co-sponsor for SB 1143, Aerial Firefighter Relief Act of 2005. The bill provides death and disability benefits for air tanker crewmembers who work on a contract basis for a public agency and suffer death or disability in the

line of duty. Senator Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., introduced the bill in Congress in May. Enzi's bill has been referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill is retroactive to September 29, 1976. A similar bill has been introduced in the House by Representative Barbara Cubin, R-Wyo.

As the mid-October deadline for this issue looms, fire season is winding down and jumpers from various bases have deployed to Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas to work on recovery efforts after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In the hurricane stricken areas, there are 23 Type II crews, 22 Type II-IA crews, 21 Type 1 crews, 41 camp crews and 166 law enforcement officers from the Forest Service. 🔦

Let Us Know If You Were Involved In Hurricane Relief Work

Many of our readers/members have been involved in the hurricane relief work as members of government teams or volunteer groups. I would like to hear from you and do a column for the April issue.

Send me a few lines or paragraphs telling about your experience. I'm sure it will be interesting reading and, at the same time, all of us thank you for stepping forward during this time of need.

My contact information is on page three of this issue.

Chuck Sheley

40 Years of Smokejumpers

by Gary G. Johnson (Fairbanks '74)

For more than 40 years smokejumpers have been a part of my life. As my career has come to an end, I thought I would share a few of those years and some of those jumpers with the readers. This year marked my 39th year in fire control, and here is how it happened.

I grew up in Sandpoint, Idaho, where my dad spent 20 years on the old Kaniksu National Forest. Much of his summertime was spent on fires. I recall the smell of smoke on his clothes, his old White boots and bloodshot eyes. I suppose he planted the first seeds in me for a love of the outdoors and for work in the fire services.

After graduation from high school, I could not apply to the local Forest Service because of nepotism, so I applied with the National Park Service in Yellowstone and was picked-up on a blister rust control/fire crew. Accommodations were old military-style barracks that we had to make spotless every morning. Next we'd march to the mess hall to make lunches and have breakfast. By 0700 we were loaded in the trucks and headed to the work site. Travel time in those days was on your own time. Success on this crew was measured in hard work and your ability to hike in the mountains. A supervisor could fire you on the spot, and I saw a number of crewmembers kicking horse manure down the trail. I kept my head down in work and I hiked hard. Little did I know that all this would lead to a lifelong profession.

Our first fire in 1966 was on the Buffalo Plateau just north of the park. A small helicopter had flown in most of our crew. When the helicopter broke down, the last seven of us had to hike 12 miles to the fire. I was excited to get going and didn't care how we got there. En route a sow grizzly treed us, and all of us competing for the same tree was quite a sight! We arrived at the fire late, and our first shift was at night. I had grown up cutting firewood, so I inherited the chainsaw. The next morning I noticed an airplane flying over the meadow. The boss said it was a load of smokejumpers coming to reinforce the troops. That was my first contact with smokejumpers. We watched them jump in the early morning light and, for the next five days, we worked closely with the jumpers. I remember thinking that parachuting was a great way to get to a fire. I left it at that for the next eight years.

The summer of 1967 was a very busy fire season, and our crew spent much of August in Glacier National Park. **Steve Nemore** (RAC-69), **John Mohn** (MSO-69), and **Doug Abromeit** (MYC-71) were on the crew that season. Summer travels, the fires, and crew life combined to "hook" me on the fire lifestyle.

The summers of 1968-69 were normal summers in the Park with small fires and blister rust fieldwork. **Dann "Free-Fall" Hall** (ANC-71), **Steve Walker** (MSO-68) and I spent the winter traveling in Europe and Africa. In 1968 I became friends

with **Gary Stitzinger** (MSO-65). Gary was the NPS smokejumper liaison at West Yellowstone and a John Wayne-type to us jumper wannabes.

I spent the next three summers in Yellowstone chasing fires, bears, and girls and was ready for a change. In 1973 I went to Alaska on a helitack crew.

The proudest experience of my career came that summer when **Don Whyde**

(MSO-66) and I responded to the rescue of **Gene Hobbs** (IDC-61). I'll never forget seeing Gene lying there on the tundra, covered in blood and mosquitoes. I wondered if he would make it through the night. By the grace of God we must have done something right that day.

1974 was my rookie year and I was nervous, like all rookies, reporting the first day. **Mike Clarkson** (RAC-65) was known for his tough rookie training and **Pat Shearer** (MSO-67) was his assistant. In later years I enjoyed kidding Pat about being one of the elite hand-chosen rookies in Missoula in 1967. His class had 92 rookies! I had a malfunction on my second rookie practice jump into Dog Musher's Field. Upon exiting and opening I did a quick check of my canopy. Looked good to me. I heard Pat on the ground with a megaphone shouting, "Pull your reserve." I thought my jump partner must have had a malfunction, but upon careful scrutiny of his parachute, saw that he had a perfectly good canopy. I must be the one with the malfunction. "Check your canopy, dummy!," I said to myself. What I saw was an ugly line-over and a partial inversion. I pulled and threw my reserve and hit the ground in an awkward position. As I was lying there, "**Big Al**" **Dunton** (FBX-67) tossed my reserve handle to me and told me to keep it as a souvenir. That handle is mounted on my shop door in Idaho as a reminder of that spring day in Fairbanks. During that year the old timers like **Bob Betts** (RDD-64), **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65), **Jon Klingel** (CJ-65), and **Gene Bartel** (MSO-67) always had something up their sleeves. I was present for the famous egg-eating contest between **John Rakowski** (MSO-66) and **Skip Scott** (ANC-72) at the Mush Inn in Anchorage. The legendary "Rake" won easily, eating 13 eggs while the loser was still choking on one. After 18 fire jumps, my brother Bruce and I hitchhiked home to Idaho.

1975 was a very slow fire season, but I learned to juggle while on long patrol flights and the dreaded stand-bys in McGrath. In those years I met jumpers like **Rick Hudson**



Gary Johnson 1974 (Courtesy G. Johnson)

(MYC-73), **Rod Dow** (MYC-68), **Eric Schoenfeld** (CJ-64), **Larry Vanderlinden** (RAC-69), **Tom Hilliard** (MYC-67), **Bob Cunningham** (MSO-74), **John Purlee** (MYC-70), **Gary Benavidez** (MYC-72), **Mike Silva** (RDD-72), **James Budenholzer** (MSO-73), **Zeke Reister** (NCSB-70), **Davis Perkins** (NCSB-72), **John Jones** (MSO-75), **Gary McMurtrey** (MYC-73), **Doug McCoy** (RDD-73), **George Rainey** (RAC-68), **Rob Collins** (RAC-69), **Jim Vietch** (MSO-67), **Bert Mitman** (RAC-70) and many more.

In 1976 **Gary Benavidez** (MYC-72) and I jumped a fire just below Mt. McKinley. After knocking the fire down, we set up our hootch in the bottom of a dry creek bottom. At about three in the morning the diurnal melt from Mt. McKinley hit us like an instant raging river. We lost most of our fire pack contents but managed to save the jump gear. The river ran high and swift for about eight hours. Luckily we had retreated to the side of the river where the fire was burning.

Diane Dardar and I married in 1977, and we returned to Alaska for a very active fire season. I made 20 fire jumps and had one of my most miserable jumps ever, a two-manner with **Roscoe Rowney** (RDD-75) north of Galena. Roscoe sprained his ankle badly and could barely walk. Noticing a beaver pond close by, I told him to go soak his ankle while I lined the fire. Guilt got the best of Roscoe, so he filled a piss pump and hobbled over to help. While working the pump handle, he caught the flesh between his thumb and finger in the trombone mechanism, resulting in a large cut. I did some quick first aid and urged Roscoe to go sit down. Hobbling back to the pond, Roscoe stepped on the head of his Pulaski and the handle hit him in the nuts. Roscoe was finally down for the count. To make things worse, the gnats had discovered us. Never have I experienced the numbers and viciousness of those gnats. For three days we tried everything to escape those pesky insects.

We tied everything down: shirttails, collars and sleeves, but still they found openings. Fresh food was dropped, but we were in no mood to eat it. After five days of hard mop-up and battling the gnats, a helicopter arrived to take us to Galena. Roscoe looked like he had measles as he limped back to the barracks to nurse his aches and pains. That was the last time I saw Roscoe Rowney. The same year I jumped a fire in the Brooks Range with the other **Gary Johnson** (RDD-69). The fact that we were both jumpers with the same name confused a lot of people throughout our careers. Gary and I enjoyed a unique bond over the next 30 years. His nickname was “Gramps,” and I became “Pops.”

In 1978 I spent the early spring going from village to village, giving fire training. Clifford Adams, the crew boss for Beaver, invited me to go duck hunting. I accepted the invitation and met Clifford at his cabin. With guns in hand we headed out to the fields that surrounded the village. While sitting and waiting for ducks, Clifford had consumed most of a bottle of booze, and that is when he looked at me and said, “Gary, there is only one white guy I ever liked.” Since I was the only white guy out there, I was sure he must have been talking about me, so I asked him who it was. “Elvis Presley,” he replied. I realized the booze was talking and guns were close by, so I quickly agreed that I liked Elvis too. We staggered back to the village tired and empty-handed.

That same year ten of us came uncomfortably close to death on a patrol flight in the Alaskan Range. Helitack had beaten us to a fire, so the pilot and spotter decided to check out the Alaskan Range. We were flying up a narrow canyon below the ridge tops that ended in a box canyon. With nothing but glaciers below and high peaks above us, we were trapped! The pilot attempted to make a turn, but it was too tight. He gave the plane full power, attempting to clear a low ridge in front of us. One glance out the cockpit window and we knew it would be close. Even tough guy, **Ron Lund** (FBX-64), had a look of fear on his face. We cleared the ridge by about 25 feet, a close call to say the least. With us that day were **Rick Blanton** (MYC-71), **Steve Nemore** (RAC-69), **Davis Perkins** (NCSB-72), **Kent Harper** (RDD-75), **Sam Houston** (MYC-71), **Tony Pastro** (FBX-77) and **Craig Burns** (RAC-73).

In 1979 I had some memorable jumps in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. One was the Elk Creek Fire with a beautiful 25-mile, PG bags only, hike through the “Bob.” Another was the large jumper action Redshale Fire, next to the famous Chinese Wall. What incredible scenery!

I became a spotter in 1980 and enjoyed the new challenge. I jumped only four fires that year, but was a spotter on many.

In 1982 I jumped part of the summer and then took a temporary job in timber with the USFS in Bonners Ferry. I worked for **Karl Braunais** (MSO-77) and **Cecil Hicks** (NCSB-62). We shared an instant bond, and to this day I’m especially grateful for Karl in helping me



Ralph Johnston (RDD-63/ 3rd from right) pictured in front of Wyoming Air National Guard C-130 in August. Ralph helped train the first group of C-130 pilots to use the Modular Airborne Firefighting System in 1973. (Courtesy of Wyoming Air National Guard)

save a failing marriage, which has now thrived for almost 30 years. I left the timber job and returned (crawled back) to the smokejumpers the following spring.

Most jumpers know the story of the C-119 in slow flight, but here is a little extra. I had not seen my wife in a month or so (she worked with the YCC crews in the bush of Alaska). We had just opened a bottle of wine to celebrate our reunion when I heard a knock on the door. They needed an EMT for a possible rescue for a downed C-119 with pilots and jumpers on board. I quickly changed modes and found myself, along with **Shawn McKenna** (FBX-79), headed to the reported crash site. Word came that the jumpers had parachuted safely, but we had no word on the fate of the pilot(s). We found the wreckage on a large sand bar on the Koyukuk River, but still did not know the condition of the pilot(s). I jumped with the EMT kit and landed right off the nose of Tanker 138. A quick survey revealed no pilot(s). We found out later he/they had been picked up by helicopter before we jumped. We extinguished the last of the flames and prepared to stay inside the plane. I had to use the aircraft's survival gun to scare off a grizzly and her cubs. That big old airplane seemed so out of place resting in the wilds of Alaska.

The early '80s were spent on the Ram Air square parachute experiments. Malfunctions were common. **Mat Kelley** (FBX-71), **Bob Quillin** (FBX-71) and **Dave Hade** (MYC-77) all experienced malfunctions with the squares. Needless to say, others and I were hesitant to trade our rounds for squares. In 1983 all the squad leaders were trained on Ram Airs. Even after nearly 200 round jumps, I wondered if I could handle the squares. I soon discovered the training would pay off. Watching that square deploy was quite a sight. For the next four years, the challenge of using Ram Airs was one of the highlights in my jumping career.

September of 1983 saw the birth of my first daughter, Dawn. She is now grown and a third generation firefighter for the USFS on the Toiyabe National Forest. Some of the memorable fires I remember from that season were "the all night beat of the Unalakleet" and the "all night whack on the Kodiak." Some of you might remember them?

The summer of 1985 was a busy fire season down south. I jumped fires out of Missoula and Grangeville for almost two months. One that stands out was **Jack Deed's** (MSO-65) last fire jump in the mountains of Washington. A call came into Missoula for a 10-person load and I was fire boss. Upon arriving at the fire it was obvious we did not have a clear jump spot. We would use the smallest "reprod" timber for the jump spot and plan on a timber landing. The only real danger was one 100-foot snag. Nine of us made it O.K., but Jack nailed the snag perfectly. Apparently Jack tied off to his harness and when he popped his capewells he freefell about 70 feet. Fortunately, he hit a smaller tree, probably lessening the impact. He was unconscious and lying face down. His jump partner did not see Jack under what appeared to be a pile of jump gear. When we all got together there were only nine of us. **Ron Rucker** (RAC-76) realized he had seen no letdown rope coming from the parachute in the snag. We knew Jack was in trouble and headed back to the snag where we found Jack in pretty bad shape. We administered first aid and immobilized

his body, but shock was starting to really set in. It was late in the day, and we were down on the side of a very steep mountain. I ran to a small outcropping and made a mayday call to the local forest. We needed I.V. solution and a Stokes litter. It was nearly dark when we heard the sounds of the jump ship with EMTs. **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57) and **Jon Button** (NCSB-75) were the two NCSB jumpers, and we were surely glad to see them. The I.V. solution stabilized Deed for the night, and we spent what seemed an eternity hauling him to the ridge helispot. We took turns on the Stokes litter, but it was tough getting Jack up that long steep slope.

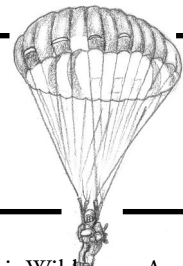
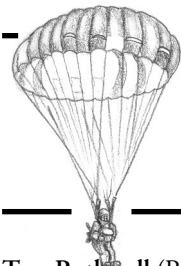
At first light a care flight helicopter out of Spokane, Washington, picked up our injured jumper. We heard that Jack recovered from his injuries but never jumped again. The jumpers I can remember that long night were **Ed Kurowski** (MSO-61), **Ron Rucker** (RAC-76), **Leonard Wehking** (FBX-85), **Jon Ueland** (MSO-80), and **Van Davis** (MSO-85).

In 1986 my second daughter, Emily, was born. I split jumping between Alaska and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. It was becoming more difficult to be away from a growing family. In 1987 I resigned as a smokejumper and took a full-time position in air attack at Carson City, Nevada, and the Sierra Front. I missed jumping for a long time after I left the program but always maintained a close relationship, since Carson City serves as a primary spike base in the Great Basin. Soon I inherited the entire air program in the district, including visiting jumper crews. In 1996 I took over as the Assistant Fire Management Officer. For a long time the jumpers main standby area had been at Stead near Reno. In 1997, I moved the jumpers to the Carson Airport where they still remain. Throughout this time I've enjoyed serving the smokejumpers in briefing, catching up on the news, drinking a beer or two and providing them with a place to hang their hats. I've encouraged and helped several of our firefighters go on to jumping: **Spencer Mellum** (NIFC-92), **Carlos Mendeguia** (RAC-92), **Jim Reid** (MYC-92), **Pete Briant** (RDD-00), **Jake Class** (MYC-04), **Kip Shields** (FBX-04), and **Mark Skudlarek** (MYC-02). It's been fun hearing their stories and watching that spirit continue in new rookies.

While on the Carson District I've had the pleasure of working with some great folks, like **Leonard Wehking** (FBX-85), **Diane Pryce** (RDD-83), **Scott Dewitz** (FBX-82), **Dan Mitchell** (RAC-78), **Dave Easton** (NIFC-92), **Dennis Terry** (RDD-90), **Allen Biller** (FBX-82) and **Doug Swantner** (RDD-82). Swanni and I did our P.T. together and were often compared to Walter Matthau and Jack Lemon in "Grumpy Old Men." Our runs have been reduced to long walks and talks. There is hardly a place I go where I don't run into a smokejumper or two. My 39 summers in fire have gone by very quickly, but in each of those years I have been touched in some way by the smokejumpers.

These are just a few of my stories that come to mind as my career has closed. Though I've left smokejumping behind, the sound of an airplane overhead can still take me in an instant to the open door. Now the closest I get to jumping is jumping out of bed, and sometimes my exits aren't that great. Thanks for all the many wonderful memories. 🍷

Odds and Ends



Tara Rothwell (RAC-92) again competed in the 100-mile Tevis Race across the Sierras in July. **Cynthia Lusk** (RAC-87) also rode one of Tara's horses ("T"), so there were two ex-jumpers in the competition this year. Tara was riding "Laser." Got an update from Tara after the race. Some highlights:

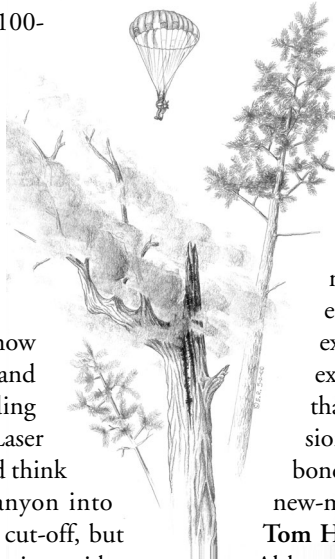
"Laser did well. We got behind in the first bit of the race because I stopped to help a lady whose horse had fallen with her in the Granite Chief wilderness. You won't believe how many people rode by. She had a broken arm and her horse was bleeding badly. Got the bleeding stopped on the horse and splinted her arm. Laser was brilliant all day but I really had to ride and think for him. Coming up out of El Dorado Canyon into Michigan Bluff we had to push to make the cut-off, but Laser was really cruising up the hill. At one point a rider wanted to pass. Well Laser DID NOT want to be passed, had a fit and ended up going down the cliff side but still had one foot on the trail. Cynthia said it was amazing the power Laser had to hoist himself back on the trail. I had no idea how close we were to going over the side. At the next 'Vet check,' Laser was off on the foot that had done the hoisting job and got pulled. Its nothing major as the next day he was sound again, but it ended our Tevis day. I am disappointed not to finish but, admittedly, I was really tired. It was a lot of work to get two horses ready and there and started.

Next year it is all about Laser and me! I am going to start training him now with the intention of finishing in the top ten. He's an amazing horse and I know he has what it takes. I am going to start at the FRONT so there won't be anyone ahead of me getting hurt."

Webmaster **Jon Robinson** and *Smokejumper* magazine columnist, **Chris Sorensen**, were quick to get information pertaining to the aircraft crash July 21st at the North Las Vegas Airport posted on our website www.smokejumpers.com. **Ron Rucker** (RAC-76) and **Marge Kuehn-Tabor** (RAC-91) were passengers in a Twin Commander that went down shortly after takeoff. Rucker was treated for foot and hand injuries and released. Kuehn-Tabor was hospitalized with a broken hip and other injuries. Pilot Jonathan Stairs was hospitalized and listed in critical condition. I've asked Chris Sorensen to follow through with more detailed information in his column in this issue.

Ken Hessel (MYC-58) passed along a website that contains some excellent information on the "Secret War" in Laos in which smokejumpers played a significant part. Please check out the site at: www.secretwarinlaos.com

Chuck Mansfield (CJ-59) and his son, David, took their an-



nual trip into the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area at the end of June. Chuck hopes to run an NSA Trail Project in that area in 2006.

John Wayne Walden (MSO-65): "I was able to get reacquainted with several friends and had the pleasure of working with new ones on the NSA trail maintenance program earlier this summer. It was, without question, one of the most memorable experiences I have had. Like any eight-person smokejumper crew, our talents and expertise ran the gambit. As usual, no one held back expressing their opinions regardless of the reaction that it might invoke in someone else. Our 'discussions' were lively and diverse. By the end of the week, bonds of brotherhood existed as they had at the end of new-man training."

Tom Hunnicutt (RDD-78) is our newest Life Member. Although he rookied in Redding, I think his heart is in Cave Junction: "The Gobi had more than its share of interesting individuals. But more than that, it had a number of dynamic, inspirational leaders. In all my life I have never met people with the quality of character as jumpers in general and Gobi jumpers in particular. I will die a Gobi jumper."

Larry Boggs (RDD-63) has provided some more information about the experimental program at Redding in 1964 involving the Bell 204-B helicopter. This operation was the feature of an article by **Dirk Chandler** (RDD-64) in the Jan. 2005 issue of *Smokejumper*. The program was ahead of its time and involved "thinking outside the box" by Base Manager **Bob McDonald** (MSO-52) and North Zone Regional Helitack Specialist **Ralph Johnston** (RDD-63). Ralph had this position since 1962 and took smokejumper training during 1963. He was seriously injured in his last training jump that year. The program involved jumping from the 204-B and also rappelling using the Sky Genie. Positive results from the experimentation showed that the 204-B would be an asset to the firefighting corps in the western U.S.

Karl Hartzell (NIFC-70) is on the move these days: "The mission I took on is GPSing the Appalachian Trail in Maine so as to provide more accurate locational information about the trail and its features for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in Harpers Ferry, WV. In order to achieve the best coordinate information possible, a fixed GPS receiver base station was used in concert with a roving unit housed in a pack which I carried on my back along the trail. We used a total of five base station locations in Maine, all of them within the relatively unobstructed openness of small airports.

The field we used in southern Maine was owned by one

Robert Swain of East Andover. I was delighted to discover that Robert had been a C-47 pilot in WW II, hauling paratroopers and towing gliders from England to France and then Germany as the war progressed to its final stages. I relished the opportunity I was given one rainy afternoon to ask questions and elicit stories from him. I listened with unflinching attention as he related his service first in the U.S. and later in Europe. Upon hearing that we had used C-47's in smokejumping, he was very interested to hear a summary history of smokejumping and how it was we dropped personnel on a fire from the plane he flew.

"Mr. Swain deems himself to have been quite lucky during his military service. As proof he remembers his plane being hit several times by shrapnel from shell bursts but "never losing an engine or hydraulics" due to enemy fire. He completed his service without injury or accident and returned to Maine after the war to assist his father with a wooden dowel manufacturing operation. He is now 85, looks in great health, and last flew only two years ago!"

Karl Brauneis (MSO-77): "I retired from the Forest Service on the last day of July. I am going out on the Rocky Mountain Incident Command Team (Blume) as either Division, Information, Facilities or Safety. Went to Idaho on the Salmon Breaks, and now the Katrina disaster seems to be a black hole for teams."

Denis Symes (MYC-63): "My wife and I took a rafting trip down the Salmon River last month (August) and had a great time - 85 miles through the Frank Church Wilderness. I stopped by the McCall base and saw several old timers (and new guys) - had a blast!"

Paul Wilson (MSO-50): "I was glad to see the article about Rollo Julander in the Smokejumper. Julie and I started jumping together at MSO in 1950 and became good friends. During July of 1971 I was detailed to BIFC as the national forest service coordinator and was sleeping at the motel, when I was called approx. 12:15 a.m. to get over to the center for a fatality report. It was a real shock when I saw that Julie had been killed in an aircraft accident in R-3. I still have a copy of the report, he was in a Cessna 206, not a 182."

I was recalled to the Navy for the Korean War as was Julie. We met in San Diego a few times, he was at Camp Pendleton and I was aboard a ship at the destroyer base in SD. We both returned to jumping in 1952 and jumped some fires together. In fact we jumped the first jumper fire in R-1 for the 1952 season. Over the years I lost contact with Julie. I transferred to the St. Joe NF and he went to R-3."

Roger Brandt (Associate) reports in on his goal to get the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base saved from being torn down: "I took a class of college students on a tour of the base last weekend. There were 35 from Humboldt State University and all are studying Environmental Education and design of museum displays. Our local Public Radio station called me up a couple of weeks ago and did an interview about the base and our attempts to get it designated as a national

historic landmark. Also gave a talk at the Rotary Club in Grants Pass with about 50-60 in attendance. Lots of positive interest." Roger has taken on the task of saving what is left of the Cave Junction Base from being torn down by the Country Airport Commission. The amount of time he has spent is enormous. We all owe him our thanks.

Romie Deschamps (MSO-61) via NSA website: "May wife, Pat, whom a lot of MSO jumpers know as a nurse from St. Pats, was deployed to Katrina via a DMAT strike team. She was there 10 days and said FEMA did well with strike teams but the ICS higher up needed some work."

Dave Provencio (MSO-77): "Just wanted to let you to know that I am always inspired and motivated by your articles and information in the NSA Smokejumper! I read the article by **Karl Brauneis**. Karl and I trained together in MSO. Of note, I enjoy the "Odds and Ends" column. Deputy Chief **Steve Vittum** (MSO-71) and I worked side by side on the Los Padres NF. While I still work for the Forest Service at the Regional Office in Ogden, Utah, I reached a personal and professional milestone. I was just recently qualified as a Type 1 Incident Commander and looks like I will be headed to assist in the Katrina Hurricane event with the team. The days I spent as a smokejumper were the foundation to reaching this milestone."

Thank ALL of you PAST and PRESENT Smokejumpers for what you do and what you represent!!"

Jerry Dixon (MYC-71): "Recently I received the 2005 *American Alpine Journal-The World's Most Significant Climbs*. I have two articles in the book which were described in the *Smokejumper* magazine articles *Beaverhead* and *Jump to NW Arctic*. Both articles end with how I first saw these magnificent mountains, 'From the open door of a DC-3 jump ship.'"

Larry Welch (CJ-61) Sept. 21st: "Rita is scheduled to hit on Saturday morning. We just are not sure where. I could have 100 + mph winds here for a couple of hours and I am 120 miles inland. I was at the coast four days ago and the water is very warm for this time of year. It was 104 today and not a puff of wind - the Spanish moss hung straight down from the trees like plumb-bobs at a construction site. I suppose I will batten down the hatches, get my chainsaws ready to go, get emergency stuff in order & wait & see what happens."

Some updated information from **Jake Jacobsen** (MSO-63) on the "Last Ford Jump" article in the October issue: "Just wanted to give you some additional information on the last Ford jumps. 1962 was not the last year of use on fire. I spent the entire 1964 summer jumping out of the Ford with the Grangeville crew. I also recall one other jump that I made from the Ford out of Missoula in 1967. I don't know if the Ford was retired after the 1967 fire season, but you may well hear from other jumpers if that was not the case. This dialogue about the Ford brings back many fond memories."

Jim Clatworthy (MSO-56): "A special trail project is in the works for the summer of 2006 to recognize **Art Jukkala** (MSO-56) and **Ray Schenk** (MSO-56). If you can donate a week of your time in late July (either the 3rd or 4th week)

and can get to Missoula with camping gear, contact Jim Clatworthy: jclatworthy@comcast.net or drop him a note at 1804 Edison Shores, Port Huron, MI., 48060. Get your name on a growing 'Jump List' for the Zoolie '56 Trail Project. It's first come, first served and the cook has already signed on—trail kill delights!"

If there are any **Life Members** out there who have lost or worn out their Life Member caps, I would be glad to send a replacement. Cost is \$10 payable to NSA and mailed to me.

Herb Fischer (MSO-57) in an interview at the reunion in 2004: "The stories kept unfurling like parachutes all weekend. And some of 'em might even be true. Like one of my friends said, 'Some of my fondest memories never happened.'"

Dick Flaharty (MSO-44): "The latest issue of the *Smokeyjumper* (Oct.2005) arrived yesterday, and I had the pleasure of reliving the excitement of my training jumps as I read Gregg Phifer's article. As a member of the D squad in '44 I was making my training jumps along with Gregg and was the unfortunate guy who had the line-over on jump five referred to in his article. As I left the plane I looked up to inspect my chute and my heart started beating triple-time when I saw the canopy pulled tightly together in the middle,

so thought I better crack open the emergency chute. That canopy started falling down through my legs, so I grabbed up armfuls and tried to throw it out away from me to catch the air. Panic really set in when the canopy just wrapped up around me, covering me like a silk cocoon. I started flailing away like mad when a very calm voice came floating up from the loudspeaker system, 'You're O.K., Flaharty. Just get that silk away from your face so you can see when you're ready to land.' It was **Jim Waite** who sent up that reassuring message and the panic subsided."

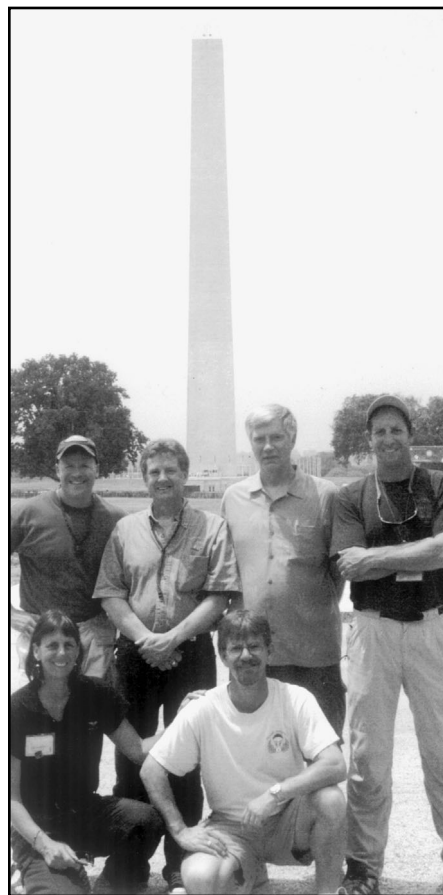
From Lynn Martinez, wife of **Jerry Martinez** (RDD-77): "Jerry passed away this summer while away on an assignment in Cortes, Colorado. He was working as a manager for air support in that area. Life has changed for me and our eleven-year-old son. Jerry left us with a lovely home in a wonderful community. We live in Camp Crook, SD; the population is about 60 people. With our loss, the whole town came together to help us out. Jerry had over 30 years with the Forest Service and he was planning to retire soon. Smokejumping was the part of his career that he was the most proud of. I would like to continue as a member so that our son can read the magazine. Right now he says he would like to someday be a smokejumper like his dad." 🦋

Smokejumpers Return to the Washington, D.C. Mall

After 56 years, smokejumpers returned to Washington, D.C. Only this time they did not jump as they did back on June 28, 1949. They returned as part of the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Due to numerous security concerns, they had to drive to the Mall to participate in the Forest Service's Centennial celebration. They demonstrated letdowns, parachute rigging, parachute repairing, and helped youngsters suit-up in small jump suits. The Smithsonian estimates there were a million visitors during the June 23 through July 4 Folklife Festival. 🦋



Keith Wolferman, assisted by Steve Reed, suiting up for a few of the thousands of children visiting the Folklife Festival. (Courtesy F. Cooper)



Standing L-R: Steve Reed (MSO-95), Bob Beckley (RAC-83), Fred Cooper (NCSB-62), Keith Wolferman (MSO-91). Kneeling L-R: Kelly Esterbrook (RAC-86), Tim Eldridge (MSO-82). (Courtesy F. Cooper)

Political Correctness

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

A few years ago I was flying Air Patrol with my favorite pilot, Terri Watson. An Army Aviator of both fixed and rotor craft, Terri is tougher than a two-dollar steak. She also taught our Wilderness First Aid Class. I knew that if we ever had to set down, she would make it survivable and pack me out on her back to boot.

It was a record day together. Eight fires detected, sized up and reported. We were later diverted across the Wind River Indian Reservation to BLM Public Lands on the lee side of the Owl Creeks. Terri pointed out my window: "That's Limp Dick Creek and Salt Peter Draw – and – there are the old homestead buildings." I roared. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the homesteader and his wife could not bear children. Without the added help, their homestead soon went belly up.

Tom Lawrence in his book, *The Great Wyoming Whorehouses*, tells of the risk and liability of pregnancy to a "Sporting Girl." A black prostitute gave birth to such an unwanted child near a stream in eastern Wyoming. The baby was left to die. A few days later, a couple of cowboys rode by to water their horses and discovered the dead child. After burying the infant, they named the stream Nigger Baby Creek. Later a one room school was built near the grave – the Nigger Baby Creek School. All have since disappeared from the landscape.

Many of the large ranches in Wyoming are intact today because of Great Grandpa. Only young men of the family name will become co-owners and inheritors of the ranch. Sometimes it's not about equality. Sometimes, it's just about the land.

Today, officials pour over maps in a crusade for political correctness. Names are changed to erase our history and culture at the bland, generic altar of conformity. What a fragile society we have become.

This poem is dedicated to all those people and places removed from history and time through the sweep of a pen. It is inspired by forest ranger Skip Shoutis, forest aviator Terri Watson, and the Frank Ranch of Lyon's Valley, Wyoming. 🐾

What's in a Name?

Each spring I try and take a weekend day or two
And help my ranching cowboy friends when men are far and few
Brand and cut and vaccinate their new born spring arrivals
Chew the fat and throw the dogs those tasty oyster morsels

The cow boss introduces me down at the sorting chute
As one - a local Washakie; U.S. Forest Ranger

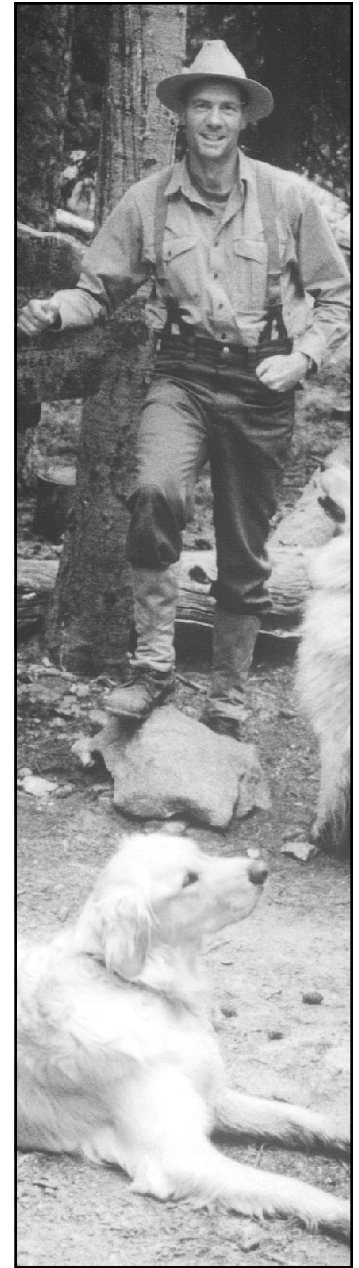
The name sure fits most all of us like a worn in pair of britches
I never could quite understand why bureaucrats restrict it
And call us instead of "*Rangers*"; USDA Forest Service Employees
That's neuter on the open range - just extra words it seems

Or when folks call the *National Forest*; Forest Service land
See bureaucrats don't own a piece, belongs to each American
Of land that's claimed in multiple use for all of us to share

The rangers are its stewards to use wise and produce
The forest, range and watershed for children far removed

And then - *Senior Executives* re-name our legal brands
And turn them into something ugly, bitter, rough as sand
Like *Coeur'd Alene* the *Saint Joe*; *Kaniksu* all into
"*The Idaho Panhandle National Forests*" - yet worse in Colorado
When *Gunnison*, *Grand Mesa*, *Uncompagne* – conceived anew
The bastard child "*GeeAMuck*"; Poetic it won't do

I don't believe the U.S. Senate or Teddy Roosevelt
Would be to happy changing names - lest congress should approve



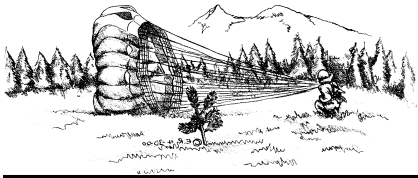
Karl Brauneis (NSA file)

About the USDA Forest Service – few have heard it here
Always been the U. S. Forest Service just like those devil dog's
Imagine our dear president sends in the USDD Marines
Won't work - since 1775, it's always been United States Marines

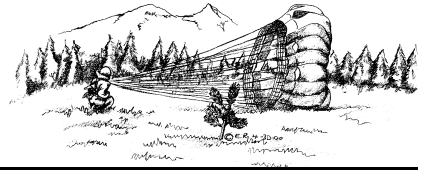
So pick and choose the name you use with thought and introspect
And call an object what it is - not more and never less
Challenge the new revisionists who sterilize the range
Re-calling what we all hold dear for feathers by their names

And hold the titles used by those whose lives are deep entwined
From generation days gone by - for proud tradition lies
In "Americana" history spelled out in native times
English, Spanish, German, Indian; colorful, poetic lines

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Karl is a member of the "Cowboy Poets of Wind River" incorporated



Checking the Canopy



by **Tom Decker**
(Idaho City '64)

Retired Army chaplain, now pastors a small Lutheran congregation in Long Beach, California.

Annual Outing

Flynn throttled back
the engines of the twin Beech
to coast, silently, at treetop
level down the long ridge,

aiming dead on
at the vulnerable,
white fire lookout tower,
“...buzz 'em ...for kicks!”

Four of us crowd
the cockpit door
to thrill at the tower's
windows in our sights,

while the lookout
and his summer guests admire the
view,
“When it's clear, you can see
all the way to Camas Prairie.”

Suddenly the air explodes
with the blast of the
Beech's engines powered up
to rattle every polished window,

and the visitors
run like mice around the tower
platform
and duck, point, laugh, shake their
fist,
and we are gone.

Yes, we buzzed a tower, and yes, I

have forgotten its name! I remember only that it was somewhere towards Mountain Home, Idaho. The lark of buzzing that unknown tower has given me pause to consider the valuable service provided by “unknown” Forest Service and BLM lookouts to fire crews and to the American public. Their legacy of solitary vigilance endures as a solid effort in conserving our nation's natural resources of timber and grassland. The jumpers' hardhats are off to the lookouts, buzzed or unbuzzed!

It's good to know that people look out for the welfare of others, not just in remote towers, but in everyday life such as the workplace, in schools, and in the home. In education and on the job, the lookouts of life are sometimes called mentors, who guide the neophyte past known dangers. In the home it's the parent. In the neighborhood, grandparents or some older member of the community keeps an eye

open for kids as they go back & forth to school. They're all look-outs!

Human beings, being what they are, need over-watch from time to time. Spotted early enough, a small fire can be headed off before it gets out of control and ruins a lifetime of hard work. Life's dangers are plentiful and take their toll on jumpers old and young alike. Alcoholism, drugs, and gambling are addictions that come to mind, but there are other self-destructive behaviors that need only the right wind to set the spark blazing. Rank matters not!

Thank the good Lord that there are lookouts on duty, night and day, to sound the alarm when it's needed, and heaven help us if we heed not their warning! If you know a lookout, be he or she a friend, chaplain, pastor, priest, rabbi, or spouse, thank him or her for keeping watch! They're out there! 🙏



Historical Photo: 1948 work project Nezperce N.F. L-R: Ed Eggen, Walt Johnson, unknown, Bob Manchester, Jim Murphy, George King, Jerry Linton, Fred Koons, Jerry McGabey, unknown, Art Jensen, Jack Mathews. (Courtesy J. Linton)



Touching All Bases



Alaska Base Report

by Mike McMillan (FBK-96)

The Alaska Smokejumpers were blessed with another remarkable fire season. After the onslaught of 2004, few expected a near repeat in 2005. But Alaska's jump list again rolled from June through August, and we shared the bounty with scores of boosters. We put 684 jumpers out the door on fire missions, 676 on practice jumps. Of 139 fire missions, 15 were 'pounders.' Ninety-nine were initial attack – the remaining 25 were structure-protection assignments. Alaska's Paracargo Operation had its most productive year since 1988 – when larger airplanes led the fleet.

In 2005, three Casas and one Dornier – all guided by exceptional pilots and staffed by the best paracargo monkeys in the business – were responsible for kicking 365,131 pounds of cargo on fire missions, re-supply, practice and projects across the state. “And that weight doesn't include parachutes either,” reported **Mitch Decoteau** (GAC -78), our newly named paracargo supervisor. “Incredible” is how **Mitch** describes the performance of his paracargo crew. **Mitch** is recovering well after a painful tib-fib break during a fire jump in the spruce. PC welcomed four USFS jumpers for a month, training them in the ways of Alaska paracargo – just in time to fly them into the thick of a relentless fire season.

Operationally it was mostly smooth sailing for jumpers in Alaska in 2005. Widespread smoke posed fewer problems for air travel than in 2004, but jumpers still found themselves in extended demobe situations, for better or not.

A steady stream of boosters – escaping fickle fire seasons down south – happily joined in the action. Alaska's ready-room, loft, paracargo bay, garden, and lounge were mobbed when fire activity occasionally ebbed.

Alaska sent one load south to Homer on April 29 to spend a week battling the season's first fire – a bug-killed spruce blaze snaking through meadows and melting ice bogs. Fire behavior was impressive, spawning well developed smoke columns while sparing area homeowners. Midway through the week, the eight jumpers bought matching Xtra-Tuff rubber boots to face the spring thaw. They followed the fire's perimeter for miles, sloshing through knee-high trenches carved by a local cast of bulldozers.

From there, fire season produced many travels to memorable places. Smokejumpers protected premier hunting and fishing lodges at Selby Lake and on the Anvik River, chased several fires through the canyons and open ridge tops of the Brooks Range, jumped a fire north of Arctic Village and an-



other on the Porcupine River. Dozens of jumpers spent weeks battling two large fires near Eagle and the Boundary Area into Canada.

Some assignments were more notable for seven-pound trout, fat King and Silver Salmon, Pike and Sheefish – all found their way to dinner in 2005.

A muskrat nearly made the menu near Galena when eight jumpers – protecting a remote trapping cabin – nearly ran out of food. With half a day's MREs left, no fish in the lake, and zero visibility for aerial re-supply, the crafty crew caught a large aquatic rodent with a snare they found at the cabin. Upon close inspection, a large boil was discovered above the creature's long fleshy tail. But the boys were hungry. “It's not a tumor!” announced one jumper. “Maybe it's just from

a fight,” offered another. Any debate over edibility ended as soon as the abscess in question was lanced during pelt removal, releasing an odor that would have made the devil proud. No muskrat love was shown, and the carcass was less than ceremonially removed from camp.

In July, worried residents watched as flames threatened their summer homes along picturesque Wild Lake, located north of Bettles and accessible only by floatplane (or jumpship) in the summer, dog team or snow machine in the winter. The residents were initially provided one load of smokejumpers with no additional air support. Cabin owner and long-time Alaskan **Richard Wien** – describing Governor Frank Murkowski as a “personal friend” – employed his satellite phone to enlist his friend's aid in interpreting state and federal firefighting priorities affecting the remote retreat. When the smoke cleared, smokejumpers acquired two Canadair CL-215 air tankers sitting in Bettles. The mighty “Ducks” drenched several cabins with 1000 gallons per trip from the lake, making tandem one-minute turnarounds. Paracargo also saved the day by dropping direly needed pumps and hose. By day three, the jumpers had successfully defended all cabins and were rewarded with a lakeside BBQ, complete with refreshing sodas.

Officially retiring in 2005 were **Bruce Ford** (MSO-75), **Jon Larson** (FBK-89) and **Bruce Nelson** (FBK-81). Their dedication to the Alaska crew over the decades is inspiring. Each has made unique contributions, and their talents and personalities will be sorely missed. The Alaska crew is richer for having these great smokejumpers grace our list for so long, and we hope their exits from jumping are rewarding and fulfilling.

Eight of 11 rookie candidates joined the Alaska ranks in 2005. They are **John Fremont** (Midnight Sun Hotshots), **Evan Karp** (Arrowhead Hotshots), **Dan Klatt** (San Juan and ZigZag

Hotshots), **Brandon Kobayashi** (Chena Hotshots), **Rob Miller** (Midnight Sun Hotshots), **Matt Oakleaf** (Midnight Sun Hotshots), **Tyler R. Smith** (Los Padres Hotshots), and **Gerry Suomalainen** (Flathead Hotshots). Alaskan **Ty Humphrey** (FBK-97), in his last season as lead rookie trainer, described the class as "strong and impressive." Once he loosened up, I asked Ty to describe each rookie with one-word associations. Ty chose to use two words. In the above order of rookies, they are as follows: "Pretty Speedy, Pretty Stinky, Pretty Solid, Pretty Pretty, Pretty Grumpy, Pretty Messy, Pretty GQ, and Pretty Gnarly." **Suomalainen** is Alaska's oldest rookie ever at age 47, working 14 seasons as a hotshot. "He was gnarly in Region 1. He's famous down there. He cracked a rib during the final units test, but there was no stopping 'Uncle Rook,'" added Ty. **Derek Patton** (RAC-00) replaces Ty as Alaska's lead rookie trainer. "Ty did an excellent job. I've got big shoes to fill," admitted **Patton**. Joining the rookie trainers in 2006 will be **Mike Lambright** (FBK-99).

The Alaska trainers plan 6-12 rookie candidate selections in February. This is the part of the job Ty says he won't miss. "We've got paperwork for everything. You can't take a crap after February 1st without filling out a form."

Rookie **Tyler Smith** won the Big Flip, donating substantial amounts to both the welfare fund and the **David Liston** (FBK-98) Memorial Fund. Thanks Tyler.

2005 Jump King **Pete Hearn** (FBK-02) recorded 15 fire jumps in Alaska to tie the crew record. Pete then called it a fire season, cashed in his comp time and whistled his way home to Boise, just before a lingering hold was placed on all terminations. I like your style, **Pete**.

Requests to respond to Hurricane Katrina sent two Alaska jumpers south. Alaska's **Mike Bradley** (FBK-95) and **Dave Hade** (MYC-77) proudly served the relief effort in management capacities.

Several Alaskans recently tied the knot, or are making plans to do so. Newly hitched - as of this writing in October - are **David Bloemker** (FBK-97) and Lisa, **Matt Corley** (FBK-97) and Lyndsey Rose, **Jon Kawczynski-Frisch** (FBK-96) and Kirsten, and **Jeff McPhetridge** (MYC-93) and Mia. Announcements are in order for **Charlie Brown** (FBK-88) and Laura, **Mike Lambright** (FBK-99) and Amy, **John Lyons** (FBK-90) and Ellen, **Tom St. Clair** (FBK-01) and **Lisa Allen** (NIFC-03), **Jeff Stark** (FBK-03) and Laura, and **Robert Yeager** (RDD-92) and Deborah. I will marry my sweetheart Molly in Alaska in June, and for that I'm a lucky man.

Boise Base Report

by **Hector Madrid** (MYC-89)

Another season has come and gone. 2005 was about an average year based upon a ten-year average for the Boise BLM Operations.

Listed is the action from this season: 121 fires jumped - 658 jumpers out the door. Pounded 57 jumpers on 12 pounder fires. Deployed 54 jumpers on single resource assignments. Deployed 37 jumpers on miscellaneous fire management details. Assisted with 23 Fuels/Prescribed fire projects, working 495 "person-days."

Some of our recent promotions include **Mel Tenneson** (FBK-86) as our new Air Operations Manager and **Matt Bowers** (MYC-95) as the new Crew Supervisor. Last year's rookie class of **Dax Permenter**, **Josh Graham**, **Dray Thompson**, and **Ben Oakleaf** did a fine job for us and we hope this next year's class will be as good as they are.

Bros who left to get real jobs: **Jon Curd** (FBK-81) - is the new Idaho State Office BLM State Aviation Manager. **Mike Tupper** (FBK-85) - is the new Carson City BLM Assistant Fire Management Officer. **Dennis R. Terry** (RDD-90) is the new Western Great Basin Coordination Center Assistant Center Manager. **Billy Lee Rickard** (MYC-93) is the Central Zone FMO for the Upper Colorado River Fire Unit in Rifle, Colorado. **Dan Arnold** (RDD-87) is the Elko BLM Air Tactical Group Supervisor. **Steve Price** (MSO-95) is the Carson City BLM Air Tactical Group Supervisor. **Dik Lagerwerff** (NIFC-02) is self-employed and will be on the cover of Forbes Magazine soon.

Currently we have 13 jumpers assisting with the hurricane relief efforts, and 19 jumpers providing assistance to Arizona Strip BLM and Lassen National Park.

Lastly, **Grant Beebe** (NIFC-90) is still detailed to the Fire Program Analysis Group, and **Jerry Drazinski** (FBK-91) is detailed to the Twin Falls District BLM as an ATGS.

Grangeville Base Report

by **Randy Nelson** (GAC-87)

Fire season 2005 got off to the slowest start since GAC became a permanent base in 1972. The first fire jump was on July 31. Once started, August proved to be very busy, dropping multiple fires almost daily. We also hosted booster crews steadily from late July into early September from nearly all of the lower 48 smokejumper bases. We even had boosters on the board that never set foot in GAC, going directly to extended fires enroute and then demobing straight back to home. Thanks everyone for your help, we could not have done it without the support.

Grangeville jumpers were also active in numerous regions on booster crews, details and single resource assignments. All in all, it was a pretty good fire season for GAC jumpers.

Marge Kuehn-Tabor (RAC-91) is finally home, doing rehab and is much better, being upright and mobile. She has accepted the assistant training position at MSO, congratulations Marge!

We still have a few jumpers hanging on, helping FEMA out with Katrina and helping with Rx planning in Mississippi. We are anticipating quite a bit of involvement in the South over the winter. Like everywhere else, at GAC it is time to be thinking about winter training, hiring, and planning fall hunting trips and winter vacations.

McCall Base Report

by **Rick Hudson** (NIFC-73)

Following last winter's low snow precipitation, the 2005 McCall smokejumpers began gearing-up for an early fire season. However, the months of May and June brought near-record rainfall and tall grass, postponing any local activity, but sending jumpers to BLM bases in the southern Great Basin.

A total of 69 jumpers completed jump training including 5 NEDS (rookies). At this date, 356 fire jumps were made by McCall jumpers throughout the Western U.S. during the 2005 season.

A TDC-3 and 2 Twin Otters made up the aircraft for the McCall jump base. Otter J-41 was based in Silver City, N.M., as the jump plane. TDC-3, J-42 flew the Ogden spike base and the Salmon spike base during their operations.

NEDS (rookies) included **Tyko Isaacson**, **Heidi Garrett**, **John Patton** (detail), **Brian Austin** (detail) and re-tread, **Patrick Baker**. **Pat** rookieed in NCSB in 1982 but had not jumped since 1989. A ruling was made that anyone who left the jumpers and fire world for five years or more would not only lose their fire qualifications but had to go through rookie jump training again. At a young 42 years of age, **Pat** thought he knew what he was getting into, but later admitted he had not abused his body to such an extent for many years. With a season of six successful fire jumps, **Pat** is now involved in hurricane support at a southern college and is the proud owner of TWO NED pins.

This was the first season for **Frankie Romero** (MYL-89) as base manager. **Frankie** quickly got down to business with human resources, trying to fill long-vacant career positions at the base. **Larry Wilson** (MYL-84) is the new Smokejumper Training Foreman. New 13/13 positions went to **Damon Nelson** (RDD-97), **Matt Galyardt** (MYL-02) and **Andre Mascheroni** (MYL-01). Career 6/20 positions went to **Christy Behm** (MYL-01), **Todd Haynes** (MYL-02), **Ryan Myers** (MYL-02), **Matt Huber** (MYL-02), **Jake Class** (MYL-04) and **Cory Berg** (MYL-03). Detail squadleader positions went to **Eric Messenger** (GAC-00) and **Rod Kilner** (MYL-98). **Barry Koncinsky** (MYL-74), who has held the Loft Foreman position at McCall, will be retiring after 32 years as a McCall smokejumper. **Barry** plans on visiting his daughter at school in Ecuador and is looking forward to sailing his boat into the sunset at Payette Lake. **Carl Seielstad** (MYL-93) has left the smokejumper community to attend to a professorship at the University of Montana and assist in writing the curriculum for Wildfire Management. **Tom Dwyer** (RDD-79) has retired to his winter job as teacher in California after 20 seasons smokejumping throughout the western U.S. Though these individuals will be missed, they have contributed greatly to the overall smokejumper community in countless ways. We look forward to reinforcing friendships at many jumper reunions.

Ogden, Utah, was opened as a spike base again this season, but received very little activity over a 38-day period. A spike base was established in Salmon, Idaho, for 16 days with nine fires and 36 jumps on the Salmon/Challis. We have been learning from the BLM jumpers on establishing and operating spike jump bases.

The last few years, spring and fall APHIS climbing has been a dependable smokejumper project assignment in Chicago, New York and New Jersey. The funding fell through this fall for any future climbing, but the hurricane/support vortex in Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana has been pulling in smokejumpers. All indications are that ICS qualified jumpers interested in extending themselves beyond wildfire response will have work into the late fall/winter.

Renee Jack (GAC-03), a transfer this spring, experienced a rare and unique parachute malfunction in June on a training jump. Despite her rapid descent, she was uninjured and made seven fire jumps later in the summer.

Prescribed fire sent several folks to PFTC (prescribed fire training center) in Florida early and late in the year. The detail to burn in Gunnison, Colorado, both spring and fall, has been a great deal for gaining prescribed fire-quals for the jumpers and local Payette N.F. district people. **Rob Morrow** (MYL-89) has been instrumental in leading the McCall jump base into prescribed fire by establishing and maintaining contacts and providing users with an eager work-force. **Rob** continues to work on the Board of Managers for the PFTC program.

Single resource assignments for jumpers to fires has greatly increased in the last decade. Newest of these is on WFU or Wildfire Use in the management of wildfires. Smokejumpers are not only qualified but also comfortable in this environment monitoring and taking limited action on a fire. Several WFU fires on the Gila N.F. as well as on the Payette N.F. became part of their daily routine for many McCall jumpers throughout the 2005 season.

Missoula Base Report

by **Keith Wolferman** (MSO-91)

Things here in Missoula are chugging along. We are going to have our end-of-the year meeting today and our T- Party tonight, in the Governor's ballroom of a historic hotel, no less.

We had somewhat of a slow jump season in the northern region with 196 fire jumps on 29 fires. (50% of normal for number of fires jumped, but 84% of normal for individual fire jumps). For those of you thinking, "What the hell good is a base that size with those puny numbers?" keep in mind we had an extremely wet late spring and a very hot, dry late summer. This in turn led to a late start but one with a vengeance.

We had a number of Type 1 incidents (10+) within 100 air miles of base. This coupled with a light lightning pattern and slow initial attack allowed our base to fill 88 overhead single resource requests on large Type 1 and II incidents. The Bros did O.K. on hours as a result, but jump numbers were pretty dismal. Stories will be lacking, but the bills are paid.

We also put out a large number of boosters with folks in Alaska and the Great Basin. Silver City experienced a slower than normal season due to the sheer amounts of moisture last winter, but hung in there with a productive spike-base season, providing horsepower for projects and Wild Fire Use (WFU) fires. Most detailers were back by late July.

We also put out some folks on FUMA team assignments with **Mike Fritsen** (MSO-95), doing what we could to help regional teams manage WFUs.

We had some movement within our organization with the filling of five GS-8 assistant foreman positions: **Sarah Doerhing** (MSO-91), and **Kevin Lee** (MSO-79) in the Paraloft, **Marge Kuehn** (RAC-91) filled the training assistant spot, **Marge Phillips** (MSO-88) will be splitting her time in Recruiting and Human Resource duties and **Keith Wolferman** moved over to Loadmasters to assist **Ken Wabaunsee** (MSO-86). We also filled five squadleader positions (FINALLY!). **Knute Olson** (MSO-00), **Jen Martinuik** (MSO-99), **Charles**

Special Announcement—NSA Vietnam Tour

When: January, 2007 How Long: 11 days

Cost: \$2,950 per person - Twin sharing hotel room

Itinerary:

- Day 1 - Depart Seattle EVA Airlines, 747-400, refuel Taipei, Taiwan then Ho-Chi-Minh City (formerly Saigon)
- Day 2 - Arrive Ho-Chi-Minh City about noon and rest
- Day 3 - Tour re-unification palace (formerly Independence Palace) and War Remnants museum
- Day 4 - Tour Cu-Chi tunnels - former bastion of Viet Cong, close to Saigon
- Day 5 - Depart to Da-Nang by air, rest, stay Furama Resort on China Beach
- Day 6 - Tour Marble Mountain and historic town of Hoi-An near China Beach, another night at Furama Resort
- Day 7 - Drive to Hue, cultural capitol of Vietnam via scenic Hai-Van Pass, visit historic Thien-Mu Pagoda
- Day 8 - Tour citadel in Hue and old Emperors tombs
- Day 9 - Depart for Ho-Chi-Minh City by air
- Day 10 - At leisure in Ho-Chi-Minh City
- Day 11 - Depart for Seattle via Eva Airline and arrive same day

Included in cost:

- All airfare both transpacific and in Vietnam
- All ground transportation according to tour
- All meals - Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- All hotels - will be five star hotels in Saigon and Da-Nang and three star hotel in Hue for two nights
- Guide service - three guides for 30-person group
- Travel insurance to include medical evacuation, lost baggage, etc.

Not Included:

- All personal expenses - laundry, telephone, etc.
- All beverages - soda or alcohol
- Tips and unspecified meals
- Any side trips or transportation at your expense
- This tour is limited to first 32 people and twin sharing hotel rooms.

Other Information:

- Tour will be led by **Fred Rohrbach** (MSO-65) and Vietnam veteran.
- Fred is currently a businessman with 30 years experience in Asia and Vietnam. He has traveled Vietnam extensively since 1975 and has co-authored the first picture book on Vietnam by an American in 1988.

Interested:

- Contact Fred at 206-574-3300 - Mon - Fri and specify NSA tour when calling or email at pollyfred @comcast.net
- Note - Prices such as airfare and hotels could increase by Jan. 2007 but would be minimal if at all.

Savoia (MSO-01), **Godot Apuzzo** (MSO-00), and **Frank Castillo** (MSO-92) accepted those positions and we wish them all congratulations.

With all of the moisture we received in eastern Montana after last year's mild winter, big game numbers are looking awesome, and many of us are looking forward to a productive hunting season, as well as good skiing!

Have a great winter and safe holiday season.

NCSB Base Report

by **Daren Belsby** (NCSB-86)

The pre-season was taken up with climbing back east, Rx, and one FUMA detail. NCSB had a slower than normal fire season with 21 fires.

The crew got off to a good start in 2005 by heading to

Alaska with our jumpship J-07. Most of the season was spent filling various assignments, training and booster requests.

Our three trainee squadleaders are: **Inaki Baraibar** (NCSB-98), **Michael Noe** (NCSB-99) and **Scott Wicklund** (NCSB-91). The operations position was filled by **Matt Woosley** (NCSB-84). The crew was busy in the fall with Rx burning and aiding in hurricane relief efforts. The winter has three PFTs planned for next year and we're hoping for a more active fire season.

Redding Base Report

by **Nate Hesse** (RDD-01)

After a wet winter and lack of lightning, a relatively slow start to fire season allowed jumpers to take advantage of various details and projects in 2005. I joined **Hernan Sotela**

(RDD-89) and **Ed McGavren** (RDD-02) and headed to Silver City, where we each jumped several fires and had a good time with the other detailers. When we returned to Redding, **Hernan** accepted a new job in south zone as a heli-tanker manager. Best wishes **Hernan**. **Adam Lauber** (RDD-99) detailed as a foreman on the Truckee Hand Crew on the Tahoe N.F. for the season. **Steve Murphy** (RDD-88) and **Josh Mathiesen** (RDD-94) detailed to an ADFMO position on the Mendocino N.F. **Casey Ramsey** (RDD-01) detailed as an assistant on the Mammoth Fire Use module on the Inyo N.F., giving several jumpers an opportunity to fill-in with that module for month long stints and gaining additional experience in Fire Use. **John Casey** (RDD-99) detailed with the Whiskeytown Fire Use Module and Yosemite N.P. in the Task Force position. **Jerry Spence** (RDD-94) worked on a Rx project in the Lassen N.P. for a spell. **Bob Bente** (RDD-88) headed south for hurricane relief, along with a crew of 20 jumpers to assist in hazard tree removal.

To date we put 122 jumpers out the door in 2005. Several boosts to the north and a handful of fire jumps in the south zone from Fresno and San Bernardino brought most of the overtime for the crew. In September, fires popped up after small lightning storms quickly moved through the area, making September nearly our busiest month. We also jumped our first Fire Use fire in the Klamath Wilderness.

In Aviation news, the contracted Commander is working as lead plane and air attack. We still have **Stan Kubota** (RDD-85) flying various missions in the Cobra helicopter. The DC-3 contract has ended and they headed back to Indiana. Thanks to all of our pilots this year - Forest Service pilots for our Sherpa and late season MYL otter Bob Coward, Dan Johnson, Rick

Haagenson, Wendy Gima, Dave Spliethof, and John Blumm, who was away in Iraq this season. He has since returned and was spotted fishing in the Sacramento River's famous barge hole. Thanks also to our DC-3 pilots - Travis Brown, Dave Seest, and Kim Kappel.

During times of limited fire activity, some jumpers used the opportunity to temporarily transform the saw shop into a mini "Monster Garage," where slag was thrown, the air was thick, and the music was blaring. Of all of the creative and useful items built, the most notable was an old Schwinn bro-bike that would make American Chopper proud. The saw shop garden yielded a variety of peppers and tomatoes again in 2005. **Don Graham** (RDD-01) researched a hybrid pepper plant to get arguably the hottest pepper on the planet. Paracargo has tinkered with different configurations of boxes to suit the needs of a variety of fire situations.

In the Training dept. **Bob Bente**, **Steve Murphy**, **Rick Rataj** (RDD-00), and **Justin Horn** (RDD-03) attended the EC-4 Ropes and Rigging course in Oregon this year. The loft had a few newly qualified senior riggers and others going through rigger training. We've made a few runs of a newer designed pack-out bag enhanced by Bittenbender from MYL.

Congratulations go to the Class of 2005 for completing rookie training: **Isaiah Fisher** (Union IHC), **Tony Herbert** (Blue Ridge IHC), along with detailers **Leonard Dimaculangan** (Texas Canyon IHC), **Derek Wheeler** (Mendocino IHC) and **Doug Powell** (Shasta-Trinity N.F.). They had a good time in the woods with Winthrop's **Tim Lum** (RDD-90) and the Rookie P.J.'s, participating in navigation courses and tree climbing.

Rick Rataj and **Greg Fashano** (RDD-99) have been head-



Some of the smokejumpers in attendance at the Air American reunion in Reno June 2005. L-R: Lee Gossett, Chuck Sheley, Shep Johnson, Barry Reed, Steve Seigrist, T.J. Thompson, Gene Hamner, Bob Herald, Dave Towers, Cliff Hamilton and Ken Hessel. (Courtesy Gayle Morrison)

ing to Eureka, California, in search of good surf during days off. Reports of good waves and a slight scare when a dolphin was mistaken for a Great White.

In other "days off" news, huge fish are being caught off the boat of **Dave Johnson** (RDD-00). Results are still being tallied for the Redding Jumper Big Buck contest. Talk of winter travel plans are surfacing. **Darby Thompson** (RDD-04) is off to Germany for the winter. **Justin Horn** is planning to climb around in New Zealand, and recruitment is on to see who will head to England for the "Tough Guy Competition."

Congratulations to **Rachel Kellogg** (RDD-04), who was recently engaged. **Mitch Hokanson** (RDD-00) and wife Kamie, **Ryan Clifton** (RDD-03) and wife Nina, and my wife Elena and I are all expecting new additions to our families around the first of the year. **Brian Kvisler** (RDD-03), **Shane Ralston** (RDD-03), and **Brad Schuette** (RDD-04) have each purchased houses here in Redding. **Brad** is taking charge as coach in another season of softball starting this fall. Try-outs are coming up, and there are a few more bros sticking around this winter to help with the averages.

Redmond Base Report

by **Gary Atteberry** (RAC-97)

The 2005 fire season looked to be a grand one here at Redmond.

There was a record low snow pack in the Cascades and temps in the winter months reached 60 degrees on some days. Prescribed burning started early. Jumpers were dragging torches on the Deschutes in February. It all came to an end in late March and April. The rains didn't stop until late June. The Central Oregon area received 500% of its regular precipitation during the spring months. This didn't deter the mood of the jumpers at RAC. We figured the spring rains would just keep the fires smaller and more manageable for us. "Two manners for all" was the attitude. As we waited for the woods to dry out, we continued implementing the National Smokejumper Organization. The next round of hiring would implement the GS-8 level in the RAC organization - something we had never seen.

Congrats to **Tony Loughton** (RDD-83), **Ray Rubio** (RAC-95) and **Gary Atteberry** for receiving the GS-8 spotter positions. Shortly after those positions were announced, GS-7 Squadleader positions were flown. Congrats to **Jim Hansen** (RDD-87), **Tony Sleznick** (RDD-92), **Josh Cantrell** (MSO-97), and **Rob Rosetti** (RAC -01) on their new positions.

All of the hiring didn't distract us from the arrival or absence of a fire season. We entertained ourselves with rookie training through the end of June. **Tony Johnson's** (RAC-97) first rookie class as training foreman did very well. We started with 11 and ended up with six. Our congratulations go to **Matt Wood**, **Bjorn Skovlin**, **Aaron Skillings**, **Aaron Olmos**, **Brett Fairchild**, and **Jason Barber**. All performed exceptionally. However it was unanimously decided amongst the crew that training was much harder in the past than nowadays.

As of early July, fire season had still not showed in Central Oregon. We were caught telling rookies, "Just you wait until late July, then it'll happen." Luckily, boosts to Alaska came through and kicked things off for us. Finally on July 21st the

siren in the ready room sounded for a sweetheart, 15-acre fire in The Bull of The Woods Wilderness on the Mt Hood. That was the 1st of only 25 fires that Redmond jumped in 2005. Redmond's 10-year average is 76 fires. To say the least, 2005 was a slow season at RAC.

We entertained ourselves with typical jumper antics and all tried to become movie stars. All summer we found ourselves in front of the cameras. A film company funded by the Discovery Channel set up shop in our training room and took to documenting the lives of jumpers, fires or not. They followed us everywhere. Physical training, sewing, in the plane, out of the plane, fishing, in the pub, and with the help of **Wayne Risseeuw** (RAC-90), even out on our fires occasionally. We had cameras everywhere except, well, where the sun don't shine! We as subjects most likely put our best boots in our mouths at times, but expect to see some outstanding jump footage. Look for it on your local cable channel possibly in January.

The winter looks similar to the last few. Our regular contingent of jumpers will go down to the Francis Marion in South Carolina - most likely starting in late fall. Details back east for tree climbing will probably come trickling in soon. We have our steady stream of project work, and by the time the snow is too deep in the woods, the sewing machines will be humming in the loft.

West Yellowstone Base Report

by **Charles Wetzel** (WYS-92)

The 2005 fire season has finally ended in West Yellowstone, with a couple of days of light snow wetting down the woods. There was one final hurrah on Oct 1st with a fire on the Gallatin for which an air tanker was ordered, forcing us to re-open the mixing plant after having winterized it.

We had a pretty good season with 25 fire jumps and two round action fires out of West, plus a few other fires that were staffed using our plane while it was on the road. We also sent out numerous single resources, including Division Supervisor **Jon Ueland** (MSO-80), Strike Team Leader **Melanie Pfister** (GAC-01), Law Enforcement Officer **Tyler Robinson** (FBK-88), Helicopter Manager **Mike Hill** (WYS-95), Fire Use Manager **Bobby Sutton** (MSO-91), Air Tanker Mixmaster **Carlos "Cheech" Trevino** (WYS-92), Air Tanker Base Manager **Cole Parker** (WYS-92) and Air Tactical Group Supervisor **Hardy Bloemeke** (MSO-77). We also sent **Melanie Pfister** and **Ernie Walker** (RDD-01) to help staff the Silver City base this spring. **Mark Belitz** (WYS-01) and **Melanie Pfister** were signed off as spotters this year.

We had great support from our local dispatch this season. They were very supportive of letting the plane and jumpers respond to out-of-area fires when there was not much activity locally.

Our numbers this year were at 22 plus two rookie detailers, **Joe Rock** from the Gallatin N.F., and **Nick Stanzak** from the Huron N.F. Helping fill out the staffing requirements were eight BLM detailers and four MSO detailers. Plans are in motion to hire more folks this winter. The goal is to be able to put jumpers on single-resource assignments - improving their fire qualifications - without having us rely on detailers to fill out our jump loads. 🍄



Blast from the Past



Esquire magazine February 1945

At the height of the fire season last August, a fire was reported on Cub Creek in the Bitterroot country, one of the most inaccessible forest regions in the U.S. The smoke was rising in an area that was at least two full days travel afoot from the nearest road's end.

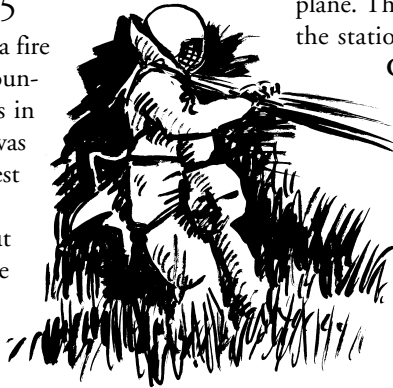
Last summer 126 'chute firefighters put out more than 150 fires before they could become big fires. Many foresters believe that we are well on the way to revolutionizing the business of fighting forest fires. Most of the smoke-jumpers were conscientious objectors who were permitted to volunteer from the Civilian Public Service camps.

The tri-motor plane took off shortly before 9:00 (A.M.) from Johnson Brothers' Field at Missoula and headed toward the Moose Creek Ranger Station to pick up the jumpers. It covered the seventy air miles in fifty minutes.

The ranger station looked to be on a shelf with the outer edges dropping off into a wooded gorge. Pilot Dick Johnson dropped into the gorge and turned the plane around with the tips of the wings only a few feet from the rock before skimming the treetops and landing.

At the head of the runway the four smoke-jumpers were suiting up. The yellow ducks of the jumpers stood out among the blue dungarees of the others. Supervising was Jack Allen of Cody, Wyoming. A year before, he was a Marine paratrooper in New Caledonia but was on the Marine's inactive list because of an eye injury (received) in a night parachute jump. He was one of a number of returned war veterans employed by the Forest Service.

Besides the jumpers and Allen (spotter), Ranger A.B. Gunderson and his assistant, Herb Wilkerson, boarded the



plane. The fire was located about eleven air miles from the station. The four jumpers were **John Shipp, Bob Cochran, Emory Garber and Ralph Spicer.**

They sat still and pensive. Only Cochran, a tall blond of twenty, took off his helmet. Allen, the ex-Marine squatted beside the smoke-jumpers.

The keen-eyed Johnson spotted the fire at 10:54. The fire was in an old burn area with brush growing up in a maze of fallen trunks of trees. To the right of the fire was a good stand of timber and all that was needed to spread the fire was a rising wind.

Allen dropped ten-pound sacks of sand attached to small parachutes to judge the wind drift and signaled constantly to Johnson using hand signals. John Shipp got into the door and Allen guided the pilot so that the plane might pass exactly over the spot Allen had chosen. At the precise moment, he slapped the smoke-jumper on the shoulder and in one flowing motion, the jumper went out the door. In slightly more than a minute Shipp was on the ground about 100 yards from the fire. The first man had stepped out of the plane at 11:03. The other jumpers went out at two-minute intervals with the same disciplined precision. All landed clear of the snags and none of them more than 200 yards from the fire. The tri-motor dropped to about 200 feet and Allen pushed the supply packs out the door. At 11:10 the operation was completed. On the ground the smoke-jumpers in their blue dungarees were now visible.

At 11:40 we were back at Moose Creek. Already a party with mules had started for Cub Creek and radio contact had been established with the smokejumpers on the fire. That evening the Cub Creek blaze was reported "dead out," but it would be two days before the fire fighters got back afoot to the ranger station. 🔦

NSA Vice President Selected As New Law Enforcement Director

WASHINGTON, July 20, 2005 – U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth today selected **John Twiss** (RAC-67) to head the agency's law enforcement and investigations branch.

"John has demonstrated strong leadership and managerial skills while serving many years as a forest supervisor as well as from managing a national program," said Bosworth. "Those

experiences will serve him well in his new assignment with responsibilities for managing the national law enforcement program and organization."

As director of law enforcement and investigations, Twiss will lead an organization of more than 600 law enforcement officers and special agents assigned to Forest Service offices throughout the country. The law enforcement and investiga-

tions program is charged with the protection of people and natural resources on some 193 million acres of National Forest System land visited by hundreds of millions of people each year. Forest Service law enforcement officers and agents respond to some 200,000 incidents in any given year encompassing a wide range of criminal and non-criminal activity, including drug trafficking, eco-terrorism, archeological resource theft and search and rescue operations.

"I am honored and excited about joining the law enforcement and investigations organization," said Twiss. "I believe that our law enforcement personnel are some of the hardest working and most professional people in our agency. They do a difficult job very well and I look forward to being part of that team."

Twiss served as forest supervisor of the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota since 1995. In 2004, he joined the national headquarters to work on several special assignments for the chief. Prior to his position on the Black Hills, he was the agency's national wilderness program coordinator in Washington, D.C. He has also served in district ranger assignments in Idaho and Oregon and as a deputy forest supervisor on the Superior National Forest in Minnesota.

Twiss received a bachelor's in forest management from Oregon State University in 1973 following military service. He began his career as a seasonal employee in Yellowstone National Park and was a smokejumper for the Forest Service for nine years in Redmond, Ore. Twiss was recently selected as a member of the federal government's senior executive service. 📌



NSA Trail Crew

by Don Courtney (Missoula '56)



ART JUKKALA (MSO-56) started it. He convinced the Forest Service, with some difficulty, that old smokejumpers could do some useful work on trails that the Forest Service was no longer able to maintain. In 1999, he assembled 17 volunteer NSA members into two crews and went to work on trails in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area.

The program has grown every year since, and this year saw between 130 and 140 NSA volunteers working on 13 projects, repairing over 100 miles of trail, building/rebuilding several bridges, repairing corrals and gates and rail fences, and doing maintenance on backcountry guard stations/administrative sites. NSA volunteers have worked in Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Colorado, and this year, for the first time, in Alaska.

Also this year, the Chief of the Forest Service honored the program by presenting NSA with "The Chief's Award" for exemplary service. Perhaps an even greater honor lies in the fact that we no longer have to twist Forest Service arms for projects. There is now a waiting list of projects they want us to undertake, whenever we can get to them. In addition to the Forest Service, we also work with the Bob Marshall Foundation, the Sawtooth Society, and the Colorado Trail Foundation, and this year for the first time, with the Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers.

As vice president of the Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers, Jerry Dixon

(MYC-71) put together a crew to work on the Iditarod Trail during June 2005. The crew was a mixed bag of dog sled racers, their families and three NSA members: John LeClair (MYC-77), C. J. Horner (MYC-65), and Dixon. The historic Iditarod Trail was originally named the "Seward to Nome Mail Trail" but it soon became known as the Iditarod Trail because it passed through the Iditarod mining district, which was the most common destination of folks setting out from Seward. The annual dog sled race on the Iditarod goes from Anchorage to Nome, a distance of 1,049 miles.

The Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers, working with the Forest Service, have recently received a \$3.5 million grant to work on the section of the trail between Seward and Crow Pass, so there should be trail work for volunteers for some seasons to come. Dan Seavey has been working on trails in the Seward area for 42 years and ran in the first Iditarod race in 1973. (Three generations of Seaveys have run the Iditarod.) Dan said of this year's NSA project: "This is the best trail crew I have ever worked with." It would seem that future crews on this famous trail could employ as many NSA volunteers as want to step forward.

Some NSA trail projects involve many miles of hiking, and others (reserved mostly for the older volunteers) are on sites that are vehicle accessible. The projects serve the volunteers as

mini-reunions and satisfying working vacations. Most volunteers return year after year from all over the country, at their own expense. Every crew includes an EMT and a cook, and a collection of former smokejumpers who became other things after they took real day jobs: doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs, fire chiefs, politicians, pilots, engineers, journalists, preachers, teachers, carpenters, cabinet makers, foresters, soldiers, sailors, cops, secret agents and lots of other things. This mix makes for good conversations, good arguments, good times and quality work. And lots of silk stories. What fun it is.

And what fun it would be if Art Jukkala were alive to see what has become of his baby, and how it has grown. 📌



USFS award for exemplary service to the NSA Trails Program. (Courtesy Jon McBride)

Profile From the Past

Danny On (Cave Junction '46)

by Jack Demmons (Missoula '50)

Originally printed in the July 1996 issue of *The Static Line*.

Dick Courson (CJ-46) sent us several pictures of Danny On. They both trained at Nine Mile, west of Missoula, in 1946, and then returned to Cave Junction to set up that base for the first time. (After 1946 the Cave Junction jumpers were trained at their own location.)

Danny was a former paratrooper with the 101st Airborne Division and saw action in Europe during WWII. He was severely wounded at the Battle of the Bulge at Bastogne, Belgium, during December 1944. Dick believes he had an 80% disability rating from the Veterans Administration.

He had a deep fascination for German culture and took German while working on a Forestry degree at Montana State University (now known as the University of Montana). Dick mentioned that he would practice his German on them. There were several times when visitors at the Cave Junction base were startled when this six-foot jumper would suddenly materialize from behind a tree, singing songs in German.

While at Cave Junction, Danny made his own bow and arrows. Dick said he was quite a craftsman and excelled in photography. He was very much a gentleman with a great sense of humor.

Forestry officials tried to discourage Danny from continuing on as a smokejumper, since he had both a bachelor's and master's degree in Forestry. Around 1950 he left Cave Junction.

We talked to Gordon George, a former Forestry official, who retired at Pendleton after serving as a timber staff official in Oregon. He was one of Danny's best friends through the years. Both of them were on the Deschutes N.F. out of Bend, Oregon, from 1955-56. Danny went on to the Supervisor's office in Bend, then transferred to the Kootenai N.F. at Libby, Montana. His next change of duty station put him at the Region 1 office in Missoula, and then to Whitefish, Montana. During those years, Danny took thousands of pictures and had them made into slides. January 21, 1979, was a very cold, windy, snowy day at the Big Mountain Ski Resort out of Whitefish. Danny had been skiing with friends that morning and after lunch went back up the mountain by himself. Few skiers ventured out because of the extreme cold. Several saw his car in the parking lot late that afternoon but thought nothing of it. However, when it was seen in the same spot the following morning, people did take note and word was soon spread that Danny was missing.

A search was launched. Cal Tassinari, a retired Wilderness Ranger in the Flathead N.F., now living at Whitefish, was one of the searchers. He told us that each had a radio and a call

came in from one of the men, stating that Danny had been found. Cal skied to the location and said one of Danny's arms was sticking up out of the snow, trapped behind him, with a ski pole still attached to his wrist. He had either hit a tree or caught an edge and then plunged down into a "tree well" – a hole under the snow near the base of a tree. It is not known if he was unconscious when going into the hole, but Cal is certain that he suffocated. (The snow in a "tree well" is not compacted and the more one struggles to get out, the deeper one usually goes.) Danny had only one arm free and his skis were near the top of the hole. Cal did not know if Danny had an "iron mask" as a result of his entrapment – where vapor from one's mouth freezes around the head, cutting off a supply of air. A rescue helicopter flew Danny off the mountain, and he was later taken home to Red Bluff, California, for burial.

In August 1981, a trail was dedicated to him on the mountain. It has two segments – one 3.8 miles in length and the other 5.7 miles. Many visitors at Big Mountain walk it during the summer months. One can either walk up and ride down on a ski lift, or ride up and walk down. There is a scrapbook at the summit house restaurant dedicated to him also.

We talked to nine different individuals about Danny's fate. They said he was a "powder hound" and liked to get off in snow away from the regular trails and ski "out of bounds." He didn't know any fear when skiing and would plunge straight down a course. Danny died doing one of the things he liked to do best.

We also talked to Danny's sister-in-law, Norma, at Sacramento, California. (She was married to Danny's brother, Jon, who passed away four years ago.) She reiterated stories about Danny. She mentioned that his brothers Joe, John and Louis live in the general Sacramento area, as does a sister, Mary Jane. The family has a furniture store in Sacramento and at one time the On family operated a restaurant, years ago, at Red Bluff. She said the family donated Danny's thousands of pictures to the U.S.F.S., the National Historical Society, Glacier National Park and the University of Montana.

A number of libraries have copies of the book, *Along the*



Danny On (NSA file)

Trail, a Photographic Essay of Glacier National Park and the Northern Rocky Mountains. It was published in 1979. The photos are by Danny and the text was written by David Sumner. It is dedicated to Danny, and the foreword reads, in part: “Danny On, University of Montana forestry graduate and Flathead Forest silviculturist, perished January 21, 1979, in a skiing accident... He was fifty-four years old, a native of Red Bluff, California (South of Redding about thirty miles near I-5), an Eagle Scout and World War II paratrooper... Danny On was known for his generosity, intelligence, respect for people and love of the outdoors... Among us are a few men and women who become legends even as they are friends and neighbors. Danny was such a man.” The foreword also states: “This unassuming forester became Montana’s best-known wildlife photographer.”

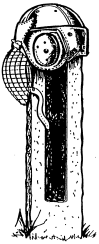
At the U of M library there is a set of 21 colored slides that Danny produced on Rocky Mountain Wildlife. He also took pictures for the book, *Going to the Sun: The Story of the Highway Across Glacier National Park.* He was co-author of the book, *Plants of Waterton-Glacier National Parks.*

This quiet, unassuming man, who almost died in the service of his county at Bastogne, went on to touch and help shape the lives of many, many people. At the memorial service held



Danny On (Courtesy Dick Courson)

January 27, 1979, Dr. Les Pengelly, wildlife biologist at the U. of M, stated: “All assembled here have had their lives shaped by Danny. He probably would have been embarrassed by all this attention. Instead, he would have suggested, ‘Let’s head for the hills.’” 🦋



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.

Roger “Rod” M. Davidson (McCall ’47)

Rod died August 4, 2005, in Boise. He served with the U.S. Naval Reserve from 1945 to 1947. After finishing his military service, Rod heard about a line of work that he couldn’t resist: Smokejumping. He fought fire with relish and distinction from 1947 to 1951 and came to be known as the legendary “Toad” in the process. He counted the time spent with his fellow jumpers as some of the best of his life. After completing a successful career with Mobil Oil Company in Southern California, Rod moved his family back to Boise in 1964. He opened the Brass Lamp Pizza Parlors in Boise and McCall and later opened Tom Grainey’s Sporting Pub and the Highlands Hollow Brew House. Rod’s affinity for people was contrasted by his love for the lakes and rivers and places in untamed parts of Idaho. His work with the Forest Service was always a source of delight. If there was a lookout tower within a hundred miles, he would lead his family there. Fighting fires in the remotest parts of the state was something he treasured. *Thanks to Leo Cromwell for this information.*

John S. “Jack” Spencer (Missoula ’52)

Jack died December 27, 2004. He was a professional forester receiving his initial degree from Virginia Tech and a Masters degree from the University of Montana. Jack spent the early part of his career in Northern California, later moving to Minnesota where he took a job as a resource analyst with the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program in St. Paul. He spent 28 years with FIA that included traveling to Kenya and writing several encyclopedia articles on global forest resources.

Jerry M. Martinez (Redding ’77)

Jerry passed away in his sleep at age 53 on July 18, 2005, in Cortez, Colorado, where he was on assignment with the Forest Service as an Air Tanker manager. He grew up in Salinas, California, and had a career of over 30 years with the USFS that included jobs in California, Oregon and Washington. Jerry took a position with the Custer N.F. in 1992 and had lived in Camp Crook, South Dakota until his death. *Thanks to Lynn Martinez for this information. See more in Odds and Ends column.*

Dewey Secrist (Missoula ’48)

Dewey Secrist passed away on August 13, 2005 at the age of 81, days short of celebrating his 60th wedding anniversary with his wife Jane. Dewey was born in Nevada, raised in Colorado, and ranched in Montana before serving in the Navy in WWII where he earned five battle stars. He met his bride in Philadelphia during the war. They moved west where Dewey jumped in 1948 and ’49. He knew many of those who were lost at Mann Gulch. After smokejumping, Dewey farmed in Colorado and ranched in Montana before moving east. He became an officer in Merchant Marines, sailing for over 25 years. He retired to “land” duty closer to home in the maintenance department of a school district in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

Thanks to Karen Weiss for this information via the NSA website. 🦋