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Smokejumper Magazine, January 2011

National Smokejumper Association

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SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



by **John Twiss**
(Redmond '67)
PRESIDENT

I AM ESCAPING the cold season of the Dakotas this year by wintering in Arizona not far from Marana, where I used to attend Forest Service fire training at the Pinal Air Park. Short-sleeve weather and lots of Border Patrol!

Board member **Tom Boatner** (FBX-80) recently put a fact sheet together about the National Smokejumper Association that I would like to share with you:

The NSA's mission is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, maintaining and restoring our nation's forest and grassland resources, responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families, and advocating for the programs evolution.

The NSA's values are comradeship, education, pride in work well-done and loyalty. The NSA implements its mission through a series of programs:

- The NSA **Good Samaritan Fund** is established to give financial support to current and former smokejumpers and their families in a time of need.

- The NSA **Scholarship Pro-**

gram will provide scholarships annually to active smokejumpers or family members pursuing education at college or trade schools.

- The NSA **Art Jukkala Scholarship Program** provides an annual award to children of smokejumpers killed in the line of duty.

- The NSA **Trail Maintenance Chair Scholarship** provides an annual scholarship to a smokejumper or child of a smokejumper who attends forestry school at the University of Montana.

- The **Smokejumper History Program** documents and preserves the history of smokejumping in part by doing video interviews of early smokejumpers (more than 250 to date) and storing photographs, historical documents and equipment (archived at the University of Montana's Mansfield Library), and displaying smokejumper artifacts in key places.

- The NSA **magazine and website** contains articles, stories, photos of all aspects of smokejumping. Updates from all jump bases, current events, reunion information, endeavors of active and inactive smokejumpers and obituaries can be found in both forums. The high-quality publication is read widely.

- The NSA **Trails Program** completed its 11th season in 2010 with more than 1,000 miles of trails maintained and numerous backcountry structures restored. The program operates in eight states from the High Sierras in California to the Boundary Waters in Minnesota. Several hundred annual volunteers par-

ticipate, and demand for the smokejumpers increases each year.

• **Involvement with current fire management and smokejumper programs** with both the BLM and the Forest Service leadership helps spot opportunities to provide support and allows the NSA to stay up-to-date with current issues and smokejumper utilization.

Maintaining connections with smokejumper leadership greatly increases the NSA's awareness. Since 2003, \$125,000 of your financial contributions has been distributed from the Good Samaritan and scholarship funds to smokejumpers and their families.

Roughly 5,000 men and women have been smokejumpers. Approximately 3,500 of you are still alive. There are 1,710 NSA members, of whom 251 are life members.

You are a generous, loyal bunch that I am proud to be associated with. Stay warm this winter or come on down for a visit. 🌲

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Smokejumper magazine

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage..... ANC	Grangeville GAC	MissoulaMSO
Boise..... NIFC	Idaho City IDC	ReddingRDD
Cave Junction CJ	La Grande..... LGD	Redmond.....RAC
Fairbanks FBX	McCall.....MYC	West Yellowstone WYS
		Winthrop..... NCSB

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, 2011.

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 email, 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:

January - February 15, 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, election results published in the October issue of *Smokejumper*.

Please call, write or email for your filing papers. My contact information is on left column of this page. The time to act is now!

Hope, The Best Tool

by LeRoy Cook (Cave Junction '64)

Awake with high anxiety, my mind was spinning. Inexperience got me here, and now which way to turn?

Last night had been full of powerful visions and dreams as I lay in a sea of shadows. Night alone in the tall uncut can be lonely if you're lost – worst if you don't have control of your thoughts. Yesterday, darkness came like a clipper across windy seas, forcing me to stop, tired, wrapping in the orange and white cocoon to siwash for the night.

Nights are cold this high up in the Cascades. I had weathered the struggle to stay warm, falling asleep only to wake often to shiver and at times listen to the phantom calls of the night dogs.

High up against the bright stars, tall trees formed a tattered and torn broken veil all around. The parachute, now wet with the dew of dawn, held little heat. Anticipating the coming light, I thought, "What to do this morning?"

On top of the hill where I stopped at dusk, water was available, but you had to go down over the side into the canyon bottom. The small stream would be clear, cold and so inviting; it, like all small streams, luridly called. No food for a couple of days and little water add to the way your mind works.

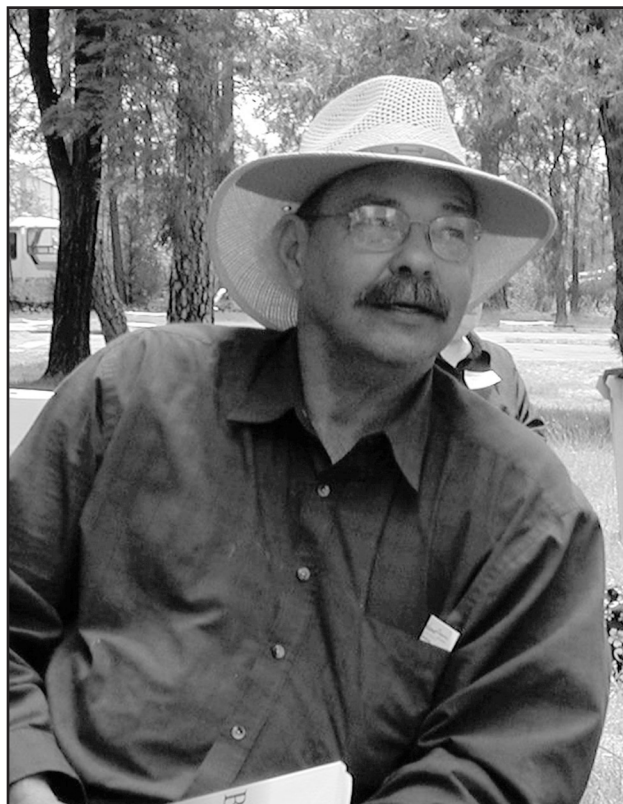
"It would be a hard climb out," my thoughts; I was awake, tired, filled with icy doubt, and feeling too drained to go for water!

A few days ago I sat in the door as long, sweeping passes were made behind a squall line of towering thunderheads. A thousand feet below, the green forest ran past, away and away, forming an unbroken, solid mass while the wind outside the Twin Beech raced by.

I scanned the woods below looking for smoke in the forest canopy – burning snags set afire by the Lightning Gods. The two Pratt and Whitney recipes sped us along over highlands as the ever-changing panorama slid past.

Moist, unstable air shook us as we trailed a massed line of storms marching across southwest Oregon. A bumpy ride, the Twin banked hard in the azure sky as primrose lightning cut anvil walls of ever-changing cumulonimbus. Below, dead snags stuck up everywhere you looked: like watchtowers, easy targets; like magic, a burning one appeared; and so it began.

The timber jump had been somewhere in the high and rugged cascading spine that crosses the state north to south and named after the rapids in the Columbia River



LeRoy Cook (Courtesy J.Kirkley)

gorge. Flyover country. I was up on a mountain in a dark and ancient woodland called "Umpqua," and somewhere in the distance far away was the Siskiyou trail now called "Interstate 5" by those who love commerce and growth.

Around me everywhere, brooding and watchful old-growth evergreens were my only companions. The Umpqua Forest, part of the western slope of the Oregon Cascades, was covered with colossal giants – fir and hemlock were my world.

This was a while ago when youth was my ally, inexperience my companion. School would again be in session today, but all of life's lessons are not taught in buildings. Sometimes there's no joy in anticipation, "having fun today," I thought! Life's simple secrets can often hide in the tall grass or the shadows of quiet pools – pretty places where nature's tests come before her lessons.

I went to Oregon before the great migration to self-centeredness – a time when pickup trucks still had one seat and were made by men in Detroit from pig iron. You were judged by what you did, not what you looked like. Parts of the West were still shiny green, since the

rapine of the old growth was not complete; unbounded and everlasting, now so long ago and far away.

The state's beauty made folks identify with a vast and slumbering, unbroken solitude. Here the ancients believed the region's tall mountains were bridges to the gods; beyond their beauty was wisdom in the silence of high places. Mythical legends lived here, like Sasquatch, and trees were king.

My day had come pregnant with concern – needing to get out, to find my way, but what to do? I felt defeated at having become lost. When you are young, it's hard to not compare yourself to those around you. Doubting thoughts can be a kiss of death, a trail not to go down. Lost, I was now not living up to what was expected, and I thought I would probably be fired when I got out – if I got out. Unchecked thoughts had taken me where I shouldn't have gone.

But morning's gift and promise had come, as it does each day; the last of the night winds whispered "Luck be with you," and my new day began. At first it was just a will-o'-the-wisp that drifted beyond wishful thinking. Soon a faint noise wafted through the canopy, and I heard the low whine of engines as they carried clearly in the still, morning air.

"It's the Beech," I thought. "They're looking for me. *Build a fire!*"

The polished veneer of civilization was not far away. As the fellow smokejumper landed near me, I can still hear that internal switch flipping in my brain. A conscious awareness came in less than a second, going from down to up.

Suddenly everything was all right; I stood still as a windless sea and thought, "Why had I been so negative?" There had been nothing wrong with me physically. "I could have gone on for days!"

It's not important for you to know how I got in this situation; think something up if you must. Anyone can get lost – in fact, many are lost today, and no amount of electronic wizardry will help them find their way. People don't have to be in the woods to get lost, but many will lose their way in today's false satisfaction of instant gratification and greed.

I'm not one to preach and it's with reservation that I write this, for it's an unmanly act to talk about yourself, but there's something about living, change, and these harder economic times. Like that time in Umpqua, we are still okay.

One time through is all we get down the river. You can't go back and fish it a second time. Life can take us all at a moment's notice to places requiring an enduring tolerance. Your thoughts are as real as the food you put in your belly and the car you drive. Getting your mind right is the fuel behind action and power, the source for

how you deal with stress and live every day.

It's the same with faith and religion – thoughts are energy, either tools of destruction or hope.

The wisdom of many years can't be wrong. You get more out of life by looking outward rather than inward, having a sense of direction. We all do better when we believe in ourselves and others. You can find someone who's lost, but you can't save a troubled soul; only God can do that.

The world can be such a lonely place for some, especially during the holidays. They may be far from family and friends with no one to turn to; love may have been tarnished or lost. Acts of kindness bring hope and put color back in people. This year, our Christmas may be a little brighter if we all reach out and help someone with need, for everyone has to be somewhere, even if it is Christmas. 🌲

Thanks To The Good Samaritan Fund

by Scott Anderson (McCall '84)

Last Fall I was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia for the second time. I am writing this letter to show my sincere gratitude for the help my family and I received from the *NSA Good Samaritan Fund*. I am pleased to report, that there are no signs of Leukemia left in my body. I expect a full recovery.

Our successful fight against Leukemia required several important elements; most of which are contained within the community in which we live and the friends we have surrounded ourselves with. Health insurance and western medicine simply aren't enough. Treatments like mine require that you and your family walk away from life as you know it and embrace the unknown. We are so fortunate that we had a solid support system, which you were a part of, that didn't allow everything we have worked so hard for to fall to pieces.

For some, the lack of support requires them to rebuild not only their bodies, but also their lives. One is difficult enough, both can be insurmountable. In the beginning we were reluctant to ask for or take help. We quickly realized just how fortunate we were to have the assistance we did.

We would like to express our profound gratitude for your help and generosity, while we went through this challenging time.

—Scott, Sandie, Eva & Jing Jing Anderson

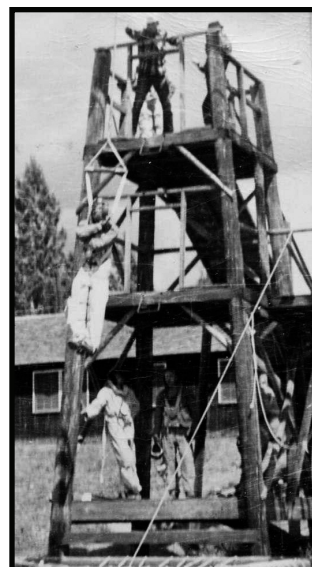


James Browne (MSO-49)



Died Mann Gulch Fire

Leonard Piper (MSO-49)



9-Mile Jump Tower



Missoula Rookies 1949

Photo's Courtesy George Harpole Collection



James Clinkingbeard (MSO-49)

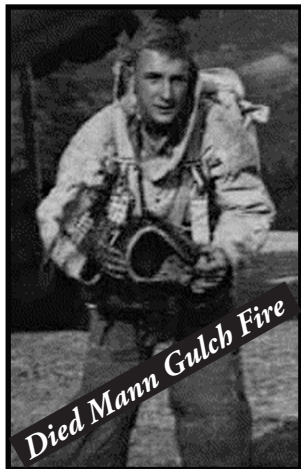


Smokejumper Brush Camp



Died Mann Gulch Fire

Robert Bennett (MSO-49))



Died Mann Gulch Fire

Hank Thol (MSO-49)



Bill Henry (MSO-49), Howard Gorsuch (MYC-46) & Bill Risken (MSO-49)

Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



George Harpole (MSO-49)

From The Smokejumpers Into The Forest Products Laboratory

by George B. Harpole (Missoula '49)

I visited the USDA Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory (FPL) in Madison, Wis., Nov. 25, 2009 – the day before Thanksgiving.

I left the FPL almost 20 years ago to retire in Colorado. The surroundings of the FPL had changed. The garden areas in front of the FPL were gone and there were new buildings everywhere. Only the front of the Forest Products Laboratory looked the same.

In July 1974 I transferred to the FPL from the Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station in Berkeley, Calif. As a forest products utilization economist, my job was to assess the accomplishments and commercial potentials for products and processing concepts being developed at the Forest Products Laboratory.

The assignment was much like the Marketing and New Business assignments I had when formerly working for Potlatch Forest (1959-67). To my delight, I found some big winners in the research programs at the FPL – for example, veneer-laminated beams and lumber, best opening-face sawing (computerized sawing techniques), and flakeboard sheathing (better known today as OSB sheathing).

Now, upon entering the FPL, I met Sandy Morgan at the receptionist's desk. She recognized my name! I was flattered because somebody I hadn't met before recognized me by name. She said she spent several years in Information Services at the FPL and had seen my name there.

Suddenly, my long-ago friend Bill Ireland seemed to come out of nowhere. We had to catch up on where I've been and why I was there, etc. In our conversation Bill mentioned the news that **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40), smokejumping pioneer and longtime base superintendent at Missoula, had passed away Nov. 9 at the age of 98.

Earl's passing was posted in every major newspaper in the U.S., as well as many foreign newspapers. He and **Rufus Robinson** (MSO-40) were the first two Forest Service smokejumpers to be dispatched by parachute into a forested area to put a fire out – back in 1940. They were on the fire to which they were dispatched within the hour, but had a 28-mile hike back to civilization.

I knew Earl Cooley. I was one of his smokejumpers during the fire seasons of 1949, 1950 and 1952. This was back in those days when being a fire guard or smokejumper was one of the stepping stones the Forest Service offered young people trying to scrape a few summertime dollars together to pursue college educations – to obtain degrees in forestry, journalism, economics, teaching and other professional pursuits. This was a time before student loans. For me, smokejumping was a stepping stone that eventually led to my employment at the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory.

I've always had a high regard for Earl Cooley, who always remembered us by our last names. Earl will be missed, but will be well-remembered. His name is certain to be a historical marker for the smokejumping culture – as a tribute to his character, courage and leadership in the face of doubters and naysayers. For example: *"I will remind you that you wrote some time ago about J.B. Bruce's scheme of dropping men from airplanes for firefighting. I am willing to take a chance on most any kind of a proposition that promises better action on fires, but I hesitate very much to go into the kind of thing that Bruce proposes. In the first place, the best information I can get from experienced fliers is that all parachute jumpers are more or less crazy – just a little bit unbalanced, otherwise they wouldn't be engaged in such a hazardous undertaking."*

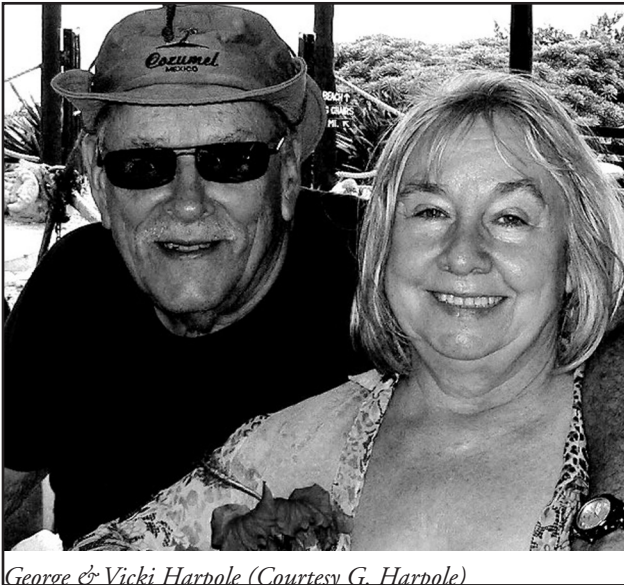
– Regional Forester Evan Kelley, July 1935

Earl Cooley wrote a 204-page autobiography, *Tri-motor and Trail*, that is now a collector's book. Hard-bound, signed copies of his book can be bought from the Forest Service Museum's gift shop for \$30, plus shipping. Visit the website at www.nmfs-history.net.

Earl's book is also offered from other sources via the Internet for as much as \$500 per copy. The Forest Service Museum offers Earl's book at a bargain price with the proceeds helping to support the National Museum of Forest Service History in Missoula.

Bill Ireland was aware I had been a smokejumper and suggested I write a blog for "Chips" regarding this part of my Forest Service career. I agreed I would try to put something together and send it to him.

After talking to Bill I was able to join a staff meet-



George & Vicki Harpole (Courtesy G. Harpole)

ing being held by long-ago friend and RWU-4851 Project Leader Ken Skog. The meeting included FPL old-timers Cherl Hatfield, Peter Ince, Jim Howard, Ted Bilek and Henry Spelter. Dave McKeever started his Thanksgiving a day early, so wasn't there, and Cherl told me I missed crossing paths with Bob Stone (a former project leader) by only a few days. I was sorry to have missed these guys.

The staff meeting revealed how much the FPL had changed, especially with respect to reductions in research programs related to solid wood products, with new research programs moving into areas of engineered structures, composite-type products, wood durability, wood protection research and remote sensing (Google Earth-kind of resource watching).

In fact, the 90,000-square-foot structure being built in front of the FPL was dedicated in June as the FPL's new "Centennial Research Facility," where these newer research programs will operate. The "Centennial" name celebrates the 100th year of the Forest Service's existence and Gifford Pinchot's declaration of the Forest Service's commitment to conservation – "To manage our National Forest in a way to create the greatest good for the greatest number."

After the staff meeting, Peter Ince escorted me to short visits with John Zerbe and Sue Austin. We looked for Regis Miller, but he was missing from his wood anatomy domain. Suddenly the dim light and smell of the FPL's hallways brought back the ghosts of everyone I ever knew at the FPL – like they should be there, but just weren't there now. I thought I could hear Norma Jones calling out for George McSwain, and Jerry Lipski's laughter coming from somewhere down on the second floor. On leaving the FPL I began

thinking I must be slipping, but after all I'll be 80 years old this year.

Then, on the 1,200-mile drive back from Madison to Grand Junction, Colo., those ghosts from the FPL emerged from the fog along the roadway, saying they wanted to know what I was going to say about being a smokejumper. Gradually those I came to know during my days as a smokejumper replaced them. The long drive created a hypnotic experience – generating a consortium of haunting memories coming back to tell me what I should write for Bill Ireland about being a smokejumper.

What could I say? What would my comrades of long ago want me to say?

Actually, what I could say about being a smokejumper during the 1949-52 fire seasons in Region 1 is best described by my friend **Starr Jenkins** (CJ-48) in a book he wrote, *Smokejumpers, '49 – Brothers in the Sky*. You could say we were Earl Cooley's boys. Copies of Starr's book (220 pages, plus a collection of professionally taken photos) are available on Amazon.com – at over \$70 for collector-grade copies, or new, signed copies from Starr Jenkins for \$35 – postage included – while copies last. Write Starr at 285 Buena Vista Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA 93405.

Rumbling west on Interstate 80 and then on I-76 toward Denver, the voices from my ghostly companions came through increasingly clear. Yes, there was lots of fun and bravado being a smokejumper. However, being on the early end of the learning curve for the smokejumper organization, we were taught all the tricks and techniques about making parachute jumps into timber and high-altitude pastures to quickly put small fires out.

But, we were not taught fire safety with respect to large fires, or for small fires that might explode into becoming large fires. During our last classroom session, while training at Camp Menard outside of Missoula, I asked our instructor two questions.

"What about the use of backfires?" I asked.

He replied, "We don't use them. They're just used on large fires."

My second question: "What can you do if you see you're going to hit a snag when coming in for a landing?"

He smiled when he replied, "It's gonna hurt."

I admit my second question might have sounded stupid, as well as a bit fearful, but, what if **Wag Dodge** (MSO-41) had been there to answer the first question? Wag Dodge used a backfire to save his life at Mann Gulch. Could his response in the classroom have saved the lives of the 13 other firefighters who died at Mann Gulch?

There were 12 smokejumpers plus a fire guard – **James Harrison** (MSO-47) – who walked to the fire. Two of those Mann Gulch victims were my close friends – **Leonard Piper** (MSO-49) and **Bob Bennett** (MSO-49) – who sat next to me when I asked the stupid (?) questions at our last classroom training session.

Being rebuffed on the backfire issue, I discussed this with Leonard and Bob in an effort to vindicate myself after the session. Obviously, nothing I said prevailed and might not have for me either if I had been there at Mann Gulch. Hence, there are 12 crosses on the hillside of Mann Gulch, plus a Star of David for one of our smokejumper brothers. Starr Jenkins’ book describes the Mann Gulch tragedy in detail.

Then there was the Yellowstone Fire of 1988 (794,000 acres), smaller than Region 1’s fire of 1910 (3.2 million acres), but with 9,000 firefighters and 4,000 U.S. military personnel without losing a single firefighter, although there were two related non-firefighter deaths.

Yes! We can thereby be proud that we know how to practice fire safety. But the Yellowstone Fire did contribute enormous volumes of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere and surely affected subsequent weather patterns – pointing to the environmental importance of the expedient suppression of small fires as is done by smokejumpers.

But, as if we needed another reminder, there were 14 more firefighters (10 men and four women) who lost their lives in Colorado’s Storm King Fire on July 6, 1994 – another two-man fire that exploded into becoming a large fire in the warm afternoon when the fire danger was at an upper limit, like the Mann Gulch fire of Aug. 5, 1949.

Twenty-five other firefighters died in association with wildland fires in 1994, although most were related to accidents and failures of firefighting vehicles, aircraft and firefighting equipment.

So, the message, as told to me by my ghostly advisors, is to tell you that forest fires are deadly, and that the suppression of small fires is of paramount safety and environmental importance as done by the Forest Service’s and Bureau of Land Management’s smokejumper units. They are telling me to tell you to stay out of any forest that has a high level of fire danger, or to be sure you have a plan for your escape from a fiery death – like keeping close to a lake, river, bio-free area, or have a surefire highway escape for you and your vehicle.

My brother, Myron Harpole, was fighting a fire in Yellowstone in 1946 that overran him and his firefighting partner. They survived by wading into the mucky waters of a small lake while a firestorm ran over them.

They emerged with cinder-burned shirts and skin. Since then, brother Myron served in the Korean War, has had a family and a successful professional career.

James Harrison, who died at Mann Gulch, was a friend of my brother. Thus, the voices of my smokejumper comrades emphasized what I must tell you, for safety’s sake: first, be informed; second, anticipate; and third, minimize your risk. These voices are saying this is what “safety first” is all about – whether you’re in the forest as a smokejumper or visitor, or you get carried away with skate sailing on the Madison-area lakes, riding motorcycles, sports parachuting, snorkeling coral reefs, rafting rapids on Colorado rivers, having a siege of road-rage or just having fun.

I know one of those voices belongs to Earl Cooley. 🙏

New NSA Life Members since January 2010 *Thanks for your support!*

#	Name	Base	Year
231	JIM DIEDERICH	REDDING	1970
232	KIM MAYNARD	MISSOULA	1982
233	TOM BOATNER	FAIRBANKS	1980
234	GLENN HALE	MCCALL	1957
235	GUY HURLBUTT	IDAHO CITY	1962
236	ALEX THEIOS	CAVE JUNCTION	1965
237	ROY BELLI	CAVE JUNCTION	1951
238	JACK HELLE	MCCALL	1954
239	WAYNE SCHRUNK	CAVE JUNCTION	1957
240	GARY JOHNSON	REDDING	1969
241	PETE LANDIS	CAVE JUNCTION	1962
242	RON THORESON	CAVE JUNCTION	1960
243	RICHARD BURNS	FAIRBANKS	1964
244	BOB “RIGGER” SNYDER	CAVE JUNCTION	1948
245	DAVID OSWALT	CAVE JUNCTION	1968
246	ROY KORKALO	MISSOULA	1961
247	RONALD BORST	NO. CASCADES	1964
248	DOUG MCCOY	REDDING	1973
249	DOUG WAMSLEY	MISSOULA	1965
250	GENE DEBRUIN	MISSOULA	1959



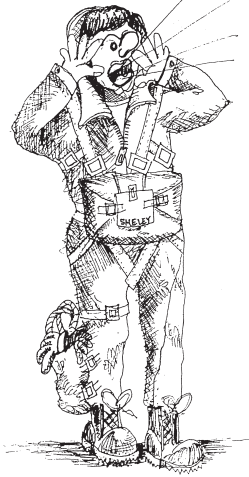
Sounding Off from the Editor



by Chuck Sheley
(Cave Junction '59)
MANAGING EDITOR

DURING THE SEVENTEEN years that I ran the Type II Crew Program for the Mendocino N.F., I felt that there was a greater benefit to our country than just helping control forest fires. As smokejumpers you might wonder what could be more important? My answer: Establishing a work ethic in young people and having them experience situations where they are hungry, very thirsty, dirty, tired and, in many cases, pushed to their physical limits. We had a very physical training program for the 3500+ firefighters that we trained and put into the field during those years. Many of these individuals continued in the fire service. Twenty-two of them became smokejumpers, and I still see some familiar names in the "Touching All Bases" reports. Coming off an NSA Trails Project in 2009, I dropped off Fire Captain **Jeff Steffens'** (BOI-78) gear at a fire station in Yuba City, California. Jeff had to leave a day early in order to

attend his daughter's wedding. I knew that the Captain on duty had started his career in the crew program, but was amazed to find out that the other two crew members on duty at that time had also started their careers in the Mendocino Crew Program. We had a mini-reunion at Station #4 in Yuba City.



What I miss the most about not doing the Organized Crew Program is giving young people jobs. I really feel that this country survived the early days of WWII on the foundation established by the CCC Program. From 1933-42 we put 3,000,000 young men into the forests of this country. They were mostly 18-20 years old and unemployed. They received \$30 a month with \$22-\$25 sent home to their families. The amount of work done by these men can be chronicled in the pages of our history.

As an active track coach at the high school level, I'm totally discouraged at the work ethic I see in our kids today. We have developed a society of people who are great with the computer, email, cell phones and texting. Could they step up and do the work of the CCC people of the 30s? No way, in my opinion. We have a soft, overweight society. If the job is not air conditioned, it is too hard.

During the track season I need a group of 3-4 people to be my hurdle crew. In order to run a three-hour track meet (which

is my standard), I need a small group of hard-working students to make the 500 moves of hurdles during a meet. Over the years I've found out that the hardest working athletes are either Cross Country runners or Wrestlers. Since the Cross Country athletes are also running track as your distance kids, I asked the wrestling coach for some workers. He gave me 4-5 kids who worked the meets over our season, and I was impressed with their work ethic. Finally, I had found some students who could make the rubber meet the road.

Lacking the ability to put 14-15 year-old kids on a fire crew, I wanted to find some jobs for them during the summer. The lack of jobs for kids is cutting away the foundation of our society.

Early on in my coaching career, I had a big young man who ran the 3rd leg on my 440-relay team that won the section championship. Fast forward to 2010 and his daughter is a runner on the Chico H.S. track team. I renewed a friendship that has been absent for 30+ years.

Rick (I won't give his last name) is the ultimate example of a self-made man. He is probably one of the largest non-corporate farmers in Northern California. There are no weekends in his schedule. In farming and the orchard business every day is a workday. It's like a fire season all year long.

I went to Rick and asked if there were any jobs for my young people who had done such a good job during the track season. Of course there are all the labor laws and reasons why 14-15 year-olds can't work, etc. But instead of listing the reasons why this wouldn't work (like we do with ideas in the public school systems), we decided that we could do field work as a fund-raiser. Car washes are OK, why not other types of work?

Now the rest of the story starts. Our first job was to pick roots in an old almond orchard where the trees had been ground to sawdust and a new orchard was being planted.

We reported to the field at 0600 the first day. The crew consisted of seven athletes and myself. The youngest were 15 and the oldest was one of my female hurdlers who attends Occidental College in Los Angeles. There were two white females: the hurdler and her younger sister who just graduated from Chico H.S. and was also my best hurdler this last season. The other five consisted of four wrestlers: four Hmongs, one Hispanic and one African-American. All were male.

The job: As a tractor pulling a large trailer drives down between two rows where there had previously been Almond Trees, we spread out to either side and picked up the roots that were left on the ground and threw them into the trailer. Easy to explain, hard to do.

When we got to the job at 0600 (I thought we'd start early to beat the heat), the regular crew had already been on the job an hour. They didn't know who we were as Rick hadn't gotten there to tell them that a coach and some high school kids

would be joining the work force. Fortunately my Hispanic wrestler could talk to the crew and smooth things out.

So we joined the fun. Bend over, pick up those roots, hustle over to the trailer and throw them in the back.

Now the challenge: The tractor keeps moving like a conveyor belt. Slow down and you are 10-yards behind the tractor. By 10:00 A.M. it is already 85 degrees going for 103 that day. I told the kids to bring hats, but they think a baseball cap will do. Fortunately, I bring a bunch of hats with wide brims, and the Hmong kids have hats their parents wear in the fields.

I thought that I was just going to be a supervisor but ended up having to push these kids like a fire crew in order to keep up with that damned tractor. 40,000 bend-overs later and it is only 10:00, and we have two hours to go. Don't know how long the rows were but the cars on the highway at the ends of the rows look like specks. I wisely scheduled six-hour workdays so I wouldn't have to bury anyone.

From 11:00 A.M. to noon it seemed like each minute was five minutes long. The only break we took was when the trailer was filled with roots, and it drove off to dump the load at the burn pile. Just time to sit down in the dirt and eat a piece of fruit or whatever. By noon I had some wide-eyed kids, and I wondered if anyone would show up for work the next day.

They all showed and surprisingly, day number two went faster. The same with day number three. I knew that the day three was the last for us, and we worked hard as we could see the light at the end of the tunnel. The regular workers, in addition

to coming back after lunch when we went home, still had three months to go.

It was an amazing experience. I felt that we kept up with the regular crews but, of course, I knew we couldn't have done the work they do day in and day out. A couple weeks later I paid off the kids. I was proud of their work ethic.

A couple thoughts: If I would have had those farm labor crews on the fireline, we could have built a line from Mexico to the Canadian Border. They were amazing workers.

I asked my hurdler who attends Occidental College what she got out of this experience. She said: That was the hardest job I've ever done and I have a deep respect for the work that the farm workers do on a daily basis.

I can second those thoughts. At the end of the first day I thought that if I were relegated to doing field labor I would head to McDonald's at the end of the first day and put in my application for a minimum wage job. I might start cleaning toilets, but it would be air-conditioned. From there I would go to dishwasher, fry cook, the counter and night manager in a year.

Bottom line: These were my best and hardest working kids. If I were to take our high school population out to the fields and pick roots, 99% of them would die on the job or not show the second day. Bring back the CCC program and ban cell phones and texting. 🙏

NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions

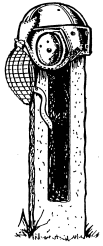
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Total funds received for the NSA Good Samaritan Fund, as of Sept. 30, 2010 – \$24,757

Total funds dispersed to smokejumpers and families since 2004 – \$10,800

**Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:
Charles Brown, 2723 Wilderness Ct., Wichita, KS 67226**



Off The List

Remember and honor fellow jumpers with a gift to the NSA Good Samaritan Fund in their name. Hard times can fall on many of us at any time. The NSA is here to support our fellow jumpers and their families through the Good Samaritan Fund. Mail your contribution to:

Charles Brown, NSA Treasurer
2723 Wilderness Ct.
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Alan "Al" Dunton (Fairbanks '67)

Al Dunton died July 18, 2010, at his home in Reno, Nev. He began his fire career in his hometown of Molalla, Ore., in 1962, and spent his rookie year in Fairbanks in 1967. Al was the Alaska smokejumper base manager from 1972 to 1984 when he was appointed as state fire management officer in Nevada for the Bureau of Land Management. He moved to Boise in 1993, and from there retired from his career as national fire director for BLM at the Interagency Fire Center.

Al was instrumental in shaping the Alaska Smokejumpers and many of his visions and impacts can be seen in the jumper program to this day. His method of "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast" remains a phrase that only he seemed to be able to perfect.

Al passed on his penchant for wildland fire to his children; his daughter Amber worked at the Western Great Basin (fire) Coordination Center and his daughter **Melanie Dunton** (MYC-99) was a McCall smokejumper. His son-in-law **Dave Vining** (NIFC-97) was a BLM smokejumper and continues today as a fire management officer in Idaho. Even Al's wife, Mary, worked in BLM fire in Alaska for five years prior to becoming a teacher.

The family has established the Al Dunton Memorial Leadership Award through the NSA. In lieu of flowers, Al's family requests donations to NSA's Good Samaritan Fund at http://www.smokejumpers.com/the_nsa/good_samaritan_fund.php.

Paul Block (Cave Junction '48)

Paul, 85, died August 2, 2010, in the crash of his home-built gyrocopter at the Illinois Valley Airport (former Siskiyou Smokejumper Base). The gyrocopter has a rotor like a helicopter and a propeller like an airplane. It appeared that something came off the tail section as Paul was preparing to land. Paul jumped at the "Gobi" for three seasons (1948-50) before moving south for a full-time job. After his retirement from his job as a public utility worker in the late 80s, he moved back to Cave Junction. He had flown for over 60 years and said, "It's nice to have an airport where there isn't

a tower and without planes being all over the sky." Any of us who worked on the Siskiyou Smokejumper Museum Project were able to see Paul and his flying machine as he loved flying and was in the air whenever he had a chance.

Robert R. "Bob" Evans (Idaho City '53)

Bob died June 28, 2010, in Tucson, Arizona, after a brief illness. He grew up in River Edge, NJ and served in the Korean War as an airplane navigator. After his military service he attended Utah State University, graduating in 1956 with a BS in Journalism and later a MS in Sociology. During his time at Utah State, he spent the summers of 1953 and 1954 as a smokejumper based in Idaho City. He later earned a PhD in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin, and he and his wife, Carol, had a counseling practice in Tucson for the past 25 years. He also had a private pilot's license and his own Cessna, and led an active life with his family.

Glenn F. Hale (McCall '57)

Glenn, 71, died August 24, 2010, in Payson, Ariz., after a long battle with chronic leukemia. He graduated from Payette High School in Payette, Idaho, in 1957. He spent seven seasons as a smokejumper, based in McCall and Silver City. He served in the U.S. Army Airborne as a parachute instructor from 1963 through 1965. He held a Master Parachute Rigger certification and for many years was a licensed pilot. He married Terry Lynelle Dinwiddie and for the first two years of their marriage, they lived on an air base in Savannakhet, Laos, where he worked for Continental Air Services, contracted with the Central Intelligence Agency. Upon their return to the U.S., he earned his bachelor's degree in business and real estate from the University of Arizona. Through Hale Construction, he designed and built nearly 500 custom homes throughout Tucson. He coached many youth basketball and baseball teams, and used his construction skills and contacts to improve sports facilities in Payson and Tucson. Glenn was a Life Member of the NSA.

Todd Sherwood (Missoula '76)

Todd, 55, died from natural causes in Victor, Mont., August 24, 2010. A 1974 graduate of Hamilton High School, Todd started his career with the U.S. Forest Service and worked at the West Fork Ranger Station maintaining trails. The following year, he went to work for the Interagency Hotshot crew out of East Fork near Sula. Todd jumped in Missoula from 1976 through 1981 and 1984-85. Todd was a Life Member of the NSA. In the fire off-season, he attended college at the University of Montana and Montana Tech, graduating with a master's degree in electrical engineering in 1987. Upon graduation, Todd was chosen for the Who's Who list for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, an honor granted to fewer than 1,000 graduates worldwide. He started his own engineering consulting firm, working in places such as Germany, Canada, Belgium, Alaska and the Arctic.

Philip Thomforde (Missoula '45)

Phil, 89, died Feb. 23, 2010, in Pleasant Hill, Tenn. He graduated from Penn State University in 1942 with a degree in agriculture and registered as a conscientious objector when World War II broke out. That led to alternate service, including a one-year stint as a smokejumper in Missoula. Phil later worked in mental hospitals for war veterans in Philadelphia and was shocked by the conditions he saw. He spent two months on Welfare Island near New York City, eating sea biscuits and drinking salt water as part of a research project by the Army, causing damage to his teeth that lasted the rest of his life.

Phil served in China for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency in 1946. He and his wife, Winnie, settled in Pennsylvania; he taught agriculture to high school students. He worked for UNESCO in Iran in 1956 as an agricultural advisor, moving to Italy in 1959 while working for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, a post he held for 22 years while visiting more than 70 countries. Phil retired in 1982.

William A. "Bill" Groman (Missoula '52)

Bill died August 27, 2010, in Pebble Creek, Arizona, after a long battle with cancer. He graduated from Penn State University with his BA in forestry and earned his Masters and PhD in forestry from Oregon State University. Bill served in the US Army during the Korean War and was a professor in the School of Forestry at the University of Northern Arizona before his retirement.

Donald "Don" Marble (Missoula '60)

Don, 72, died Aug. 22, 2010, in Tucson, Ariz., suc-

cumbing to pancreatic cancer. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1963 with a master's degree in aeronautical engineering. He jumped in Missoula from 1960 to 1965. After getting his degree he was employed as an engineer for NASA in Mountain View, Calif. and worked on landing gear for the moon mission. He attended the University of Montana School of Law, from which he graduated in 1967. Don's legal career began in Havre, Mont., with the Legal Services program through which he provided legal aid. Don joined the law firm of Paul Bunn in Chester, Montana, in 1970. He practiced law in Chester until 2002, when he closed his private practice after being elected to the Liberty County Commission on which he served for six years. He also served on the boards of numerous professional and environmental organizations in Montana.

Jerry Dixon (McCall '71)

Jerry, 62, a life member of the NSA, died in Seward, Alaska, Sept. 9, 2010, of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). After jumping five seasons in McCall and one in Fairbanks, he became a fire management officer and a fire ecologist for the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service. He also worked as a Yukon River ranger and a biologist, and enjoyed being a philosopher, climber, kayaker, extreme skier, conservationist and guide.

He taught the "Quest" program for gifted students in Seward, Moose Pass and Cooper Landing. In 1997 he was named a McAuliffe Fellow, and in 2001 he was named BP Teacher of the Year for the Kenai Peninsula. Jerry retired in 2003 because of his dismay at what he termed the "dramatic deterioration of quality education in the Seward schools and Alaska schools in general," caused by a lack of funding.

He wrote three books and many articles. Competing in wilderness ultra-marathons, Jerry traversed such courses as a brutal 180- to 200-mile course from Chicken to Central across the Tanana-Yukon uplands. He could speak four languages and had degrees in seven subject areas. One of Jerry's books, "Wild by Alaska," tells of his journey through the last great wilderness of North America. The story spans four decades of relentless pursuit of adventures, dangers, and excitement, and features 40 years' worth of Jerry's drawings. The Jerry S. Dixon Award for Excellence in Environmental Education was created in his honor.

Richard "Dick" Wilcomb (McCall '47)

Dick, 84, died June 23, 2010. He attended the University of Idaho on a track scholarship and was one

of the top javelin throwers in the nation. Before college, he served in the Army Air Corps, predecessor of the U.S. Air Force, and jumped just one season – 1947 – in McCall. Dick became a partner in a construction firm, along with his father-in-law and brother-in-law in 1948; the company built hundreds of structures throughout the Landmark Valley of Idaho. He earned the “Friend of Preservation” award from the Boise City Historical Preservation Commission in 2002.

James Mattocks (Missoula '45)

Jim, 91, died Sept. 10, 2010, in Greensboro, N.C. He graduated from High Point College in North Carolina in 1938 and from the Duke University Law School in 1941. As a conscientious objector, he served in the Civilian Public Service during World War II on the Blue Ridge Parkway, at Eastern State Mental Hospital in Virginia, and the 1945 season as a smoke-

jumper in Missoula. Jim practiced law in High Point from the end of the war until retiring in 1993. He helped establish the North Carolina American Civil Liberties Union, and the High Point Human Relations Commission named Jim and his wife, Edith, as High Point Citizens of the Year in 1985.

John D. “Jack” Wall (Missoula '48)

Jack, 83, died September 28, 2010. He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Jane. Born in Ft. Sheridan, Illinois, Jack spent his life seeing the world. He was a Merchant Marine and enlisted in the Navy in his teens. In his 20s, he became a smokejumper for the Forest Service in Missoula, Montana, and from there was recruited by the CIA. Later in life he moved to Marana to work for Intermountain Aviation. He eventually retired from Evergreen Air Park in 1987. 🦋

Enjoying A Week At The Gobi

by Ed Booth (Assistant Editor)

You’ve undoubtedly heard the widely-used expression “There’s something for everyone” describing vacation spots. Sometimes it’s a bit of a stretch.

However, there’s no better way to describe the NSA Trail Maintenance Program. It gives you all the best parts of a vacation – nice weather, clean air, spectacular scenery – while offering you the chance to feel a true sense of accomplishment.

That’s what attracted me to help at the former Siskiyou Smokejumper Base outside Cave Junction last summer. As an editor for Smokejumper magazine, I’d seen stories talking about the restoration project ... and I decided to give it a try. What a thrill!

Why do I say “there’s something for everyone”? It’s true ... whether you come alone, or

with a spouse, or your children or grandchildren. The folks who came to Cave Junction that week fit all of those categories. The best part was, they all enjoyed themselves. You can, too.

The project was exactly as advertised. **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) immediately put me to work on his tree-trimming crew, along with **Dennis Golik** (MYC-74), **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) and **Ron Thoreson** (CJ-60). I didn’t know anyone there except Chuck and his wife, K.G., but the camaraderie was strong, and I got to meet a lot of very nice people. The work could be strenuous at times, but seeing the finished product – nice, well-maintained landscaping – was a tremendous payoff.

Many of the people there had just come from the NSA reunion in Redding. A few spent some

time at the site on their way to other places. They were all united with the goal of bringing the aging facility to life again as a smokejumper museum – which appears to me as inevitable, though perhaps a couple of years away.

It became obvious to me right away that smokejumpers, regardless of age, have a remarkable bond. If there’s a task to be done, just a little direction is all they’ll need ... and it’ll get done. I enjoyed watching the transformation of the admin building while a new roof went up on the parachute loft.

Give the Trails Maintenance Program a try, regardless of the project or its location. I can guarantee you that as much as I had a good time as a non-jumper, you’ll have so much more fun in the company of comrades. 🦋

A Simpler Time With Simpler Communications

by John Gordon (North Cascades '63)

Randy Tower (NCSB-63) and I were unlikely teammates on the same Little League baseball team in Winthrop, Wash., in the late 1950s.

Randy's father, **Wally Tower**, was the well-known pilot for the Intercity Smokejumpers (later, North Cascade Smokejumper Base – NCSB). My mother, Dee, was the clerk for the project manager and smokejumper pioneer **Francis Lufkin** (NCSB-40).

The Towers (mom, dad, two boys and a girl) arrived early in the summer every year and occupied the one-bedroom trailer near the river, across the landing strip from the base.

The summers were occupied with baseball, riding bikes, hunting for arrowheads, fishing and hiking the many trails of the Methow Valley. During the rest of the year, the family lived in Okanogan, Wash., a mere jaunt of 35 miles across the Loup Loup, a mountain pass between the valleys of the Methow and the Okanogan.

Although they were considered outsiders, the Towers were eagerly welcomed each summer as a smokejumper family and valley residents.

A typical day for me, a youth of 10-13 years of age, was to rise early in the morning, bat rocks with a makeshift bat (usually an old tool handle or hardwood branch), shoot some baskets and take a few bike rides. Several days a week I secured an inflated inner tube, a fishing pole, and a stringer

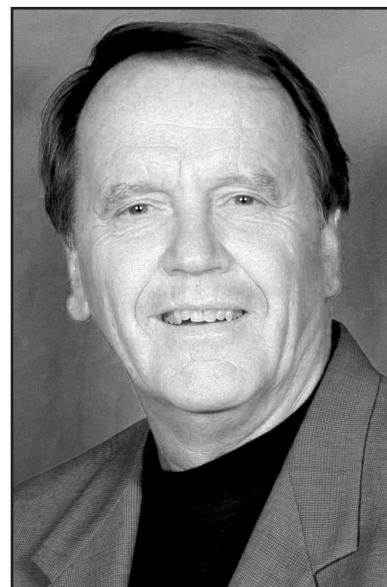
for fish to float the river from Heckendorn (south Winthrop) to the smokejumper base.

Actually, Heckendorn was established when the "great flood of 1948" dislodged homes in Winthrop, and they landed in a flat near the residence of a pioneer by the name of Heckendorn. It appears there was not a building code that insisted the homes be connected by rebar to their foundations.

The float was approximately four miles and, depending upon the number of fish caught, it would take over half a day. Most days, Mr. Lufkin's son **Larry Lufkin** (CJ-63) – a classmate of mine – and I would begin at noon and be ready to ride home when Mom would get off work in the late afternoon.

Randy and his brother, Denny, were usually by the riverbank fishing or skipping rocks when we arrived. After running around the smokejumper base for several hours, we would throw the tubes in Mr. Lufkin's truck to be dropped off so the same routine could be followed at a later date.

One day, I got word that baseball practice had been moved to a day earlier than scheduled, and Randy needed to be notified. Knowing that the trailer had no phone and that trying to get my Mom to run across the runway to the riverbank would be a hostile request, I decided to try another method of communication. My plan was to drop a bottle in the river and hope it followed the



John Gordon (Courtesy J. Gordon)

path I took when tubing and would land in the eddy by the smokejumper base for my friend Randy to find.

I secured a glass bottle with a screw-top lid and inserted a note with the change in times and a "you better be there" notice. I waded to the middle of the Methow River, dropped the bottle in the strong current about mid-morning and awaited the results.

Amazingly, the experiment worked. Randy found the bottle floating in the swirling eddy just below the trailer in time to get his mother to deliver him to practice that afternoon.

Interestingly, Randy and I continued as teammates for several years when I was invited to play on the Okanogan Babe Ruth team. Randy's father, Wally, had moved on to be the chief pilot for Region 6 and spent the summers

in Troutdale, Ore.

Following high school graduation in the summer of 1963, Randy and I, along with fellow classmate and Little Leaguer **Ashley Court** (NCSB-63), were among the 16 rookie smokejumpers at Intercity. Following the two weeks of training, we prepared for our first practice jump.

Amazingly, Randy and I were assigned to be “jump partners.” As we boarded the plane, we saw a familiar face in the cockpit of the Twin Beech – Wally Tower,

who had flown from Oregon to pilot our first jump. We made one more jump together that year; then Randy was off to be a charter member of the Redmond smokejumpers.

Randy and I still communicate periodically via e-mail. We renew our friendship when we return for reunions and laugh about the note-in-the-bottle message. We also share another laugh about living in the trailer, as I resided there my last two years of jumping in early 1973 and 1974. 🦉

John Gordon was a smokejumper at Winthrop from 1963 to 1969 and 1973-74. He was an educator in Washington State from 1967 to 2000, serving as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent. Following his first retirement in 2000, he served as a superintendent in Arizona for five years and currently is the Director of Leadership Development for Arizona School Boards Association. You can reach John at: john.winthrop@cox.net.

The Traumatic Initiation Of A First-Year Squadleader

by **Ross Parry** (Missoula '58)

Nineteen sixty-one was a dry year, a hot year, and a busy year for firefighters. It was especially busy for smokejumpers.

I was a new squadleader. I had previously spotted jumpers (on small fires), dropped cargo, and been in charge of three- or four-man fires. I was still a little apprehensive about my new responsibilities.

On the afternoon of Aug. 2, I was assigned to spot a 16-man crew on the Kelly Mountain fire. Kelly Mountain was on the lower portion of the Salmon River in Idaho. **Hal Samsel** (MSO-49) was the foreman in charge of the crew. Hal and I were good friends—we carpooled—and we had worked together on many smokejumper projects on base.

Hal was an “old hand,” so he was instrumental in picking the jump spot. Everything went quite well. Most of the jumpers landed fairly close to the spot.

The next morning, I was called as second in command on a 12-man crew to be dropped on that same Kelly Mountain fire. **Cliff Blake** (MSO-55) was squadleader in charge. (Incidentally, Cliff was the star in a Walt Disney production, *A Fire Called Jeremiah*, which had been filmed the previous year and which was shown a few times on Disney’s TV show, *The Wonderful World of Disney*. It was also released to public schools.)

As we flew down the Salmon River canyon that morning, I was watching for the spot where I had spotted 16

jumpers the previous afternoon. I was shocked to see that the area where they had been dropped had been completely burned over by the fire. I later learned that Hal Samsel and his crew had been forced to run to a rockslide. All their gear was burned in the fire.

Our crew that morning was dropped on top of Kelly Mountain in an alder patch with brush so thick you could barely fight your way through it. We had no sooner assembled with our gear than **Doug Getz** (MSO-58), who was the foreman in charge of the Grangeville jumpers that year, came running up to us and told us to get the hell out of there because if that fire started to run, as was expected, we were goners. Apparently Doug and most of his Grangeville jumpers were on that fire.

By the time we had worked our way out of the danger zone, it had been decided by “somebody up there” that there were too many jumpers being tied up on one fire. So our crew was loaded on a truck and hauled up to Grangeville to what, we hoped, would be a plane ride back to Missoula.

The next morning, the Grangeville dispatcher came running up to our Missoula crew and said they needed an overhead (squadleader or foreman) for an eight-man fire. He said all the Grangeville overhead were gone. Since Cliff was in charge of our crew, he felt he should continue with them back to base. Therefore, it was up to me to “volunteer.”

I told the dispatcher I'd take the fire, but I didn't have any jump gear because mine was still back on Kelly Mountain. I was suited up with odds and ends and we were off.

I told the dispatcher I'd take the fire, but I didn't have any jump gear ...

We were loaded into the Ford Trimotor and headed out to the Higgins Ridge Fire. It was still fairly early in the day—only about 9 or 9:30 a.m. The fire was quite high on the ridge and only about an acre in size and didn't look too bad.

After the jump, we assembled with our tools and started to attack the fire. We had two experimental fire-line trenching machines that would flail a chain and create a 12- or 18-inch-wide trench. The trenching machines did not consistently create acceptable line, so we had to follow up with the crew using traditional shovel and pulaski methods, but we were able to create line at a more rapid rate than was usual.

At first the winds were relatively calm, but the fire conditions were extreme and embers kept drifting up over our line and creating spot fires outside. I remember a couple of occasions when I would find spot fires in the middle of old stumps or on top of logs, and these fires had started and were burning without any supporting light fuels; it was mind-boggling. Although I was working very hard at trying to control these spot fires, it became necessary on two occasions to abandon our line and call back the crew to extend the line around a spot fire that had spread out of control.

It became apparent to me that we were not going to be able to control the fire without help. Just as I was beginning to feel that it was hopeless, we heard a plane and looked up to see the first stick of a 12-man crew jumping to our assistance. It was probably about 1:30 in the afternoon. I breathed a sigh of relief; maybe now we could hold our own until evening and then contain the fire during the night.

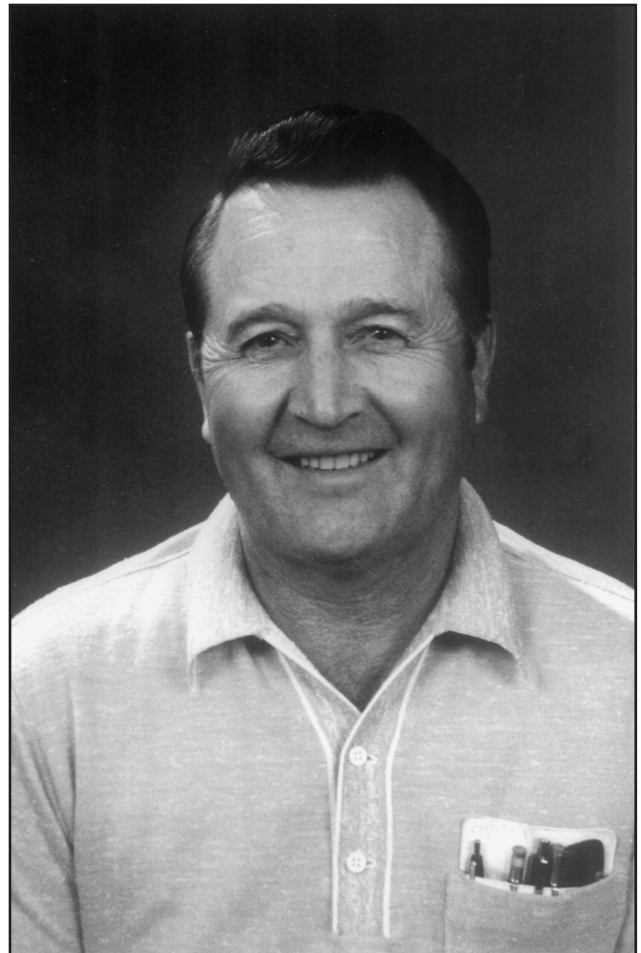
Fritz Wolfrum (MSO-53) and his crew soon joined us. We decided that the main threat of spread was on the west side of the ridge where we were currently working. Fritz, a smokejumper foreman, suggested that he continue with the majority of the men on the west side while I took five men to the other side. We could work up the ridge and hopefully pinch it off during the night. My crew consisted of both Grangeville jumpers and Missoula jumpers.

We had been working for a couple of hours when the fire blew up. It blew up so violently, furiously and swiftly

that it defied description. Up ahead there was a roar and smoke billowing up as though from a volcanic eruption, and the fire started racing down around us faster than a man could run. I remember that some of the jumpers kept looking at me with wide eyes, but they didn't say anything. I am usually a stickler for hanging in there, but I told them that we had better get the heck out of there. They didn't hesitate a second as they dropped their tools, and we headed back to a rock pile that we had passed earlier as we were building our line. We didn't waste any time doing it.

As we were hurrying back along our line toward the rock pile, my mind was racing a hundred miles per hour—what were our options? We could not run straight down the mountain to the east because the fire had already cut us off and was running down around us faster than we could move. We could, however, take off at a dead run to the point of the ridge to the north and then, hopefully, be able to run down the mountain before the fire circled around us from the west. Or we could take our chances in the rock pile.

I didn't know what was best, but did not have time to stop and take a vote; it was up to me! I decided on



Ross Parry (Courtesy R. Parry)

the rock pile.

When we reached the rock pile, it seemed to be a lot smaller than I had remembered (about half the size of a small house). I told the jumpers to dig themselves a hole in the rocks and hunker down. One of the men came up to me and appeared on the verge of tears as he told me that he didn't want to die.

I wasn't sure whether he was questioning my decision to hole up in the rocks or whether he was just expressing the fear that each and every one of us was experiencing. I told him I thought we would be okay there. We hunkered down.

We only had two or three minutes before the fire swooped up over us from the northeast. In a way we were lucky, because the fire had circled around us so fast that it came up from the north and left about a 50-foot-wide patch of unburned trees and brush on the uphill side of the rocks. A few minutes later when that uphill section burst into flames, we were then able to move somewhat to the other side of the pile and avoid some of the heat.

Even so, it was intense. We had many holes burned in our clothes; the embers that landed on tightly stretched cloth would be detected and slapped out quickly, but those that landed in creases or on loose clothing would smolder and sometimes begin to blaze before being detected.

I remember being hunkered down and hearing a clink on the rocks. Looking around, I saw my canteen cover on fire; it had burned through and the canteen had dropped out. Also, I remember being surprised at all the fires in the rocks; apparently, over the years, debris, twigs, and needles had settled into the crevices and these were now on fire.

I remember being hunkered down and hearing a clink on the rocks. Looking around, I saw my canteen cover on fire; it had burned through and the canteen had dropped out.

After a while, when the heat and smoke had diminished and it became apparent that we were going to survive, one of the jumpers came over to me and asked what I thought had happened to the other crew. He probably had a couple of buddies in that crew; we all did. I told him that in my opinion, if they had been able to get into the old burn, they might have made it.

My assessment was probably not much comfort, but it was honest, and I expect it agreed pretty much with

his own.

At this point, I'd like to interject a description of this fire from **Earl Cooley's** (MSO-40) book *Trimotor and Trail*. He apparently compiled his account from interviews with the jumper foreman, Fritz Wolfrum, and some of the jumpers in the Missoula crew. I quote:

"As in every tough fire season, the jumpers had some close calls. The worst one happened on August 4, when 20 jumpers led by Fred Wolfrum were working on the Higgins Ridge fire on the Nez Perce National Forest. The fire blew up and encircled the jumpers. Tree sap became steam and blew trees apart. The intense fire draft created a 60-mile-an-hour whirlwind at the core of the fire. It uprooted trees and flung rocks. It appeared that the only refuge available was the top of the ridge where the fire was started and where a small opening offered some hope of helicopter rescue. One of the jumpers was **Tom Kovalicky** (MSO-61), later to become supervisor of the Nez Perce. As Kovalicky made his way up the ridge, he saw the timber on a half-mile of hillside go up in flames in 30 seconds.

"When they reached the burnt-over clearing, Wolfrum told the crew to dig away the ash and lie flat against the earth. The heat and flames were almost unbearable, but the men held their ground. Kovalicky helped a jumper beat out his flaming clothing. He fully expected to be cooked by the heat or crushed by a falling tree.

"His senses numb from the heat and smoke, Kovalicky thought he saw a tree falling toward him. He tried to roll out of the way but was too weak to move. Then he recognized the sounds of a helicopter. Kovalicky was actually looking at the skids of a helicopter hovering a few feet over his head. Fortunately, the pilot pulled up for a better look at the landing spot and Kovalicky was able to get out of the way. As soon as the copter touched down, two men with the worst injuries were loaded aboard and flown out. The pilot, **Rod Snider** (NCSB-51), promised to return for the rest of the crew—if he could land. Fortunately he was able to keep his promise, making trip after trip through the flames until all the jumpers had been rescued. Some of the jumpers were flown to safety by hanging onto the copter skids.

"For this exploit, Rod Snider was awarded the North American Forest Fire Medal, which is reserved for heroism of the highest order. He knew that the 20-man crew was somewhere on the ridge and suspected that they might be in serious trouble. So he went looking for them. He had about given up the search when he spotted them lying in the ash of the ridge top. Had they not been wearing special orange shirts treated to retard fire, he might never have spotted them through the smoke and flame. This was the first year jumpers and hotshot crews wore such shirts."

One point of the preceding copter rescue that should probably be clarified is that the jumpers who hung onto the skids of the copter were not dangling by their arms as in a James Bond movie but were actually lying on top of narrow rope mesh platforms that had been built over the skids to haul cargo. Nevertheless, the fact that the pilot would go to such extreme measures helps to portray the severity of the situation.

When they reached the burnt-over clearing, Wolfrum told the crew to dig away the ash and lie flat against the earth. The heat and flames were almost unbearable, but the men held their ground. Kovalicky helped a jumper beat out his flaming clothing. He fully expected to be cooked by the heat or crushed by a falling tree.

As it turned out, the burnt-over area in which Fritz and his crew had survived was only about 300 yards up the ridge from where my crew and I had holed up in the rocks. By the time the copter first located the jumpers on the ridge top, the smoke was beginning to thin a bit and the heat and fire diminish a little. Consequently, we in the rocks eventually heard the helicopter and, for a brief moment, saw an orange shirt up on the ridge top.

We were reluctant to leave the safety of our rocks, but I told the crew that we needed to make our way up to the top. We were slow and careful, so it took a while and by the time we got there most of the other crew had been ferried to safety. When we arrived at the top, the helicopter was just leaving the last of Fritz's crew.

However, a uniformed Forest Service officer who had been with the helicopter when it first landed was still there with his radio. I'm not sure who he was, but apparently he had seen us coming up through the smoke and flames. After my small crew had been ferried out, the FS employee and I and his radio were loaded up, and we were finally all out of there.

It would be hard to overemphasize the bravery of Rod Snider. I sincerely believe that it took as much courage to land his copter under the conditions that existed as it did for many of the pilots who came down through enemy fire in Vietnam to rescue injured or soldiers surrounded

by the enemy. Rod figured that some of the jumpers were injured and/or dying and he did not hesitate.

The next morning, most of the jumpers were ferried out to Elk Summit to the nearest road, which was about 25 miles by trail but only about 10 as the crow flies. From there, they were hauled to Missoula. Some of them received treatment at St. Patrick's Hospital but there were no serious injuries. However, five of the original Grangeville jumpers did not feel they needed treatment and they wanted to get back to their base.

Since I was in charge of that crew, I felt obligated to stay with them until they were safely back to base. So we spent that day retrieving cargo from cargo drops and helping set up a major fire camp for a "project" fire. The fire by then was about 6,000 acres. Late that afternoon, fire crews started to stagger in from Elk Summit. Many of these crews were not seasoned firefighters and were ill prepared for the more than 25-mile hike to the fire.

Consequently, some of the crew leaders, who were for the most part FS employees, came into camp with only a portion of their original crew. The others had dropped out somewhere along the way.

That evening, the camp boss, or fire boss, or "some boss," sent a couple of us jumpers back along the trail with flashlights to try to bring some of the stragglers into camp. I personally walked back about two or three miles, frequently finding groups of two or three men huddled around a campfire, but with the promise of good grub and a warm sleeping bag, I was able to lead about 15 men back to the fire camp.

The next morning, our crew was ferried to Moose Creek Ranger Station to await the next available flight back to Grangeville, or in my case back to Missoula. There were no roads to the station, but there was an airstrip.

Shortly after we arrived at Moose Creek, Rod Snider came up to me and said that as he was flying over a secluded draw on the north side, he had spotted three parachutes that had not been burned. I was not overly thrilled to hear that news, but now that I knew it, I felt we should probably try to retrieve the gear. Rod said that he could probably help by dropping off some jumpers on a sharp ridge above the draw.

I told him I'd try to find another copter to drop off a couple more. We could then haul the gear up to a saddle on the ridge where we could clear a helicopter spot so that he could land later and pick up the gear and the men. I approached another copter pilot at Moose Creek and asked if he could drop off a couple of men on a ridge top on his way to Elk Summit so they could retrieve some jumper gear.

I told him that Rod had said that it was a really tough and tricky spot where they had to drop the jumpers off.

He arrogantly told me that he could land his copter anywhere that Rod could land his.

By now Rod and I had decided that it might be possible to let a rope dangle down through the trees to the jumpers. They could tie the gear they had retrieved onto the rope so Rod could haul it up to a drop spot where we would have a jumper untie it. So we took off.

Rod, myself, and a jumper who was to untie the gear were in his copter and two other jumpers were in the other copter. Rod could not land at the spot where we let off the jumper; it was just a rock outcrop on the ridge. He just kind of hovered on the edge of it while the jumper stepped off.

We circled so the other copter could let the two other jumpers off. It came over the spot, hovered for a second and then took off. It circled and came slowly back over the spot and then headed out to Elk Summit; there was no way that pilot was going to try Rod's maneuver. Later, that pilot crashed his helicopter into the pond at Elk Summit, so it is probably a very good thing that he did not try to let those jumpers off.

Rod flew on to Elk Summit, dropped me off, picked up the two jumpers from the other copter, dropped them off at the ridge, flew to Moose Creek, picked up the other two jumpers, and dropped them off at the ridge on his

way back to pick me up.

When Rod got back to Elk Summit, we tied a 100-foot rope to the center of the helicopter and dangled it out over the passenger side. I was sitting on top of the rope and holding the coils so that I could let it down when we got over the retrieval site. Also, at Rod's instructions, I was holding a knife from an emergency chute in my hand. (These knives were not very good nor sharp.)

We flew over the first retrieval site. I let down the rope and the jumpers tied the gear to the rope, then we lifted off and carried it to the drop-off spot where the jumper there untied the gear. Then we flew to the second retrieval site. At this site, the jumpers had retrieved two sets of gear so that the bundle they tied on weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 pounds.

We lifted up but not quite enough because as we headed out over the main canyon, the dangling bundle nicked the top of a tall spruce tree and that bundle started to sway back and forth under the helicopter.

Rod yelled at me, "Cut the rope! Cut the rope!" So I started to cut the rope, but before I was halfway through, Rod screamed at me, "CUT THAT ROPE!" That bundle went sailing off into never-never land (I doubt that it has ever been found) and Rod looked over at me and said, "Well, that's the end of that."

I got the feeling that maybe we had come closer to meeting our maker from that little endeavor than we had from the fire and the fire rescue.

I don't remember the details of how we eventually got back to our respective bases, but one thing I must say is that those Grangeville jumpers that I was in charge of on the Higgins Ridge Fire – especially the crew that stayed after the rescue – were one of the best crews I was ever involved with. However, they are just typical of most smokejumpers.

The original seven Grangeville smokejumpers who were with me as the first eight-man crew were **Roger A. Burleson** (MSO-61), **Rodger Wade Erwin** (MSO-59), **Dale E. Graff** (MSO-60), **Mark Greydanus** (MSO-60), **John A. Holtet** (MSO-61), **Roy E. Korkalo** (MSO-61), and **William G. Schroeder** (MSO-61). I don't remember for sure which of these seven were the men who stayed with me after the original helicopter fire rescue. 🦅

Ross retired from the Forest Service in 1988 as a computer systems analyst. He can be reached at: 2109 E 6075 S, Ogden UT 84403.

Rod Snider started jumping in 1951 for three seasons at Winthrop. He then entered a 50+ year career as a pilot in the USAF, Johnson Flying Service, Boise Cascade Corp., and contract pilot to the USFS and BLM. Personal flying involved building two airplanes and 30 years hang gliding. Rod is an NSA member.

Cave Junction Jumpers Planning Notice - 2011 by Tommy Albert (CJ-64)

Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Reunion June 10-12. We are a diminishing breed. This may well be the last Gobi Reunion for many of us. Let's make it a good one. See you there.

Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum Work Week June 13-17. Tremendous progress has been made in the past two years. This week will culminate some of the major projects. All of you are invited to participate.

Moon Tree Dedication - September 17. Stuart Roosa (CJ-53), Command Module Pilot on Apollo 14, carried tree seeds and had Astronauts Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell take the seeds to the Moon in the Lunar Module. These seeds were returned and are now seedlings to be planted on the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum site. We hope to have a national presence for this event. All of you are encouraged to attend.



Jon McBride Memorial

Photo's Courtesy Bob Webber (MSO-62)



Layout Design: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

I REPORTED IN 2008 that Nicholas Evans, author of “The Smokejumper,” was critically ill after misidentifying and eating *Cortinarius speciosissimus*, a species of mushrooms that are deadly poisonous. Evans remains on dialysis while awaiting a kidney transplant. While his writing has slowed, he is doing well, considering what he has been through.

U.S. District Court Judge Donald Molloy in Missoula ruled on the 2008 retardant lawsuit filed by the Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics. The Forest Service is required to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (costing hundreds of thousands of dollars) by the end of the year.

Molloy’s order does not prohibit the use of retardant in the interim. Current guidelines prohibit the dropping of retardant within 300 feet of waterways unless people, property, infrastructure or critical natural resources are threatened. That seems pretty reasonable to me!

Fires. We can only speculate where this all might lead. Will incident commanders be required to consider the environmental consequences of air operations? Imagine losing an entire watershed to protect a few fish.

The Midwest has become home to another Ford Trimotor project. EAA Chapter 1247 formed the Trimotor Heritage Foundation to fund the building/rebuilding of N9684. It is difficult for an EAA Chapter to “own” an airplane, so its members created a foundation. The foundation was also formed so that donations to fund the project are tax-deductible.

You can read about the project at www.trimotorheritagefoundation.org or www.tingoose.org. They are rebuilding the N9684 from the ground up. Original parts that they have are engine mounts, control surfaces, landing gear and some stray fuselage pieces.

N9684 was previously numbered N69905 when Johnson Flying Service and Island Airlines owned it. N9684 was the number it had when it rolled off the assembly line & flew off to Mexico,

then Cuba. In a previous column I mentioned the restoration of Johnson Flying Service Trimotor N8419 which was returned to flying condition last year in Michigan.

If you attended the Redding reunion last year and went on the base tour, you probably saw the vegetable garden. A small experimental garden was planted in 2009 to see if anything would grow on that particular spot. The experiment was so successful that in 2010 the garden was expanded to a quarter-acre.

The idea for the garden came out of the People’s Garden Initiative—a 2009 challenge from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to employees to create community gardens. The initiative doesn’t provide federal money for community gardens.

According to **Scott Smith** (RDD-02), six trips were made by September to the Good News Rescue Mission in Redding to drop off zucchini, cucumbers, peppers and other fresh vegetables. One side of the garden is tended by smokejumpers. They built several 12-by-25-foot raised

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

beds on the other side for others interested in growing there.

The Redding Hotshots and other employees at the Forest Service Northern California Service Center are also participating in the garden.

If you are interested in the subject of biomass, the John Deere Company has a website dedicated to the subject:

www.woodybiomass.com. John Deere is in the business of selling equipment to harvest biomass, so this site isn't neutral on the subject.

Last year was a difficult year for the NSA. We lost more members than we gained. We lost members in key positions and some of our strongest volunteers were temporarily sidelined due to illness. Several life mem-

bers also passed away.

While the NSA talent pool is very deep, there is always room for another hand. I know everyone is good at something, so please consider giving your time. While you are reading this, please consider extending your membership, investing in a life membership, or giving a membership to your children, grandchildren or a buddy. 🍄

Poor Old George-(An Interview With Bob Nicol)

by **Gayle Morrison** (Associate)

This is a follow-up story to "Project Coldfeet," by Toby Scott (MYC-57), which ran in the January 2010 issue of "Smokejumper." Bob Nicol (MSO-52) was another crewmember on the Intermountain Aviation B-17 that was used in Project Coldfeet. As part of her oral history research for a book about Jerry Daniels (MSO-58), Gayle Morrison conducted multiple interviews with both Nicol and Scott regarding the B-17's Skyhook aerial pickup system. This firsthand account of a second Skyhook mission is a composite of Morrison's interviews with Bob Nicol.

One of the first projects we got into down at Marana was the Skyhook. I think the B-17 got down there towards the end of '61. Robert Fulton, the Skyhook inventor, was there at Marana almost all the time.

The aerial pickup system required five crewmembers, excluding the two pilots Connie Siegrist and Doug Price. The Skyhook team was the nose position manned by Toby Scott or Kirk Samsel (MSO-60), Jerry Daniels was the winch operator in the old radio compartment, Miles Johnson (MYC-53) was in the Joe hole (belly gunner) position, I was in the tail position, and Jack Wall (MSO-48) was the crew chief. All of us were smokejumpers.

After much trial and error, the first time we used the Skyhook pickup system operationally was in May and June 1962 for Operation Coldfeet when we picked up two military guys we'd dropped on an abandoned Russian research station out on an ice island in

the Arctic Ocean.

We used the Skyhook system again in the summer of '63 when we extracted an American scientist up at the ARLIS Arctic research station. I called him "Poor Old George."

See, in July '63, Jerry and Toby and I and my wife were over at Silver City, N.M. I was flying Jerry and Toby around in an old Cessna 190 so they could ride in rodeos. Those guys paid for the gas for the airplane, and they'd hit one rodeo a weekend. They usually lost their butts, but they had a lot of fun.

My wife and I were sitting in the grandstand waiting for Toby and Jerry to get on their bulls or whatever they were riding that day. On the loudspeaker the announcer says, "Bob Nicol, please report to the announcer's booth."

I thought, "What the hell? Who knows I'm out here?" So, anyway, I went up there and they said, "You got a call from Marana. You're supposed to call them back right away."

I did, and that call was the alert to go up and get this sick scientist. He's one of eight or nine people livin' in Quonset huts out on the Arctic ice pack.

We rounded up Toby and Jerry, and we beat feet back to Marana. The next day we launched the B-17 and went right straight through to Fairbanks.

The scientists on the ice island were talking on the radio all the time. The one guy was sick and Skyhook was the only way they could get him out because the runway on the ice island was closed.

When the sick scientist heard the Skyhook plan, he said, "You're gonna get me out of here, how?!? No way am I leaving like that!" So we went back to Marana.

We got back to Marana and about a week later I read in the paper that a scientist at the North Pole died. Well, so sad, too bad; he missed his chance. When I read that, little did I realize that we were going back up there again. See, an ice island ain't a really good place for a grave, you know?

So the scientists wrapped Poor Old George in a sleeping bag and a canvas and strung him up on the roof to freeze him and to preserve the body. That was better than just layin' him in the snow where dogs or polar bears could get at him. They figured on bringing him out in another six weeks or so when the ice froze hard enough to land airplanes there again. Then his family found out about that and said, "No, you ain't gonna treat my son that way."

They wanted his body back for burial now. They said, "Get him off the roof and put him in a freezer." Well, the family didn't know what they were asking for. They didn't realize there was only a short deepfreeze. To get him in there, the scientists had to bend him over bare-ass naked.

Then the Navy contracted with Intermountain for us to go back up there and use the B-17 Skyhook to pick up Poor Old George.

Jerry and I and the rest of the Skyhook crew left Marana on Aug. 9. We took along a couple gallons of Oso Negro Mexican gin with us.

A couple days later a DC-4 dropped the whole pickup package to the ARLIS research station, all 850 pounds of equipment with the pickup suit, instructions and everything else. The pickup suit is like a snowsuit with a parachute harness sewn into it.

As it was, Poor Old George was bent frozen, and they couldn't get the suit on him. We were waiting in Barrow, and we said, "Well, you gotta get Old George in the pickup suit. Thaw him out."

They laid him on the kitchen floor and tried to thaw him out so they could straighten him. They radioed and said, "He ain't gonna thaw. Every time we try to get him to full length he starts comin' apart."

We had what we called a pickup drop bottle. Basically it was a canvas bag shaped like a milk bottle, about four feet tall and three feet in diameter. That's what we used to drop the entire pickup package – the balloons, the line, the suit, all that stuff. And we had used it to pick up stuff from the Russian ice island the previous summer when we dropped off (U.S. Air Force Maj. Jim) Smith and (U.S. Air Force Lt. Junior Grade Leonard) LeSchack.

All the documents and equipment that they re-

trieved from NP8 came up in one of those bottle bags. It had good air flow, and we could get it in through the tail, no problem. But it's pretty small. Anyway, we said, "If you can't thaw him out to get him in the suit, can you get him in the pickup bag?"

They said they'd try. Then all of a sudden the word come out that they got Poor Old George in the bottle bag. An hour later we were fixin' to launch.

We got all the way up there and the ground fog over the ice was so bad the weather canceled us out. We went back and waited in Barrow a couple of days because the weather was supposed to get better. It did and we launched again.

By the time we found the research station, the ground fog was rolling in again. It was rollin' in like fog does, comin' in low ground. We were pretty close by then.

The pilot radioed, "Launch the balloon." Over the fog that white balloon was stickin' right up through the clouds. The pilot said, "Stand by for pick up," and boy, we were ready to go within 30 seconds. When we went over the research camp, we never did see anything on the ground.

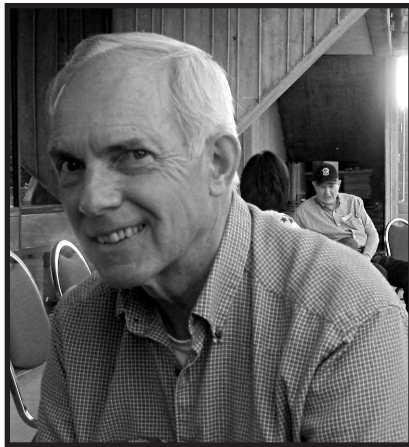
I was in the tail and Old George was just a routine pickup once we got hold of the line. Up came Old George. He was totally in the pickup bag, still frozen in the bent-over position. And as the yoke grabbed the tether line, I threw those two gallons of Oso Negro gin out the tail. We had 'em padded up real well, and we had little parachutes rigged on 'em.

You should have heard those guys on the ground talkin' on the radio. They said, "It's just like God came to us. Here's George sittin' in a bag on the ground and then we hear an airplane overhead, and George slowly lifts straight up and disappears in the fog. At the same time two small parachutes come down through the fog with big jugs of gin on 'em!"

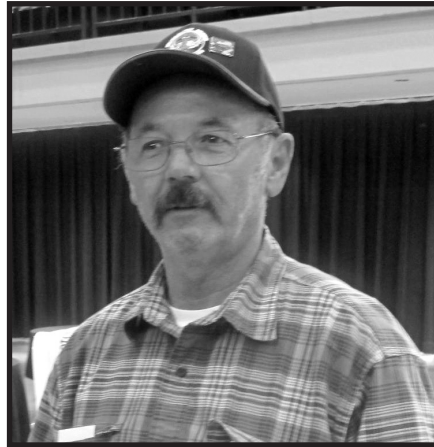
It was a long flight back to Barrow with Poor Old George riding in the tail of that B-17. My log book says the whole trip was 15 hours and 25 minutes.

I don't think the airplane would have held up much longer. We'd gone up there almost to the North Pole less than a month before, came back to Marana, then went again. Those old airplanes need a lot of tender loving care when they get rode hard and put away wet, you know?

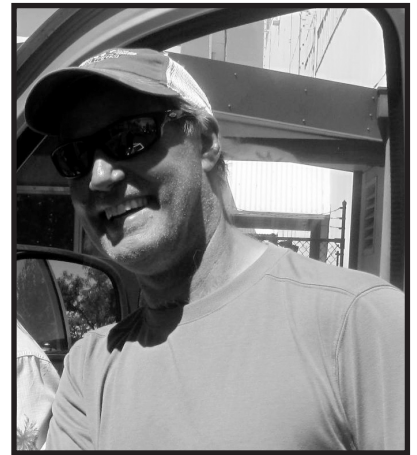
Anyway, it was seven or eight hours back to Barrow, and those scientists on the ice island were talking on the radio that whole flight. As the night went on and we got closer to Barrow, the story about Old George rising up through the clouds and the gin coming down just got better. 🙏



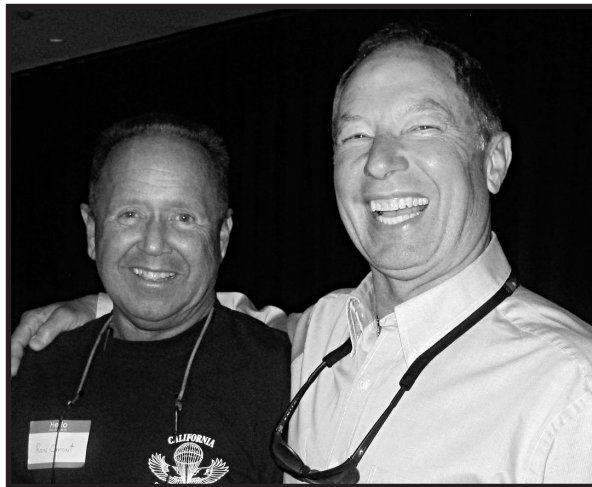
Rob Shaver (MYC-67)



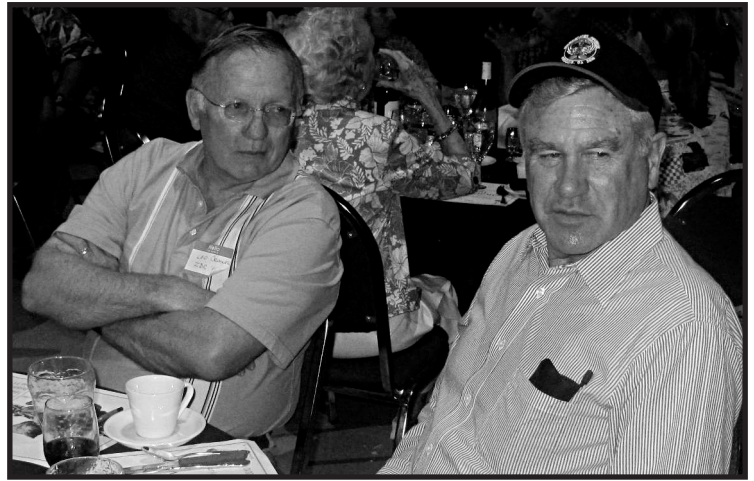
Scott Warner (RDD-69)



John Bald (RDD-78)



Ron Omont (RDD-78) & Doug Houston (RAC-73)

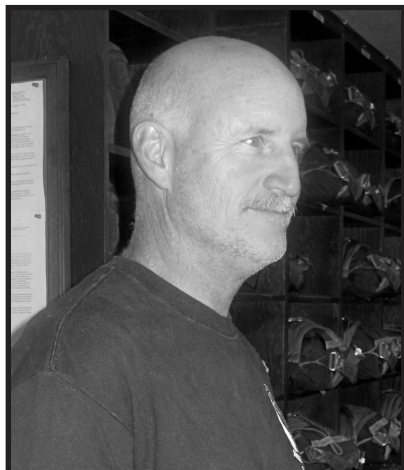


Leo Cromwell (IDC-66) & Jim Lancaster (MYC-62)



Redding Reunion 2010

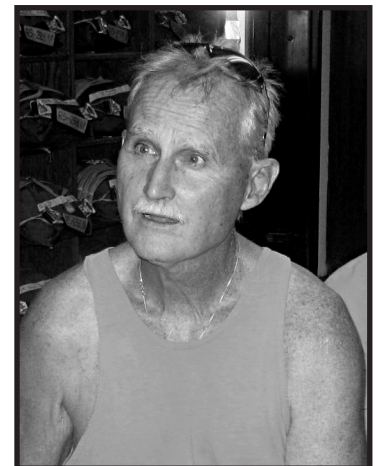
Photo's Courtesy Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67)



Don Sand (RDD-79)



Dan Emry (BOI-78) & Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67)



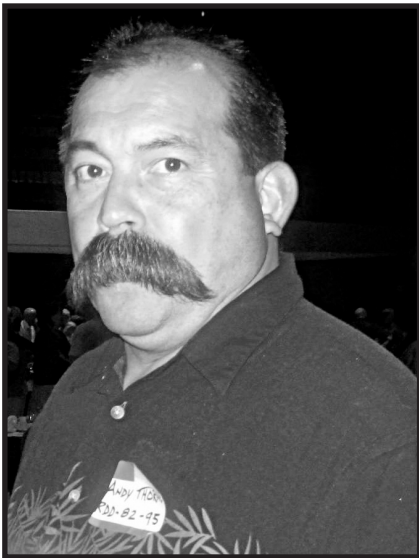
Gary Johnson (RDD-69)



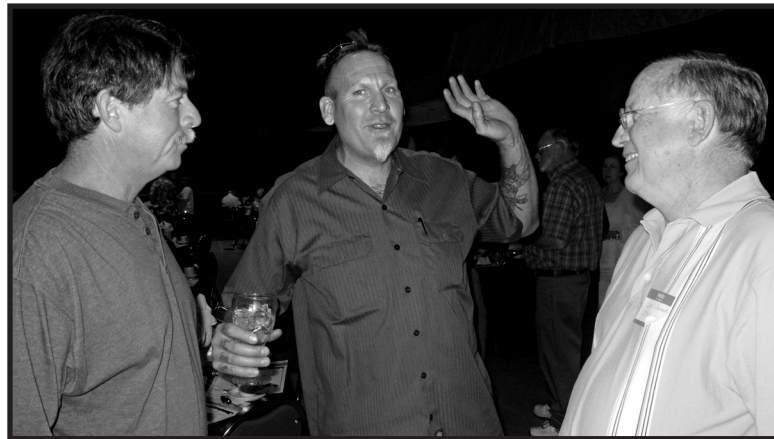
L-R: Java Bradley (MSO-74), Wild Bill Yensen (MYC-53), Don Clarke (MSO-68), Bill Newlun (MYC-70) & Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67)



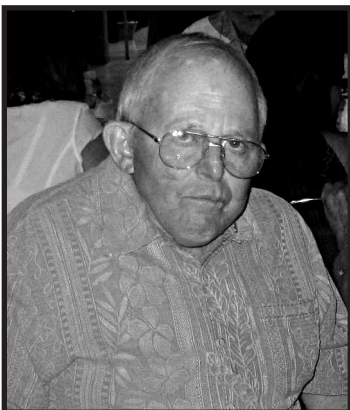
Dennis Golik (MYC-74)



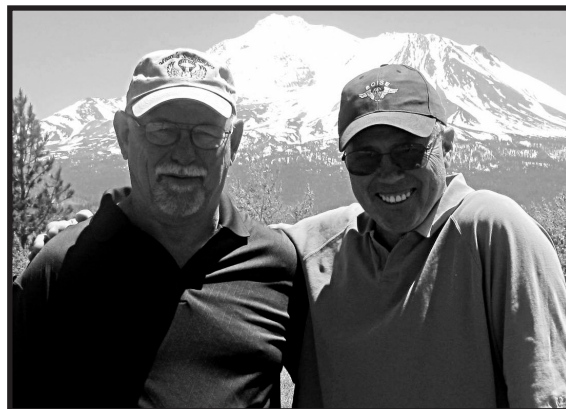
Andy Thorne (RDD-82)



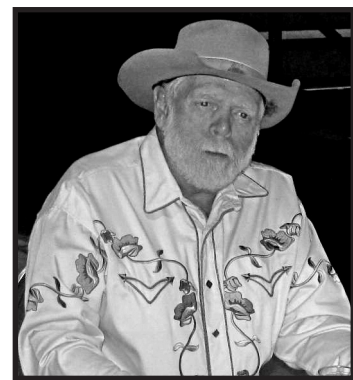
L-R: Gordon Woodhead (RDD-83), Dan Ogden (RDD-92) & Leo Cromwell (IDC-66)



Neil Satterwhite (MYC-65)

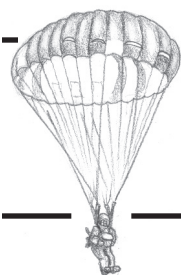


Don Clarke (MSO-68) & Bill Newlun (MYC-70)



Butch Perry (MSO-67)

Layout Design by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



Odds and Ends



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to **David Oswalt** (CJ-68), **Roy Korkalo** (MSO-61), **Ronald Borst** (NCSB-64), **Doug McCoy** (RDD-73), and **Doug Wamsley** (MSO-65) who just became our latest **Life Members**. Special thanks to **Jerry DeBruin** (Associate) who just purchased a Life Membership for his brother, **Gene DeBruin** (MSO-59), who is MIA in Laos since September 5, 1963, in the shoot down of an Air America plane.

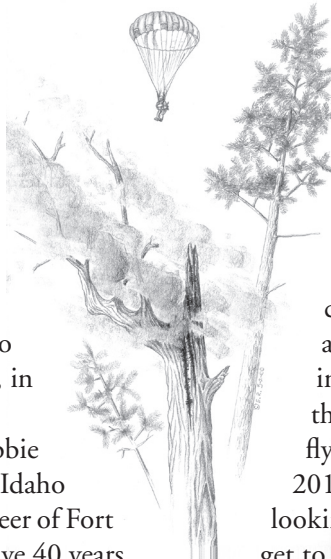
Just read an interesting article written by **Debbie Bryce** in the July 29, 2010, issue of the Idaho State Journal. It details the firefighting career of Fort Hall resident **Leo Edmo**, who claims to have 40 years in wildland firefighting. Part of this was as a smokejumper in Alaska where he made 50 jumps. Problem being is that he is not listed in our database and no one has heard of him. We probably need to start a list of "phantom" smokejumpers and go after them to increase our membership.

Another "phantom" smokejumper appeared in the *Fresno Bee* last year. **Todd "Hoss" McNutt**, a teacher at the Summit Academy in Porterville, California, was nominated for a national teaching award. He talked about his time as a smokejumper, but also is not listed in our database.

One of the most satisfying aspects of editing this magazine is contacting jumpers and hearing their stories. **Ross Parry** (MSO-58) has one heck of a story in this issue on the Higgins Ridge Fire. It is a story in which an amazing helicopter pilot, **Rod Snider** (NCSB-51), rescues jumpers from what looks to be certain death. As with many stories in *Smokejumper* magazine, this story developed over a period of a year or so with communication between Ross and myself.

Ross talked with **Ron Stoleson** (MSO-56), who confirmed that the pilot was an ex-jumper. From there I go to the NSA database and find Rod Snider (NCSB-51) and, to my luck, he is an NSA member. A quick phone call to Rod confirms that he was the helicopter pilot who saved a bunch of jumpers on that fire and who received the "North American Forest Fire Medal," which is given for heroism of the highest order.

When we started working on the Siskiyou Smoke-



jumper Base Project in 2009, **Paul Block** (CJ-48) was flying over the airport in his gyrocopter. It was a strange looking machine. It was a helicopter with a propeller in the back that made it a combination helicopter/airplane. It was an amazing machine and Paul's buzzing of the airport kept us continually looking upward. I had a chance to talk to Paul during the 2009 project and was astonished at his enthusiasm for flying. He was 84 years old at that time and said that he lived in Cave Junction so that he could fly whenever he wanted to fly. This year at the 2010 work project, Paul was on hand one day looking over our work. Unfortunately, we did not get to talk to him.

On August 2, 2010, Paul's gyrocopter crashed at the Illinois Valley Airport and he was killed. It appeared to be a mechanical failure. Observers noted that a part of the tail flew off and hit the propeller. He was 85 at the time and had flown for over 60 years. When I received the news of this event and read it, I thought that this was the way Paul would have wanted to go. Eighty-five years old and flying his gyrocopter vs. sitting in a rest home and playing checkers.

Paul's death will go unnoticed by most, but he typifies smokejumpers and the type of persons who do the job. In *Popular Mechanics* magazine way back, Paul was credited with the development of the ascension parachute. We used it in training rookie smokejumpers, and resorts all over the world still charge tourists for rides in an ascension parachute towed behind a boat.

Paul probably had the petal to the metal when his machine crashed.

Bob Webber (MSO-62): "About 200 people from all over the nation attended **Al Dunton's** (FBX-67) memorial service on Saturday, July 31, 2010. It was a hot, dusty and very windy afternoon outside Carson City, NV, on the Silver Saddle Ranch, just the way Al had hoped.

"My wife, Lee (Leona), and I were asked to video and take photos of the day. Any interested in a copy should contact **Mary Dunton**. I also video'd **Earl Cooley's** (MSO-40) funeral and both sessions of **Jon McBride's** (MSO-54) services. There is no cost for either and anyone interested in a copy should send

an email to us here in Hamilton, MT, (webbr712@aol.com).

Doug Houston (RAC-73): “Daren Belsby was named the base manager of NCSB. Daren has been in an acting position for the past few months, but now is officially the go-to guy. He also said that an order had just come in for 15 jumpers to go to McKenzie, British Columbia, and they were busy getting their gear together.”

Ramona Atherton (RAC-06) was the subject of an interview on the website Hotshot Fitness (www.hotshotfitness.com). After competing as a triathlete at the University of Nevada, Atherton has maintained her phenomenal condition – which obviously is crucial to being an effective smokejumper.

She was a member of the Logan Hotshot crew in northern Utah after serving on an engine on the Nez Perce N.F. for a season. One of Atherton’s sisters, **Aicha Hull** (GAC-03.), jumped in Grangeville for three seasons.

Now Atherton is ready to study meteorology as a graduate student at the University of Utah.

Atherton bicycles, runs and swims to remain in top-notch shape, allowing her to compete in “Half-Ironman” races once a year. In offering advice to prospective smokejumpers as they prepare for the rigors of the job, she said: “Do a lot of push-up runs. Run a quarter mile; do 25 push-ups. Find someone who runs faster than you, and make yourself keep up with them because that’s what’s gonna happen to you. And the minimums are really the minimums. And if that’s all you got – then you’re not okay. You might make it – but you’ll be pretty miserable. Definitely prepare for the packout. You might be a great runner, but once you put 110 pounds on your back, it’s a totally different story. You’ll definitely want to try it a few times.”

Several members have forwarded an article on **Sara Brown** (RAC-03) in the University of Wyoming magazine (UWYO). Sara is featured on the cover and in a good seven-page article. Sara was injured on a fire jump in 2007 and, as a result of that injury, had her right foot amputated in 2008. The NSA Good Samaritan Fund has contributed toward Sara’s support in her graduate studies at the U. of Wyoming.

Terry Egan (CJ-65): “I was asked by the Executive Director of the National Emergency Management Association to develop a short, bulleted history of PNEMA (a mutual aid compact among Washington, Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, British Columbia and the Yukon). It took a bit of detective work, but I found out that PNEMA was the brainchild of **Hugh**

Fowler (MSO-52) back in the 1980s when he was Director of the Washington State Emergency Management Division. I think it is wonderfully ironic that years later, when the arrangement became more formally organized, another smokejumper from Cave Junction should become the first Chair of PNEMA Executive Task Force and doing work to carry out Hugh Fowler’s vision.

“It is indeed a small world! I had to go to Nice, France, to give a presentation at an international conference and ended up having lunch with **Russ Johnson** (RDD-70).”

Phantom Alert: Another “phantom” smokejumper hit the news today (August 20, 2010). In a web article by “smokeybombs” about the Backcountry Horseman on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie N.F., trail coordinator **Ron Downing** is described as being “no stranger to the Forest Service, having been a smokejumper, then pack leader.”

Jerry Vice (RDD-69): “On October 16, 2010, at 11:30 A.M., the California Professional Firefighters organization added two Region 5 smokejumper’s names to the memorial wall honoring those who died in the line of duty in 1970:

Tom Regennitter (RDD-67) was killed while jumping the Oak Fire, Shasta Trinity National Forest on June 3, 1970.

Steve Grammer (RDD-70) died in a helicopter crash while detailed to the Redding Hotshots on the Forks Fire, Angeles National Forest on September 28, 1970.

“The ceremony took place at the California Professional Firefighter Memorial Wall in Capital Park, Sacramento, California. For further information and driving instructions, go to www.cpf.org

“When in the site, scroll down to Firefighters Memorial information.”

Parachute Loft Foreman, **Keith Wolferman** (MSO-91), responded to the mention of the Army adopting the new MC-6 parachute from the October 2010 issue of *Smokejumper*: “There seemed to be some confusion about the canopy being similar to the BLM Ram-Air parachutes. It is in fact identical to the USFS FS-14, 32-ft. large canopy. The use of the Forest Service canopy came about when the Army put in a large amount of time and money to find a replacement to the steerable T-10 for use in the Special Forces community. Larger loads, due to more equipment, were leading to very heavy exit weights and a higher injury rate due to hard landings. They basically reconstructed the T-10 with a very low porosity fabric to reduce descent rates and called it good. After going in to production, they found it was injuring jumpers

at the higher altitude at Ft. Carson (6-10 thousand feet). When trying to decide what course of action to take next, a soldier familiar with our operational capabilities claimed to know of a steerable canopy that could deliver a softer landing as well as tolerable openings at speeds and altitudes found at higher altitudes. The army purchased some FS-14's and test drops proved the canopy was in fact an improvement. Once formally adopted in to the Army's inventory, it was dubbed the MC-6." Thanks, Keith, for setting the record straight.

Jeff Fereday (MYC-70): "Jerry Dixon (MYC-71) died of pneumonia at 1:30 a.m., September 9, in a hospital bed in Seward, Alaska. The pneumonia was a complication of or exacerbated by ALS, the terminal disease with which Jerry was diagnosed in mid-2009.

The news of Jerry's death brought me sadness and relief. I never discussed it with him, but there can be no question that Jerry Dixon did not want to exist, not even for a few months, in a wheelchair or propped up in a bed. He walked into that hospital the afternoon of September 7 under his own power, even though he was down to 129 pounds, had trouble breathing, and had limited use of his hands and arms. ALS was beginning to affect his legs as well, but those legs carried him then just like they had so many thousands of challenging miles before: to the top of Denali, many times across Alaska, through the Rockies, through the Himalaya, through the deserts of the West, through the fatigue during long nights fighting fire on so many mountainsides. I believe Jerry willed himself to this exit, which I'll bet for him was a big windy door in the DC-3 over the Idaho wilderness, with a huge thunderhead on the horizon. Jerry hooked up and stepped out and away.

"Jerry's last eight months demonstrate his approach to life and to death. It was so...well, so purely Jerry. He climbed Kilimanjaro in January. In March he flew with a friend in a Piper Cub from Alaska to Colorado. He visited us in Boise in April. He drove himself to a college reunion in June, and in July floated the Grand Canyon for his fourth and final time on a trip with his two sons and dear friends Ron Watters and Kathy Daly of Pocatello. He drove himself back to Alaska. In August he visited friends in Alaska and kept upright and moving, moving until the end.

"Jerry's sons, Kipp and Pyper, and wife, Deborah, were with him when he left us.

"I'll think of Jerry whenever I'm on the South Fork Salmon River and whenever I see lightnin' on the Payette."

Mike McMillan (FBX-96) and his wife, Molly, welcomed Ian Patrick McMillan to their family September 11, 2010. Mike does a terrific job in putting together the "Touching All Bases" column for the magazine.

Fred Cooper (NCSB-62): "That was a very good Editorial you wrote. Several of us here in Missoula were talking after McBride's death about getting our own houses in order. As I'll explain later, it is even more pertinent for me to get it done.

"I don't know if you heard, but I came very close to making it on your "Off The List" posting. The third week in July, I led a crew of four, hiking in and out 15 miles each way, to replace a cabin roof in the BOB. Due to the weather and terrain, it took over 10 hours each way. The following week I led a crew of 12 in Glacier Park replacing a bridge and a turnpike, hiking about 5 miles each day. The last couple days in the Park, I was not feeling too good, but I drove myself home on the last Friday in July. (I wasn't feeling good after getting out of the BOB either and spent the weekend resting in a motel in Choteau.) I went to the Now Care Clinic. They looked at me for about two minutes and sent me to the ER at St. Pats Hospital here in Missoula. That afternoon they attempted to fix me up with a stent, but my heart was too far-gone, so they scheduled me for open-heart surgery Sunday morning. The lead surgeon had to almost call his team in Saturday night, but they finally got me stabilized. I ended up with a 4-way bypass and surgery to repair my Mitral Valve. I spent the first two and a half weeks of August in the hospital - had some complications that kept me there for an extra week. I'm finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel for getting back to normal, which will be at least another 60 days or so. The Doc said the only reason I made it was because I hadn't smoked, was not overweight, and wasn't an alcoholic. He said I had bad genes, which I was not aware of as my parents are still alive and in the 90s. The major thing I wish is that Jon and Ray (Farinetti) could have made it so we could have shared our own stories.

"The advice I'm giving others in our age class is that if they feel short of breath climbing an uphill trail, don't chalk it up to getting older or being out of shape—it could very well be their heart telling them it needs help!"

Got a good card from **Neil Satterwhite (MYC-65)** who enjoyed the Redding reunion in June. Neil has been in the hospital with some health issues. Wishing him a complete recovery.

At the Reunion, **Hugh Rosenberg (CJ-59)** gave me a picture taken back in 1959 showing me in a sleeping bag, glass taped to the flagpole at the standby shack

in La Grande. Writing on the back says, "Sheley being disciplined for wetting down a bunch of 'napping' smokejumpers with a fire hose." Apparently those guys didn't have a sense of humor.

Harvey Versteeg (MSO-53): "The comment in the Stan Tate article (Oct. issue) mentioned the conversion from flat pack chutes to deployment bag packed chutes in the '60s. After jumping the former from Missoula in '53, I jumped D-bag chutes with the 101st Airborne in '57-58, some years before the Forest Service got around to the changeover. I commented on the difference in opening shock in at least one of the stories I sent you some years back. The flat pack opening was tolerable in a 50-70 MPH exit, but dangerous at 100. In the Army we were exiting planes at 120 MPH or more, using the D-bag packing."

Jedidiah Lusk (FBX-10) likes big trucks and tractors. But at age 9, getting to drive one of those behemoths wasn't a possibility ... until the California Department of Transportation heard about his story.

As you might know, Jedidiah has an inoperable brain tumor. The biopsy surgery alone left the boy partially paralyzed. His parents, **Scott Lusk** (FBX-81) and **Cynthia Nichols Lusk** (RAC-87), added Jedidiah to their family list of smokejumpers, thanks to the NSA's Good Samaritan Fund. The Make-A-Wish Foundation helped transport the family to Fairbanks, where Jedidiah received spotter training and ultimately, his rookie pin with a fine ceremony.

Jedidiah got another thrill Sept. 14 when he had the chance to operate some heavy machinery at a Caltrans construction site in Plumas County, not far from where he lives.

Caltrans engineer Ron Collins set the visit up at the Spanish Creek Bridge Project on Highway 70 after hearing about Jedidiah's illness.

"He's a neighbor and we found out he loved the equipment, so I talked to (construction company) C.C. Myers and they were excited. We called all our safety controllers, and everyone 100 percent agreed and here he was, out here running our equipment," Collins said.

George Bravo with Caltrans says this isn't something they normally do, but this was a special situation and a special little boy.

"This was a pretty unprecedented thing for Caltrans and a construction company to do. There's a lot of safety factors involved," Bravo said.

Caltrans even presented Jedidiah with his own hardhat, vest and shirt. With help from C.C. Myers Superintendent Don Hughes, Jedidiah was able to operate an excavator. The smile on Jedidiah's face as he sat behind the controls made all the effort

worth it.

"I think it was just one more thing he was able to accomplish in his young life. We don't know what the future holds for him," Hughes said.

Jon McBride (MSO-54) was honored posthumously in November by the *American Trails Board* for his leadership with the NSA Trails Program. The award was given at the National Trails Symposium in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Don Hertzog (MYC-48): "We were on a tour bus trip last September and stopped at Glenwood Springs for a swim in the hot springs. As I was putting on my swimsuit, the man next to me looked at my "Idaho Smokejumper" tee shirt and asked if I was a smokejumper. It turned out he was the son of **Terrell Siepert** (MYC-47). I believe he said his dad passed away in 2002 or '03 of cancer. He was on his way out the door so I didn't even get his name, but it was a jolt for me.

"We didn't stop at the Storm King Fire Memorial, as I didn't know where it was. Now I am re-reading John Maclean's book *Fire on the Mountain*. Excellent read."

Joe Gutkoski (MSO-50) is mentioned in an article in the October issue of *Field & Stream* magazine, page 58. Joe's method of tracking an Elk over a 3-day period is the subject of the letter.

Karl Brauneis (MSO-77): "I'm in between antelope, deer and elk seasons. Highlight of the fall was surviving a good bucking horse ride. Took a good horse out to stretch his legs before we moved some cows. About a mile out he decided he was heading home. Went to bucking and I gave him his head and caught his rhythm. Didn't see ears for a good 10 seconds. Got him pulled up after a while and got off to find my hat - boy we covered some ground. Felt like I was 20 years old at the national finals. Next day I felt like a 101 and couldn't walk straight for a week. Damn, it sure gets tough living the dream."

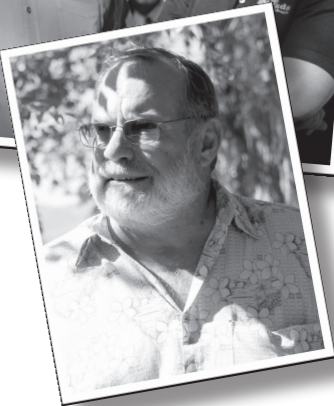
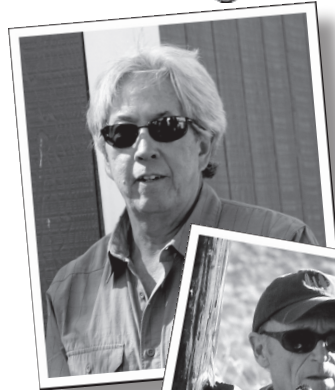
After describing training on the jump towers in his story "Glory Jumpers" about training at Camp Menard in 1953, Harvey Versteeg (MSO-53) adds this aside. "This exiting procedure got me in trouble four years later," he said. "In the Army, you grab the ends of the reserve chute so you don't have to look for the release handle in an emergency. The first three times out of the tower there, I said to myself, 'You're going to grab the ends of the reserve.'

"And each time I went out the door, reflex action took over and I crossed my arms over the chute as we learned in the Forest Service

"When I slid down to the end of the cable, the receiving sergeant said, 'Get a gig, sir.' And I did 10 more push-ups." 🍌



Al Dunton Memorial
Photo's Courtesy Bob Webber (MSO-62)



Layout Design, by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)

Remembering “Big Al” Dunton

Murry Taylor (Redding '65)

Our great jumper boss, wildland fire manager and friend **Al Dunton** (FBX-67), passed away July 18, 2010, at his home in Sparks, Nevada.

Al took his leave while in the loving care of his wife, Mary, daughters Melanie and Amber, family and friends. We who admired and loved him from a distance are thankful for that.

The memorial service at Silver Saddle Ranch was a fine tribute to a man who meant so much to so many. We called him “Big Al” because for most of us he made a big difference in our lives.

By early summer of 1973 the Alaska Smokejumpers were on the chopping block with plans to replace them statewide with helicopter initial attack. BLM overhead had simply had it with the incorrigible and irrepressible irreverence that defined the crew.

Take an already-wild bunch, toss in some “Dirty Dozen” types who were migrating to Alaska to avoid any people or things that meant to control them, and then add a half-dozen vets recently back from the war in Vietnam – many carrying a fair amount of rage – put them in an old, abandoned T-hangar out on Fort Wainwright with no electricity, plumbing, heat or running water, and you have the situation that young Al Dunton faced his first summer as the new base manager.

Fire season was slow in getting started. On over-cast days the blowing rain and the wind would moan through the old hangar in a way that was flat-out depressing. The jumpers grumbled and complained, played poker, accused each other of cheating and argued about whatever subject came up. Others hunkered in the background, nursing hangovers, writing love poems or plinking on cheap guitars.

It was about that time that Al started coming over from his office in the FAS building and holding Friday crew meetings. He listened to us like no boss I'd ever been around. On and on we'd rail about how the T-hangar was a toxic waste site, and that the Army was a pain in the butt to be around, and that helitack was getting too many fires that should have been jumper fires.

Al would just hang in there with us and hear us out. That was his way. Before long, he had us understanding that the problems weren't just his – they were ours, and that we could solve them together.

That's when Al got back the loft. He got us back doing all the para-cargo. He went after the Volpar so we could beat helitack to more fires. He did all that, and at the same time, he continued to let us be us – wild and still hard to manage. Time after time, he bailed guys (even pilots) out of jail. Time after time, he stood up for us against the Army base commander.

Al had vision and administrative guts. He drew us in by listening, getting us in the game, then helping us see the vision that we could take back all of Alaska. And we did.

While there are many great things to say about Al's smarts in managing people, I'd like to say one more thing about him as a person. I've heard it said that we admire a man for his courage ... but we love him for his vulnerability. Sometimes we'd come into work and find him passed out in the ready room, a few dollars wadded up in a shirt pocket, his hair messed up, smelling of cigarettes and booze. He'd been out gambling and drinking.

He was not only our boss and friend; he was a man who knew us and trusted us enough to be there like that, knowing we would give him the same grace he'd give us. For that we won't be forgetting the man.

“Big Al” was not just a fine boss and extraordinary leader and manager, but even more, Alan J. Dunton was one of us.

Tom Boatner (FBX-80)

On July 31, 2010, friends and family gathered at the Silver Saddle Ranch in Carson City, Nev., to celebrate the life of Alan Dunton.

Al was a legendary figure in BLM smokejumping and fire management. He was the manager of the Alaska Smokejumper base for 12 years and was the man who turned it from a base on the way to extinction to a base that was aggressive and highly competent.

Later in his career, he was the state fire management officer for BLM Nevada, and he retired as the BLM's national fire director. He was the base manager when I rookied in Alaska, and I learned leadership lessons from him that I carried throughout my career.

He was the consummate modest, behind-the-scenes operator. He made good things happen and didn't care if he got the credit. He empowered the people who worked for him to use their own judgment, common sense, and decision-making to solve problems. He was

highly respected and admired in the BLM, and in his last assignment, I believe he and his Forest Service counterpart, John Chambers, had a relationship based on mutual respect and taking care of business without getting hung up on agency turf.

On a hot summer evening, under the shade of the cottonwoods along the Carson River, a group of old friends gathered to remember Al's legacy and share stories about his life and his career. Al had a positive impact on many lives and many fire careers. He will be missed.

Fred Wolf

I'm writing this for my fellow BLMers and as associate state director in both Alaska and Nevada during his service.

Alan Dunton needs to be recognized for his work in BLM. Under Alaska Fire Chief Joe Kastelic, Al was a key player for the largest wildfire organization in the world. He was a person management listened to because he always made sense.

In that era, the complex Alaska Fire Program was self-running. The state director's input was often limited to briefings because Alaska Fire did its planning, knew what had to be done and did it. It was the same in Nevada during Al's tenure as chief of the fire program.

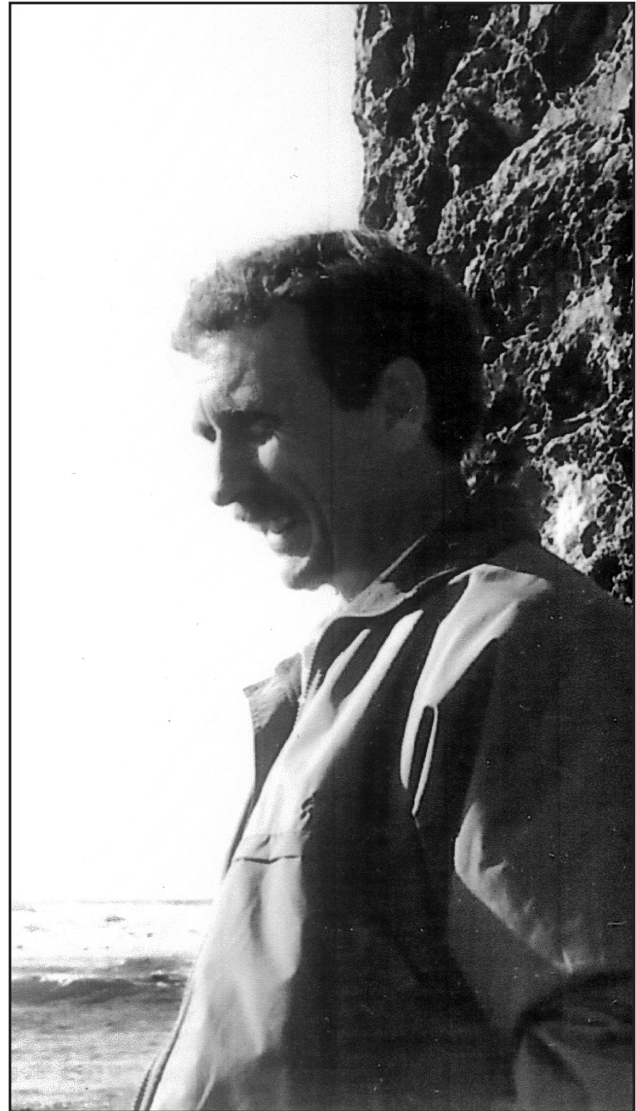
Alaska experience gave Al a tremendous background for his job in managing the Nevada Fire program. In summary, Al was the type of manager whom state directors like to have working for them. What's more, he was the kind of boss his employees liked working for, maybe without exception. He was absolutely straightforward and considerate both ways. He seemed always calm, collected and thoughtful, which are good traits for a chief of fire.

In his quiet way, Al proved he had the complete management package. He was smart at what he did, analytical, was dedicated and loyal to the mission, took care of his employees, aggressively planned for the future and made good decisions. What also helped tremendously was his ability to coordinate with other fire agencies to achieve the cooperation necessary for fire protection in the more-complex modern environment.

Al Dunton's performance was really appreciated by BLM because he had the all around abilities to serve the fire program in complex times, the employees involved and the state director, who could rest assured the program was in good hands. He was an outstanding example of how to do that.

Rod Dow (MYC-68)

Al was soft-spoken, but there was never any question who the boss was. In 1976 we all met at the house of **Gordy Henson** (MSO-63) for a pig roast on a Friday



Al Dunton 1992 (Courtesy Mary Dunton)

night after work. The "Pig Party" tradition that the Alaska rookies now throw every year began that night. I was on first load so we were on standby at the T-Hangar until 8 o'clock and then jumped the party.

It was a pretty standard beer-around-a-campfire affair until a couple of the boys shed their clothes, but that's another story.

At about 2 in the morning **Tommy Hilliard** (MYC-67), the designated driver of the government bus, was just collecting the last of the mud wrestlers when those of us drunks, who had already been gathered, got tired of waiting for him and decided to steal the bus. Someone had already glass taped the huge pig's head to the grill, so I'm sure we made quite a picture driving down the Steese Highway.

We stopped at the corner of Steese and College and picked up three hippies who, it turned out, were smoking marijuana. We continued right through downtown Fairbanks, dropped off the hippies, and then back to Ft.

Wainwright and miraculously made it through the gate unscathed.

The next Friday meeting Al slopped into the room, smoking a cigarette as usual, sat down, and put his feet up on the table in front of him. The room was silent for about 30 seconds and then Al very calmly said, "I'd appreciate it if you guys wouldn't get drunk, steal the government bus, drive down the Steese with the pig's head taped to the grill, pick up dope smoking hippies, drive right down Two Street, and then onto a military installation. Think you could avoid that in the future?"

We were good employees, so we didn't do that again.

Tom Hilliard (MYC-67)

Alan Dunton died recently from a brain tumor. Relatively few people outside Western firefighting circles ever heard of him, but anybody who worked for or with him will never forget Big Al Dunton.

There are bosses, there are managers, and then there are leaders. Big Al was a leader.

From what the old salts said, Big Al could have been one of the most undistinguished smokejumper crewmembers who ever loaded in a plane. But fate thrust him into the leadership role for the Alaska Smokejumper Project when the base manager died one winter in a trailer fire. Al became the base manager because nobody else wanted the job.

Prior to the assumption of the reins by Al, the proj-

Tribute to Al Dunton by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

Well, we went down
By the old ranch house
Coming out of the Great Basin
And the banks of the Yukon

We gathered
Under the cottonwoods
And you could see where the river was
Following its green line down the valley

Milling around, stiff at first
Working our way back
So the wrinkles and limps faded

We teamed up with the young jumpers in our midst

Hustling, moving ice and beer cans
Food to the shade
Introductions all around

A wonderful family, old friends
Jumpers, pilots, cooks, neighbors
Folks that worked with fire
Cared about the land

And cared about people
I think Al cared about that most

Our good boss

We talked in little clusters
Took turns at the mike
The preacher helped us relax
And we told our stories
Shuffling dirt at our feet

The wind came up
Cottonwoods fluttered
Afternoon breeze keeping us going

And we went till after dark

But before that
And, after I spoke
I walked down to the fields
I guess I was trying to keep folks from seeing I was crying
And I just watched that river line
Sagebrush hills
Juniper and Pinion Pine

Till I got my bearings and looked up to the sky –

Down here in Carson
Lord, it's been so many miles
Standing along this fence line
I'm thankful
Al, thanks
For helping me get this far

ect had degenerated into a sad state of incompetence. Women contractors packed and repaired parachutes for the jumpers. The supply warehouse employees did the cargo dropping because the jumpers were lazy and incapable. Jumpers lounged around all day, sleeping and waiting for a fire call.

Finally, a helper named Rocky was hired as a temporary employee to do odd jobs around the base. If a jumper was ever given an order to perform a task, the standard answer was: "Let Rocky do it."

Within a few years of Al's appointment, the Alaska Smokejumpers led the firefighting world in innovation, speed of attack, parachute technology, training, aircraft use in aerial attack, and fire-suppression effectiveness. His men and aircraft covered an area 10 times the size of Georgia, or close to 365 million acres. The paracargo operation, now run totally by smokejumpers, dropped more cargo to forest fires in Alaska than any paracargo operation in the world, except for the U.S. and Russian militaries.

In 1979, Al assigned expert Alaska jumpers to develop a bold and innovative personnel delivery system utilizing sportjumping ram-air parachutes. This system allowed Alaska smokejumpers to jump in winds as strong as 28 miles per hour, as opposed to the status quo system of round chutes only capable of handling winds of 9 miles per hour.

Instead of landing in their plane and waiting several hours for winds to subside, the ram-air parachutes allowed jumpers to commence initial attack within minutes of arrival over fires fanned by high winds.

Smokejumper effectiveness is directly linked to speed of attack – the faster men can begin fighting the fire, the smaller it is and the easier it is to control.

What qualities did Al possess to make him such a memorable leader? Nobody can put a finger on that answer, but he inspired us by setting the goals and empowering us to accomplish them. He mixed humanity and duty very effectively. Talented jumpers from many other bases wanted to come to Alaska to develop their talents. They knew that Al would give them the chance and the resources to do that.

In 1978, I committed the unpardonable sin of smokejumpers – I declared a fire to be out. A short time later the fire reared its ugly head to burn several hundred additional acres, requiring several jumpers and aircraft to fly hundreds of miles to finally extinguish it.

The fire was near the Athabaskan Indian village of Allakaket. We initially determined the cause of the first fire to be carelessness on the part of an Indian from the village. My crew and I did the best we could, and we always asked ourselves before leaving a fire: "Are we willing to bet our jobs that this fire is out?" We each

answered "yes," but somehow we missed a hot spot, and it re-burned a couple of days later.

When the fire was finally out, Al held an inquiry and thoroughly investigated the circumstances of the second burn. It was obvious that I was responsible as fire boss for not ensuring the fire was dead out prior to demobilizing. Shame and pain had racked my soul for several days, and I seriously considered resigning.

As discussions at the inquiry wound to a close, Al looked at me and said, "Forget it, Tom. The Indians went back up there and set it." His leadership saved my career as well as the careers of several employees he never knew. Over the ensuing years those men under my leadership continued to reap the benefits of Big Al Dunton's mercy for a distraught smokejumper who let a fire get away on a riverbank near Allakaket.

Bill Cramer (NIFC-90)

This wasn't an average load flying out to Fire #501 on Aug. 3. With more than eight jumpers on board and an all-Alaskan load, it wasn't typical for the busy 2010 Alaska fire season. It was probably fitting considering the circumstances, though most of the jumpers didn't know that this mission was special.

We dutifully completed our pin checks as the muddy waters of the Yukon passed underneath. The southern edge of Fire No. 501 soon followed as the jumpship proceeded to the northern edge. Small and medium columns of smoke rose from the vast spruce and hardwood forest northeast of Stevens Village.

Tom Kubichek (FBX-90), J-07 spotter, made his way back to the rear station to prepare for jump operations. "Door coming open. Guard your reserves!" was our warning that our time onboard was coming to a close.

Tom's streamers showed 400 yards of drift with lots of up air. It also showed that our assignment to burn a half-mile of line between two lakes would have to be attempted against the wind.

The jump spot was on the southern edge of Tanjoga Lake. None of us worried about landing in the lake, but we paid close attention to the subtle colors of the grass along the shore. Green usually means you'll get wet on landing; brown is usually drier.

Tom indicated he'd be kicking us in a 2-3-3 configuration as the 900-horsepower turbines powered us up to 3000 feet AGL.

"Two jumpers. Are you ready? Are your leg straps tight? Hook up!"

Matt Allen (FBX-95) and I hooked-up our static line clips and listened to Tom's briefing. No surprises, though I laughed at the thought of having kicked Tom out as the IC on this fire on June 25 when it was only 30 acres. I appreciated Tom returning the favor.

The Upper Yukon Zone FMO, **Steve Theisen** (FBX-86), probably wasn't laughing, as the fire had been problematic from the first day. Severe drought conditions, scattered structures, numerous scattered Native Allotments, proximity to Steven's Village, and Doyon Corp. land ownership all contributed to Steve's headaches. More than 80 jumpers and 20 crews had been on this fire in the previous six weeks and this fire was far from over.

"Get in the door."

My jump partner got in the door and both of us completed our four-point checks: "Drogue release, main release, reserve, lower RSL."

Focusing on the task at hand was important as Tom made two minor corrections to our final.

"Get ready!"

The command was quickly followed by a slap on Matt's right shoulder. Matt exited into the roar of air, and I swung into the door he had just vacated. The slap on my shoulder triggered the same response. A blur of scenes came into peripheral view – a rapidly diminishing jumpship, smoke columns, and a mix of boreal forests with intermittent lakes.

One object captured my mind's focus, the drogue release handle.

"Jump thousand, look thousand, reach thousand, wait thousand, pull thousand."

The CR-360 main parachute opened smoothly and easily passed the opening checks.

"Check your canopy, check your airspace, right turn, left turn, stall check."

We both had parachutes we wanted to land. Matt had already initiated bomb turns with his DC-7 main parachute to gain vertical separation. The CR-360's tendency to "float" would make my job pretty simple so long as the next stick didn't catch up with me.

We both executed left-hand patterns to keep us from flying over the lake. There was plenty of time to get a good view of the section we'd be working and to simply enjoy the Alaska scenery. The "up air" was a minor hassle, but a few sinks and stalls soon put us in a good position for turning final.

The world got smaller as we both focused on where exactly we wanted to land. I chose a dry-looking clump of grass about 10 yards shy of where Matt landed. The wind was close to ideal and the CR-360 responded admirably to my half-brake flare.

We were soon joined by our other bros, **Randy Foland** (FBX-01), **Branden Kobayashi** (FBX-05), **Brian Kirkman** (FBX-08), **Robert Miller** (FBX-05), **Isaiah Fischer** (RDD-05) and **Greg Conaway** (FBX-04).

As we gathered the cargo and bagged our jump gear, I considered the relative merits of several locations I had

spotted on my jump. We were here to do a job for the zone, but I had been given the honor of a job that was more important in the bigger scheme of things. I wanted to do it right.

Al Dunton's ashes were safely secured in my right leg during the jump, and I moved them to my PG bag as we prepared to burn the half-mile section of line against the wind. The test burn went very well, but it was obvious we'd need to take it slow. Eating smoke and catching the spots weren't going to be a lot of fun.

The fuel loadings weren't that heavy, but it was obvious that rain had been a stranger this summer. By 2100 we had made it about half way down the line and were worried about losing the burn window due to an increased hardwood component and the unfavorable west winds.

God smiled on us about then as the winds suddenly shifted and blew from the east. God also laughed as the AFMO flew over a few minutes later and could plainly see that winds were in our favor and we should obviously be done with the half-mile burn by now. Things like this seem to be standard in life.

About 40 minutes later, we finished up the southern end of the burn and actually got to enjoy some clear air. Life remained good for a few more minutes until the west winds returned and our visibility went to nil, and we started wishing for oxygen. We caught all the spot fires, though it came at the cost of multiple bee stings.

At 2300, Matt declared the line safe to leave for the evening and we headed north to set up camp.

I left camp shortly before midnight with Al Dunton's ashes. Moving west along the lakeshore, I came to a small peninsula that jutted into the lake enough to provide good views of the landscape. Darkness began to fall, but the occasional torching of spruce illuminated the smokey air.

With a short prayer, I scattered Al's ashes amongst the cattails. In the vastness of Alaska's interior with fire to the east, south, and west, I thought this was the type of spot any Alaska smokejumper would be happy to have for a final resting spot.

We finished securing the line. Despite the solid burn, much fuel remained as the burned trees fell over. Matt and I had to hustle down the line the next day when a large fire whirl came out of the black and threw multiple spots across our line. The remaining days consisted of mopping up and dropping hazard trees.

During this time I kept an eye on the spot where Al's ashes were scattered. In close proximity to the spot I saw Arctic hares, loons, sandhill cranes, Wilson snipe, tundra swans, a large bull moose, and only a few mosquitoes. All in all, a great spot for a great smokejumper making his last jump. 🌲

A Fond Farewell For Al Dunton

by Pat Shearer (Missoula '67)

I first met Al in 1968. I think my first comment was: "Someone needs to put a new transmission in that guy. He seems to be stuck in low gear." It didn't take me long to learn, just like everyone else (especially a few political opponents), that Al's mind worked much faster than his feet.

The following years were filled with many adventures. The job itself was "Jumper Heaven." Add to that the hunting, fishing, floating rivers, and the ill-conceived search for the big win at a place

called Sam's. We were constantly trying to live a lifetime of adventure in the next 15 minutes. Luckily, for both of us, we finally realized our big win was at home waiting for us all that time.

Al's building of the Alaska smokejumpers and his rise within the organization is well documented. His ability to think way ahead of the pack was legendary, but the one thing he had above all others – and an attribute which is rare these days – is that Al had class.

Everyone felt comfortable with Al almost from the moment they met. From behind the scenes, he would help people who were bidding for jobs within the organization – many of them never knowing that he was instrumental in helping them along the career path they were seeking.

You could turn your back to Al and not feel the sting of the knife. His smokejumpers, including me, revered him always knowing that a man of his caliber would move on to bigger things – and he did.

Don't get me wrong – Al was as human as the rest of us. He had his weak points and the only thing he had in common with Mother

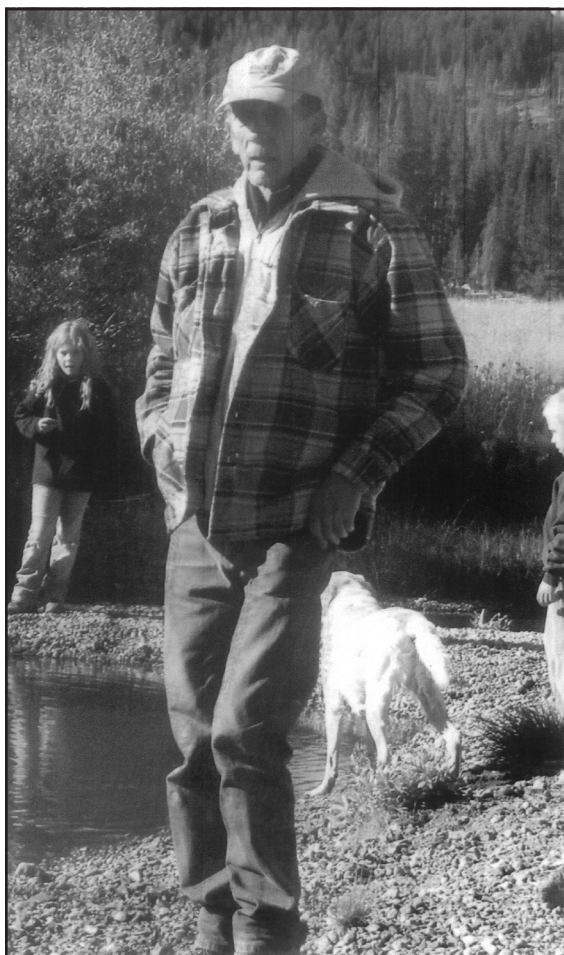
Teresa was that if they were both running the PT test, it would be at about the same speed. Actually, I think Mother Teresa had the edge there, too.

During our jumping years, and when Al was in the Supreme Commander position, the hat he wore was as my boss. I respected his position as my boss. But occasionally, my quest for adventure would go too far and I would be called to Al's woodshed.

After a couple of times, I realized there was a simple pattern to his reaction to my sins. If it was a small sin, things were going to be all right, and what I had done was considered minor. Al would put his fingertips on his forehead; slowly move his head from side to side, and in his best fatherly voice mutter, "Shearer, Shearer, Shearer."

If it was a mortal sin and serious because I really crossed the line, he would slam the flat of his hand on the desk and shout "SHEARER!" and proceed to work me over. I could put up a dignified defense when it was three "Shearers." One "Shearer" and a desk slam automatically triggered my begging-for-mercy defense.

Usually after either one, I would return to work. A call would come later in the day. It would be Al saying he thought I was in need of employee counseling and I was to meet him at Tommy's Elbow Room for remediation. I am going to have to check, but I should have some kind of certificate for receiving the most employee counseling in a drinking establishment.



Al Dunton 2009 with grandchildren Anna/Wyatt
(Courtesy Mary Dunton)

I'm trying to keep this light but in reality, my heart is broken. I was so lucky to spend most of the winter in Reno and was able to visit with him and relive some of our past. We would have lunch several times a week and even did some mild gambling.

I recall early fall of 1973. The Anchorage district called and said that due to warm weather, they had a fire near Marshall, Alaska, that needed to be manned. They were going to send a light helicopter that we could keep at the fire and use at our discretion.

They wanted us to monitor the fire and try to keep it in check. There were only four of us at the base, but Al told Anchorage we would man the fire. He told us that we were going to catch it.

The next morning we loaded the Grumman Goose, taking extra fuses and rations. "**Diamond**" **Don Wahl** (MSO-63) would spot and Al, **LeRoy Cook** (CJ-64), and I would jump. We worked the fire for a week. Al would drop LeRoy and me off to burn out from different anchor points, and he would throw fuses from the helicopter.

The last day we worked the fire, we were burning out from a small river. LeRoy was dropped off and Al took me to my starting point. We landed, shut the copter down, and ate a C-ration lunch and smoked our mandatory cigarettes. I shouldered my PG bag full of fuses and trusty C-rations.

Al started back to the helicopter but then turned and said, "Shearer, if things go bad here, if it gets too hot – then we will meet up on the other side of the river."

Well, we actually caught that fire. The next day the rains started. So we overnighted in

McGrath and debriefed at a local tavern in town. Al said he was pleased with our performance, but there were two things that bothered him.

One was that Anchorage would not give us credit for catching the fire, and second, someone was high-grading the C-rations for the pound cake, peaches, and C-ration cigarettes. I suggested that it was more than likely the helicopter pilot.

The reason I tell this story is that this fire showed me Al's tremendous will to win. At no time did he consider backing off and letting the fire burn. He was going to beat this thing!

Over the years, the Marshall Fire would occasionally come up when we would talk over old times. He would always bring up the helicopter pilot who high-graded the C-rations. This was getting worrisome as it was bordering on the Caine Mutiny and Capt. Queeg and the strawberries.

I had been in Reno recently to try to help Mary care for Al in his last days. Al had stopped eating and was in the hospital hooked up to IVs. I was due to leave the next morning. I wanted to try and build up his will to fight this thing – this insidious cancer.

I decided to talk about the Marshall Fire and see if he could regain that will to win which had seen him through in the past. Dick O'Connell and I drove to the hospital. Melanie and Amber were sitting with their dad. We visited for a bit and then I asked if I could speak to Al in private. Everyone left the room and when I was alone with him, I leaned down, looked into his eyes, and asked him if he remembered the Marshall Fire. He just stared.

I told him, "You have to fight this thing, use every weapon they

offer you – chemotherapy, radiation – whatever they offer." And then I stopped – what was I doing? This is the man who taught me and many others that the odds were never too great, that you always fight to win. I realized that he had been fighting to win. He was going against the odds and he was losing.

So I took his hand, looked into his eyes and told him what he had told me so many years ago on the banks of the river near Marshall: "Al, my friend, if things do go bad, if you get overrun – then we'll meet up on the other side of the river. Do you understand what I am saying?"

Ever so slightly, he squeezed my hand and he smiled. I left for Alaska the next day. He passed away several days later.

It could accurately be said that Al was the best of us, but the description I think he would prefer was that he was one of us.

Al and I had a great time playing one-upmanship, verbally sparring over small things that really didn't mean much in the big picture. I want to thank him for his honest and challenging leadership and his friendship.

I thank him for enhancing my life experience. Life would have been very boring without him. But I really want to thank him for the pound cake, peaches, and C-ration cigarettes. Yes, it was me – sorry, helicopter person! Yes, it was me, I readily confess. I ate it when Al was asleep, when he was awake, when he flew over me in the helicopter. And when I was done, I smoked many C-ration cigarettes.

This fall and next summer, I'm going to revisit some of the old hunting and fishing places we went. Sheep hunting might be a stretch – but I will try! With my Irish imagination turned on,

I'll be listening when the wind blows across the shale slides, or the water swirling around the rocks in the Anchor River – I'll be listening for the words that

tell me that “Yes, it's bad, but in the long run everything is going to be all right.” I'll be listening for “SHEARER, SHEARER, SHEARER.”

So long, Al. See you on the other side of the river!

And P.S. – God, please let Al smoke. It will save you a lot of grief. 🙏

Thoughts From A Daughter

by Melanie Dunton (McCall '99)

In the weeks following my dad's death, I feel as if I received a rare gift: the opportunity to get to know him better even as we said goodbye. Through the many e-mails, phone calls, visits and, of course, tributes at his memorial service, I learned of a man who was the consummate professional, the unconventional leader, the incorrigible gambler, the devoted friend, the supportive boss, the avid outdoorsman.

While in my adulthood I figured out, like any child, that my parents did have lives before children, and that they were complex beings just like “regular people.” There were certain things that I could never have learned about my dad directly from him, certain things that took a tragedy like his death for me to get the chance to hear from others.

What an honor to know how much he meant to so many, and what an honor to have his story told through the eyes of so many in the pages of a magazine devoted to the profession he loved. It is obvious that the story of “Al the boss, smokejumper, friend, colleague, drinking buddy, etc. etc.” is covered by fine people like **Pat Shearer** (MSO-67) and **Bill Cramer** (MSO-70), so I would like to share a little bit about how my dad as a family man came to be – something I am sure many who knew him in his early days would have sworn on all that was holy would never happen.

Someone at my dad's memorial mentioned how hard it is to balance work and family, and he did that beautifully. I try today to achieve that balance with my own kids.

As most know and many remember, Al, circa 1970, worked hard and lived hard; days found him at the T-Hangar, probably getting an extraordinary amount of work done while appearing to actually direct very little. I'd also wager there was a cigarette protruding nonchalantly from his lips; he once told my mom that he switched each year around January from Marlboros to Carltons for his “annual journey to physical fitness.”

After hours ... I've only heard tell ... Dad, Pat, and

a handful of others could be spotted at The Officer's Club or Sam's, drinking, gambling, storytelling, or doing some combination of the three. I believe the family would still own property somewhere off the Steese Highway had it not been for a little too much of the first two.

Dad always downplayed the “legendary” Fairbanks days, which slowed considerably sometime around the birth of his children. I do remember certain glimpses into this part of his past, like the time he quipped, “The hard part about winter was when it was dark, you felt like it was time to go to Sam's ... but it was almost always dark.”

I suppose the darkness also was to blame for the spur-of-the-moment trip he and Bob Schaeffi decided to take their wives on to Hawaii in December of 1977. In some capacity I went along, just a month and a half from making my debut in the world. I'm sure my mom was thrilled to find herself with child in the middle of bikini country.

Often in my high school years I would wish my dad to be seized with “aloha fever” after a couple of whiskeys, but the most impulsive and irresponsible thing he did after a night out when I was a kid was to buy a horse at an auction – never mind that he knew next to nothing of the breed – and once referring to their hooves as “paws.”

Of course, hard living is only the stuff of legend if it is accompanied by hard working, as accomplishing the two concurrently with any sort of distinction is exceedingly difficult. Dad excelled at both at the same time, for a long time.

As **Murry Taylor** (RDD-65), **John Culbertson** (FBX-69) and Pat Shearer (through his daughter, Heather) explained so articulately at his memorial, my dad and a handful of others guided the Alaska Smokejumpers through their formative years, and many went on to become leaders and innovators in fire management.

I wasn't old enough back then to understand basic physics, let alone the finer points of aerial firefighter delivery, but I think those known today as "squares" partially have my dad to thank for not still being known as "rounds."

I knew Al, circa 1990 much better. Once we moved south, though his career continued to flourish, his life revolved entirely around his family. His new friends – people like Kevin and Fran Hull and "the state office crew" – were dear to him, but the end of most work weeks meant loading up the truck and heading to Webber Lake, where he watched with proud eyes as he pitted his daughters against each other in trout fishing contests ... which Amber usually won with little effort while reading a Danielle Steel novel. He knew he could count on his beloved Mary to keep the peace while I seethed.

My dad had a way at home, like he did at work, of bringing out the best in us minus any guilt or pressure. I ran faster when I saw his face along the fence at track meets, and studied a little harder to get the "A" in math, not because he'd take me to the Nugget Casino's seafood buffet, but because he'd smile at my report card and say simply, "Good job, kid."

When I started jumping he never once asked, "Why not BLM?" though I do remember him underscoring the importance of a good landing roll if I was going to jump rounds.

When I tired of playing four-square on the tarmac in Battle Mountain and got homesick, he drove three hours each way to pick me up for a one-night visit home, and when I broke my arm on my first fire jump he listened for an hour as I cried into the phone, sure that I had ruined the family legacy – and Dad assured me in his quiet way that I had not.

I'll never forget when he came to watch my practice jumps in McCall; he didn't say much, but I remember knowing how he felt – he was proud of me and that was all I needed.

Grandpa Al emerged seemingly out of thin air when his first grandchild, Anna, was born. The man who had changed only enough diapers to avoid sleeping on the couch each night when his daughters were babies now rolled an adoring 9-month-old around the backyard in an umbrella stroller, proudly wearing a baseball cap labeled "Grandpa" in red puffy paint and singing "The Wayward Wind."

When she'd cry, he'd dance, and something about the way he resembled a 6-foot-2 marionette smoking a Barclay would make her laugh. In fact, it was so successful a mood changer that he adopted the same routine for each of his three subsequent grandchildren.

My dad was also an innovator in grandparenting.

Though none of his inventions ever made it to the patent stage, his polystyrene duct taped to the counter corners saved many a toddler's head from too sharp a corner cut, and the way he slurped green beans off a plate at dinner made even the most veggie-phobic of 2-year-olds want to eat some, too.

I'll never forget when he came to watch my practice jumps in McCall; he didn't say much, but I remember knowing how he felt – he was proud of me and that was all I needed.

He was never too busy or too much in a hurry not to let one of the kids help him hammer a nail or mow a piece of lawn, and often my mom would come around the corner to find the remnants of whatever fun Grandpa and the kids had enjoyed that day, including the furniture dolly that he rigged up as a sort of scooter-slash-wagon, or the BB-gun shooting range he set up in the garage directly parallel to my mom's new car.

They all adored him, and they'll all miss him terribly.

My dad, like anyone, had his faults; he watched Fox News, detested yogurt, and had the annoying habit of never forgetting anything when he went on a camping trip, usually being able to produce two or three of whatever it was anyone else forgot.

He confronted his share of demons, fought his share of battles, and lived through tragedies, but he emerged on the other side of each obstacle wiser for it, and had the capacity to take that wisdom and better those around him. He embodied something rare ... some intangible, almost indescribable combination of intelligence, integrity, compassion and sincerity. He achieved much in the most unobtrusive way possible, and he hated being the center of attention for any reason, preferring instead to lead by example and let success speak for itself.

In spite of his tendency to shrink from the spotlight, though, I know he'd be touched to see what a fine group of people came to bid him farewell in July. He might have been sitting in the back row, as far from the crowd as possible, with an O'Douls and his grandkids, but he'd be touched.

So, here's to my dad, and the fact that everyone he knew is a little better person today because of that relationship. 🍷

Smokejumper Center Seeks Donations

by Carl Gidlund (Missoula '58)

Barry Hicks (MSO-64) wants \$150,000, and he wants it this winter.

Hicks swears he won't use the dough for a Mediterranean yacht cruise or a gold-plated skiing vacation in the Alps.

Instead, the president of the National Smokejumper Center says it'll be spent to dig basements and build foundations for the four buildings that comprise the historical Madison Ranger Station. They're to be moved from their current location in the center of West Yellowstone to city property directly across the street from the thriving visitors center at the Yellowstone National Park entrance.

The ranger's house, office, garage and barn will make up the new center, an environmental education activity for kids that began in 2006 in West Yellowstone.

My wife, Sally, and I spent five days as Junior Smokejumper volunteers the first week of August, and we came away impressed with what the center is trying to do. As Sally and I can attest, it's a worthwhile and fun experience.

"Trying" is the operative word here because, during the days we were on station, only 10 kids showed up for the program which is designed to provide a bit of education about ecology, forest fires and smokejumping.

The lack of attendance may be as a result of a pair of factors: a paucity of information describing the program and the appearance of the current compound.

I noted when we arrived at the historical station where the program has been conducted that the container affixed to the front fence, which should have contained flyers, was empty; it was still empty when we left. I presume brochure racks around town were also barren.

The weeds in the one-acre Madison Ranger Station

compound where the program is conducted are knee-high, and no American flag was flying.

I visited the current ranger station where I attempted to borrow a riding lawn mower. I was turned down with the explanation that the project was on its own for maintenance, even though the historical station is, I presume, still on Forest Service rolls.

Future programs will be conducted at the station's new high-visibility location, and that should go a long way to solving the non-attendance situation. And I presume the station's appearance will improve once it's on city-owned property.

About our week: Sally and I were put up in the station's house, a comfortable two-bedroom facility with a shower, well-appointed kitchen and dining room. Our host for the week was **Chuck Flach** (MSO-68), who's been a volunteer for several years.

The office assistant and environmental education teacher was Laura Stumhofer, a Brown University student whose father was a retardant pilot. She vacated her room in what was the ranger's family quarters so we could move in, and took up residence in a bedroom behind the ranger station's office.

Hicks wasn't present during our week. He was working in the Gulf of Mexico on the oil cleanup campaign.

Flach briefed us on the program, then we watched the first day's presentation. In subsequent days, Sally and I pitched in when there were kids.

During the first half-hour Laura described the fire triangle and, through a series of photos and drawings, led the kids to the conclusion that forest fires are neither good nor bad, but some have to be extinguished. She also had them pluck and identify various plants from the profusion growing in the compound.

Other stations were devoted to smokejumping. Those included a dummy in jump gear beneath a parachute hanging in a tree, simulated "jumps" by the kids from an "airplane door" about 18 inches from the ground, the flaring of a parachute with the kids rushing underneath, a look at fire packs, cargo chutes, tools, a fire shelter, and a female dummy in firefighters' Nomex clothing.

The kids practiced pull-ups and sit-ups, and then ran around the station's interior perimeter, "working out just like real smokejumpers do." Their three-hour session ended with a written test administered by Laura that reinforced what they had learned.

The center also made available a very large smoke-



Youngsters flare a parachute (courtesy Frank Burbhenn)

jumper suit which the children could don for pictures by their parents. Barry told me he's negotiating with the Missoula jump base to obtain kid-sized jumpsuits which that base uses in its Junior Smokejumper program.

Although we were disappointed by the sparse attendance, it was a very nice week. Those kids who did participate obviously had a great time and enjoyed their experiences.

We didn't receive an information packet in advance, but thought we might have time for some recreating. And we did – our volunteer duties took the mornings, but we spent a couple of afternoons in Yellowstone Park. Our bicycles were right handy for touring the town, and we whacked away with our golf clubs at a course about 20 miles from West Yellowstone.

The town is well-equipped with grocery stores, restaurants, museums and coffee houses, so we weren't roughing it in any sense.

After we arrived home the center mailed us a stipend of \$75, which we donated back with a few more bucks thrown in.

Which brings us back to the first paragraph of this article. The center is a 501(c)(3) corporation, so deductions are tax-deductible. If you wish to donate, you can mail your check to the National Smokejumper Center, P.O. Box 264, West Yellowstone, MT 59758. You can also donate via credit card or through PayPal's secure website. The center's Web address is www.smokejumpercenter.org, and its email address is smokejumperctr@gmail.com. To contact Barry directly, his phone number is (406) 244-5025.

The center will need volunteers next summer and, owing to its new location, it will probably need a bunch. In addition to those who would like to take part in the smokejumper aspects of the program, he'd like a cadre of volunteers with carpentry, electrical, plumbing and landscaping skills. They would provide guidance to an Elderhostel volunteer group of 20 to 25 retirees who will be on site in mid-May of 2011. He'll furnish the tools and materials for the project.

The NSA Board Is A Bit Wary

The National Smokejumper Association has been supportive of the center's program, but several NSA board members want to keep the relationship at arm's length, at least for now.

NSA President **John Twiss** (RAC-67) said, "The board is sitting back. We want to make sure the program is successful before we endorse it fully. Right now, there's not a lot of enthusiasm for it."



Mark Petroni teaching fire ecology (courtesy Frank Burhenn)

He also related that Hicks has invited the board to establish NSA headquarters at West Yellowstone and partner with the center. Thus far the board has declined that invitation.

Hicks has been counseled by board members to check out employees, volunteers and local residents on the national sex offenders website. He says that he has done that for employees and local residents, but not for volunteers. However, he says, with the move to the new venue, he intends to ask the West Yellowstone Police Department to conduct background checks on all persons affiliated with the project, including volunteers.

Our own recent check of the Web site revealed three sex offenders who live in West Yellowstone, and one of them is classified as "violent." Hicks said that we were supposed to have been shown photos of those persons when we checked in for our workweek. However, that was not done.

A board member also has suggested to Hicks that the center should affiliate with the American Camping Association or a similar organization to take advantage of information networks provided by such organizations. Such a move would require the center to comply with the standards under which those organizations operate.

Hicks told me that he doesn't think such an association would benefit the National Smokejumper Center since the children who take part in its programs are not campers, but day users of the facility.

He did say that the center buys liability insurance that covers the buildings, employees and volunteers.

But despite the board's hesitancy to become active partners in the center's operation, the two entities are working together. In June 2008, the NSA loaned the center \$6,000. That sum was repaid in September of that year.

And during each of the last two years, the board gave grants of \$1,000 to the center. Also during the past two years, center personnel have sold a total of \$718 in merchandise for the NSA. 🍄

Touching All Bases

Alaska Base Report

by Mike McMillan
(Fairbanks '96)

Fire season was too good to keep to ourselves in 2010. We shared 1,090 fire jumps with 197 boosters from the BLM and USFS. Our best jump season in 20 years kept our paracargo section rolling—dropping 715,570 pounds of cargo to fires and projects across the state – the most tonnage dropped in the post-Argosy (C1) era. We had seven jump planes on the ramp in 2010, led by the incomparable Casas, logging 1,218 total flight hours last year.

Our head count was 67. We jumped our first fire on April 27. Our last fire was jumped on Sept. 28—the latest, and one of the coldest on record. **Jeff McPhetridge** (MYC-93) and **Randy Foland** (FBX-01) endured the experience, reporting suppression in -17 degrees was truly unlikely.

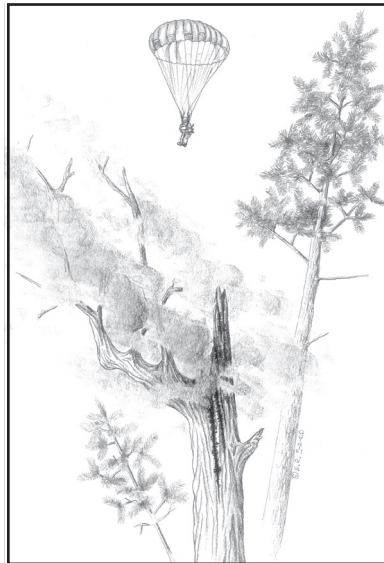
Negligible precipitation in parts of the Upper Yukon Zone kept fire managers and smokejumpers busy all year. Approximately 1.1 million acres burned across the state in 2010. One fire that burned down the appropriately named Farewell Lodge has burned for three years.

A few samples of 2010 Alaska fire names include Deadman Island, Wright Way, Sucker River 2, Tipooktularuk River, and the Klikhtentozna Creek Fires.

Two fires – Pat Creek and Canvasback Lake—were breadbaskets, with several jumpers jumping the same fire three times. When asked which of his three jumps on Fire 501 was his favorite, **Jason Schroeder** (FBX-08) replied: “The first time’s always the best.”

Dry fuels early in the season contributed to more than one escaped campfire. However embarrassing, it acutely pointed out the need for diligence with campfires, even for gnarly smokejumpers who too often slink away from a smoldering campfire in the night chill, murmuring, “What could possibly go wrong?”

One load jumped a fire burning deep along a lake near Bettles. The crew set up five Mark 3s, with each jumper having his own pump and 1-inch hoselay to himself.



Even after a week of spraying peat banks burning four feet deep, “gladiator-style,” the fire still showed signs of life and was left in monitor status.

One load jumped Fire 666, in which a privately-owned cargo plane had crashed near Ft. Greely, killing all aboard and starting a small fire. The responding jumpers had the somber task of spraying remains to preserve evidence.

There were 541 smokejumper missions flown in Alaska in 2010. Among those, 168 were fire jump missions, 146 were paracargo missions, and 82 trips were made to drop 724 smokejumpers on practice jumps. We flew 25 “dry runs,” or false alarms. That’s nearly 25 “Chicken Dances” – the musical,

obligatory, clucky welcome-home greeting for jumpless jumpers.

Four Alaska Smokejumpers made a total of six fire jumps in Lower 48 in 2010.

Back where the jump action was, 2,485 personnel parachutes were rigged in the Alaska loft. We employed a few retired jumpers and were happy to have them back among us! **Jon Larson** (FBX-89) spent several sleepless weeks working in our paracargo section. **Ron Lund** (FBX-64) and **Ken Coe** (FBX-80) were cargo-chute rigging workhorses. Other Old Salts returned to work in single-resource capacities in the state. They included **Rod Dow** (MYC-68), **Steve Nemore** (RAC-69) and **Mitch Decoteau** (GAC-78). It was surreal seeing so many familiar faces and a pleasure to have them in our halls again.

We welcomed the Lusk Family to Alaska in July. **Jedidiah Lusk** (FBX-10), 9, is battling brain cancer. Filled with high spirits and the love of his family, Jedidiah completed smokejumper rookie training – in a record three days. In doing so Jedidiah fulfilled his wish of becoming a smokejumper, like his parents **Scott Lusk** (FBX-81) and **Cynthia Lusk** (RAC-87).

The Alaska Crew and Alaska Fire Service played a big part in making Jedidiah’s unprecedented training a success. Our loft specialists made him a custom jumpsuit to keep. His training included a jump mission and cargo drop. Jedidiah tossed streamers from his seat at the open door, then gave two jumpers a kick to send them on their way. “Your other left!” Jed quipped on the headset to the

ship's pilots as they made final adjustments.

Several jumpers in the support crew didn't flinch when they missed fire jumps that week, and we were all entertained and moved by the experience. Photos of Jedidiah's Make-A-Wish adventure can be found in my section of the NSA Image Gallery. In October, Jedidiah was feeling well, staying active and being happy.

Congrats to **Tamar Young** (FBX-07) and **Ian Dooley** (FBX-08) for becoming senior parachute riggers. Dooley was also the jump king of the U.S. with 16 fires jumped in Alaska. **Doug Mackey** (FBX-99) became a Designated Parachute Rigger Examiner (DPRE).

Alaska had no cut-away malfunctions and relatively few parachute-rigging related MARS incidents. Alaska Base Manager **Bill Cramer** (NIFC-90) said one of the highlights of the year is the fact we had no serious injuries on fire jumps in 2010.

More highlights: a ropeswing set up over the Little Black River, catching salmon with burlap bags 10 miles from the ocean, and building a Huck Finn-style raft during a long demobe. The raft in question, painstakingly crafted by three jumpers, was reportedly stolen and hidden upstream by three other jumpers, forcing the raft-builders to conclude their craft had floated downstream and spurring them to give chase, running downriver for miles.

As the raft-builders gave up and trudged their way upriver, the raft-thieves appeared around a bend, floating peacefully on the well-made craft. "You've started something now," said the builders to the thieves.

We had three ASM (aerial support module) assignments and 17 single-resource prescribed-fire assignments in the Lower 48. We sent four jumpers to the Gulf for oil cleanup in October. McPhetridge spent several weeks in a detail to AFS' south Zone as AFMO. McMillan had two public affairs details to the NPS and the FWS at NIFC to be closer to his family and develop a plan for life after jumping.

The McMillans welcomed son Ian on Sept. 11. We will never forget...his birthday. Also arriving in 2010 - Bill Cramer and wife Sharon welcomed fourth daughter Ella, Randy Foland and Jamie welcomed daughter Isabelle, **Ty Humphrey** (FBX-98) and wife Jennifer welcomed daughter Delia, and **Jeff Stark** (FBX-03) and Laura welcomed son Tanner. **Mike O'Brien** (FBX-98) married Julia.

Ward Scanson (FBX-07) left us for West Yellowstone, taking his square parachute with him. **Tony Pastro** (FBX-77), our saltiest jumper, retires in March. His willingness to share his practical knowledge will be missed. Tony also won the 2009 **Iron Al Seiler** (FBX-85) Award.

It looks like 2011 will be our third season without rookies, except of course for Jedidiah Lusk. We're deeper

than ever now, like the ocean, but different.

2010 will sadly be remembered as the year our friend and fellow Alaska Smokejumper **Dawson Kelsey** (RDD-95) took his life on February 14. Dawson's talent, wit, drive and determination make his suicide difficult to understand. He earned his Master Parachute Riggers license just months before driving into the snow-covered woods outside Weaverville, Calif. and shooting himself beside his pickup. I intend to write more about who Dawson was to so many people in a future issue, and I look forward to input from Dawson's friends. Our sympathy and support for Dawson's mother, Judy, and sister Alice endures.

Boise Base Report

by **Quincy Chung** (NIFC-03)

Hello from the Boise Smokejumpers. This last winter, spring and summer were pretty mild in not only temperature but also in operations and prescription. During the winter and early spring, we provided jumpers to many users in the Southeast, Montana BLM and Washington State to help write, execute and support prescribed fire operations.

Last spring we picked up four strong new rookies: **Steve Ramaekers** (NIFC-10), **Dereck Bohan** (NIFC-10), **Eero Okkonen** (NIFC-10) and **Jordan Williams** (NIFC-10). Congratulations on making it through.

Also, we assisted in the training of 10 new Region 1 Forest Service Ram Air jumpers (FRAM) and are currently on track with the current FRAM program. Even with the slower-than-normal fire season, the Boise Smokejumper base was able to provide opportunity for R-1 jumpers to get into our operations in Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and Utah. The Boise Smokejumpers had 68 fires jumped with 21 fires pounded for a total of 514 smokejumpers on fires.

Those numbers do not include the high demand for jumpers in the spring and summer in Alaska, which provided great training and operational benefit for the Boise jumpers.

One new addition to our smokejumper operational country was our action in Wyoming. This was mostly due to the recent move of **Paul Hohn** (MYC-00). Paul left the assistant operations manager position and took a job this summer at the Wyoming State Office as the state AFMO in Cheyenne. **Todd Jinkins** (NIFC-98), former assistant loft manager, was hired into Paul's old job. All look forward to the upcoming heckling and harassment of Todd.

During the summer of 2010, we had 22 fire-management details at the local, district, state and national levels.

We also had 26 people on Type 1 and 2 Incident Management Team rosters, with completion of command and general staff positions. The most notable accomplishment was achieved by **Marty Adell** (NIFC-95). Marty completed his Incident Commander Type 2 task book and will be a new IC in 2011. Congratulations, Marty!

The summer of 2010 was one of the slowest jump seasons in the last decade. The Boise jump base had a total of 76 active jumpers with three planes in the fleet. Colorado was the most active place, not including the activity in Alaska. As previously mentioned, the new FRAM program continued with great success and is still on track for 2011 with Region 1 Smokejumpers.

We plan to have a rookie class of 5-10 persons in 2011, with a head count around 81 active jumpers. As for planes, we intend to have three planes, plus the shared Dornier with Alaska, in the fleet with **John Stright** (MYC-83) as our permanent pilot.

We have had a few good smokejumpers move along into new positions this last year. Their work ethic and leadership will truly be missed, but some district, forest, or zone will benefit greatly from our loss.

Until the next report, enjoy, and we will update you later.

Grangeville Base Report

by **Michael Blinn** (RDD-01)

The Grangeville Smokejumpers experienced another slower-than-average fire season in 2010. Couldn't happen three years in a row, right? Wrong!

Central Idaho weather was foggy starting in 2008 and extending through the time of publication. Early refresher spirits were very high, but the downward spiral was in full swing by mid-May. By early June, management had confiscated all belts and shoelaces, edged or pointed items, and sleeping pills from crewmembers. Gacsuckers frittered away their time by dreaming of going to Alaska where fires still occur, pursuing online degrees with the University of Phoenix (no one graduated), and wearing out the bar stools at the Triangle.

By late July, the weather had warmed to tolerable temperatures, and the sun had nearly burned off the ever-present cloud cover. Unfortunately, the increased visibility only made the next approaching system easier to view on the western horizon.

Grangeville hosted R-1 rookie training for the second consecutive year. **Brett Rogers** (MSO-90) and **Chris Hertel** (GAC-91) headed up the training, with sig-

nificant pitch-ins from **Isaac Karuzas** (RDD-01), **Mike Dunn** (GAC-04), **Dan Mooney** (WYS-07) and **Kelly Matthews** (GAC-08). Trainers from the other R-1 Bases included, but were not limited to, **Jesse Meyers** (MSO-03), **Seth Hanson** (MSO-01), **Tony Navarro** (RAC-83) and **Pete Lannan** (WYS-07).

GAC had four rookies finish training this year: **Nick Maki** (Union IHC), **Jeremy Cawn** (Smokey Bear IHC), **Jacob Quigley** (La Grande IHC), and **Brian Agbalog** (Moose Creek RD, NPNF).

There were a few personnel changes in 2010 at GAC. **Joey Forthofer** (RDD-04) and **Jodie Baxter** (GAC-07) were promoted to GS-7 Smokejumper Squadleaders this spring. **Casey Ramsey** (RDD-01) found a more lucrative opportunity to be lanky and nerdish elsewhere this year. **Alessandro Potenziani** (RDD-01) quit again. He's currently doing tree work on Whidbey Island, off the coast of Washington. **Ryan Desautel** (GAC-04) threw in the (bar) towel in September.

Brett Rogers decided to take a detail as a Forest Safety Officer this winter. Apparently baby-proofing his house

Head East, Young Men: Trail Project Expands

The National Smokejumper Association has announced a first-ever Trail Maintenance Project on an Eastern forest. Mark June 12-18, 2010, on your calendars. Attendees will gather on the afternoon of June 12 at the Black Water Falls Lodge for the first meal and a discussion of the project.

The project will involve 1 1/2 miles of tread repair on a segment of the Appalachian Trail System in the Monongahela National Forest and the Canaan State Park near Black Water Falls, which is near Elkins and Davis, W.Va.

The project is for one week this summer, and the crew will stay in state-owned cabins (six men to a cabin, with hot showers and a full kitchen; volunteers will take their meals in the park lodge). Eat your heart out, Kovalicky.

If you are interested in participating, please contact **John McDaniel** (CJ-57) at jumpercj57@hotmail.com or by phone at (785) 643-1865 anytime, Central Time Zone.

Eight jumpers are signed up right now. Join the crew in a beautiful area.

for the expected new arrival has illuminated some holes in our occupational safety guidelines. He used to just hide popcorn in the couch cushions to keep his former child **Kevin Thompson** (GAC-95) occupied. Now there'll be a new baby with the capacity for rational thought to look after.

Kim and Joey Forthofer are expecting their first baby this fall. These are the only known chilluns on the way, but don't count **Nate Hesse** (RDD-01) out. He's usually good for five or six unplanned pregnancies throughout the course of the year.

McCall Base Report

by **Matt Galyardt** (MYC-02)

Most folks would sum up the 2010 season for McCall as another slow year, which was particularly tough since it came on the heels of two previous slow seasons. However, while it is tough to argue that point, plenty of things occurred to make the year memorable.

We continued to support Region 8 by sending burn modules to the South throughout the winter and spring months. Many a jumper's wallet has been saved by getting this extra winter work, and the modules continue to pay dividends for prescribed fire experience. Of note, one of our modules was asked to participate in a Washington Office ceremony honoring the last surviving members of the Triple Nickels. Those who participated greatly appreciated the opportunity to visit with those being honored, as well as getting their pictures taken with their boots on the chief's desk!

Spring brought about the typical training season in McCall, shoveling out the units. Once again we had 70 smokejumpers. Ten rookies were hired, with eight successfully completing Ned training. The end of May brought the time to say good-bye (and throw a great party!) to a smokejumper legend. **Eric Brundige** (MYC-77) retired with more than 550 career jumps and left a big void in the operations functional area where he had been the foreman. Eric is missed; however, we still see him around town quite a bit.

Another old timer is looking at hanging things up at McCall as well: **Fred Pavlovic** (MYC-89). If the retirement paperwork goes through, Fred will be leaving a big void here at McCall as well as with our First Aid program. We wish Fred and Eric well and thank them for their efforts.

On the hiring front, **Chris Niccoli** (MYC-95) was hired to fill in behind Eric as our operations foreman, and **Brett Bittenbender** (MYC-88) was hired as our new loft foreman.

As with most bases, we got a jump start to the season by sending 24 boosters to Alaska in May. In all, McCall sent two separate boosters to help our bros in Alaska for a total of 44 jumpers getting to enjoy the Alaska experience. However, while things were cooking in Alaska, McCall was experiencing an epic month of June as far as precipitation was concerned.

The average rainfall for McCall in June is two inches. This year we received just over six inches of rain for the month. Widespread flooding and property damage occurred, as well as many forest and county roads getting washed out. This set the tone for the fire season in central Idaho. We only staffed a total of 13 fires out of McCall. Fire jumps for McCall jumpers totaled 233 nationwide, with many of those occurring in Alaska.

We also boosted North Cascades and Redmond, and set up spike base operations in Stead, Nev., and Ogden, Utah. In addition, we continued to support the Silver City detail by sending five smokejumpers. While our fire jumps were far below average, training jumps were aplenty due to the need to train four new smokejumper pilots.

Also of note, we continued to tear up the local softball league, albeit the "recreational" division. The team went undefeated all the way up until the championship game. That is when our two-day local fire season occurred, and we had to forfeit the game to the city fire department, of all teams. We tried to reschedule, but they had all sorts of excuses and took the trophy and ran. We had a very similar feeling at this year's big flip when, once again, we had to watch GAC take our money and run! Who keeps inviting those guys?

As fall settled into McCall, we had unseasonably warm temperatures that led to a great fall burning season on the Payette. The base contributed many man hours to the efforts and had a great time working with our local resources. We are also continuing to support the Asian Longhorn Beetle extermination efforts by sending tree climbers back to Worcester, Mass.

Lastly, keep an ear out for news on the hiring front as we will be filling vacancies for our assistant loft and assistant operations positions.

Missoula Base Report

by **Court Wallace** (GAC-04)

The summer of 2010 has come to an end and, like many years before, our hopes and predictions didn't exactly work out the way we envisioned. With a winter snow pack ranging from 40 to 60 percent of normal across the region, we thought there can't be three slow fire seasons in a row.

Since this was the 100th anniversary of the fires of 1910, many of us believed/hoped this would be the summer where we broke personal jump records and walked away with overtime exceeding our expectations. As it would turn out, we would not see the big fire season we were hoping for in Region 1, but were able to stay busy fighting fires in other regions, countries and states. We also had the occasional fire up Rock Creek, which thankfully has limited road access. All said and done, we jumped 15 fires out of Missoula, with a handful of miscellaneous single-resource assignments.

Sarah Doehring (MSO-91) and **Jen Martynuik** (MSO-99) headed up Silver City this summer. The crew was made up of six Missoula, two West Yellowstone, three Grangeville, five McCall, and four Boise jumpers. Overall, Silver City jumped eight initial attack fires, which is below average. Even though the fire season in Region 3 was slow, the jumpers were utilized on a variety of different missions.

Most notably was the first time smokejumpers had jumped in the great state of Texas. Five jumpers set up an ICT-3 team for the Big Bend National Park on the Sublett Fire, which was managed for resource benefit. Two weeks later jumpers were back in Texas, this time for a wildfire.

The New-Man-Ram-Air (NMRA) program continued with training nine more Region 1 jumpers (6 MSO, 2 WYS, 1 GAC) moving from the FS-14 to the DC-7 canopy. **Charles Savoia** (MSO-01), **Tory Kendrick** (MSO-00), **Mike Pennacchio** (MSO-00), **Chris Loraas** (MSO-04), **Josh Clint** (MSO-04) and Wallace were the Missoula jumpers who completed the three-week training.

Tory managed to have the first Forest Service cutaway malfunction on the Ram Air system, which came in the form of a tension knot on his sixth training jump. He followed the correct procedures and landed softly on his reserve canopy. The training was intense and thorough, thanks to the BLM trainers who dedicated a lot of time in providing excellent training, as well as integrating new Forest Service trainers. The plan is to train another class of Region 1 NMRA jumpers in 2011.

This summer Missoula saw the retirement of **Wayne Williams**, a.k.a. "W.W." (MSO-77). Wayne retired soon after refresher; his wish granted to retire as a current jumper. He is now working for the Montana DNRC, where he has become known as the "cool" safety guy.

Mike Patten, a.k.a. "the General" (MSO-87), also hung up his jump gear and was encountered by MSO jumpers packing out after jumping a fire above Mike's house in Rock Creek. Congratulations on sticking it out and good luck to no longer having to come to work.

Currently MSO jumpers are performing fuels work around Missoula, starting in on the winter work, head-

ing to the east coast for APHIS climbing, prescribed burning in Region 8 and Region 1, working with Natick engineers on who knows what, hunting, and getting laid off. The rumor is, it is supposed to be an "epic" ski season ... only time will tell.

North Cascades Base Report

by **Scott Wicklund** (NCSB-91)

The North Cascades Smokejumper Base was a beehive of activity in 2010 despite a relatively slow fire season. To start the New Year off-base, manager **John Button** (NCSB-75) retired from a long and admirable smokejumping career. John will be missed.

Daren Belsby (NCSB-86) hit the deck running this winter as the temporary base manager and, in July, was selected for the permanent position. Congratulations, Daren! Along with his various new duties, a large part of Daren's winter was filled with hiring 16 rookie candidates. For a small base, this was a huge influx of new smokejumpers.

Other changes at NCSB being considered are replacing the current administration shack and loft. During the winter and spring NCSB jumpers were involved in multiple projects including prescribed burning details around the nation, the ongoing hunt for the Asian Longhorned Beetle in Massachusetts, a Tussock Moth eradication effort here in the Methow Valley, and an extensive White Bark Pine cone caging and picking project.

Record amounts of June rain dampened the jumpsuits of prospective rookie candidates, but never their spirits. With the help and the tireless efforts of the trainers and support crew, 12 new rookies emerged from the mist, and NCSB started the 2010 fire season with a total of 36 smokejumpers. The dirty dozen (rookies) who made it were a solid bunch. Congratulations to all of you!

Of special note: John Button's lineage lives on in smokejumping in the form of his son, **Patrick Button** (NCSB-10). At the time of John's retirement, Patrick was merely another smokejumper applicant. As of this writing, he has a successful year under his belt and holds this year's jump hog title with 10 fire jumps.

Another interesting side note was a reconfiguration of the trusty CASA jump ship that allowed us to carry 15 smokejumpers on practice jumps and 10 smokejumpers with cargo for fire missions. Speaking of the CASA, our fearless Capt. Kevin McBride returned this year with "rookie" co-pilot Kyle Skidgel, who made another great addition to the staff here at NCSB.

With the NCSB plate full of project work, the Pacific Northwest wet spring hardly put a dent in the workload. Nonetheless, the wait for that first fire jump of the season was a long one for many of the NCSB personnel. Alaska, however, was having none of that and made it clear that the CASA was in high demand. Booster request from Alaska also trickled in, but “rookie training hold” limited available numbers. The day after rookie training ended, the CASA headed north with just two lucky NCSB jumpers. A couple weeks later 12 more NCSB smokejumpers joined the Alaska mega-mix. Thanks, Alaska!

By late July, with no fire jumps on the NCSB board and everybody home from Alaska, things seemed like they might be just starting to get desperate. However, a wet thunderstorm on July 28 left its mark in the form of a small fire in the Cascade foothills that was spotted first from the NCSB saw shack by **Guy McLean** (NCSB-07).

The plane was soon filled with various jumpers and several wide-eyed rooks, along with **Dale Longanecker** (RAC-74) leading the charge. NCSB’s official jump season had begun. By the way, Dale Longanecker still reigns as the leader in total jumps as a smokejumper. With mandatory retirement looming at the end of 2011, next year may be everyone’s last chance to jump a fire with him and give him a well-deserved high five.

As if his successful career and jump record isn’t enough, over the last few years Dale has also designed and created an experimental main canopy which is showing promise in current MTDC test drops.

Washington State finally dried out in August and September. Sporadic lightning ignited several fires, and we ended up being busy on and off for several weeks. We also managed to send a few boosts to Redmond and filled a surprise request from Canada to jump fires with our northern brethren at the North Peace Smokejumper Base, where all NCSB boosters ended up “parattacking” fires. In the end, all had a successful smokejumping season. NCSB finished the season with a total of 117 smokejumpers out the door.

NCSB also saw a growth in skills and qualifications this summer with six new senior riggers, three trainee spotters, a variety of temporary appointments, and many fire qualification task books being started and signed off. On a more personal level, congratulations to **J.T. Sawyer** (NCSB-07), **Ryan Taie** (NCSB-00), **Inaki Baraibar** (NCSB-98), and **Matt Desimone** (RAC-97), who all became proud fathers this past year. In addition, **Ryan McCliment** (NCSB-07) tied the matrimonial knot in July.

As winter approaches, project work is back in full swing with prescribed burning, multiple tree-climbing projects, district beautification (i.e., painting), and various other less-glamorous, but no less important, tasks and duties. **Nan Floyd** (RAC-00) is off in Washington,

D.C., for her second trip this year to help out with the Disaster Assistance Support Program. With a La Niña weather pattern setting up for the winter, some of us are looking forward to increased snowfall and a deep snow pack. Others are lining up for prescribed burning in warmer climates.

Wishing you all the best! See you in 2011.

Redding Base Report

by **Dylan Reeves** (RDD-03)

Due to procrastination, laziness and general slack-assery, this will be the shortest base report to come out of Redding since Cecil B. Fudgebottom’s “that’s what she said” one-liner in the 1958 edition.

Highlights from the 2010 season are as follows: We had the big reunion in Redding, during which those of us who were lucky enough to miss the first Alaska boost were edified about the history of smokejumping and our relatively leisurely position therein.

We came ever so close to shattering records once again, this time for the slowest season in recorded history. We did break the record for the latest fire jump, which was ... sometime late.

“**Beef Jerry**” **Spence** (RDD-94) still stubbornly refuses to pronounce the letter “l” in almond. It’s not spelled “ammond,” Jerry. **Josh Mathiesen** (RDD-94) had to take several sick days to regroup and heal emotionally after discovering that that is, in fact, what she said.

Dan Hernandez (RDD-85) is up to eight quart-sized canteens of “fine” Folgers coffee a day, and has been spending his evenings working on his future bestseller, entitled “How Long: A Practical Approach to Wondering Out Loud How Many Minutes Are Left in the Work Day.”

The Redding baby factory is in full swing, thanks to **Doug Powell** (RDD-05), **Dave Johnson** (RDD-00), **Rick Rataj** (RDD-00), **Derek Wheeler** (RDD-05) and **John Casey** (RDD-99). Please forgive any overlaps from last year or outright omissions.

The vacant GS-8 Spotter position went to **Rico Gonzales** (RDD-99), the GS-7 Squad Leader went to **Dylan Reeves** (RDD-03), and the GS-6 Senior Smokejumper went to **Erin Springer** (RAC-08), who made semi-history by being the first jumper to transfer to Redding since “Welcome Back Kotter” was filming new episodes, if not earlier.

Brian Pontes (RDD-03), **Ken Perry** (FBX 93), pilot John Blumm, Mathiesen, Spence, Casey and Reeves ventured to Bear Valley, Calif., to take part in Tough Mudder Norcal.

Contingents were sent to Region 8 to burn and Mas-

sachusetts to climb trees and slay the Asian Longhorned Beetle.

Pontes continues his battle in the Clay County, Ky., courthouse to gain custody of little Bosphorus Pontes, who looks more like Brian every day, minus a few teeth. We all wish him luck.

Redmond Base Report

by Josh Voshall (Redding '03)

Greetings jumpers, old and new! We here at the Redmond Smokejumper Base hope that everyone had a good season or at least had a semi-productive and safe season.

This year at RAC, the base was filled with the proverbial emotional roller-coaster rides. The jump list stayed stagnant for weeks on end, project work ended because of the lack of funding, and jumpers started up MMA events in the loft to pass up the time. So what was going on this year? I guess the main answer was the lack of fires, with the exception of Alaska early in the season. If you were in Alaska anytime this season, you probably made a lot of money. If you didn't make it up there, you're *probably* in debt to your local bartender!

We sent two boosts of jumpers up to the "Last Frontier" to exploit the old cash cow. Here at the base, we want to thank the bros in Alaska with our deepest gratitude for your hospitality to everyone who made it up there. We also sent boosts to North Cascades three times and one boost to McCall.

Like most lower 48 bases, as far as fires go, nothing was really established until the middle of July. The high desert was hit pretty well as was the south end of the state. Jumps were made on the Fremont/Winema National Forest as well as the Deschutes, Willamette, and Malheur. We had to contend with the engines more than the rappellers this time around due to a national stand down of the rappel program until the middle of July.

Things started to pick up in July and August, but August never had that "Dirty August" feel to it. Most fires had enough precip on them to keep them small and manageable. Needless to say, there were a lot of good deals out there! In all, the Redmond Smokejumpers staffed 36 fires – 54 percent of our 10-year average of 66 fires. Additionally, we had a total of 204 fire jumps, which is only 66 percent of our 10-year average of 309.

An incident worth mentioning was the Cedar Creek Fire, located on the Rogue/Siskiyou National Forest on Aug. 22. If you know the Siskiyou, then you've probably heard about the Biscuit Fire and Oak Flat Fire.

This year's Cedar Creek Fire was initially attacked by two loads of jumpers. Both loads came from Redmond

and consisted of both McCall and Redmond jumpers. The fire was located on the southwest end of the forest and was fairly flat, on top of a ridge, which was fortunate because those parts are usually STEEEEEEEEP! The first load quickly established a Type 4 incident management structure, but due to the location, weather, and aerial resources on the fire, the jumper in charge called for reinforcements and a Type 3 incident commander.

The second load took off from Redmond with **Forest Behm** (MYC-00) leading the charge as the IC Type 3 at around 1630. It took roughly an hour and a half to get to the fire and as soon as the second load hit the ground and got all of the gear together, we tied into the first load, came up with a plan and made some pretty good headway by the end of shift. After the second load got to the ground, air attack from the Oak Flat Fire was estimating the fire to be more than 60 acres, so we had to work quickly to establish a good anchor point so we didn't lose it, because the next day was supposed to be even hotter and drier.

The next day, Aug. 23, we had established a well-rounded Type 3 management team because we were going to have hotshot crews, Type 2 crews, and more aerial resources on the fire, as well as fire investigators and the district ranger visiting the fire. Later that day, we had handline and sawline established around the fire with the help of all the crews. So, fast forward to Aug. 24. GPS showed the perimeter of the fire to be 23 acres. It wasn't the 60 or so acres that air attack had estimated, but it was quite an accomplishment by both the McCall and Redmond Smokejumpers, especially on the Siskiyou!

Some notable milestones that came about this season are in no particular order: **Tony "TL" Loughton** (RDD-83) recorded his 500th – yep, that's right – 500th parachute jump. **Tony "I Live on Fried Food" Sleznick** (RDD-92) jumped out of a perfectly good airplane for the 350th time. **Tony "Terrible Towel" Johnson** (RAC-97) jumped number 250. **Dirk Stevens** (RAC-91) jumped his 400th, and **Bill Selby** (RAC-91) took the big leap to number 300. Congratulations, as well, to everyone who hit a jump milestone that I didn't mention!

This year, to our large list of 53 jumpers, we added 11 rookies who successfully went through rookie training unscathed or relatively unhurt (well, at least I think they were unhurt)!

We welcomed back **Nate Silva** (RAC-08). Nate was in nursing school in Oklahoma for the 2009 season. Welcome back, Nate. **Nick MacKenzie** (NCSB-09) transferred from North Cascades to join the crowd of jumpers here at Redmond this year. Welcome to the family, Nick.

With every jumper we added, it seemed as if we had lost another jumper to another base or another line of oc-

cupation. **Mitch “Go Griz” Kearns** (GAC-89) returned to Missoula as training foreman. It was sad to see Mitch leave because he had done so much for the base as far as keeping people employed during the fall and spring with numerous projects in the Southeast. Thanks, Mitch, for everything you did here at Redmond!

Bruce Card (MSO-06) took off to greener pastures in Florence, Ore., to continue to be an electrician. Good luck, Bruce, in your endeavors! **Erin “Captain Insanity” Springer** (RAC-08) transferred to Redding at the end of the season. Have fun in Redding, Erin. **Rob Rosetti** (RAC-01) became a permanent fixture in the Air Attack world. Flying in circles seemed to be really fun for Rob this year!

We did have a few changes occur during the year as far as overhead and spotter movement are concerned. Tony Johnson was detailed into our operations foreman position with **Gary Atteberry** (RAC-97) as his assistant. Both Tony and Gary did a great job in operations this year. Thanks, guys!

Mark Gibbons (RAC-87) was detailed as our training foreman with Tony Loughton as his assistant. **Ryan Koch** (RAC-01) and **Brandon Coville** (RAC-00) were our newest spotters in training. They both did a really good job in putting jumpers on the ground.

Heidi “Mrs. Dez” Bunkers (RAC-04) and **Matt Desimone** (RAC-97) welcomed a beautiful baby girl this year, adding to the list of future smokejumpers we might see here at Redmond. **Dave Keller** (RAC-04) was in Reno, Nev., for the year going to paramedic school. Good luck, Dave.

Well, I guess I’ve rambled on enough. To those who’ve been laid off, football season is upon us, so begins the armchair quarterback phase of our life. To those still working, I hope you’re having fun completing overdue loft projects and wishing you didn’t have to look at a computer screen all day doing miscellaneous Aglearn classes.

From ALL 53 jumpers representing the Redmond Smokejumpers, have a safe and wonderful off-season, and see you on the big one!

West Yellowstone Base Report

by **Ernie Walker** (RDD-01)

West had another quiet year with a little action abroad. We ended the summer with six fire jumps. **Brian Wilson** (WYS-98) and **Nick Stanzak** (WYS-00) trained on the Ram Airs. We had three detailer rookies: **Nathan Basford**, **Garrett Kirpach** and **Rob Spence**. Rookies scored one to three jumps, not bad for a slow one.

West had jumpers working all over the West: Alaska, British Columbia, California, Mexico, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. This fall we have climbers in Massachusetts and prescribed burning in the West area and R8.

We would like to congratulate our new Base Manager **Jon Ueland** (MSO-80). In other new promotions, we have Operations Foreman **Pete Lannan** (WYS-07), Assistant Operations Foreman **Brian Wilson**, Assistant Training Foreman **Cindy Champion** (MSO-99), Spotter **Cole Parker** (MSO-92), Squadleaders **Jason Gibb** (GAC-04), **Joe Rock** (WYS-05) and **Robert Smith** (MSO-07). Congrats!

West would like to welcome **Knute Olsen** (MSO-00) as assistant loft foreman and **Ward Scanson** (FBX-07) as a GS-6 13/13 transfer.

We got another boost to the Junior Smokejumper program. The new additions for 2010 are **Alexander Ames** – son of **Kevin Ames** (WYS-05) – **Tully Gibb** and **Mia Smith**. Currently our office manager, **Magen Crowley**, is working on a new package due in January 2011. 🦋

The Early Days Of The Southern Oregon Skydivers

by **Dick Burns** (Fairbanks '64)

Dick Burns sent the following letter with his NSA Life Membership check. It is an interesting recounting of how he got interested in smokejumping, and he mentions some very familiar names. (Ed.)

Okay – count me in. Been pondering on this since your “promotional letter” came, back in February. It worked! But, then, so has the difference you have made in the growth of the NSA

organization as editor of *Smokejumper* magazine. Don't actually recall what year I did join the NSA membership, but have seen the "magazine" grow from a newsletter of a few pages (Xeroxed and stapled) to the fine-quality magazine it is today!

Am sure most would agree that as the magazine grew and improved, so did the NSA grow and mature into so much more than just a collection of former smokejumpers getting together for an occasional reunion.

In 1961, I became acquainted with a rather informal group of local guys, amusing themselves and all curious bystanders by jumping out of airplanes (with parachutes, of course). This was Southern Oregon, Rogue Valley, Medford/Ashland. I had grown up in Ashland, graduated from high school in 1956, had a three-year hitch in the Navy, and returned to attend (at that time) Southern Oregon College.

Life was good: had a job, going to school, and living at home again. Kinda dull after three years in the service, so ... joined up with the "Southern Oregon Skydivers." Some of that loose group of "informal" members and participants were smokejumpers, most of them from Cave Junction and Redding.

Mort Gossett was club president (main guy) when I joined in June 1961 and was still the main guy in '66. Mort was never a smokejumper, but his brother, **Lee Gossett** (RDD-57), was a principal member all along, too.

Both Mort and Lee were pilots. Mort must have gotten tired of soliciting "willing pilots" and airplane owners to fly skydivers on weekends, so he and Lee bought a used Cessna 172. They had it modified with a special door on the right side to accommodate jumpers.

Our weekend sport-jumping "schedule" suddenly became a lot more "reliable." Seems like the smoke-jumper guys had to keep pretty quiet about participating in sport parachuting, though; "smokejumper headquarters" must have frowned on that activity at the time.

Some of the others who'd show up to make a few sport jumps were **Bill Bowles** (RDD-57), **Mick Swift** (CJ-56), **Charley Engstrom** (MSO-55) and **Tommy Smith** (CJ-61).

Dick Zediker (CJ-64) was already a member when I joined; he and I became pretty good friends. We both got hired on at the Star Ranger Station near the Applegate River in March 1963. Both of us wound up on the Hotshot crew that summer, and we both got picked for smokejumping in '64.

We had shared a couple of classes at SOC and had gotten acquainted with **Ed Weissenback** (RAC-64)

there, got him interested in sport jumping, and I'm pretty sure it was Dick who encouraged Ed to put in an application for smokejumping. We both (and I'm sure Ed did, too) used Lee Gossett as a reference on our applications. Lee must have put in a "good word" because we both got hired, and so did Ed. I'm pretty sure they both trained on the same crew at Cave Junction.

When you get with a bunch of 60-, 70- to 80-year-old former smokejumpers, you know you are among friends. You don't find much to disagree on, and you find you can still get a lot of "schtuff" done!

I had always been eager to go to Alaska. I got my wish! Thanks, Lee!

I've always felt a little guilty over not being able to go back for a few more seasons. It was the best, most fun, most satisfying job I've ever had. And, at that time anyway (1964), smokejumping in Alaska – compared to the Lower 48 – was a "piece of cake." The chances of landing in a tree were pretty remote. Even if you did, you had a 50-foot letdown rope (the standard for Cave Junction was 200 feet), and you never had to pack out your gear (where would you go?).

I did get 10 fire jumps that year and would have liked to have gone back for a few more seasons; "circumstances" come up, however, and your fantasy has to change.

Forty-two years later (2006), I found a way to ease my conscience a little by signing up with the NSA Trail Maintenance Program. Have been coming back ever since and been getting a pretty good "workout" each year, too.

Being among the "elder demographic" now and having been attracted to similar interests and "activity" during our, ah, youth, we have quite a few "similar" values, attitudes, ethics, and the phenomenon of having grown up in a much different "social culture" than we see "around" today!

When you get with a bunch of 60-, 70- to 80-year-old former smokejumpers, you know you are among friends. You don't find much to disagree on, and you find you can still get a lot of "schtuff" done! So, here is a "contribution" to a very worthy cause, although, hey, I will accept the "free" lifetime subscription to *Smokejumper* magazine. 🍄