

June 2021

## Smokejumper Obituary: Pearce, Jimmy B. (Fairbanks 1969)

National Smokejumper Association

Follow this and additional works at: [https://dc.ewu.edu/smokejumper\\_bios](https://dc.ewu.edu/smokejumper_bios)



Part of the [Forest Management Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

National Smokejumper Association, "Smokejumper Obituary: Pearce, Jimmy B. (Fairbanks 1969)" (2021).  
*Smokejumper Obituaries*. 87.

[https://dc.ewu.edu/smokejumper\\_bios/87](https://dc.ewu.edu/smokejumper_bios/87)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Smokejumper Digital Archive at EWU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Smokejumper Obituaries by an authorized administrator of EWU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jotto@ewu.edu](mailto:jotto@ewu.edu).

# Smokejumper Obituary

## Pearce, Jimmy B. (Fairbanks 1969)

Jim died November 5, 1978, on a ranch near Davis Creek just north of Alturas, California. He was born in Republic, Missouri in 1940. When he was three, his mother died tragically in the home. Jim, his older brother and two sisters were placed in an orphanage.

At thirteen Jim was delivering papers for the Westport (Kansas City neighborhood) newspaper. He worked his way up to illustrator for the paper while also excelling at track. He was on the Westport H.S. State Champion Cross Country team of 1959 and received a full university scholarship. But university was not to Jim's taste and on return to Kansas City he decided to ride a bicycle west to California studying wildlife and developing his art along the way.

His adventures on a J.C. Higgins "Lightweight" bicycle, purchased for forty dollars at Sears, are well documented in his thirteen-part newspaper column, California or Bust. Showing a future propensity for smoke jumping, Jim took only two blankets a plastic sheet and one change of socks rolled up as a bedroll. In time he added bug dope. Despite his spartan travel regime with a hundred dollars he had saved from work, he treated himself to coffee and a hot meal each day as he traveled west. All who knew Jim can imagine him in those roadside caf s and his easy camaraderie with waitresses, cooks and farmers and townspeople.

He entered the Army and proudly served as a Paratrooper in Okinawa. Out of the service, he settled with a buddy who was a member of the Alturas Indian Rancheria and eventually found work on neighboring ranches. For three summers Jim worked for the Modoc N.F. on the Devils Garden Helitack Crew. Jim jumped in Fairbanks from 1969 to 1977 rising to Squadleader. In the winter, he continued ranch work in the Alturas area, where he was a popular figure around town, and continued to further his art. His sketches of ranch life sold in local western shops and adorned many ranch homes. He converted an old stage stop into a world-class bunkhouse. Mid-winter would find Jim warming an abandoned calf by the wood stove that he worried wouldn't make it through the night. He took equal care with his neighbors and was known for his generosity. Jim loved playing the host and guests were treated to a wakeup call of Marty Robbins, blasting from the speakers of his Rube-Goldberg phonograph, hot coffee, grits, and pork chops.

Jim took the 1978 season off to concentrate on training for the Trans-Sierra Tevis Cup horse race with his beloved quarter horse Juby. They completed the 100-mile race in 19 hours despite Jim getting knocked off Juby twice and a mandatory twenty-minute Vet break for Juby to slow her breathing down. No mean feat, Jim earned his Tevis Cup Belt Buckle on his first try. More of Jim's adventures are recorded in the October 2002 issue of Smokejumper magazine.

Thanks to John Culbertson (FBX-69) for this obit.

*(end of excerpt)*