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National Smokejumper Association

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THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
JULY 2009

SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



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

HELLO, EVERYONE. ANOTHER fire season is upon us, and I wish our active smokejumpers lots of fire jumps and a safe journey. As I assume the Presidency of the National Smokejumper Association, I want to thank **Doug Houston** (RAC-73) for his excellent leadership as our most recent President. Doug gave us all his skills, enthusiasm and energy and we grew as an organization. Our membership and financial net worth increased as an organization, and we were able to help a number of our NSA members in need and other smokejumper and firefighter families who suffered losses. Our volunteer trails program (led by **Jon McBride** MSO-54) flourished and our quarterly Smokejumper Magazine (produced by **Chuck Sheley** CJ-59) tackled new subjects and reached a wider audience. Doug, you weren't much of a rookie smokejumper, but you were a great NSA President, and I look forward to your service as our Vice President.

Another group that I want to pay tribute to is our hard working NSA Board of Directors. They are as talented and experienced as any group of leaders that I have been associated with. Many have stayed

on the board for some time to provide continuity and needed focus. They work between meetings and are a fun bunch to work with. They will be challenged this year because we will review our Charter, By-Laws, and Mission to see if we are the organization that we want to be and are going in the direction that we want to be going. What do we want to stand for and what do we want to become as an organization? What might we want to change? This exercise will require reviewing our values and developing a vision for the future. **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) has done a yeoman's job of suggesting some ideas to consider. From that foundation we will set new goals with strategies and action items. We will look at short term (2-3 years) and long term (5-7 years) goals. As NSA members, the board members would welcome your input at any time. We need your ideas!

After reconnecting and perhaps adjusting, I see the board setting goals and policy for items such as: appropriate involvement with federal land management agencies on fire and smokejumper policies, increase in membership, improvement in financial resources, appropriate investments, suitable NSA sub-organizations, appropriate gifts/donations/response to smokejumpers in need, involvement with other organizations with similar missions, and many other goals/policies.

The next National Smokejumper Reunion will be in Redding, Calif., June 11-13, 2010. **Chuck Sheley** is our lead on the board. I wish you a wonderful summer, and if you have thought of becoming a NSA Life Member, I encourage you to do so as your contribution goes into an account where the interest is used to help those in need. 222 have taken the plunge thus far. Stay cool. 🧊

The Birth of Smokejumping - Notes Of The First Forestry Parachutist

by Georgy Alexandrovich Makeev (Leningrad 1949)

PART ONE

In 1934 the Soviet Forest Management Science/Research Institute was considering the suppression of forest fires by airplane. Their idea of dropping a retardant was running into problems due to the dispersion of the liquid. To solve this problem, professional forester **Georgy Alexandrovich Makeev** suggested dropping the retardant in a bladder attached to a parachute. When asked who was going to apply this retardant once the bladder was on the ground, he replied, "People must be dropped by parachute." This began Makeev's uphill battle to prove that dropping firefighters by

parachute would be a safe and effective way to fight forest fires.

In 1949 Makeev wrote the following account of the development of the world's first smokejumper program. Thanks to **Bruce Ford** (MSO-75) and **Tony Pastro** (FBX-77) for their translation of this historic document.

1934-First Experiments

After finishing the Forest Technical Academy and several years of forest management work, I switched to scientific work in the Forest Management Institute, and summer months were occupied in field expeditions. In the winter I processed data in Leningrad, carrying out complicated statistical calculations and analysis. Ten years of field work in the far north and in the Siberian taiga, as well as participation in the imperial and civil wars, didn't have any significant effect on my health, beyond a notable weakening of my hearing.

In the spring of 1934, I was completing a big computing job. In another sector of the institute, they were going through the preparations for an aviation project to research the possibility of extinguishing forest fires directly by airplane. Talking with the *project's boss*, the still vigorous old-timer **Zolotov**, I learned that the research conducted in previous years in this area didn't give positive results because of the dispersion of fluid during its fall to the ground and its retention by the forest canopy.

"And what about trying to drop a retardant solution to the fire in some kind of bladder on a parachute?" I asked.

"Yes, but who will apply this retardant on the fire?"

Zolotov replied.

"People must be dropped by parachute," I said.

"This is very complex. Look, if we could get to where we could extinguish fires directly from a flying airplane, that would be the solution of a much larger problem," replied the boss.

After this conversation the idea of dropping bladders of retardant to forest fires didn't leave me. Knowing well what a scourge fires are to the forest, what huge losses the state suffers from them yearly, and how many people are torn away from important field work to fight them, the necessity of finding a way to suppress them immediately was obvious to me.

The problem of parachuting people to fires seemed much more complicated than dropping retardant in bladders. In order to assess using parachutes in extinguishing forest fires, it would be necessary to experience "in my own skin" a parachute jump. Then it would really be possible to decide

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



Before Po-2 flight, pilot-observer Balakshin checks patrol route with pilot Labezniy, Northern Airbase, Archangel, 1954. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

whether this business would work or not. I would have to start with a parachute tower. Initially, that one jump should be a sufficient test. I did this jump within the next few days. True, going to the edge of the tower's platform I was a bit scared, but to do nothing wouldn't wash. I jumped and then jumped again to reinforce the impression.

"You know, a parachute very reliably arrests a fall. I myself tried it," I told the project leader, **Zolotov**, the next time I met him.

"It should also be possible to drop retardant and tools to fires by parachute. If you want, I will call you to the project and then you can do some tests," he suggested.

I gladly agreed and said, that for my part, I would also try to find out some more about parachuting.

Makeev's First Parachute Jump

Around that time the scientific project that I led was fully completed. Several days later, I found out where parachute jumps from aircraft were carried out. Armed with a letter from the director of the institute, I contacted the aviation head in charge of parachuting. With trepidation in my soul, I walked into the aviation head's large office, offered the letter from the institute and, in a few words, laid out the importance of parachute use to forest management.

"This can be done. I will write that they provide you the opportunity to acquaint yourself with parachuting," and he quickly wrote something with a blue pencil on the corner of the paper. "You will have to go to the *parachute instructor at the air center*, Comrade **Vinogradov**, for training," he said.

I was floating on air with happiness. Warmly thanking the aviation head, I set out to the air center. **Vinogradov** showed me the parachute and how to pack it, and answered my array of questions. He said that jumping into timber would probably not be possible, as under windy conditions you could easily wind up with broken legs. This cast doubt on the possibility of using parachuting in forest management, where parachute jumps, in most cases, would have to be into timber.

I thought that if you couldn't jump into timber, you might be able to jump into the meadows and open swamps that could always be found in the forest. But even there **Vinogradov's** answer was not very reassuring. It turned out that landing in a predetermined spot was not so easy and, although the parachute is somewhat steerable, the landing area would probably need to be rather large.

It was clear that in order to definitively decide the question about using parachutes for suppressing forest fires, it would be necessary for me to learn parachuting and learn

to jump from an airplane. I asked Vinogradov about the possibility of doing an introductory jump. Vinogradov, considering the value of this jump, inquired about my health, then agreed to it. Knowing that I had never flown in an airplane, they gave me a 20-minute introductory flight. This first flight affected me very badly. The engine noise, the smell of gasoline, and the sharp turns made me very nauseous, especially during the plane's descent and landing. I strained with all my might and tried to stay as cheerful as possible, but when they spoke to me after the flight, I was as pale as death.

The jump would be the next day. **Vinogradov** explained to me that accidents on jumps never happen if the jumper correctly performs all procedures during exit from the aircraft cabin and during the jump.

"The most dangerous thing," he said, "is to pull the ripcord handle and then have the parachute catch on the tail of the plane. Control of the plane will be lost and the pilot, airplane and jumper will invariably die." This point made a big impression on me. So, under no circumstances would I pull early.

At last came the day of the jump. A young doctor at the aerodrome examined me and cleared me to jump. The day was sunny with a light wind. **Vinogradov**, the doctor, two students and I sat on tarps spread with parachutes near the ramp and observed the flights. It was a long wait to the end of the training flights. I was afraid that the flight would have a bad effect on me again, but I calmed myself with the thought that the flight would be horizontal and without turns. Then the last training flight was finished. With **Vinogradov's** help, I put on the parachute and went with him to the airplane. The pilot was a mature man with a face bronzed by the sun, clearly very experienced. They showed me how to climb in and out of the plane's cabin so as not to hook the steering cables, how to stand for the jump-with one leg on the step, the other on the wing-and how the jump commands would be given. Then I sat in the plane.

"Remember," **Vinogradov** said to me, approaching the aircraft at the last minute, "you should do a good jump for the sake of science."

The engine increased power and the plane started to gradually rise into the air. The even flight in a circle over the aerodrome didn't give me the feeling of nausea. After two circles, the engine throttled back sharply, and I saw the pilot turn around to me and smile. This calm, friendly smile very much encouraged me. I quickly and carefully climbed out of the cabin and stood as they had taught – with one leg on the wing, the other on the step, with the left hand strongly grasping the side of the cabin, and the right holding the ripcord handle awaiting the commands. I had to hold this pose for what seemed a long time. My left hand started to tire. The engine throttled up a bit, the increased wind began to tear me from the airplane, and my left hand started to completely lose its grip. At this very moment the pilot turned and waved his hand. I remember that with pleasure I let go with my tired left hand and then came to my senses hanging by the risers of an open parachute in full silence and solitude in the midst of the sky's expanse. The wind

rocked me strongly. I flew over the aerodrome. This minute of parachute descent was one of the happiest of my life.

Now, after completing a jump, I was fully convinced about the possibility of using parachutes, not only for fighting forest fires, but in other areas of forest management as well. Landing fields for aircraft in the vast forested expanses of our region aren't easy to find, and parachuting could significantly widen the sphere of aviation use in forest management.

About two weeks later a letter came from the leader of the Egorevski Project (so it was called for its location). I quickly got ready and went. Going through Moscow, I reached an agreement with the *well-known parachutist*, Comrade **Moshkovski**, from the parachute center, about a possible detail to the project by one of the sport instructors with two parachutes.

Resistance From Project Leader Is Overcome

Upon arrival at the project a deep disappointment awaited me. The project leader decided not to conduct experiments with parachutes and suggested that I work on researching waves of liquid poured out from a flying aircraft. Nevertheless, I persistently insisted on the necessity of carrying out parachute experiments. Probably wishing to be rid of these conversations, the project leader promised to place this question in front of a representative of the Narkomles (Committee for Forest Industry), the Head of Forest Protection, who should soon arrive at the project. The representative reacted very cordially towards my request and after a short conversation, agreed to go down to Moscow and procure an instructor with parachutes for the project.

Comrade **Moshkovski** fulfilled his promise and allocated for the project the *instructor Dvognani* with one cargo and two training parachutes. **Dvognani** was still quite young and comported himself very arrogantly. He was proud of his 13 jumps and looked on everyone with disdain. With his arrival at the project there arose a new difficulty for the tests. **Dvognani** refused to jump into even small timber, afraid of tearing the parachute, and the project leader wouldn't permit me to make any jumps at all. It was very hard for me when I saw the impossibility of overcoming these new difficulties, but it was still possible to carry out small tests.

A Successful Test

Six kilometers from the aerodrome a large bonfire was started to simulate a forest fire. A spray apparatus was dropped to this fire. On the next flight, the airplane dropped **Dvognani**, who quickly ran to the sprayer and put out the fire. This very simple test was fully successful, and all the workers of the project and the Narkomles (Forest Protection) representative were convinced that the fire was extinguished in the shortest time and the jump was completed in an unfamiliar spot not prepared beforehand.

Further small cargo drop tests also turned out well, since this airplane could fly very low and put the cargo exactly in

a predetermined spot. Finally I succeeded in obtaining permission to complete two jumps. The first of these jumps was not completely successful. **Dovgani** sat me in the middle cabin, and he would spot the jump and give commands from the rear cabin. A small village was located near the landing field, and around it were large fields where accurate spotting was not required for the jump. After two circles over the landing fields, the airplane went on final. After some time **Dovgani** told me to climb out. I quickly climbed out on the wing, but for some reason **Dovgani** motioned me to return to the cabin. Afterwards **Dovgani** explained that he was late with the command, and the airplane had flown past the exit point.

On the next circle the command was late again and, after jumping, it was clearly visible that I had been carried over the village. Remembering how it was possible to prolong a descent with an open reserve parachute, I pulled the reserve handle. I wasn't able to get it open properly, and the reserve canopy quietly fluttered in the air like a long, stretched

sausage. Not filling with air, it descended level with my body. I was inexorably dragged towards the village. There under my legs drifted a garden where a sheep lay. Right close to my leg the roof of a house flashed by, and I fell right in the middle of the road, nearly in the arms of a mortally frightened, old peasant woman. The parachute hung in a young aspen grove. Running up quickly, **Dovgani** began to curse me for daring to open the reserve. The expedition workers ardently congratulated me for a successful outcome of the jump.

Although no major parachute experiments were done on the Egorevski Project, those conducted all gave fully positive results. Cargo was dropped intact and squarely on the chosen spot on the ground, a jumper jumped onto an unprepared open spot and, afterwards, was able to begin extinguishing a forest fire. The project leader's tests on extinguishing forest fires by dropping liquid gave unsatisfactory results. The wave of liquid, dispersed by the wind into a light mist, completely failed to fall through the forest



Two jumpers boarding the second and third seats of a Po-2 with engine running ready for takeoff. Northern Airbase, Archangel, 1950. The Po-2 had both 2- and 3- seat variations. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

canopy. The expedition's fieldwork was ended. Returning to Leningrad, I composed a report on the tests carried out. The project leader, who deleted my signature, accepted this report. Afterwards the secretary of the party organization restored it. Fall came. Parachuting work was finished. I returned to researching the growth speed of forest types. The winter months passed without note. From occasional conversations with the project leader, it was understood that next summer they would include me in the aviation-retardant expedition, not by wish of the project leader, but on the orders of the Head of Forest Protection.

1935-Small Achievements, Great Difficulties

In the spring of 1935 the aviation-retardant project was again getting ready for departure. I insisted on the purchase of at least one parachute, but they didn't want to hear of this.

"So, you are getting ready to go on the aviation-retardant project in order to jump?" my wife asked apprehensively. "And you want to completely throw away your main specialty for which you finished the academy?" Further urgings and persuasions followed, but didn't succeed.

It was decided to carry out our work this year in the Gorky region (noted for the remarkable combustibility of its forests). I was again in Moscow at Comrade **Moshkovski's** and asked about the possibility of assigning two instructors with parachutes to the project. The Gorky aviation-retardant project leader assigned the young *scientific worker* **Rogov** to help the old-timer **Zolotov**.

In the project they gave me extra work to be a pilot-observer; that is, to map the location of new forest fires. I disliked this work very much, knowing how poorly my constitution endured long flights. But to object wouldn't do, as without this double duty they would remove the parachuting experiments.

As in the previous year, it was made clear on arrival that the project management's attitude was unfavorable towards testing parachute use. Old **Zolotov** was afraid of parachuting and didn't believe it could possibly be expedient, and the new young project leader, **Rogov**, didn't want to hear about it. For his project of 1935, he didn't once independently permit parachute tests. They were done only when it was possible to receive formal permission from the project's technical manager, **Zolotov**. But it was almost impossible to get his permission – there were always a multitude of excuses of all kinds in order to reject the experiments.

More Problems

I ended up at the project after a long delay since I was assigned to Moscow to look after the manufacture of a tank for the P-5 aircraft. When I arrived at the project, forest patrols had already started. An experienced pilot-observer from the forest aviation branch carried them out. The weather was very hot, and I arrived with such a sunburned face that one eye was swollen, and the skin on my face was swelled up and covered with blisters. Because of trouble in

mounting the tank and procuring the parachutes, I was very fatigued. But the worst of it was that I wouldn't be able to gradually get accustomed to the flights, make myself good patrol maps, and get used to landmarks for navigation. Finally, with my face healed and with a hurriedly-made map, they put me on a flight.

On the flight I immediately felt bad. It started with an awful nausea, and besides that, I was lightly clothed and frozen to the bone. The flight continued for five hours and on every fire that was discovered (there were seven), the airplane descended steeply for an inspection, then rose and descended a second time to a settlement to throw a message streamer. This steep descent and twisting turns right over the fire brought on strong attacks of nausea the entire time of the flight.

As soon as the flight ended, the pilot, **Khotyanovich**, immediately informed the administration that I couldn't take the flights and the medical commission probably shouldn't permit me to fly. But worst of all was that the administration consequently decided I couldn't jump with a parachute. They gave me an ultimatum-go to the medical commission. So they sent me to Gorky.

While the staff of doctors was being organized in Gorky for the medical exam, I rested a little. The exam went without mishap. I was cleared for flight and parachute work.

Help From Moscow

The *sport parachuting instructor* **A. V. Yarov** and *parachutist* **Asafov** arrived from Moscow. It was important to carry out experiments this year including conducting parachute jumps into forest conditions and finding out how a drift parachute ensured the accuracy of the jumper's exit point. Great trouble was required to carry out the most minor parachuting tests and then only at the aerodrome. The pilot soon familiarized himself with the calculation of the jump by the drift chute and good results were obtained – the jumper landed very close to the spot marked on the ground. Both the project leaders were uninterested in the parachuting. They ridiculed the jumps as "ballet acts" and pointedly failed to attend them. **Zolotov** increasingly lost the ability to talk calmly about them - he only swore. He had very weighty reasons for this – his experiments with extinguishing fires from airplanes again gave no sort of positive results. But the parachute tests, which he took a dislike to for some reason, all showed reassuringly good signs. He was probably plagued by pride and envy.

Finally, there was success in convincing him to permit several more interesting experiments. One of these consisted of deploying two jumpers to an unfamiliar swamp in the middle of the forest. The place was chosen twenty-five kilometers away. One of the project members would lie out a white canvas in the swamp. I set out with **A. V. Yakov** on the flight. When we had flown to the established spot, the forest started to thin. Narrow open strips of swamp appeared. We saw a crumpled square of white canvas in the middle of a small bog. The pilot turned and nodded his head. I indicated that I also saw it. The swamp was covered with scattered, well-spaced, light-colored tree trunks.

The drift chute didn't fall into the swamp, but was carried into the forest. On the next pass of the plane A.V. Yarov jumped. He landed next to the edge of the forest. I ended up closer towards the center of the swamp. Landing on the green moss was as soft as a feather pillow. This was my first jump on the soft moss of a sphagnum swamp in typical forest conditions. After the hard ground of the aerodrome, this jump was much more pleasant.

The ecstasy of the successful landing didn't end. Yarov began to sing and dance. I took pleasure in the clean air, the smell of grass and moss, and the stillness, which was especially pleasant after the banging and thrumming of the motor. Heading out from the swamp we followed the compass towards the settlement. We met people appearing from somewhere in the forest. They were hay mowers who had seen the falling jumpers and came to see them. The way to the village of Lichkovo was passed in happy conversation, and several members of the project came from Lichkovo to meet us.

The project didn't want to think about parachute jumps to active forest fires with the aim of putting them out. In the project they figured this was my fantasy and a completely futile undertaking, carried out only at the command of the Head of Forest Protection. At that time they still hadn't thought about the advisability of jumping to a settlement closest to a forest fire with the aim of quickly mobilizing the population and organizing proper firefighting efforts. Only at the end of the project did this come to mind.

Ice Road Jump

A request came to check the feasibility of an ice road to the Baranikhovski Mechanized Forest Station. I insisted on permission to complete this assignment. A telegram was sent to the forest station saying that on a specific day I would fly to them and parachute in to check the planned road.

On the set day the jump took place. The population and forest guards cordially and hospitably received me. Happiness showed in the eyes of every person. The crowd never gave me a chance to carry my parachute to the village. The job was completed and the ice road planned correctly.

That year I received some experience in working with parachutes and considerable training in jumps, but at the end of the summer I took ill from a boil on my leg. Not being in condition to jump myself, it was annoying for me to hear that the *pilot-observer* Khotyanovich had requested a jump to a settlement that hadn't put out a fire after two message streamers had been thrown. Here was work necessitating the use of a jumper. This was a chance for a real operational use of parachuting and would surely show the advisability of sending a jumper to suppress a fire, since finding a forester or collective farm chairman and organizing the fire suppression would, of course, present many difficulties.

The settlement was 50 kilometers away, and the project didn't want to send A. V. Yarov so far into the forest. The pilot-observer ranted and raged, but the project wouldn't permit a jumper to be sent. I was also disturbed, but was bothered by my leg and couldn't do anything, and so a great chance was missed.

Negative Reports Presented To Moscow

The experimental work ended the season of 1935, but the struggle on the political front still remained unfinished. The lack of interest in parachuting was manifested ever more often in overt hostility and in silence about the results achieved. Management gave reasons to believe that the introduction of parachuting into forest management would be met by many difficulties. At that time I didn't know that an entire treatise, ridiculing the idea of using parachuting to fight forest fires, had been put together by the management of the Gorky Project and directed to the Head of Forest Protection. Hostile action on the part of **Zolotov** and **Rogov** towards parachuting was revealed yet more distinctly. The Gorky aviation-retardant project presented a report to Central Fire Protection Management in Moscow. I also attended this presentation by order of the Head of Forest Protection. From the opening words it quickly became clear that **Zolotov** and **Rogov** were actively working to compromise and discredit the idea of using parachutes in firefighting and to ridicule the completed tests.

"Two opposing opinions exist," said the Head of Forest Protection. "The scientific representatives **Zolotov** and **Rogov** say the use of parachuting is pointless in fighting forest fires and insist on the termination of further tests. The Head of Forest Protection, on the contrary, supports the conducting of further and even broader experiments in this direction, since it concedes the possibility that parachuting can help in fighting forest fires."

After the opening words of the Head of Forest Protection, **Zolotov** gave a detailed report about the project's work. He spoke a long time about the chemical solutions that were used and the reasons of the lack of success in his experiments, but he didn't even mention parachuting. The clever old-timer probably decided to stay quiet about it until he heard the opinion of State Fire Protection. After **Zolotov**, the project leader **Rogov** appeared. He tried to present the idea of using parachuting for fighting forest fires in the most humorous light, expecting to achieve a big effect.

"Here we see," he said, "a huge, massive fire taking in hundreds, thousands of hectares of forest - certainly this is a horrible elemental force. Now we imagine a single parachutist dropped to this sea of fire with virtually naked hands to extinguish it. I can imagine what the physical and mental state of this parachutist will be. In my view, making parachute jumps for fighting forest fires is a figment of a huge imagination and at least a poorly thought out undertaking."

Clearer Thinking

The State Forest Protection people listened attentively to the expedition leader, not uttering a word. After **Rogov** the floor was passed to me. I briefly told about the completed parachute jump tests and the cargo dropping. Of course, large crown fires arise only from 3-6% of all fire starts. They appear only when small ground fires are not quickly extinguished. The overwhelming majority of forest fires, 60-70%, are detected by airplane in their initial stages at an area



Jumper preparing to jump from wing of Po-2. Northern Airbase, Archangel, 1950. (Courtesy Valery Korotkov)

of from one to three hectares. These new small fires could be put out quickly by groups of 4-5 jumpers dropped from aircraft. If we put out fires in time and while still small, then there would not be massive crown fires.

Now the fire protection representatives began to come forward. They sharply condemned **Rogov's** speech. They said that using the example of one jumper didn't fit when it was possible to send ten. They said that the question should be decided by conducting tests with small aircraft and large aircraft when needed. They all spoke out for the necessity of continuing and broadening research on parachute use for fire suppression.

This conference was very significant for the future development of the parachute service in forest management. The hostility of **Zolotov** and **Rogov** at the conference could not stop its development. The conference also helped place my articles in forest journals. A lively interest in my experiments arose in forest aviation, and people started asking me whether I was preparing to continue them. I answered that I certainly intended to continue testing and to incorporate operational jumping into forest fire protection. Now I was ready to temporarily suspend my scientific work,

which I so loved, and give myself fully to experiments on the adoption of parachuting.

In order to prepare for these tasks, during the winter of 1935-1936, I took a sport jumping training course and passed the exams for sport parachuting instructor. I was alone in my research on using parachutes to deliver firefighters. At home, my wife didn't want to hear about this work. The only place where they always sympathized with me and willingly gave advice from the heart was the air club. In the parachute instructor's circle at the Leningrad air club, there were often discussions about the prospects of adopting a parachute service. My report about the results of the first experiments was posted there. I was introduced to the *first inventor and constructor of aviation parachutes* – **Gleb Evgenevich Kotelnikov**. Subsequently, **Gleb Evgenevich** took a lively interest in the adoption of parachuting for fire suppression and devoted one chapter of his book to a dramatic exposition on its prospects. 🦋

In Part Two, Georgy Alexandrovich Makeev continues his battle to introduce parachuting into the fire suppression community in the Soviet Union.

Billy and Me

by Tommy Albert (Cave Junction '64)

The 1964 fire season was not one to write home about. It had to be one of the slowest for Region 6 jumpers on record. I personally ended up with two fire jumps that year: one out of Cave Junction and the second out of La Grande. Both fires ended up being memorable for different reasons.

The first fire out of CJ was unforgettable because we caught a going fire; much to the surprise of the Klamath fire staff. Mostly though, it was because of the people involved: **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59), **Mick Swift** (CJ-56), **Truman Sandelin** (CJ-61), and **Dave Towers** (CJ-60). And then five rookies, four of whom later transferred to Redmond: **Ed Weissenback**, **Ray Farinetti**, **Dick Zediker**, **Mike Johnson**, and myself.

The second fire was a two-man lightning fire in the beautiful Elkhorn Mountains. My jump partner was **Billy Mosley** (CJ-63). Now, I'll tell you, drawing Billy as a jump partner produced some true trepidation. Billy was a hard person to get to know when back on the base. He wasn't exactly unfriendly, but a guy one couldn't get close to. Its hard to put it into words; he was just different. Maybe he was like this because he lived under the shadow of his older brother, **Charley Mosley** (CJ-62), who was a big track star at the University of Alabama. But then Billy played on the often nationally-ranked University of Alabama football team, coached by the legendary Bear Bryant. So who knows why he was like that.

We were on a detail to La Grande, which was a spike base and the home base of the infamous Twin Beech that later earned the nickname "The Silver Coffin." This airplane was a Call-When-Needed (CWN) contract bird that the Forest Service picked up during high fire activity. Forest Service pilots, who drew the short straw, flew the plane. I believe the last time the Forest Service used it, **John Cowen** was flying and **Garry Peters** (CJ-63) was the spotter. Mick Swift was in the right seat observing. They had dropped a fire and were returning to Cave Junction. When John put the gear handle down, the sworn testimony has it that the gear went down and then retracted without John or Mick knowing it. Yes, they landed gear up. Later, the malfunction couldn't be duplicated. John and Mick took the truth to their graves and Peters just isn't saying. So, you be the judge.

An added interesting tidbit: the plane then went to Medford Mercy Flight and was stationed in Lakeview, where it retired. The infamous "Silver Coffin" now hangs from the ceiling of the Museum of Flight at Boeing Field in Seattle.

Back to Billy's and my story. We suited up and boarded the Silver Coffin. Can't remember who the spotter was. It

was a short flight up to the fire and, from the air, looked like a typical two-manner. We had a nice alpine meadow as a jump spot. It was pretty high, and I was a little worried about the thin air as I was fast on my way of earning my nickname, "Gravity." We jumped single man sticks and the trip down was uneventful.

Now, here I was in the middle of nowhere with Billy Mosley. I didn't know how he would be on a one-to-one basis, but I knew this fire wouldn't be much fun. I couldn't have been more wrong. Billy Mosley was a delight. Maybe what I mentioned earlier was correct. Once he got out from under the shadow of his older brother, he could relax and be a real person. Hell, I'm not a psychiatrist, but I can say it was like being with a different person, truly, night and day.

The fire turned out to be a holdover that appeared to have crept around for a number of days. It was close to half an acre in size and had eaten down into the roots of a number of trees. We spent three full days and part of the nights mopping the thing up.

Oh yes, the nights. The fire was around the 8000-foot elevation and the nights were cool. Cool enough that one had to stuff the paper sleeping bag with a cargo chute to sleep comfortably. Remember when you slid in against that cool nylon? Had a tendency to make one fantasize a little.

Mid morning of the 4th day, we packed our gear and started down the mountain. Now, this is a true story. We hadn't traveled more than half a mile down the mountain when we came across a camp where two beautiful, and I mean beautiful, girls were camped. Ol' Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde-Billy put on the charm and had those girls hanging on every word. Come to find out, he spoke their language. They were coeds at the University of Alabama and one knew Charley. The story has it she turned out to be Susan Nuranburg, who later became either Miss Alabama or Miss University of Alabama. Charley had tried to date her but, to put it in his words, he didn't have the money to turn her head.

Wouldn't you know it, they had been there the whole time. You ask if anything happened, the answer is not a damn thing. Talk about fantasizing the possibilities of what could have happened dominated our thoughts all the way down the mountain. 🍄

Tommy Albert jumped in Oregon and Alaska for seven years and then moved over to the aviation side with BLM, OAS, and the USFS, retiring in August 1999 as the North Zone Aviation Manager, Region 5. He and his wife, Kathy, now reside on the McKenzie River in Oregon. Tommy still flies fires as a contract pilot.

The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

A TIP OF THE HARD hat to **Jim Cherry** (MSO-58) for being named NSA Trail Maintenance Volunteer of the Year. Jim's many accomplishments include leading three projects in Montana and Minnesota in 2008 and working on others in Colorado and Idaho. He has raised over \$10,000 for the trail program and, in 2008 alone, he drove an amazing 15,000 miles volunteering for the NSA. Jim has been a Board member since 2000 and is a life member. On the job, Jim has the calm, steady hand of a sea captain.

Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., has introduced a bill to change the definition of "renewable biomass" to include slash removed from federal lands during fuel reduction projects. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., and three other senators have drafted a bill to define dead trees, sawdust and wood chips as renewable biomass. The 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act requires the production of 36 billion gallons of renewable fuel by 2022. Of that, 16 million gallons must come from celluloid biofuels, fuel refined out of tree bark, according to the federal Energy Information Administration. But the law doesn't list waste wood from

federal forests as an acceptable source for renewable fuel. "My bill creates a market-based incentive to harvest wood that isn't suitable for commercial use and uses it to create energy," Rehberg said in a press release. "Renewable resources that can be used to fuel our future shouldn't be defined by imaginary boundaries," Tester said in his own statement. Both offices said by including waste wood in the official "Renewable Fuel Standard," they would reduce dependence on petroleum and create jobs. Like all recyclable materials, slash is subject to price fluctuations in the marketplace. On the East Coast, slash is selling for \$30 a ton or less - barely enough to make it worth hauling out of the forest. Using biomass to generate electricity could raise the price to \$70 or \$80 a ton in four to five years.

Pilot/Mechanic Renee Gregory, who is one of the volunteers restoring Johnson Flying Service Trimotor N8419 to original condition, contacted me through the NSA web site. This is the Trimotor that crashed at the Moose Creek Ranger Station in Idaho on August

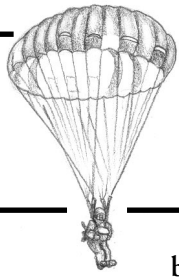
4, 1959, resulting in the deaths of **Jon Rolf** (MSO-57) and **Gary Williams** (MSO-59). As I recall, the plane's original engines are still located at the Moose Creek Ranger Station. By the time you read this, the Trimotor should be flying again. A blog on the restoration can be found at: <http://n8419.blogspot.com>. The plane had been in a museum in Michigan and was disassembled by volunteers and never reassembled. Wouldn't it be great if the crew brought this plane to the next NSA National reunion?

The Forest Service did not renew the lease on the Interagency Tanker Base at the Glacier International Airport in Kalispell due to increased air traffic and an aging facility. Money will be invested in upgrading bases in Missoula, Helena and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Would a tanker base in Great Falls, MT, make sense?

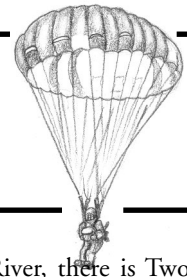
This column is dedicated to Sparky Imeson, one of the deans of mountain flying. He was killed in a plane crash on the south end of Canyon Ferry, Montana on March 17, 2009. His web site is: www.mountainflying.com. 🍷

Please Tell Us When You Change Your Address

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



Odds and Ends



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to Scott Holliday (RAC-88) and Doug Michaelson (MSO-56) who just became our latest Life Members.

Dave Bennett (MSO-61) has “retired” from his volunteer job as NSA Board of Directors Secretary. Dave has been turning out an excellent set of minutes for our board meetings since 2001. Keeping an accurate record of our organization’s meetings is an important and tough assignment. Dave has been doing that for eight years. He was replaced by **Tom Boatner (FBX-80)**, who took over for the April 2009 meeting in Seattle.

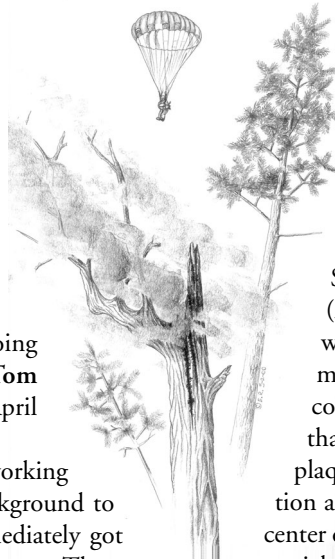
Got an email from **Jerry Howe (CJ-65)**, who is working in Baghdad on contract putting his FBI background to use: “I arrived a couple weeks ago and immediately got involved with the arrest of a three-man sniper team. These folks like to video their deeds, which should make good evidence, even in an Iraqi court. Our job is to put together criminal cases against the terrorist.”

John Manley (CJ-62): “I like your comments in recent issues regarding the attitudes and greed running wild in municipal firefighters and other public servants. I have seen it first hand here in Alaska. Cops and firefighters have been busting budgets for years, and it is only getting worse with so little objection from taxpayers.”

Bill Yensen (MYC-53): “I was blessed by being able to jump with “**Doc**” **Houston (MYC-71)** during his three years he spent in McCall. In 1972 I was on the verge of being excluded from the smokejumpers, as I was about to turn forty. When I went out on Aug. 29 for what I was sure would be my last fire jump, I had “Doc” Houston as my jump partner. We had a very nice little two-manner. We did all the old tricks: cargo chute tent, bleeped some cans, and drained my little blue plastic container of apricot brandy. We had a great time.

“The age rule was changed during the winter of 72-73, so I was able to return to jumping as a temporary. Two years later we jumped another fire in Utah. We had just received the new yellow fire shirts, and the one I was wearing was so large and the sleeves so loose that I had a problem. I was carrying the crosscut and those sharp teeth caught in those loose sleeves, and I got cut on my arm. It was a two-inch cut. ‘Doc’ was right there and fixed me up. He butterflyed the cut and bandaged it up so I could work the rest of the day. No one could have done a better job. I am very sad to hear of his passing. He was a dear friend and as competent a smokejumper as there ever was.”

Jerry Dixon (MYC-71): “I recently floated the Roaring Fork near Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Where the Roaring Fork



runs into the Colorado River, there is Two Rivers Park. In the center of the park is a wonderful memorial to the 14 firefighters that died on July 6, 1994, on Storm King.

“There is a full-size bronze statue of three firefighters in the center. Around the statue are 14 plaques with photos and stories of the firefighters. Two of the men from my McCall Smokejumping Unit died on that day: **Jim Thrash (MYC-81)** and **Roger Roth (MYC-92)**. I jumped with Jim and he was a jumper of merit. An endowment was started by smokejumpers for his children’s college education. I have contributed every year to that fund. I was very interested to read on Roger’s plaque that he was a descendent of the Iroquois Nation and was a helicopter pilot. The memorial is in the center of the park and is very well done. Viewing this memorial was one of the most moving aspects of my summer.”

Received a copy of an article from the June 25, 1959, edition of the *Silver City Press* from **Roland “Andy” Andersen (MSO-52)**. The Regional Forester presented a “Superior Service” Award to Andersen and the smokejumper unit for services performed from 1954-58. In addition to Andersen, there were 20 jumpers honored.

Forwarded by Frank Fowler (Missoula ’52)

I recently received a letter from a smokejumper acquaintance who has been off my radar for fifty-seven years. I thought some of his letter was worthy of a greater readership.

Jim Gunby (MSO-52) tells why 1953 was a banger year. My friend **Jerry McGraw (MSO-52)** and I both went through rookie training with you. We also jumped in ’53, earning money to go to the University of Idaho. Jerry wrote me at Christmas about your book, *High-Mountain Two-Manner*, and I just finished it this evening. It brought back some special memories. I only got five jumps the first year (plus the seven practice jumps). One of them was as a member of the 10-man rescue crew with Jerry and you. A ranger, who was leading a group of folks on a show-me trip in the Bob Marshall Primitive Area, had broken his leg when his horse fell. We jumped at Danaher with the objective of carrying him to an airstrip eight miles away. After landing, one of the ranger’s party came staggering up to me with a bottle and asked, “Hey, buddy, you wanna drink?” I also remember stopping several times so the injured man on the stretcher could throw up. At some point we gave him a shot of Demerol.

In '53 I was assigned to jump out of Grangeville. I don't know how many times we had a meal in a mess hall or a restaurant, but it wasn't many. I got so tired of C-rations that real food became a special treat. Almost all my fires were two-manners, but one was quite different from the others. They were in a hurry to get us there before dark and picked us up from some grass airstrip. When we reached our destination there were four small fires within two miles of one another. One was in dense timber and was putting up a lot of heavy smoke. It looked like it was the biggest threat, so we jumped it. After landing, we quickly found out why the timber was so thick and the smoke so heavy—the whole hillside was weeping with springs.

We put a line around it and then channeled the water so the fire was quickly subdued, but by noon the next day the conditions on the other three fires had turned bad. They all blew up and I still remember the noise they created when they came together. It was the loudest thunderclap I've ever heard. The Travelair appeared overhead and dropped us a note saying we should go over to the other fire and see if we could help the ranger who was there alone. We arrived well before dark but had a difficult time finding him because the fire had grown so big. Within a couple of hours we met thinking we were in for a lot of hard work. However, the

ranger kind of laughed and said there was nothing we could do but stay out of the way and not get hurt. A large crew walked in, but if I remember right, it didn't go completely out until the snows came.

The next day we walked about 20 miles to the airstrip at the Moose Creek Ranger Station. The Travelair was setting there, and I knew it was going to be the same thing all over again. They flew us back to Grangeville saying we would be going to another fire right away. When we landed, the Ford Trimotor was waiting with engines running. To my surprise my folks were also there. They had been waiting to see me for three days, but I could only visit for a few minutes because the spotter was yelling for me to board the plane. It was a banger year!

I took Air Force ROTC while in school, and after graduation, I went to pilot training. I spent 26 years in the Air Force, flew the whole time, and survived two tours in Vietnam: one in F-105s and one in F-4s. One thing that struck me about your book was your faith. I still have a small pocket bible that went with me on every jump and on every flight I had over North Vietnam. It's a little worse for wear, but I think it served me well. One of our daughters, a Lutheran pastor, has said she wants it when I'm done with it, but I'm not ready to let it go just yet. 🙏

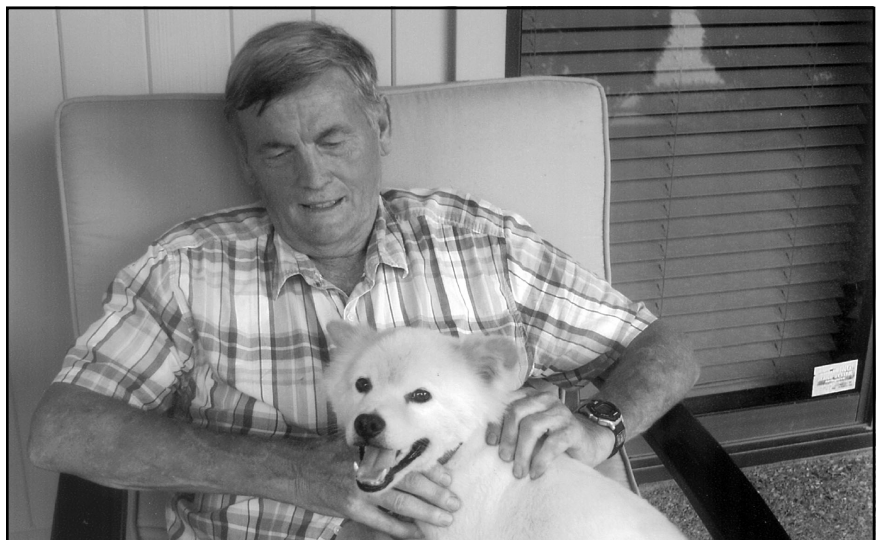
We Took An Hour Off Each Day

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

In May 1960, I reported to the Siskiyou Aerial Project, Cave Junction, Oregon, for training as a rookie smokejumper. We had a large class for CJ: 18 men from eleven different states. Our training was uneventful and without any serious injuries. About half way through our training jumps, dry lightning hit Eastern Oregon, and they doubled up our jumps. I think we made two on Saturday, and we were official smokejumpers. We flew a DC-3 load to a satellite base in La Grande, Oregon, and the fun began.

There were fires everywhere and only a limited number of jumpers and aircraft. We would take off before first light in order to be in the air when the first smokes were spotted.

About 0400 they rolled us out of the sack to start getting our gear together, pack a few cargo chutes, and load up. My jump partner on several fires that summer, and on this one in particular, was the late (Feb. 2008) Cecil Owen



Gary "Tex" Welch and "Sport." (Courtesy Whitney Welch)

Riffe (CJ-60) from Crab Orchard, West Virginia. Owen had a dry wit and was a good guy to have on the fireline. We were in the air by daybreak.

The USFS had a leased twin beach that was unpainted; we called it the Silver Streak. We called it the Silver

Streak because it had been modified, maybe a few inches added to the wing tip, and maybe they had a turbo charger on it, for all I know. The point being that it would go fast but would not slow down much when they dropped jumpers.

When we got to the fire they put Owen and me in the door: one sitting on the floor with one foot out on the step, and one standing behind holding onto the bar over the door. We thought the second man was to hold on to the bar, swing gracefully out the small door, and assume a tight body position. After a couple of jumpers ended up going through each other's lines using this method, they put a stop to that maneuver. And, as **Jim Allen** (NCSB-46) later told me: "That means no swinging out the door anywhere, including when jumping in Washington, California, or any where else." I had wrongly interpreted that rule to apply to Oregon only, but that's another story.

Deployment bags were new in 1960, and rookies didn't get to jump with D-bags. This meant when you checked your canopy it was not to see if it opened, you knew it had opened! Stars blurred my vision. The landing was nice: no trees, no bushes, just a clean, rock landscape. Being a 190-pound jumper on a 28-foot chute necessitated a near-perfect Allen Roll. More stars. Remembering that we had "hired out to be tough," I dusted myself off.

We bagged up our chutes, took our tools and headed down the ridge to the fire. The fire was about 20 acres on the side of the ridge. We put our food and paper sleeping bags off to the side, dropped down the ridge to start a line, and worked until after dark. It was deemed a two-manner only because of the large number of fires and the limited number of available jumpers. When we reached the top of the ridge, we noted that the sneaky fire had sent a little curling finger over to our gear and, Walla, no food or sleeping bags.

We worked the rest of the night and put out streamers for a re-supply of food, as we were living on a few boxes of raisins and a bar of Bakers chocolate. There was a lot of air traffic in the area due to the large number of fires. Mid-afternoon a plane came over and kicked out about three cargo chutes. Attached to the chutes was a five-gallon can of chicken fried steak, a five-gallon can of green beans and new potatoes, and a five-gallon can of hot coffee. Somewhere, some poor, big fire

crew probably went hungry. However, there was no cold beer. I was never on a fire where they dropped beer, but some of my associates claimed to have been so treated. I still don't know if that ever happened, as some smokejumpers are prone to lie now and again. Anyhow, we ate well for the next two days. The next morning they dropped us another five-gallon can of hot coffee and more doughnuts than I care to remember.

We mopped up with stale coffee, as ten gallons was a lot more coffee than we were coffee drinkers. Every time we saw a smoke we hit it with a cup of coffee and stirred it around and, Walla again, no more smoke.

Owen and I packed up our gear on the third day, hiked out, got a ride to a ranger station, and got back to La Grande sometime after midnight. We were able to get another two or three jumps before things died down, and we were dispatched back to Cave Junction.

When we turned in our time sheets for the fires there were some questions,

and they called Owen in to explain. When they reviewed our time sheets, they noticed we got up at 0400 on the first day and turned in 19 hours. We also turned in 23 hours the second day and 23 the third day. They wanted him to explain how that could happen. Owen simply said, "Me and Tex knocked off an hour a day whether we needed the rest or not."

So here's to you, Owen. I told it as best I could. My dog Sport went "off the jump list" in August last year, a little white Spitz. We chased rabbits, ducks, squirrels and cows for almost nine years together. He is a good guy to hang with, so you look him up and take care of him till I get there. And tell Sport I said, "Hi." Adios amigos.

We were paid for the full 65 hours. If I remember right, that was about \$2.33 per hour, no overtime on fires back in the olden days. I think we earned it. 🐾

Tex lost his fight with leukemia and passed away February 22, 2009.

NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions

Donor

In Memory/Honor Of

Judith Haugaard	Lloyd M. Haugaard (MSO-62)
Jim Lancaster (MYC-62)	Ken "Moose" Salyer (MYC-54)
Donald (MSO-63) & Paula Sanders	Frank Sanders (MSO-63)
Starr (CJ-48) & Stella Jenkins	Forest firefighters killed on duty
Michael Denis Michaelson	Douglas K. Michaelson (MSO-56)
James E. Blowers (MSO-46)	Buddies long gone
Bill Joyner (MSO-53)	Bobbie, my loving wife
Bob Nolan (CJ-47)	Cliff Marshall (CJ-46)
Bob Pell (NCSB-56)	Anonymous
Virgil A. Miller (MSO-45)	
Britton Quinlan (NCSB-08)	Fallen smokejumpers and families
Wes Langley (MSO-68)	All MSO 68s who have gone on before us
Doug Stinson (CJ-54)	Howard L. Wolf (MYC-53)
SQ VI	Bert Tanner (MSO-68)
Richard Trinity (MSO-66)	S. Sgt. Travis Atkins, US Army
Nels Jensen (MSO-62)	
Jim (NCSB-46) & Emily Allen	All smokejumpers: Past, Present, Future
Jeanene Jukkala	Arthur Jukkala (MSO-56)
H. Grace & Kori Moore	C. Gene Wahlstrom, Pilot Tanker 09
Jon T. Klingel (CJ-65)	
Tim (RDD-77) & Cindy Huntington	
Ed Hinkle (CJ-50)	Cliff W. Marshall (CJ-46)
Jim Lee (MSO-77)	Tom McGrath (MSO-57)
Denis Michaelson	Doug Michaelson (MSO-56)

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

In the 1970's the U.S. Forest Service began enforcement of an off-road travel regulation on the Bighorn National Forest. In short, the regulation said, "Keep your vehicle on a designated route – you can, however, drive 300 feet off the road to find a suitable place to park or camp as long as there is no resource damage." The regulation helped us protect the fragile high country. We thought we had problems then. But, "we



poem is a true story about the "Good Old Days." Imagine a hunting season before the ATV.

hadn't seen nothing yet." Soon the All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) made its debut. Have you ever tried to catch an ATV on a saddle horse? Well, as Bob Dylan once said, "The times they are a changing." Most folks use their ATV's with courtesy and respect for the land – but it only takes a few to damage the land. This

High Meadow Rodeo

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

I sat atop a saddle horse and wore the Pine Tree Badge
 Rode with Denny Eckardt in the fall of '76
 Way high up in the Bighorns – the hunters were in force
 We rode to keep their jeeps and trucks from tearing up the forest

Upon a ridge the outfits sat – all safe and warm inside
 They waited for majestic elk to jump and show their hides
 Now I was cold my teeth a chatter my horse blew frosty breath
 Its 9,000 feet in October and the sun ain't rose up yet

A sky of purple, orange and red all trimmed in ice and frost
 I reined right and Denny rode left, no further should they romp
 That's when a big majestic bull broke out to start our ride
 Invited there to rodeo – the sun peeked over the mountainside

"Can I Shoot?" – "You Bet!" I spurred my horse to make for safer ground
 "Look out Denny – there gonna ..." Bang! The muzzle flash spoke first
 That starts the clock off to rodeo – and another 8-second verse

I saw the sky and then the ground then once again the sky
 My pardner soon to catch a rhythm then evened out his stride
 Still, in the air with Socks that day I had the grandest view
 I caught a glimpse of Denny - his horse was bucking too

A skirmish line formed to our front as hunters blazed away
 That bull elk set his antlers back and raced the gauntlet fray
 Now not one hunter hit that bull - he dove into a draw
 He disappeared the shooting stopped – and nobody broke the law

So I caught my breath and said to Socks "Looks like we're all a right"
 He whinnied, sighed and blew his breath to end our 8-second ride

Karl is a member of the Cowboy Poets of Wind River and can be reached at brauneis@bresnan.net in Lander, Wyoming.



Mark Corbet (LGD-74)



*Margo Freeman (RAC-90), Cynthia Lusk (RAC- 87),
Tiffan Thoele (RAC-95) & Tracy Hall (RAC-95)*



Jay Decker (NCSB-63)



Randy Tower (NCSB-63)



*Jamie Tackman (NCSB-75), Tom Albert (CJ-64)
& Bert Mitman (RAC-70)*



Arlene & Chuck Mansfield (CJ-59)



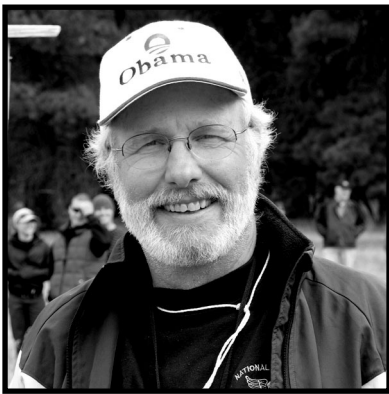
Karen Weissenback Moen



RAC Jump Plane, Shorts Sherpa C-23A



Tony Sleznick (RDD-92)



Vic Congleton (RAC-67)



*Gil Boundy (CJ-62), Jerry John (CJ-62),
& Warren Maxon (RAC-66)*



John Twiss (RAC-67)



Linda & Bill Selby (RAC-91)



Practice Jump



Jim Allen (NCSB-46) & Emily



Redmond Air Center Reunion 2008



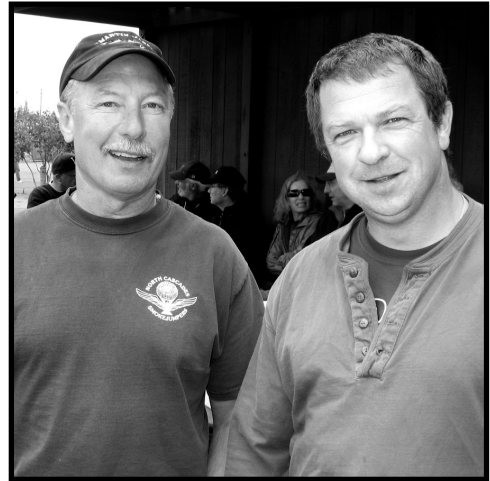
Photo's & Layout Design by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



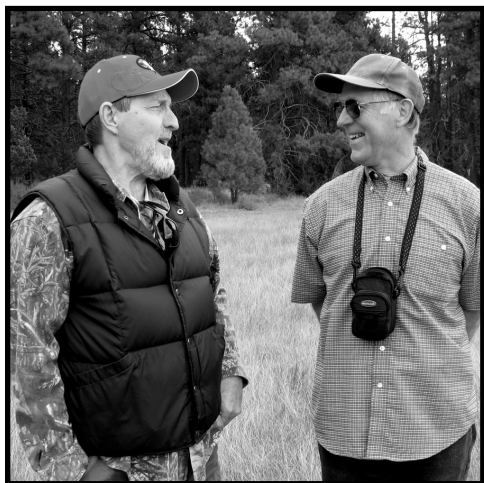
Al Boucher (CJ-49) & Ruth



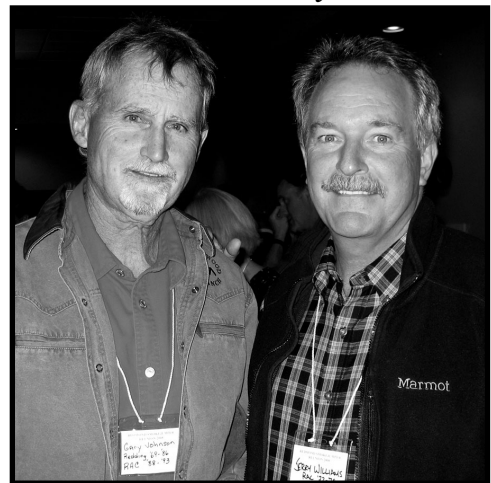
Erin Springer (RAC-08)



Doug Houston (RAC-73) & Matt Woosley (NCSB-84)



Charley Moseley (CJ-62) & Chuck Yeager (RAC-65)



Gary Johnson (RDD-69) & Jerry Williams (RAC-72)

First Fire Jump

by Fred Donner (Missoula '59)

Fifty years ago this month, July 20, 1959 to be exact, I made my first fire jump. A half-century later, I remember it like it was last week. In 1958 two Missoula rookies broke their ankles on the second practice jump into Lower Sherman, and I broke my right tibia near the knee on the sixth practice jump of scheduled seven into Mill Creek # 2. And so it came about that one of the broken ankles and myself rookied again in 1959, finishing rookie training on Friday, July 10.

My rookie roommate **Jack Benton** (MSO-59) and I spent the next week on such projects as hauling horse manure from the Missoula stockyards for a **Len Krout** (MSO-46) lawn project at the base. Since "Benton" and "Donner" were near the top of the initial rookie jump list in alphabetical order, we were chomping at the bit for our first fire jump. Jack Benton was clearly an outstanding person then and now, and I treasure him as a friend today. Later he was ROTC cadet commander at the University of Montana and is now a retired U.S. Army colonel. Unfortunately his jumping career (1959-61) ended when he suffered a ruptured stomach on a fire jump and almost died in the Hamilton hospital. He spent a long night in Salmon River territory after a helicopter sent to pick him up went to the wrong location and then could not get to him before dark.

Saturday, July 18, incidentally my 22nd birthday, was predicted to be clear and cool with no serious fire weather for Region One. Jack and I decided to sleep in late, skip breakfast at the base, and go to town to Ye Olde Ox for a big meal. (For more on the famous Ox restaurant, see the April 2006 issue, pp.8-9.) We hitchhiked into town and were walking up the west side of Higgins Avenue from Broadway toward the Ox when a north-bound car on Higgins went by. A male human body was half-way out the driver-side rear window in a horizontal position parallel to the street with his hands cupped to his face and screaming, "THEY'RE LOADING THE DOUG FOR OREGON!" Forgetting the Ox and our empty stomachs, Jack and I leaped into a taxicab shouting at the driver for all possible speed to the base. We arrived just in time to hear Krout calling our names. Grabbing our Bemis Seamless gear bags, we were quickly airborne to Cave Junction.

When we landed in Oregon later that afternoon, having had nothing to eat for almost 24 hours, I thought I was going to die when I got off the plane into the hottest temperature I had ever experienced, even as a hotshot crewman in southern California. On Monday, July 20, **Jim Cherry** (MSO-57) and myself were paired with two Gobi jumpers in the Cave Junction Twin Beech to jump a fire that was getting away from a ground crew. In Missoula records it is the Snailback Fire and Cave Junction records it as the Squaw Mountain Fire. The fire was in the upper reaches of

the Illinois River on the Siskiyou National Forest. In 1958 I had witnessed several noisy arguments in Missoula between chief pilot Floyd Bowman and foreman **Al Hammond** (MSO-46) as to whether the Twin Beech could drop four jumpers. Al insisted it could and Floyd said three was the limit. Whatever the arguments in Missoula, here we were in Oregon dropping four.

Ever since July 10, 1958 when I broke my leg, I intended to hang up in a big green tree on my first fire jump if I was fortunate enough to get there. Jumping careers have ended with first fire jump injuries, and I was determined it would not happen to me, and green trees were an excellent target short of an open area. One look at the plenteous rocks and dead trees below me, I picked a huge green tree and steered to get all the chute possible into the green as we had been trained to do. I ended up about 30 feet off the ground hanging by one riser. Has anyone ever hung up with both risers at the same level? I do not recall ever practicing letdowns hanging from one riser. After I stopped shaking and confirmed I was hung up solidly, I did a dumb thing. I took off my right glove, the one I would need for a friction brake, and carelessly dropped it. I gingerly reached in my rope pocket and pulled out about ten feet of the double letdown rope carried outside Region One and made a proper tie-off and took the slack out. (Later I wondered if anyone had ever dropped their letdown rope and how they solved that problem. It struck me that perhaps the far end of the letdown rope should be secured with a break cord in the leg pocket.) What did I do for the friction brake? I took off my left glove and put it on my right hand backwards.

It didn't take long to find Jim and the Gobi guys. Then came two elephant bags with two firepacks in each. One cargo chute opened and we spotted it immediately. The other cargo chute broke loose and the elephant bag went into the brush. We never found it despite a frantic search. So we split the tools and food intended for two jumpers four ways. I am not sure how we shared the two paper sleeping bags, but I think I slept in my jump suit that night.

The fire was not too much of a challenge. We had it wrapped up by nightfall. The next day I used the climbing gear to climb my tree, cutting branches with the folding saw while Jim put tension on my letdown rope. The chute peeled backwards out of the tree with very little damage. We had been told to hike down the mountain on a certain trail and call in when we got to the ranch house at the bottom and someone would pick us up. This being my first packout, my feet were killing me. I fell behind and was desperately thirsty. I found a little wet spot in the trail about the size of a saucer. I took out my Parker ballpoint pen and removed the cartridge and used the lower part for a straw to get some water. Feeling better, I got on down the trail to

meet the guys at the ranch house. The rancher's wife had set out cold drinks and blueberry pie for us. I thought I had died and gone to heaven.

Roommate and good friend Jack was not so fortunate. He was in the door ready to go when he looked down in the fast-approaching twilight and saw headlamps and vehicle headlights moving around on the fire. He and the spotter came to the obvious conclusion that the fire was already manned. Jack was one of several jumpers who returned to Missoula without a fire jump from that Oregon trip.

Post-script. I never saw Jim Cherry again until the 2000 Redding Reunion by which time he was a retired Lutheran minister in Iowa. Later he and his wife visited our home in Virginia. He asked me if I remembered all the snakes slithering around on that fire. I did not. I asked him if he remembered the never-found elephant bag. He did not.

Apparently we each have a mild case of Halfhimers. I saw Jim again at the 2004 Missoula Reunion. In 2005 I spent five days in my pickup cab with Jim enroute to and from two weeks of smokejumper volunteer crew in Idaho, building logworm fences and corrals in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. In 2006 I spent a week with Jim fixing up the pioneer Pole Creek Ranger Station in the Sawtooth for historic preservation. In 2008 I was at our second home in Minnesota when Jim drafted me on three days notice to serve as cook for the first smokejumper volunteer crew in Minnesota, rebuilding the famous Stairway Portage in the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area. I trust you have surmised by now that we know each other very well. As a fellow Christian, I have specified that Jim be invited to speak at my funeral. It all started with that first fire jump. 🙏

Introducing Afghanistan

by Michael S. Hill (West Yellowstone '95)

When many people hear about Afghanistan, they think of a war; yet I'd like to introduce you to another Afghanistan.

Flying along in a helicopter over the desert sands of this crossroads of Asia, it is never far from ordinary to skim over the turbaned heads of nomadic gypsies still leading their camels along as they have for thousands of years. There are times, as well, when you can zip over crumbling ancient fortress walls or pull up high over rough mountain peaks blanketed with snow. Afghanistan is surely a place of extremes, where you can find some of the hardest and most hospitable people on the face of the planet on one corner and, in the other, intrigue, warlords, danger and violence.

When I first became interested in Afghanistan, I discovered its striking parallels with Laos back in the time of the United States' Southeast Asia Wars. Both countries have huge amounts of remote, rugged lands hard to control by military means, aggressive rebel forces, untouchable rebel support havens, complexities due to narcotic wars over opium, many covert operations, a colorful history and strong tribal warrior traditions.

My entry into the Afghanistan picture began in 2007, a number of years after the American Invasion of Afghanistan in October of 2001. When I arrived in Kabul to manage a helicopter program, Afghanistan was already a country slipping back into war. The initial action from the invasion had quieted the enemy, but just like the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan nearly thirty years before, the resistance was already slowly building against us. Improvised explosive devices were targeting scores of people and kidnappings had become a fact of daily life. Big areas of the south had turned back to the Taliban, and my aircrews had become combatants. Afghani-



Mike Hill (3rd from left) with flight crew 2007. (Courtesy M. Hill)

stan had again become a land of intrigue, danger and violence.

Over the generations, Afghanistan has found itself in this unlucky position so many times because of its rugged landscape; its position as one of the major crossroads of Asia; and the independent, strong and brave nature of the tribes who have long lived here. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, the Persians, Russians and British have all invaded this land, stayed awhile, then left after a frustrating period of mounting expenses as they each had to battle rebelling locals.

The people of Afghanistan have always driven out these invaders, and their cultures vary like the terrain in which they make their homes. The far north of Afghanistan is steppe country of vast rolling grasslands coming down from Central Asia.

The Uzbek tribes that live on this steppe still embrace their long history as fierce horse-borne warriors. The Tajik people, the highlanders of Afghanistan, live in the hills of the steppe that meets the sharp ragged slopes of the Hindu Kush Mountains. These Tajik highlanders must be strong, independent and resourceful as many of their remote communities are snowbound up to six months a year.

In Central Afghanistan you'll find two other dominate cultural groups: the Aimak, who for ages have valued their music and arts, and the Hazara, with direct ancestral links to Genghis Khan and his Mongolians. To the south and east can be found the Pashtun, who have adapted to live in Afghanistan's great, harsh, desert lands with their extremes in weather. These are the proud, brave and independent people who fill much of the ranks of the Taliban.

Four Wars Going On

The War in Afghanistan is nowhere the clean picture as seen on the nightly news. It is not a single war with one chain of command and one easy-to-see enemy. Four wars are actually at play currently in Afghanistan. In the south there is the Afghan-Taliban War being fought by a loose coalition of NATO armies. Along Afghanistan's eastern borders and sometimes up into the tribal areas of Pakistan, another war is being engaged between the US and Afghan military taking on al-Qaida and other Pakistan-based Pashtun Taliban. Across Afghanistan, two other often just as dangerous wars are being battled out on various levels. One is against armed criminals and the other counter-narcotic. This anti-drug war, unlike the Afghan Taliban War, is one rarely viewed by outsiders; however, it is one of Afghanistan's most serious security threats. Currently around ninety percent of the world's Opium is coming from Afghanistan. This has become profitable for the Taliban as they make ten percent off the top of these harvests due to taxes they emplace in many areas. The Opium trade raises hundreds of millions of US dollars annually for the Taliban that they reinvest into funding their war efforts.

To add one last complexity to this fascinating modern war, the Taliban's main battle plan is "death by a thousand cuts." This simply translates into wearing down their enemies by repeated small attacks until they get tired and leave, just as all other invaders have done throughout Afghanistan's past. To win, the Taliban believe only their belief system must survive. They see their soldiers as largely expendable and, if they hold out long enough, they will be able to outlast the current invaders.

I have found Afghanistan to be a brilliant place to work while managing remote aviation operations. Buzzing across deep blue skies keeping our cargos up off Afghanistan's dangerous roads, we are but one of the valuable transport links keeping the action moving about on the fronts of these various wars. This is how my flight team and I are mak-

ing our contribution towards the rebuilding of this battered land.

Last summer I was able to come back to the U.S. to fight some fires out west and, while doing so, some of my old smokejumper friends discovered I work in Afghanistan and wanted to know what it is like. I have written a series of three stories for *Smokejumper* to offer a snapshot view into Afghanistan.

Luck often rules your life over here along with just being alert. At home in the United States we have come to live our lives at a jet-set pace while over here the way of life is often still based on ancient tribal loyalties with their own shared histories and rules. Many Afghans are left continually wondering if they and their families will be alive from one day to the next. Afghanistan is a fascinating place in which to work, a land unlike the rest of the modern world.

Editor: You tell of four separate wars currently going on in Afghanistan. It looks like only one of these wars is against al-Qaida. Is that the case?

MH: Yes. al-Qaida is really just one of those engagements.

Editor: Do we have military in all four actions or do NATO forces completely handle the action in the south?

MH: We do have forces involved in all four, to varying degrees.

Editor: Give a bit more detail in the action you describe against the "armed criminals."

MH: Armed criminals do kidnappings, commit ambush attacks on companies for ransom and sell their prisoners, etc. Afghanistan has a lot of unemployed people with military skills, and some invest their skills in this direction. A huge effort is being made to rebuild, strengthen, and empower the abilities of the Afghan police force.

Editor: It doesn't look like fighting the Taliban and fighting al-Qaida is the same thing.

MH: It is not. They are very different organizations with different ethic makeups and chain of commands. They can do combined operations depending on the regions they are in and the Afghan



Mike in Hindu Kush mountains north of Kabul. (Courtesy M. Hill)

Diversity of a Smokejumper

by Brett Fairchild (Redmond '05)

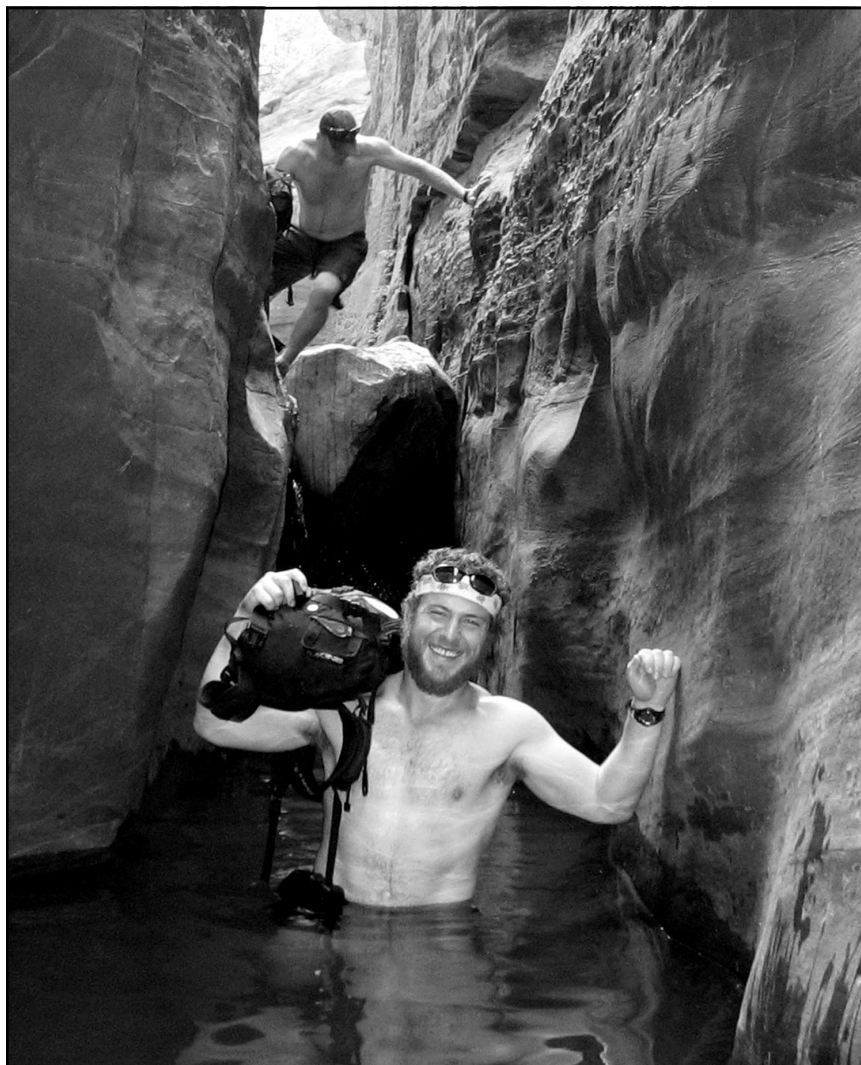
Come fire season, smokejumpers arrive at their respective bases from all corners of the globe. They are already physically fit, ready to tackle the PT test and any last minute loft projects, while waiting for the siren to sound. These unique men and women often are leaving an equally exciting life when they come to bail out of airplanes to battle fire. Can life get any more exciting, many ask? Well, maybe not as exciting but nearly as action packed.

Almost everyone who reads this magazine knows what a smokejumper does on fires, at base, and off work. Frankly, almost everyone who reads this magazine is a smokejumper; once a jumper always a jumper. So those reading this article probably know that when a smokejumper is bored, they look to find something exciting. Now, something exciting for a jumper is altogether different than something exciting for someone who doesn't leap for a living. Point is jumpers shouldn't be left unattended when bored. Also, jumpers' off-seasons include very fun activities.

One aspect of the jumper world that is rarely touched on is what they do in the off-season. I doubt an entire book could cover in depth this subject. OK, well maybe a very long book, and although it would probably be exciting, it would take the average person a long time to read. So I won't even try to tell the whole story. However, the option to be enlightened of off-season jumper activities is priceless.

It is no secret: jumpers by nature are very adventuresome. I can't think of one I've met who is happy doing nothing in the off-season. These individuals have a keen ability to enjoy life all year by doing fun, exciting, and sometimes relaxing activities during the winter.

These days many smokejumpers are family men and women, and from what I have gathered, this is very dif-



Brett Fairchild (front) and Kurt Borcharding (GAC-95) hiking in Zion N.P. (Courtesy B. Fairchild)

ferent from a generation or two ago. It is so nice to see people doing what they love and enjoying a family of their own at the same time. Several decades ago this was considered a young man's job. These days the majority of jumpers I know, men and women alike, have beautiful families that they are very dedicated to.

Taking care of a family is a full time job, but these proud toddler-toting jumpers lead adventuresome off-seasons as well. Whether they see miles of country with a kiddy-packer on, which

I hear is good pack training, or travel with their children, you will always find jumpers out and about.

Now these proud, parent leapers adventure to their fullest, but with a permanent home, mortgage payments, kids in school, and loving partners with their own careers, they usually stay pretty localized during the snowy months.

The young, careless, kid-less, jumpers (single or not) seem to scatter like beer cans after the big flip when the aircraft goes off contract. Even the best

wildlife trackers with locating collars couldn't keep up with these individuals.

From living in Vietnam teaching children to hitting as many ski lifts as possible throughout the world is just the beginning. Finding virgin snow off the grid in the Alps? Traveling and enjoying the culture and jump bases in Russia? Touring all of South America by motorbike? How about just chillin somewhere in Central America for the winter, kayaking untouched lands. This is only the beginning.

Like I stated earlier, to cover such activities in depth would take a novel. There are so many things to do in the off-season that I have put these adventurers into groups.

First let's talk about the foreign travelers. The previous paragraph gave an idea of some foreign adventures. These thrill seekers find destinations on earth they find particularly appealing and, to put it lightly, check them out. Some find areas they have grown to love and continue to return to every year. Some don't ever see the same location twice, but yearn to gaze upon land untouched by their eyes.

Many travel south across the equator to enjoy a summer, making up for the lack thereof during the northern hemisphere's smoke-filled fire season. These foreign travelers usually scrimp and save during the fire season so they can enjoy world travel or find an area to live for pennies a day in the off-season.

Another unique group is the national adventure seekers. By national I mean in the United States and Canada. Maybe I should state it as North America. Regardless, these adventurers are content enjoying life with few borders. All jumpers know some of the most amazing country in the world resides in our own back yard. The nationals take full advantage of this by experiencing their adventures here.

Several jumpers I know return after fire season to guiding jobs, both big game and birds, providing hunting opportunities to those willing to pay. The sweat and outdoor life guiding allows is a nice change in employment while still keeping the lifestyle and outdoor experiences jumpers love.

Working with energetic French Brittanies chasing chukar and pheasant, guiding Montana's big bull elk or the elusive Oregon mule deer, and all the way down to Arizona for cougars and coues deer, you will find smokejumpers doing what they love and being outside.

Many smokejumpers are trappers, who string steel throughout the west and Alaska. These outdoorsmen (and women) find the hard work of running a trapline in remote country to their liking, viewing the solace and beauty that coincides with chasing furbearers as a godsend. It also puts a little wintertime cash into their pockets while doing what they love.

Standing on creaking river ice in the depths of winter, you will find a hardcore group of fishermen. The numbing hands, frozen feet, and icy rivers do little to slow the steelhead chasers down. Fishing for these metalheads gives smokejumpers a chance to wet their lines during the winter.

During the fire season, fishing for salmon and trout is out of the question, so pulling beautiful red-sided steelies out of deep winter holes quenches the thirst of many jumping fisherman. Here, too, beautiful scenery and solitude will be found to collect one's thoughts and fill one's stringer.

With freshly waxed skis and boards,

yet another group of nationals will be found touring Alaska, the west and the Rockies searching for everlasting deep powder. Snow machining up lofty peaks, taking lift after lift testing every run, and many times hiking hard all day for only a few graceful turn-filled runs descending down the mountain.

These adrenaline junkies have found an activity nearing the level of leaping. However, all of these powder hounds I know say there is nothing like feeling the slipstream and falling towards mother earth.

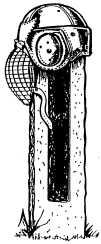
Rock climbing in Joshua Tree, construction in Wisconsin, collecting maple in eastern Canada, you will find a few more renegade jumpers doing what they love, experiencing two lives in one: the off-season and the fire season.

Diversity is one of the first words that come to mind when I reflect about all the jumpers I know and what they do in their "other" life. So many things to do, and it seems like jumpers have found a way to collectively experience them all.

While the proud parents, foreign travelers, and nationals might not cover all jumpers, I would say it covers most in some way or form. While I can't cover all wintertime activities of jumpers here, I can leave you with an idea of the "diversity of a smoke-jumper." 🧠



Historic Photo Missoula 1954 L-R: Larry Anderson, Cedric Blackwell, Paul Bowen, Ray Carter, Lyle Brown, Mick Best, Hank Brodersen. (Courtesy P. Bowen)



Off The List

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

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

Dennis E. McCorkle (Missoula '65)

Denny died January 17, 2009, in Tacoma, Washington. He was born October 17, 1944, in Silver Springs, Maryland, and graduated from Charlotte Hall Military Academy. He also attended Clemson University. Dennis joined the Marine Corp and served a tour in Vietnam where he participated in the Battle of Khe Sanh. After retiring from the Marines, he worked for the U.S. Postal Service.

Gary E. "Tex" Welch (Cave Junction '60)

Gary lost his multi-year battle with Leukemia and died February 22, 2009. He graduated from Texas Tech and was a four-year letterman on the swim team and a member of ROTC. After graduation Gary was assigned to the Second Armored Division at Fort Hood, where he won the 4th Army Championships in swimming and triathlon. After leaving the Army he started his career in banking that lasted until 1999. A lifetime rancher, "Tex" owned ranches in Garza, Sterling, McLennan, and Falls counties, and enjoyed working to improve the ranches during his ownership. He was a Life Member of the NSA.

Newell L. Burya (Anchorage '63)

Newell died January 30, 2009, after a long battle with lung cancer. After high school he worked in Alaska for the BLM jumping the 1963 and '64 seasons. Newell drove logging trucks until his health prevented him driving. He spent his last few years working for Burya Logging and Trucking, a business owned by his two sons.

Gilbert R. Weldy (McCall '44)

Gilbert died December 20, 2008, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He graduated from Manchester College in 1949 and got his master's and doctorate from Indiana University. Gilbert was a high school administrator for 30 years and also taught at Kent State University. He was a member of the CPS-103 jumpers and worked out of McCall for the 1944 and 1945 seasons.

Sherman "Tim" Wapato (North Cascades '53)

Tim died April 19, 2009, at his home in Rapid City, South Dakota. He was a member of the Colville Confederated Tribe in Eastern Washington. Tim attended Washington State and Cal State Universities before enlisting in the Army. After leaving the Army, he spent 21 years with the L.A. Police Dept. rising to the rank of Lieutenant. Tim was the Executive Director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission 1979-89 and Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans in the Dept. of Health and Human Services until 1993. He jumped at NCSB in 1953-54 and 1957.

Eugene P. "Jake" Dougherty (Missoula '48)

Jake died March 15, 2009, at age 83. He served in the Army Maritime Division 1945-47, 82nd Airborne 1945-47 and U.S. Navy 1950-52. Jake was a Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, firefighter for 25 years. He jumped at Missoula for the 1948 and 1949 seasons. 🦉

Weissenback

by Dave Wood (Redmond '66)

I read with great interest Karen Weissenback Moen's article (*Smokejumper* April 2009) on her husband, **Ed Weissenback** (CJ-64). At the Redmond Smokejumper Reunion I had the opportunity to meet this gentle woman and share some "stories" of Ed. I would also like to share some of these stories with you readers.

My first contact with Ed Weissenback was the summer he returned from the Army to smokejumping at the Redmond Air Center. Living at the barracks that summer, we were introduced to "Animal Ed" when he drove up in his

Karmann Ghia. What made his arrival quite unique was the fact that in the place where his rear window used to be was a deer. On his journey to RAC, Ed had hit a deer on the highway, and it flipped over his vehicle landing in the rear window. What was Ed planning on doing with the deer? Getting it butchered and "dressed out," of course. No sense in wasting good meat.

On a fire during the summer, Ed had an opportunity to collar a baby rattlesnake. You've already read about his "thing" for animals. Ed built a cage for this snake and kept it

in his room at the barracks. We all kept a distance as Ed played with his young friend. Did he ever get “bit?” Yup, in fact, we learned that baby or not, all snakes carry enough venom to “do you in.” What about Ed? He’d look at his swollen, bitten thumb and laugh. That was it.

Was he “Mr. New York?” That was the rumor. He had a solid, “body-builder” type body. He had a thick, black mustache. He dripped sweat like a champ in the morning PT sessions.

I jumped a fire in the Umpqua N.F. with Ed where he was severely injured. As we “scoped” the situation prior to the jump, we determined that there wasn’t a “hole” in the high-timber canopy. I was able to make it to the ground between two monstrous trees. **Bruce Jackson** (RAC-69) also made it to the ground. I don’t remember who the fourth person was on the jump. Anyway, we were not able to locate Ed. Bruce found him and hollered like a “scared banshee” (you had to know Bruce to appreciate this).

I rushed over to Ed, who was sitting at the bottom of a very large tree. The tree had collapsed his chute and he had fallen a long way. His first words to me were: “Eye tink eye

cut mi tong.” I looked into his mouth and saw that his tongue was almost cut in half. Ed also had a back injury, initially assessed as a compression fracture of the lower back.

A jumper plane was sent from Cave Junction with Demerol as Ed was in a lot of pain. I don’t remember whom it was who jumped, but he was one of the overhead from Cave Junction and was of great help to Ed. Cutting a spot for the helicopter was hell. It took forever to clear a spot and in the end, there wasn’t much room to spare. They lashed Ed on the outside of the helicopter and off he went.

As Karen says in her story, it wasn’t long before Ed was back at it at the Air Center in a back brace and then off to Air America.

I’ve always remembered Ed. He was that kind of guy you want to remember. It was special to share a bit of this with Karen at the reunion, and it was special to associate with someone who was very close to a special guy. 🙏

Ed’s Air America aircraft was shot down December 27, 1971 in Laos.

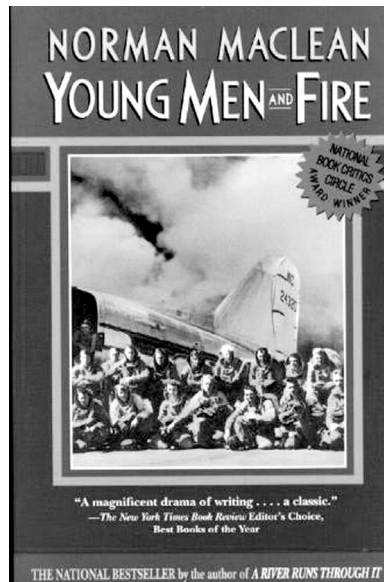
A Bit of History

The following is a letter written by Chuck Muehlethaler (MSO-46) to relatives in 1992 after receiving a copy of “Young Men and Fire.” In it he recounts what he was doing as a jumper at the time of the Mann Gulch Fire.

Thank you very much for the book “Young Men and Fire.” Just started reading same and recognize names of many people I had worked with. My college roommate was the one jumper who became ill and couldn’t jump. The flight was very rough and since he was the last man to jump he became very airsick.

In retrospect I had just returned from ROTC training camp in California (1949) and, being a seasoned jumper, had only to take a practice jump before going on duty. This was taken when the others left for the Mann Gulch Fire. The next day I believe I, along with three others, jumped on a fire in Yellowstone Park (in those days we fought fires in the national parks). 1949 was a very bad year – very dry and explosive for fires.

In any event our Yellowstone fire was in lodge pole timber country. We landed in the trees and didn’t attempt



to retrieve our jump equipment but went directly to the fire. On the way we passed through a buffalo wallow. We were not on the fire long before it literally exploded on us.

We got in the buffalo wallow and the fire went around us. After regrouping we again attacked the fire and managed to contain it. Later a group of Arizona Indians walked in and we turned the mop-up work

over to them.

I believe all of our jump equipment was lost in the fire. We walked out to a road area where a park ranger picked us up and took us to West Yellowstone before a return trip to Missoula and further fire jumps. I do remember while walking out of the fire we found a hot spring near a cold spring, and we trenched the two together into one nice warm pool where we did wash up somewhat.

I first started smokejumping in 1946 shortly after getting out of the Navy. Luckily another fellow (I believe he was from Hamilton, Mont.) and I were first to jump that season on a fire in Idaho. The jump was recorded in the *Spokesman-Review* and Mom and Dad were surprised to learn what type of work I was doing for the Forest Service.

I jumped in 1947 but didn’t in 1948 since we foresters had summer camp at McCall, Idaho, and that was a mild year for forest fires so they didn’t need extra jumpers. The balance of the summer I worked as alternate ranger in the Wise River area of Montana. This is the Big Hole area south of Butte, Mont. 🙏

Cliff Marshall Stories

by Bob Nolan (Cave Junction '47)

One Saturday Afternoon

Cliff Marshall became foreman at Cave Junction in 1946. He had been a decorated first sergeant in the 101st Airborne in World War II (It was rumored that he had been one of the few to make three combat jumps).

Cliff was a big husky guy. Before becoming a smokejumper, he fell and bucked timber with a crosscut saw in northern California. He also boxed professionally for a while. He told me he quit boxing when he broke a guy's neck and paralyzed him.

One Saturday afternoon after pigeon hunting, Cliff and I stopped

at the Owl Tavern to have a beer. That time of day the place was packed with loggers and people standing three deep at the bar. We had been in the tavern before the loggers showed up, so we had a stool at the bar.

One way for some loggers to get a seat was to tap someone on the shoulder and when the unsuspecting

The Firefighter's Lament

by Mark Walmsley (Associate)

We are the folks with drip torches, yellow shirts, and metal hats,
And we've had quite a year turning slash and brush to ash.

Yes, all you've got to do is dig a line that holds,
Then light a little fire and hope it doesn't get too bold.

But if things get too hot and east winds begin to blow,
Back off all your crews 'cause that fire's going to go.

Now there's traffic on the radio,
And the smoke's too thick to see,
And your Fedco's out of water,
And there's too many hot spots for you and me!

Still we seldom ever worry or get to feeling low,
Because we pass on all our problems to the good old FMO.

Oh lord, four-thirty's already here,
And I'm looking down the line,
At a row of sooty smiles,
They all know it's overtime.

Now the spots along the south line have been mopped up
pretty well,
But looking up top across the line we all eye a flaming hell!

There are flames along the ground and crowning up prime
lumber,
And now the boss is on the five-watt calling for a project
number.

Tomorrow will bring more firefighters here,
And maybe a chopper or two,
Yet for the present it's gotten awfully dark,
And there's little we can safely do.

So we're moving down the fire line toward a row of dusty,
green trucks,
But there's only one headlamp working and we're spending
ample time on our butts!

Soon we reach the cutbank,
And we note it's near vertical,
Still, there's little hesitation,
And it's down the hillside we all flow.

Looking up the road, I have a grimy vision,
Folks are huddled between the trucks scraping tins of their
nasty cold provisions.

Soon a voice rings out,
Through the ash-choked mountain air,
It calls for volunteers to spend the night,
Looks like ten are already there.

So the rest of us pack up,
And hop in our cozy trucks,
Exchanging a good day's stories,
While we pass the coffee cup.

Yes, another day has ended,
In this forest we adore,
Still the morning sun will call us back,
And we'll do it all again once more.

(Dedicated to the firefighters past and present of the Olympic National Forest and Olympic National Park.)

guy turned around, the logger would throw a haymaker punch, knocking the guy to the floor. The logger would then take the seat. This happened pretty regularly. Of course, the logger was usually careful whom he picked on. There was a long mirror behind the bar, enabling you to see what was going on behind you. Cliff nudged me, figuring this big guy behind us was about to tap one of us. We both doubled up our fists, just in case. Sure enough, he tapped Cliff who was ready. Cliff whirled around and knocked the guy across the pool table. He pounced on him and hit him a few more times. He then grabbed him by the feet and dragged him outside where he could beat the hell out of him.

I thought he was going to kill the poor guy. Cliff told the logger that if he ever saw him again he would finish the job. The guy must have believed Cliff because no one ever saw him again. Cliff was a hero to the other loggers. This guy had been doing this pretty regular. He was a big raw-boned guy about 6'4" and 275 pounds. Everybody was afraid to tackle him. Cliff now gained the reputation as the toughest guy in town!

The Toughest Guy In Town

A couple of weeks after this episode Cliff and I were sitting at the bar across the street having a couple of beers. Another big, burly timber faller came up to us at the bar and told Cliff he wanted to fight him to find out who was the toughest guy in town. Cliff told him he didn't want to fight; he just wanted to enjoy his beer. The guy left for a few minutes, then came back. He insisted that Cliff fight him. Cliff again said no. By this time a crowd had gathered around the bar, trying to egg Cliff on. Finally Cliff had enough and said, "OK, let's go."

Out into the middle of the street (Hwy 199) they went with the bar crowd following. They stood in the middle of the highway, trading punches like two bulls. Anyone of



Cliff Marshal (Courtesy Bob Nolan)

those punches would have done in the average man. The whole highway was blocked with the large crowd.

This went on for a few minutes until someone hollered that the cops were coming. Everyone headed back to the bar. As soon as we got inside, Cliff informed me that he had lost his false teeth. I rushed out to the street and found them in the middle of the road. When I returned inside, I found Cliff and the guy at the same table laughing and joking over a beer.

Arm Out of Socket

In the fall of 1947, only Cliff Marshall and I were at the base. There was a cable strung between two trees about 60 feet off the ground used to hoist jumpers up to practice letdowns. Cliff wanted to put up a new and larger cable. The one in use had been up there since the base was established. Cliff had a

bad shoulder that sometimes slipped out of its socket. More than once, he had me pull hard on his arm to put it back in place.

Cliff climbed up the tree to remove the old cable clamp. He had to jerk hard on the cable to free it from the tree. He gave it a big jerk and his arm came out of its socket. He was in great pain and needed help. I hurried into the loft for a pair of climbers and went up the tree to help. I got on the opposite side of the tree, grabbed his arm and jerked hard several times before it went back into place. Cliff had been putting off having this problem taken care of. After this episode, he decided to have the operation to fix it. He never had any more problems after that. 🦋

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Bob Marshall Wilderness Trimotor Crash- August 1953

by Bob Graham (Missoula '52)

1953 was one of the busiest Missoula Smokejumper years since the beginning of smokejumping and may have been the busiest year ever to that time. We took our refresher training at Nine Mile and moved out for a couple weeks on projects. A number of us were sent to Ant Flat Ranger Station on the Flathead NF and were falling Spruce Bud Worm trap trees. On the weekend, we went to Whitefish, Montana and got over-served. I ran into a school friend, and the two of us took off late Saturday evening for Glacier National Park. Somehow we managed to crash and roll his new Chevy convertible and I ended up in the Kalispell Hospital, nothing broken, but lots of sores and cuts. Upon release, I called **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41) and told him I was really hurting and needed to get back to Missoula rather than go back up to falling trap trees. Brauer said that there was no sense in me coming back to Missoula if I was hurting.

I hitchhiked back to Ant Flat and arrived just in time to see my fellow jumpers loading into a passenger van. They said they had been called back to Missoula, but the dispatcher said I was to stay at Ant Flat. Not wanting to be left alone, I told the dispatcher that he must have been mistaken about the message. He swallowed that tale and I returned with the crew to Missoula.

As we pulled up to the loft at Hale field, Brauer came out of the office and immediately asked me what the hell I was doing there. I told him that the dispatcher sent me with the crew. Fred said he knew I was pulling something and would be on the next fire jump. I jumped that afternoon and vividly remember every aspect of that jump because I think every joint and bone in my body hurt, even before the opening shock.

The rest of that summer we were going out on fires almost as soon as we returned to base. There were very few days of rest or the Sunshine bar. We had paper name tags on the end of our bunks at the Fort. This allowed the office folks to wake up individuals for fire calls rather than to wake us all. Some guys would change name tags just to get a little extra sleep.

Later that year on August 17, 1953, six of us were dispatched to three fires in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Included in this load were: spotter **Dick Conklin** (MSO-49), and jumpers **Dave Owen** (MSO-51), **Torky Chorbajian** (MSO-51), **Donald Kerr** (MSO-53), **Fritz Wolfrum** (MSO-53) and **Frank Wolfe** (MSO-53).

We took off from Hale Field early afternoon in the Ford Trimotor N69905. This particular Ford was purchased by Johnson Flying Service just a couple weeks earlier on August 1, 1953, from Frenny Frensdorf of Orofino, Idaho.



The crash site. (Courtesy Bob Graham)

Upon arriving over the fires, found that it was too windy to jump, so we landed at the Spotted Bear R.S. strip to wait and try to jump later in the day. Around suppertime we took off to try to jump the fires before dark. As we began to gain altitude, one of the engines quit. But one of the reasons we liked the Ford was that it had three engines. But shortly after the first engine quit, a second died. We were all suited up, and I was the closest to the door and immediately looked out to the rapidly-closing ground. It was questionable in my mind as to whether there was enough altitude to jump, so I looked up to the cabin at the spotter, Dick Conklin. Conklin saw what I was considering and shaking his head, pointed to me to return to the cabin floor. As I did that, the third engine quit and we crashed. **Kenny Roth** (MYC-46) was the pilot and fought the plane all the way to the ground, hitting tail first.

I was knocked unconscious and must have been out awhile as when I did come to, there was no one else around. I had been buried by all the fire gear and must have been completely covered because everyone else had already gone past me and left the plane. Remember, I was closest to the door. I freed myself and scooted down the floor to the door and got halfway out when I heard voices hollering at me to get up and run and that the plane was about to blow up. Being extremely well educated, I thought that would be a good idea and wondered why I was not doing exactly that. Then I noticed that my left leg and ankle were broken and hollered back that I could not walk, let alone run.

My brave brethren, who all had to crawl over me to exit the plane, now abandoned all caution and began to administer to my immediate needs. This consisted of tearing the

sleeve off my new work shirt and administering Demerol. They also began to figure out how to cut off my White boot. I vetoed that move and succeeded in convincing them that it would be fine to unlace the boot and pull it off. That Demerol really worked.

Kenny Roth had broken his instep and almost all the jumpers had some injury including a broken arm, broken ribs and other miscellaneous sores. Kenny and I were stretchered back to Spotted Bear, and that night Fred Brauer and Bob Johnson came into the strip with Johnson's Twin Beech to fly us out to Missoula. I believe Jack Hughes, Bob Johnson's son-in-law, piloted the Twin Beech. Brauer and one of the jumper foremen were suited up and prepared to jump into the crash site in the dark, if that became necessary. As we began to take off, the stretchers were sliding around quite a bit on the floor, so Bob Johnson held Kenny down and Fred held me down. There were moose on the landing field and the Beech was scooting around trying to herd the moose away. Finally Bob Johnson hollered up to

the pilot to quit fooling around and take off.

The season ending rains came while Kenny and I were in adjacent rooms in St. Pat's hospital, so we had a lot of visitors, mostly jumpers and pilots, but also a lot of investigators. Everyone but the investigators brought beer until finally the nuns complained that they were running out of room for the patient's medications in their refrigerators.

After a few days I was allowed to get out of bed and use the bathroom, but Kenny was still bedridden and had to use the dreaded bedpan. The devil told me to frequent the bathroom, open Kenny's door, and flush the toilet a couple times. Kenny was stuck in St. Pat's long enough to become acquainted with one of the nurses, who later became his wife and lifelong companion.

That turned out to be my last jumper mission. I went back to college, got drafted into the army the next spring, and ended a Forest Service career in the 80s. 🙏

Bob can be reached at bobmag@coldreams.com

You Know, You Don't Have To Do This

by Dave Wood (Redmond '66)

In high school I dreamt of being a forest ranger. I worked during the summer as a young suppression team member for the Washington Department of Natural Resources and, after high school, I entered the University of Idaho School of Forestry.

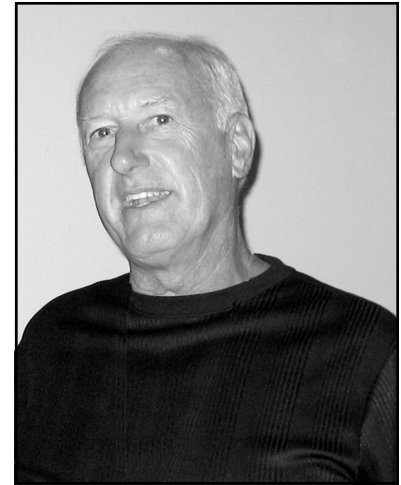
In my freshman year, between girls and beer, I met **Roger Richcreek** (RAC-66). Anyway, Roger had been working for the Forest Service in California that previous summer and had run into some smokejumpers out of Redding. He thought that's what he and I should be doing that next summer. So we applied to a number of smokejumper bases and, son of a gun, we were accepted in McCall, Idaho and Redmond, Oregon.

Roger had heard that Redmond was a new smokejumper base and that we should go there. We said "yes," and they said "yes," and we were set to be smokejumpers. Looking back on things, I don't think I really knew what I was up against. I think I was taking Roger's lead. Hey, why not? It sounded pretty neat and Roger said we'd make good money.

The school year ended in 1966, and I had somehow avoided flunking out with the emphasis on girls and beer (I think I already mentioned that). I went home to Tacoma, Washington, to get things together for my new career as a smokejumper. I kind of remember they sent me stuff on physical requirements and all. Maybe I ran a bit but not much more. Running was not my strong point. Really, anything physical wasn't my big selling point.

Anyway, my Father agreed to drive me to Redmond, Oregon, since I had no car and had never been to Oregon. We got into the station wagon and headed down the long highway to the Redmond Smokejumper Base. I don't remember much of what we talked about on the way. Maybe we didn't say anything, but I do remember the one statement my Father made as we approached Redmond: "You know, you don't have to do this."

I assured him that this was what I wanted to do, not realizing what lie ahead. If I'd had any real insights, my quick answer would have been: "Right, Dad, let's head on down to



Dave Wood (Courtesy Dave Wood)

Disneyland and not waste the trip."

My first inkling of the real world came when we pulled up in front of the barracks at the Redmond Air Center. I remember two individuals, **Mike Clarkson** (RAC-65) and **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62), standing on the steps who I will never forget. Mike Clarkson had no shirt on and was a tan, muscular, blue-eyed man, the likes of whom I would never have messed with. To this white-bodied, skinny, muscleless kid, I

immediately said that this was a place I shouldn't be. Maybe I had missed the real requirements of the job. Those piercing blue eyes looked at me in a way that said I was in the wrong place. Fred Cooper looked twice as big as he does today. He must have shrunk with age as I remember him being really big. I also remember that grin that crept out of the side of his mouth when he saw me show up. I had that "fresh meat" look that said, "Son, you don't belong here." The bad news was that my Father had left me in this world that I quickly

figured out was not where I should be.

Well to make this short, I stayed. All the smokejumpers looked big and...and. The only person we had an "in with" was **Gary Granquist** (RAC-65). He was jovial and spoke kindly to everyone.

There were 19 of us rookies that summer of 1966. I learned quickly not to be in the back of the pack. Be in the pack for security. It turned out to be something that I achieved that I am most proud of. I was never the best, but I gave it everything I had. I ended up staying for 12 summers

and one winter. I acquired a lot of skills but, most importantly, it's where I grew up and became a man. It was also the place where I learned that I could do anything once I set my mind to it and not give up.

It is an experience I will never forget as well as that first meeting with Mike Clarkson and Fred Cooper. Those two folks haunt me to this day with that memory of pulling up to the base and my Father saying, "You know, you don't have to do this." 🦋

Dave can be reached at 927 E. Creekside Ct., Sisters, OR 97759

The Big Blow

by Dick Courson (Cave Junction '46)

Part of the fun and games at Cave Junction involved the old swimming hole on the Illinois River just behind the Ranger Station. We had a car tire on a rope that hung from a large limb on a huge fir tree on the bank of the river. The sport of the day was to grab the tire and to swing out over the river and to let go with a splash in the river to follow. The point was to see who could get out over the river the furthest. There was a problem however. There was a large boulder in the river and it was hazardous when you let go of the tire. We could not get the boulder out of the river by hand and we needed another tool.

Seems there was a tool shed at the Ranger Station that had various tools and trash in it, also some very old dynamite. The dynamite was so old that the nitro glycerin was dripping from the box. We decided if we could convince the Ranger to be rid of the old explosive, we could use it to solve our problem with the rock in the middle of the river. So, we convinced **Cliff Marshall** (CJ-46) to ask the Ranger to let us dispose of the dynamite in a "safe and secure manner." Of course, we did not disclose what we really had in mind.

Cliff came back and said that the Ranger OK'd the project and that he wanted the entire shed cleaned out. We hadn't bargained on that, but it was going to be part of the deal. We went to work and cleaned out the shed. We were a little careless in handling the dynamite and got the nitro on our hands and faces, as the day had been so hot. We all suffered from severe headaches for the next day.

James "Doc" Middleton (CJ-46) got some electric blasting caps, and there was a "Hellbox" in the shed that, to our surprise, still worked. Two of our conspirators got into the river with the dynamite and swam out to the rock. They dove down and placed the explosive at the base of the rock. They then strung the wire from the blasting caps

up to the shore where we hooked it to the old Hellbox. We pushed the plunger.

What an explosion! We almost made a new channel for the Illinois River. Water went up in a column at least 50 feet. There were dead fish floating all over the river. As it happened, the Ranger had gone to the Forest Service headquarters in Grants Pass that particular day. So, he wasn't aware of the "Big Blow." Cliff Marshall sure was. We were very, very successful in getting rid of the offending rock. We all swam happily ever after. 🦋

Reprinted from "Book of Gobi Two." Dick Courson can be contacted at 74631 Barnhart Rd., Pendleton, OR 97801



Courtesy Ken Morris

What Made the Gobi Special?

by Ray Lahr (Cave Junction '47)

It was 1945 and the war was over! In early 1946, the veterans were returning home and getting ready to go to college on the GI Bill. Among them was my close friend, **Andrew "Hank" Henry** (CJ-46). He spent that first summer smokejumping, and I spent it on a commercial fishing boat. At that time, the jumper camp was in the town of Cave Junction, down on the river behind the Forest Service facility.

During the summer of 1947, **Dick Kater** and I joined Hank as

smokejumpers. Several jumpers that year were ex-paratroopers, a pretty rugged group of guys. One was **Pete Rosen**. The game was to play "King of the Platform." The idea was to shove everybody else off into the river. Pete was getting the "heave ho," but he grabbed at the tree as he was going off. It swung him around head first into the shallow water. He came up with a 3-inch gash in his scalp. Never a whimper out of Pete. Well, we put a compress on the gash and all piled into

my little car and headed to the emergency in Grants Pass. It was like a Norman Rockwell painting. The doctor stitched-up Pete without the benefit of Novocain and Pete didn't even wince. The rest of us were standing around in a circle with our mouths open. After that display of invincibility to pain, we all headed to the nearby bar and toasted Pete with questions like, "How'd you do that, Pete?"

We were kind of mellow when we got back to camp. As we rolled in, there was a telegram waiting for us. "Bring Pete Rosen back to the hospital." They had taken an x-ray of Pete and he had fractured a vertebrae. Back we went and they put Pete in a brace. No more jumping for Pete that year.

We lost track of Pete. He lived back in Delaware. But for those who knew Hank, he passed away a couple of years ago. It must have been the aftereffect of the beer and pickled pigs feet at the Owl Tavern in Cave Junction. 🦉

Reprinted from "Book of Gobi Two." Ray Lahr can be contacted at 18254 Coastline Dr., Malibu, CA 90265.



Reprint from Book of Gobi Two

The Logger and the Raccoon

by Ed Hinkle (Cave Junction '50)

A few of us were behaving ourselves at the old Owl Saloon. The jukebox in the back of the room was playing a popular tune. Out of the night and into the din and the glare, there walked in a logger just down from the hill. He was loaded with raccoon. Yes, Raccoon!

Now this long drink-of-water was six feet plus and his left shoulder was filled and loaded with a large full-grown boar raccoon. It wore around

its shoulders a leather harness-like leash that was decorated with a single row of either diamond rhinestones or bright cut shiny metal pieces. I can see it still. It's funny how memory works. Of all the things about this story that I remember, it is that darn harness and leash with the hand loop at the end.

So this tall logger bellied up to the bar and ordered a beer. He was just across from where we were at one of the booths. Now, both the logger's

back and the coon's fanny were facing us. One of our group, **Bob "Rigger" Snyder** (CJ-48), reached over and tried to burn that coon on its rear. As usual his aim was off and his cigarette hit that big boar coon right dead on his family jewels. Now that coon made a noise that I have never heard before or since. It was a cross between a roar and a scream and off the logger's shoulder he came. As he jumped he sprayed diarrhea-like crap. Boy, did it stink! It just missed our



Owl Tavern, Cave Junction (Courtesy Ed Hinkle)

booth, going to the left.

The coon hit the bar surface and immediately reversed its field - no doubt due to the lack of traction and the noise of dropped bottles and overturned draft glasses. He went up that logger's front, around his neck and down his back. He hit the floor and, with better traction, started out

the door, but there were too many boots and legs in the way. So, again he reversed his field and up that logger's legs and back he went. We know coons have claws and big coons have big claws. It left holes in the logger's jeans and rips in his plaid shirt as the coon went to the logger's shoulder again. All the while, the logger was frantically trying to reel in the coon on the leash. He would have

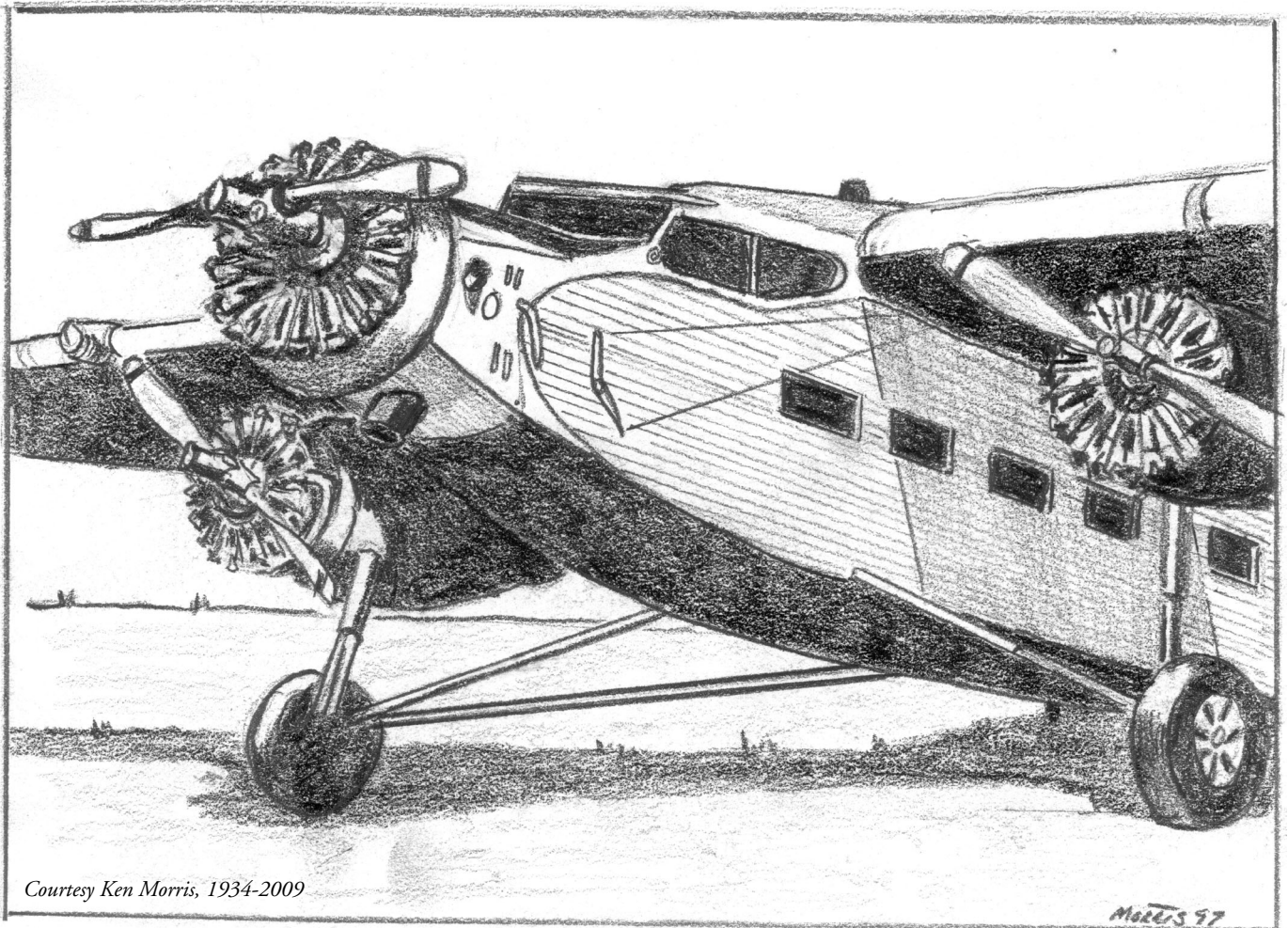
made it too except for the loop around the logger's neck from the coon's first sortie.

The coon was over the shoulder and made another jump to the bar and damn the beers - full steam ahead! About the time he hit the end of the now shortened leash, Ray the

owner and bar keep, pulled up one of his short, thick, leather-covered Billy clubs and bellowed, "Get that damned animal out of here!"

Now Ray wasn't quite as tall as the old man, **Cliff Marshall** (CJ-46), but I don't know of anyone that successfully fought either one. Oh yea, when Ray slapped the bar, the poor coon reversed it's field one last time and, with a leap, landed with all four on that logger's chest and belly. So the logger immediately headed for the front door while trying his damndest to get that coon off his body and the leash from around his own neck. The last time I saw them was as they went out the front door, logger, leash and coon. And, that damn shiny leash! 🦉

Reprinted from "Book of Gobi Two." Ed Hinkle can be contacted at 1530 S. McDuff Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32205.



Courtesy Ken Morris, 1934-2009

(Courtesy Ken Morris, Associate Member, 1934-2009)

