

7-1-2016

# Smokeyumper Magazine, July 2016

National Smokeyumper Association

Robert L. Bartlett

Follow this and additional works at: [https://dc.ewu.edu/smokeyumper\\_mag](https://dc.ewu.edu/smokeyumper_mag)

---

## Recommended Citation

National Smokeyumper Association and Bartlett, Robert L., "Smokeyumper Magazine, July 2016" (2016). *Smokeyumper and Static Line Magazines*. 96.

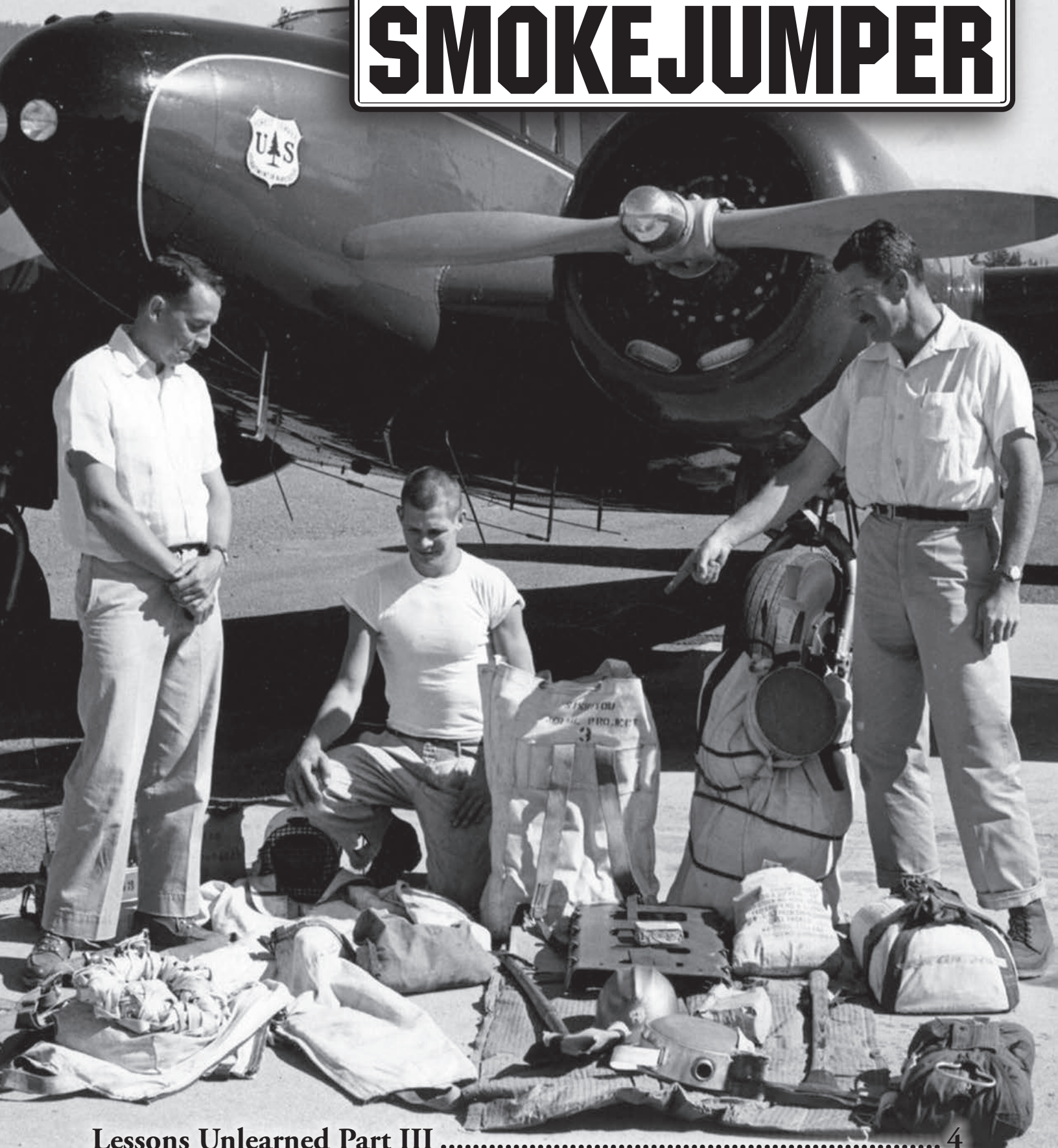
[https://dc.ewu.edu/smokeyumper\\_mag/96](https://dc.ewu.edu/smokeyumper_mag/96)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives & Special Collections at EWU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Smokeyumper and Static Line Magazines by an authorized administrator of EWU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jotto@ewu.edu](mailto:jotto@ewu.edu).

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
JULY 2016

# SMOKEJUMPER



|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Lessons Unlearned Part III .....     | 4  |
| Tale of Two Coins .....              | 7  |
| NSA Photo Preservation Project ..... | 16 |

# CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Message from the President.....   | 2  |
| Lessons Unlearned—A Historical Prospective,<br>Part III “Get Thar Fustest with the Mostest” ..... | 4  |
| A Tale of Two Coins.....  | 7  |
| More Information on Gene DeBruin .....  | 12 |
| My Eighteen-Mile Ride Out .....   | 13 |
| Bryant Cox Teaches Smokejumper Bridge.....  | 14 |
| Sounding Off from the editor .....  | 16 |
| We Saw Pink Elephants.....  | 17 |
| Recording Smokejumper History.....  | 19 |
| Blast from the Past.....  | 26 |
| Flat Broke.....   | 26 |
| The View from Outside the Fence.....  | 28 |
| Fire Jump at the Western Edge of America .....  | 29 |
| Odds and Ends .....   | 33 |
| Readers Comments.....   | 34 |
| Fires 2015 - Something Is Wrong.....  | 36 |
| 2015 Al Dunton Leadership Award Winners.....  | 38 |
| Off the List .....  | 39 |
| Remembering Bill “Murph” Murphy.....  | 41 |
| Phisit—An Interesting, Intriguing Life .....  | 43 |
| Snapshots from the Past.....  | 44 |
| Australian and American Firefighting .....  | 45 |
| Working For Food .....  | 46 |



SMOKEJUMPER, ISSUE No. 93, JULY 2016  
ISSN 1532-6160

*Smokejumper* is published quarterly by:  
THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER ASSOCIATION  
c/o IO JUDY LANE  
CHICO, CA 95926

The opinions of the writers are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the NSA. Permission to reproduce *Smokejumper* in any manner must first be obtained in writing.

NSA Web site: <http://www.smokejumpers.com>

Managing Editor: *Chuck Sheley*

Associate Editor: *Ed Booth*

Editing: *K. G. Sheley*

Photo Editor: *Johnny Kirkley*

Illustrators: *Dan Veenendaal*, and *Eric Rajala*

Printing: *Larry S. Jackson*, Heidelberg Graphics,  
[www.HeidelbergGraphics.com](http://www.HeidelbergGraphics.com)

Front cover: *Al Boucher*, *Norm Pawlowski* and  
*Jim Allen Cave Junction 1950s (NSA File)*



## Message from the President



by **Jim Cherry**  
(Missoula '57)  
PRESIDENT

THE NSA BOARD of Directors held their spring meeting this past March in Boise at the Wildland Firefighters Foundation that is located just a stone's throw from National Inter-agency Fire Center (NIFC). The Board had the opportunity to hear from Lincoln Bramwell, the Chief Historian for the USFS, on what he is charged to do, and we explored how his office can work in sync with the NSA to preserve our smokejumper history. At the same time, we had conversation with the University of Montana's Mansfield Library staff, where the NSA has been building a repository of documents and photos toward the same end of preserving our history.

Our meeting in Boise provided us with the opportunity to become acquainted with **Roger Staats** (MYC-86), the recently appointed National Smokejumper Program Man-

ager. **Jim Raudenbush** (FBX-82), base manager for the Boise BLM operation, was also able to stop by and visit with the Board. Between Roger and Jim, we were able to get a good picture of the BLM and USFS preparation for the upcoming fire season.

The NSA Board moved forward and approved funding for restoring a NSA Photo Gallery to our website. We lost this several years ago when our website was hacked. Getting the main components of our web page back online has been a high priority during these intervening years, but now the time and the means for getting a user-friendly photo gallery up and operating is now possible. Look for it to gradually come back online.

During the past year **Chuck Sheley** (CJ 59) has been working with **Stan Collins** (MYC-67) to set up a traveling smokejumper museum. Chuck shared information about the museum's development in the April 2016 issue of *Smokejumper*. Response has been outstanding. Is there a place in your community that could host the traveling museum and, in doing so, could help bring to the general public a broader appreciation of the role and importance of smokejumpers in the world of wildland firefighting?

The NSA has recently



received a bequest from the estate of **Bill Murphy** (MSO-56) designated for the NSA Scholarship Fund. Another undesigned gift came to the NSA from Peapod, LLC in memory of **John Carr** (FBX-63). Such memorials and bequests are a wonderful way to honor an individual and that time of their life that held so much meaning and purpose. Have you shared with your family and friends your thoughts about how you might like to be remembered? The fact that you are reading this magazine means that your time as a smoke-jumper holds a high place in your past and present.

I'd like your input on this next matter. Not long ago I received an email from a former jumper who, after his jump years, had gone on to become a physician. He wrote to me about how he had recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and has had to retire with a medical disability. In

his research he has "*found information indicating the incidence of this disease in urban firefighters is 10 times that of the general population. They are still searching for an exact cause, but suspect inhaled toxins.*" Do you remember what you used on the fireline to give you some protection from the smoke (fire volatiles) and engine exhausts? Probably nothing more than a bandana. There is no known recording of data for wildland firefighters and the occurrence of Parkinson's disease. I want to ask your help by having your input on any smokejumpers (both living and deceased) who developed Parkinson's disease during their lifetime. Throughout our 75 year history, we have had something less than 6,000 total smokejumpers in the USFS and the BLM. It is known that the incidence of Parkinson's disease increases with age. One study has shown a rate of 0.3 per 1000 persons ages 55 to 65 years and increasing to 4.4 per 1000 persons aged 85 years or older. If smokejumpers have been experiencing a significantly different rate of developing the disease, perhaps our input can contribute to this medical research. I would appreciate it if you would provide me with whatever information you have available.

### ***NSA Members—Save This Information***

Please contact the following persons directly if you have business or questions:

#### ***Smokejumper magazine***

Articles, obits, change of address

Chuck Sheley  
530-893-0436  
cnkgshaley@earthlink.net  
10 Judy Ln.  
Chico, CA 95926

#### ***Membership***

John McDaniel  
785-404-2847  
jumpercj57@hotmail.com  
807 Eileen Ln.  
Salina, KS 67401-2878

#### ***All else***

NSA President  
Jim Cherry  
641-927-4428  
jimcherry@wctatel.net  
2335 300th St.  
Ventura, IA 50482-8502

### ***Fire Starters—***

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

*Fire calls come at all times of the day or night in the US Forest Service. One day a fire call came late, just before sunset. A lightning strike set a fire. The bosses decided that we needed to walk into the fire, even if it was dark. Since a cloudburst had accompanied the thunderstorm, the trail was dark, wet, and dangerous. I quickly learned not to walk too close to the guy in front of me so as to avoid the sharp, wet slaps in the face from the boughs that snapped back as he pushed them out of the way. As expected, the rain had put out the fire. We ended up sleeping in the middle of a logging road so as to be found the next morning.*

### ***Walking Trail.***

We all walk trail...even in the city. And we take our cues from those who go before us. Sometimes we have to go, even when it's inconvenient. We're not sure exactly where we'll end up because it seems like we're walking in the dark. We find that some on the trail are considerate while others are thoughtless and careless, letting the unexpected

#### ***Smokejumper base abbreviations:***

|                         |                       |                      |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Anchorage.....ANC       | Grangeville ..... GAC | Redding.....RDD      |
| Boise ..... NIFC        | Idaho City ..... IDC  | Redmond.....RAC      |
| Cave Junction ..... CJ  | La Grande..... LGD    | West Yellowstone WYS |
| Fairbanks ..... FBX     | McCall.....MYC        | Whitehorse Yukon YXY |
| Fort St. John ..... YXJ | Missoula .....MSO     | Winthrop..... NCSB   |

hit us. There are also those who are headed in the wrong direction. Sometimes they listen; sometimes they don't. Trails take unexpected twists and lead to unexpected destinations, and to some dead ends. We trust those in the know to pick us up when we need a lift.

Nevertheless, we walk the trail wherever it leads with a certain amount of trust that there is one who accompanies us in all life's journeys. He's

been here before us. He's walked the trails, knows the route, the pitfalls, and the goal. He fears neither the darkness nor those who think they own it. If we make a misstep, he sets us on the right track. Even when it's a dead end—and we're insistent on going that route—he doesn't give up on us. In the end, he brings us out. We call him the Good Shepherd, not a bad companion for the trails...or the sidewalks of life. *Hoot!* 🦉

---

# Lessons Unlearned—A Historical Prospective, Part III

## “Get Thar Fustest With The Mostest”

by Karl Brauneis (Missoula '77)

---

### Historic Background

One of the great American generals of all time was Nathan Bedford Forrest of the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Forrest enlisted as a private but later raised and equipped his own cavalry regiment at his own expense. Lightning raids became his stock and trade and his words “Fustest with the Mostest” are immortalized in American folklore and song. He was such a thorn in the Union's side that General Sherman declared, “that devil Forrest must be hunted down and killed if it costs ten thousand lives and bankrupts the federal treasury.” Well, the federal treasury was bankrupt and they never did catch Forrest. Known for bold attacks and swift retreats ... you might say that Forrest knew how to engage, disengage, and swiftly retreat to a safety zone.

“Fustest with the Mostest” could also be the motto of the Smokejumpers. This idea was at the heart of program development in 1939. “Hit 'em Hard and Keep 'em Small” is simply a re-wording of Forrest's concept of “Get Thar Furstest with the Mostest.”

It is important to understand that “Fustest with the Mostest” is an offensive strategy. The concept may not apply to the 30% of National

Forest System lands that are in Wilderness or backcountry with fire management plans intact. It might not even apply to our commercial forests (30%) or rangelands (40%). If we run the logger and the cowboy off our public lands, there is absolutely no scientific reason to control fires and circumvent fire-adapted ecosystems. We suppress fires scientifically to manage natural systems for resource outputs and ecosystem health. If this idea no longer applies, then we only need to suppress fires socially to protect property. In that case, there is no need for the Smokejumper program.

Hotshots are much better equipped to perform defensive fire suppression action to protect lives and property. It has been my observation that the

---

*Hotshots are much better equipped to perform defensive fire suppression action to protect lives and property. It has been my observation that the growth in hotshots and the downturn in smokejumpers are directly related to this trend.*

---

growth in Hotshots and the downturn in smoke-jumpers are directly related to this trend.

Let's assume, for the purposes of discussion, that fast initial attack is still a viable option and that the federal agencies will continue to manage the majority of their lands to produce outputs for the American people. Then we can explore: 1) Battle Worthiness and 2) Battle Need for today's firefighter as it relates to the amount of equipment they are required to carry.

Battle Need demands experience and good listening skills at the top levels of management. Changes required by Battle Need are fast and adaptive to the field situation. We are talking about a timeline of days, months or, at the extreme, a year. If Battle Need is not addressed quickly, then it is probably not a real need at all.

## Mad Scientist Disease

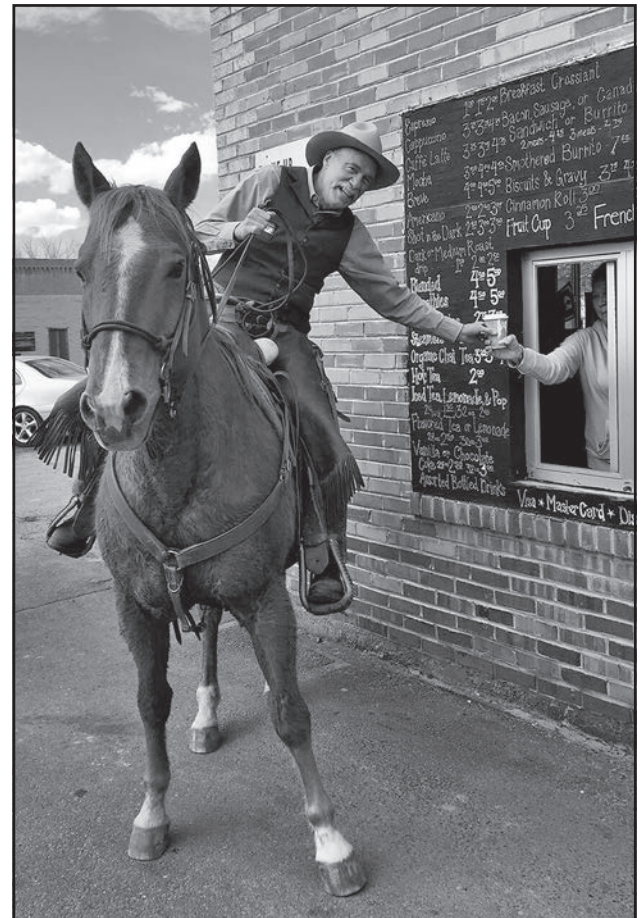
In 1942, Mad Scientist Disease ran rampant. It was up to Army leadership to shut down the projects that did not address Battle Need and focus on those that did. Fortunately, Lt. General Lesley McNair (Head of US Army Ground Forces) was able to keep the mad scientists at bay. Ordinance might have been slow on some improvements, but it was often because the troops were not screaming Battle Need at the time. When the Panther and Tiger threat became real, the Sherman tanks were upgunned as fast as possible, and the M-26 Pershing heavy tank was fast tracked (Part II of the series).

As an outsider looking in, I find the development of the square parachute for Forest Service Smokejumper operations almost comical. It does not meet the criteria of Battle Need either on the timeline scale or within the operational and safety standards of the US Forest Service. I once detailed a BLM smokejumper to our fire zone to serve as the assistant fire management officer. She was and is an impressive individual. However, she narrowly escaped death by square parachute. I saw no Battle Need in her eyes for "squares" when she told me about the parachute malfunction and her near death experience. On the other hand, Don Gore's (Sherman Tank Commander – Part II) eyes lit up when he told me how his upgunned 76 mm high velocity Sherman punched through Panther armor to save him and his crew.

Let's look at just a few examples of Mad Scientist Disease that have infected our organizations.

I first became aware of deaf upper management when our uniform was changed in 1978. We had a beautiful dark olive green uniform with a very distinguishable shoulder patch. All of a sudden the pee green pickle suit arrived. No one asked for it. No one wanted it. I remember many in the agency boxing theirs up and sending it back, never to wear the uniform again. Field officers petitioned for their old uniforms back, but management was deaf and morale sunk.

We were first told that nomex fire pants were optional. They will never be required. Just try them out. Most threw them in the garbage after one fire and went back to their Levi 501's and Lee Can't Bust 'em jeans. Then, all of a sudden, nomex was required. I remember signing a letter, along with just about every jumper alive at the time, to keep our personal purchase denim jeans. Management was deaf. Morale sunk. Think of the cost outlay to outfit firefighters in nomex pants at 100 dol-



*A Wyoming drive-up. Karl Brauneis (NSA file)*



lars a pair, not to mention the problems and costs associated with initial attack (Part I). I remember eating dinner at the Wapiti Ranger Station while deployed on a fire nearby. The mosquitoes were biting through my nomex pants. I thought, you know, these pants aren't even Battle Worthy.

Fire shelters use to be optional. No one used them because there was no Battle Need for them. Then the shelters became mandatory. After the initial shelters failed, a new and heavier design was forced upon the firefighter. Australia and Canada soon did away with the required use of the fire shelter. In effect they said, "Nothing known to man will protect you from 1200 degree of heat except fast legs and a good head on your shoulders." Still, the answer in America was a heavier and more improved fire shelter. I have studied numerous fatality fires. In some cases the shelters prevented death, but in other instances they could be considered the cause of death. I think that our fellow firefighters in Australia and Canada figured that out years ago.

We used to start up on the Hotshot Crew with soft hands from the college school year. It was a symbol of pride to build the tough and calloused hands required to dig line. Purchase is a word long forgotten by bureaucrats. Purchase is the hand-to-tool grip that provides control and stability of the tool. Purchase is negated with gloves. We always took the new GSA tools and sanded out the slick, verithane finish and rubbed in linseed oil to give oil to the wood and purchase to our hands. Break a tool handle and most often, it has a verithane varnish on the outside and a dry, brittle wood on the inside. Linseed oil on wood with tree sap and dirt with calloused hands give the firefighter the purchase required to safely construct fire line. Now, however, gloves are mandatory.

## Recommendations

I believe that wildland firefighter safety equipment should be optional. I think a new policy should be put in place that allows the crew boss or district ranger to fit the safety equipment required to meet the specific job at hand. I know I will take a lot of flack for this idea because it challenges the status quo of legalism. Still, let me use a few more examples.

Photographs of soldiers and marines in WWII

show men stripped down for combat. These photographs mirror my early days of firefighting. In the WWII army, equipment was transported as needed by truck and not carried on the back. These men carried only what they needed that day to engage the enemy. Often, the equipment carried consisted of a canteen and a lot of ammunition for their M-1 rifles. Today's soldier may carry upwards of 80 lbs on the back. Veterans tell me that the back and knee injuries from this policy have become epidemic. We have to ask, "Who are we protecting with our present policies – the field troops or the managers?"

The same can be said about today's firefighter. Forty pounds of gear on the back is just too much weight to effectively construct fire line. In the old days, we use to simply bump up our water and lunches as needed. The firefighter was lean and able to do the arduous job at hand.

In the cowboy culture, we had both the chuck wagon and the hoodlum wagon to carry the extra gear. I can fit my outfit for the days work ahead. The idea is to be as light on the horse as possible. Are we pushing cows out of timber in grizzly and wolf country? If so, wear my chaps and a revolver. What's the weather forecast? Should I tie on a slicker or a jean jacket or a wool coat? Do I need my palm hat or my felt? Will they bring lunch by truck or do I need to grab my saddlebags and pack my own. The key is that I can fit the right equipment to the needs of the day. It's called experience and flexibility.

Nathan Bedford Forrest had the fastest horses and the most experienced cavalrymen. Creighton Abrams had the fastest tanks and the most experienced soldiers. We need to remember that with each required item that we add to the firefighters list of mandatory equipment we lose speed, endurance and flexibility. Both Forrest and Abrams won because their men were fast, versatile and experienced.

It is my opinion that training, both physical and mental, to focus on fire behavior and lessons learned along with radio communications and fire weather forecast is what makes a safe environment for our firefighters. Well, ok, throw in the chain saw ... but after that ... like **Hal Samsel** (MSO-49) said back in Part II, "The rest is just blowing hot air." 🦉

---

# A Tale of Two Coins

by Robert “Bob” Bartlett (Associate)

---

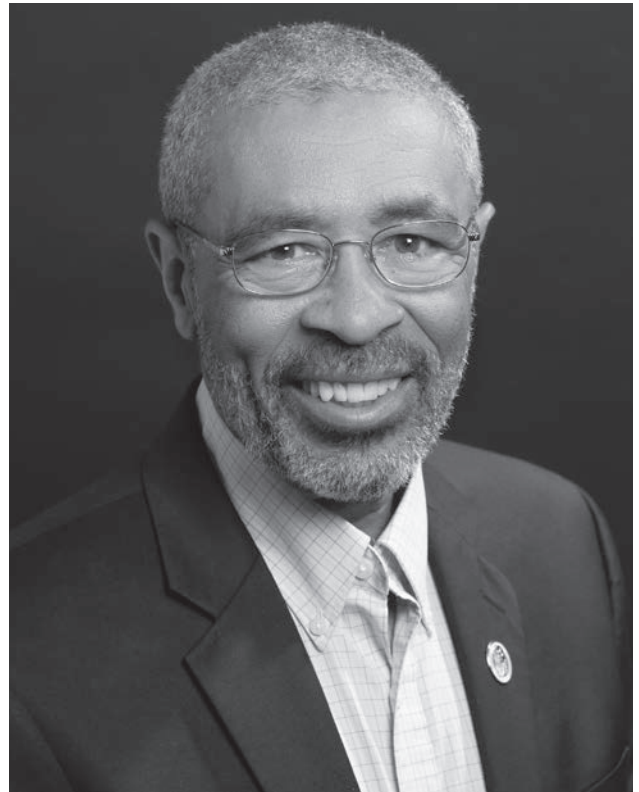
Challenge coins or medallions bear an organization’s insignia or emblem and are carried by its members. They are given to prove membership or association and to enhance morale. I now carry two medallions, two similar, yet different, silver Challenge Coins. One coin would be familiar to members of the National Smokejumpers Association (NSA) and many current jumpers, especially those who attended the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion this past summer in Missoula, Montana. The other one I purchased while attending the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion of the Triple Nickle Association in Washington, D.C. two months after the event in Missoula.

## Heads and Tails

Both Challenge coins speak volumes to those who carry them. The one coin boldly proclaims, *SMOKEJUMPERS 75 YEARS 1940-2015*, on the heads side, where the other reads, *AIRBORNE 555<sup>th</sup> PARACHUTE INFANTRY ASSOCIATION, THE TRIPLE NICKLES*. On the tails side the first medallion reads, *NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPERS ASSOCIATION*, while on the other there is the image of three buffalo nickels (with the buffaloes showing) forming a pyramid and the dates 1944-1947. The coins of both organizations have similar wings and an open parachute on them and, like their members, share a common experience, they are jumpers. In addition, they share a briefly joined moment in history in the Pacific Northwest near where I live. Back east and in the southeast, the Army and the United States Forest Service (USFS) have long since recognized the contribution and sacrifices of the *Triple Nickle*. However, outside of a few smokejumper bases in the West and Pacific Northwest and a few smokejumper history buffs, little to nothing is known about them and the fire season of 1945.

## Summer 2015 travels

I had the opportunity to attend the reunions of both organizations and was asked by the editor of



Bob Bartlett (Courtesy B. Bartlett)

this magazine to put my experiences into writing. As an African American, a university professor, a researcher, a traveling speaker, and an Army veteran, the summer of 2015 was one for the highlight reels, so I jumped (no pun intended) at the chance.

First, I am forever grateful to those who invited me to attend their events. I owe a great deal of gratitude to NSA’s **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) for including me this past summer and for providing time during the NSA Reunion for me to tell the *Triple Nickle* story. Thank you, Chuck, for the kind words concerning my presentation mentioned in the October issue. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to *Triple Nickle* lifetime members, Liane Young, author of *Operation Firefly*, and *Triple Nickle* president Joe Murchison for their invitation to join them in D.C.

Both reunions were full of youthful stories of



the glory days and of people talking about “the best jobs they ever had.” Both groups have their sacred stories and their heroes. Like their Challenge coins, their stories are similar, yet their experiences during and after the summer of 1945 were and are uniquely different. Both were new reunions for me—the researcher, the non-jumper, the outsider—and both histories, smokejumping and the *Triple Nickle*, were new to me prior to February 2014.

## Smokejumper History 101

In brief—it began in March 2014 with a few back and forth emails with **Jim Rabideau** (NCSB-49) of Pasco, Washington. I then followed a lead to the Missoula Smokejumper Base Visitors Center Director **Dan Cottrell** (MSO-01). That phone conversation with Dan led to Liane Young’s 2014 book *Operation Firefly* that she had recently sent to the Visitors Center. And, as one might expect, that lead to Chuck Sheley. From then until now I have continued to immerse myself in smokejumper and *Triple Nickle* history and on occasion have been caught in the crossfire. Chuck Sheley and this magazine remain my primary go-to sources for smokejumper history. Chuck is a passionate researcher, magazine editor and writer, as well as a tireless guardian of smokejumper history. Thanks to him I was introduced to the story of the first black smokejumper, **Wardell “Knuckles” Davis** (MSO-45), whose jumping days predate the arrival of the *Triple Nickles*.

## Missoula

At the reunion and at the Missoula Smokejumper Base, I met many wonderful NSA folks and current jumpers. My focus was to do more listening than talking, and I heard plenty of stories of the good old days—jumping a “two manner,” jumping out of the Ford Trimotor, the DC-3, the Twin Beach, the Twin Otter, and now the Sherpa. I learned the difference between jumping fires in the Alaskan tundra and windy New Mexico. Jumpers talked about their favorite planes, the loads and gear they carried. And, as reunions go, there was the occasional story of those who made their last jump. It was a humbling experience to be a part of it and especially to share the *Triple Nickle* story in front of a

standing-room-only, cross-generational crowd of “jumper bros.”

## Missoula SJ Base

I intentionally arrived in Missoula from my home in Spokane, WA a few days early and went straight to the base. I especially want to thank the staff at the Visitors Center and the jumpers at the base for giving me so much of their time, for showing me around, and for answering a million and one questions. While at the base I was introduced to a young, white jumper outside the Ready Room who happened to be wearing a *Triple Nickle* t-shirt! On permanent display in the loft, I was shown three large, framed pictures of members of the *Triple Nickles* geared up and ready to board the familiar Army C-47. The pictures were accompanied by a brief history. I was also pleasantly surprised to learn of retired Missoula jumper **Wayne Williams** (MSO-77), aka WW, who since 1990 has had a long affiliation with the *Triple Nickles*, and who, since 1995, continues to tell the *Triple Nickle* story to every rookie class of jumpers in Missoula. It was a week of stories and amazing people.

After a week spent with past and current jumpers in Missoula, I am convinced more than ever that smokejumpers, once known as smoke chasers, are a certain breed. Their history and their continued commitment to jumping fires is indeed an American treasure. Although there was never an uncomfortable moment for me while in Missoula, I did feel like an outsider looking in. The most common question people asked me was, “So, what year did you rookie?”

In contrast, at the second reunion I felt like an insider looking out. Although I share a similar lived experience and DNA with 99 percent of the attending members of the 555<sup>th</sup>, I felt like a previously unknown in-law showing up at a family reunion. One huge difference was that I felt my deceased father’s presence when I was with the *Nickles*.

## A More Familiar Story

The *Triple Nickle* story was unknown to me until February 2014, even though my hero, my father, and his brother both served in segregated Army units during World War II. Both were

combat medics. I grew up in a small, backwoods West Virginia town with black men who had served with the Tuskegee Airmen and with other all-black units that fought their way across Europe and North Africa. I grew up knowing that both the nation and the military were harshly racially divided during and after the war. I grew up with stories of the unimaginable treatment my father and others like him had to endure while in uniform, as they trained and waited for orders to ship out to fight an enemy overseas.

I stumbled across the story of the Triple Nickle in our local newspaper during Black History Month, and it immediately stirred a fire and a curiosity in me. The fact that the only *Triple Nickle* fatality during the fire season of 1945 was a combat-trained medic and a volunteer on the mission that cost him his life was not lost on me. I am positive that my medic father or his brother would have reacted the same way.

My father and the other black men I grew up around were all proud Army volunteers who fought the doubters and the racists at home, as well as an enemy overseas. When they returned after the war, they were forced to establish their own Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) Chapter because of racism. The all-white VFW Chapter in our hometown did not accept black veterans, their stories or their heroes. And, when these brave black men died, they were buried in an all-black cemetery. The stories of blatant racism endured by the *Triple Nickles* were also not lost on me, nor why the *Triple Nickles* have their own passionate guardians of their stories and their place in history.

## Triple Nickle 101

In brief—Young's *Operation Firefly* led me to the 555<sup>th</sup> Triple Nickle website, then to Walter Morris and Bradley Biggs 1986 book, *The Triple Nickles: America's first all-black paratrooper unit*, to Tanya Stone's 2013 book, *Courage has no color: The true story of the Triple Nickles* and to the 2000 DVD, *Nickles from heaven*.

## The Reunion

My summer travel ended in Washington, D.C. at the 36<sup>th</sup> National Reunion of the *Triple Nickles*. Although born and raised only a short distance

south of D.C. the summer heat and humidity always comes as a shock to my system. Like the smokejumpers I have come to know, the group of men I met in D.C. have gone by many names since their origin in 1944: *Triple Nickles*, Winged Warriors, Sky Soldiers, Troopers, Smokejumpers, Airborne firefighters, Buffalo Rangers, and, occasionally, "hot rods." Their members are active duty and retired, mostly black men and women, proud Americans, and past and present combat veterans. Members of the association have served in every conflict and war since WWII-Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan. Some served in three or four wars.

Much like the smokejumper community, they are a family made up of folks who share a common experience and history. One of the first *Triple Nickles* I met was Life Member, Lt. **Thomas McFadden** (PNOR-45), who jumped out of *Triple Nickle* bases in Pendleton, Oregon, and Chico, California, and at 92 still looks fit enough to jump.

## Proud Guardians

Much like Chuck Sheley and other NSA members, *Triple Nickles* are extremely protective of their history, their stories, and their heroes. Above all else, they are Airborne! All the way and then some! Much like smokejumpers, they told stories about the C-47 and the C-119 Flying Box Car. They talked about jumping in a Stick of 4-9 or a Chalk of 28 on one pass. They talked about packing their own chutes in Pendleton and being told to land in trees, rather than to avoid them during their smokejumper orientation. There are only a handful of the original three hundred *Triple Nickles* left who jumped out here in the West that fire season. They were the first and the last all-black Airborne Infantry Firefighters—"smokejumpers."

For many years the men of the *Triple Nickle* hosted informal gatherings in their own homes. They formally established themselves as an association in 1979, and now have a membership of approximately 1,000 with several Chapters scattered across the country. It was interesting, but not surprising, to learn that their current president, Joe Murchison, and many other *Triple Nickles* are also Life Members of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Association.

Other attendees at the reunion included members of the National Buffalo Soldiers Association, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Buffalo Ranger Company, formed at Fort Benning to fight in Korea, and members of the United States Forestry Service. The grandson of **Walter Morris** (PNOR-45), Army Major Michael Fowles, was also there. Walter Morris was the first First Sergeant of the *Triple Nickle* Test Platoon at Fort Benning, Georgia. He made his last jump October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at 92. Major Fowles graduated from paratrooper school at Benning in 2004—50 years after his grandfather.

## Malvin Brown Remembered

The *Triple Nickles* Reunion began in Baltimore at the gravesite of PFC Malvin Brown. It began there thanks to the tireless efforts of NSA members **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) and **Fred Donner** (MSO-59), along with Philadelphia reporter Tony Woods, Baltimore *Triple Nickle* Bob Matthews and Deidra McGee from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). PFC Brown's gravesite was lost for 70 years and only found in 2014 in a remote, all-black cemetery in a Baltimore City neighborhood.

Mark Corbet initiated the search with his magazine article titled "In the Interest of Public Welfare," which appeared in *Smokejumper* magazine in 2006, also see Fred Donner's article titled, "The Search for Malvin L. Brown's Grave," *Smokejumper* magazine, 2014. Thanks to Deidra McGee, several of Brown's family members were located and present for the unveiling of a new headstone and plaque that proudly displays the official brands of the USFS, the NSA, and the *Triple Nickle*. The plaque reads in part:

### *In Memoriam*

**PFC Malvin L. Brown**

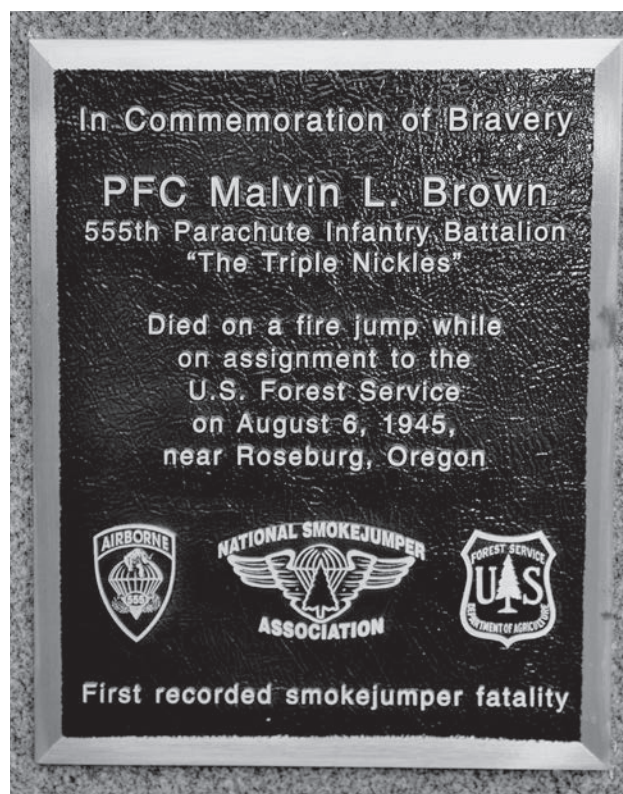
**October 11, 1920**

**August 6, 1945**

*Recognized as the first smokejumper fatality with heartfelt appreciation we salute PFC Malvin Brown an honorable US Army soldier and paratrooper. While serving in the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion Triple Nickles on a secret mission "Operation Firefly" PFC Brown died on a fire jump.*

*Good men must die, but death cannot kill their names.*

**AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY.**



*Plaque Malvin Brown (Courtesy Fred Donner)*

## 1945 Circumstances beyond Their Control

For a brief moment in history in 1945, the smokejumper community, the USFS and the *Triple Nickles* (the Army) were brought together by circumstances beyond the control of either group. And, like most blended families, they each have their share of warts from the experience. Given the little cross-training the *Triple Nickles* received in Pendleton, the Army pilots and planes that delivered them to fires, jumpers stationed in Pendleton and their planes stationed in Walla Walla, Washington, forty ground miles away, the standard Army gear they used or modified, the parachutes they jumped, the number of fires they jumped or pounded, and the way they jumped—Army style—makes their story, their survival and their success that much more incredible.

As one might expect, written accounts and stories of '45 do not always match. With time and interpretation the distance between fact and fiction blurs, feelings sometimes get hurt and guardians of their histories, of their storytellers and of



their sacred stories retrench—that's when warts take root.

## The Assessment

Lest we forget, in the end military leaders, whether assessing a combat or peace mission, initially ask one question of its troops, "Was the mission you were given accomplished?"

Unlike civilian organizations, casualties and even death are anticipated. I believe Chuck Sheley said it best concerning the *Triple Nickles* in a past edition of this magazine:

*"We should recognize that they (Triple Nickles) were put into a very difficult situation with little or no help. None of us would have been able to do the job of smokejumping if we were placed in the same circumstances." Smokejumper magazine, April 2015*

From the Forest Service official report card on the *Triple Nickle*, "The Final Report on the Fire Fly Project," filed by Liaison Officer Neal M. Palm, San Francisco, CA, January 31, 1946:

"The offer of the Army to assist in the protection of our timber, grazing, and watershed resources was greatly appreciated, without which our fire record of 1945 would have been much less satisfactory. . . Many of the problems encountered and the criticisms thereof were undoubtedly unavoidable and inherent in any wartime administration, especially during a transition period from war to peace, and would never be encountered under normal conditions."

## The Nature of Stories

The fire season of 1945 was dry and dangerous with an added wartime threat of more Japanese balloon bombs and a shortage of young men, real or imagined. Reunions are about telling stories, renewing old relationships and making new ones, and that was true for both of the reunions I was privileged to attend. The reunions were the tale of two similar, yet quite different, Challenge coins and those who carry them. I am extremely proud to be associated with both the past and the present smokejumper and Army Airborne communities, warts and all. For a brief moment in history the lives and the worlds of these proud, dedicated jumpers, both serving their country during wartime, crossed paths and the rest, as they say, is his-

tory. In my view, we could take a page out of the sports record books for the fire season of '45. That year in smokejumper history deserves an asterisk and a footnote, *CPS/Triple Nickles*.

Since this journey began I have heard a number of conflicting stories and continue to read conflicting accounts of what happened during the fire season of '45. I still find myself, at times, caught in the crossfire. As a researcher I know that history is not always kind to those on the margins, that stories, written or otherwise, can take on a life of their own, and that even eye-witness accounts vary. Stories, written or otherwise, are not always flattering across groups.

Most importantly, there never is one story: the one and only story does not exist. In this case all groups involved are trying to tell and carry forward the best story they know about the fire season of 1945.

## \*1945

At the very least, CPS jumpers, aka Conscientious Objectors (CO's), and *Triple Nickles* deserve special recognition in smokejumper history. They both had their detractors while serving their country during wartime. The records show both groups jumped into the same rugged mountains and fought fires together, side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder. How ironic is that?

Truly, 1940-47 and beyond is a tale of two historically important groups, one civilian and the other Army. Their similar Challenge coins are symbolic of their members' true grit and unflinching service as jumpers—I choose to carry both coins and with the blessings of both groups will continue to seek written records and stories about the fire season of 1945.

## Smokejumper History

- 1940-42 Pioneer Years
- 1943-45 Civilian Public Service (CPS) Years
- \*1945 CPS/*Triple Nickles*
- 1946-51 WW II Veteran Years
- 1952-75 College Years
- 1975-Present Professional Years 🧑

# More Information On Gene DeBruin

By Chuck Sheley (Cave Junction '59)

**L**ee Gossett (RDD-57) gave me a copy of *Cash On Delivery, CIA Special Operations During The Secret War in Laos*, by Tom Briggs. Tom is a friend of Lee's and spent 32 years in government service in different positions. One of those assignments was as a CIA operations officer in Laos.

In one chapter of his book, Tom provides some more information about **Gene DeBruin** (MSO-59).

Gene, as were other smokejumpers, was a kicker for Air America during the Secret War in Laos. He was in a C-46 that was shot down on September 5, 1963. Five of the crew, including Gene and NSA Life Member **Phisit Intharathat**, were able to parachute from the flaming aircraft. All were captured and held prisoner.

In May of 1964 they made an escape that lasted five days before they were recaptured.

In July of 1966 they successfully made another escape during which three of the guards were killed. At that time two American military flyers, USAF helicopter pilot Duane Martin and USN pilot Dieter Dengler, had been added to the group in prison.

Dengler was picked up by rescue helicopter near death on day 23 of the escape. He was featured in Werner Herzog's movie *Rescue Dawn*, a highly inaccurate portrayal of the escape. Herzog's portrayal of Gene was a complete character assassination of a person who was the hero of the escape.

Dengler remained in the Navy for a year and left the service and continued a career in aviation. In about 2000 Dengler was diagnosed with ALS (an incurable neurological disease). On February 7, 2001, he rolled his wheelchair from his house to a nearby fire station and shot himself.

Phisit lasted 32 days before he collapsed in the jungle. When he awoke, he was tied to a post and, again, a prisoner of Laotian soldiers.

On January 9, 1967, a Cobra team of Laotian Rightists raided the prison and released 53 prisoners. An Air America helicopter, piloted by Jerry

McEntee, rescued fourteen of them. Phisit lived in Bangkok, Thailand. He was a close friend of **Fred Rohrbach** (MSO-65) and attended the recent reunion in Missoula.

Gene chose to partner with Y.C. To, who was older and very sick at that time. None of the others wanted that burden, but Gene would not abandon his friend.

From Dieter Dengler's book:

Duane and I kept running. We heard the sound of someone coming to our left and ducked into the bush and froze. The familiar red head appeared, and there were Gene and Y.C. We started to move off together, but Y.C. held us back. Then Duane ran ahead while I stopped and took hold of Gene's hand.

"Go on," he said. "See you in the States." I looked into Gene's face and got all choked up. I tried to say something, but the words wouldn't come. I pumped his hand, began running, then stopped and waved at him and Y.C.

Gene, Y.C. and the other two Thai crewmembers are still missing.

From Tom Briggs' book (condensed and paraphrased due to space limitations):

I first heard Eugene DeBruin's story from Lee Gossett in early 1971. Lee was a Pilatus Porter pilot for Continental Air Services. Lee was very professional. He inspired confidence and was very likeable.

Tom handled all the CIA roadwatch assets in the region. Lee gave Tom detailed information on Gene with hopes that more information could be collected about Gene.

Tom and Lee worked out a list of questions about Gene for the roadwatch groups. Special emphasis was to obtain any intelligence about an alleged prison camp near Mounong Nong. This was in 1971 and Gene had been missing for eight years.

In March 1971, one of Tom's teams reported that they had spoken to a villager who gave them information about Gene.

Also from Briggs' book:

Eugene Henry DeBruin arrived at Muong Phine in late 1966. On or about 3 January, 1967, DeBruin was taken from Muong Phine and arrived at Mounong Nong on or about 5 January, 1967. The Mounong Nong prison contained only eight other Americans at this time.

DeBruin was strictly guarded by the North Vietnamese Army and he suffered very much. The NVA did not torture him but kept him imprisoned and gave him propaganda lectures. The NVA often displayed anger towards prisoners because of the US bombing in their area.

DeBruin was allowed to eat his meals with and talk to the other Americans. DeBruin never escaped from Mounong Nong because he

was strictly guarded. In early 1968 Ong Lui and six NVA soldiers took DeBruin and eight other Americans away. The villagers were told only that DeBruin and the others were being taken away for training. End of report.

According to the Arlington National Cemetery website, nearly 600 Americans, including **Duane Martin** and **Gene DeBruin**, remain imprisoned, missing or otherwise unaccounted for in Laos. Although the U.S. maintains that only a handful of these men were POW status, over 100 were known to have survived their loss incident. The Pathet Lao stated during the war that they held "tens of tens" of American prisoners but added that they would be released only from Laos, meaning that the U.S. must negotiate directly with the Pathet Lao. Because the Pathet Lao was not part of the agreements that ended American involvement in Southeast Asia, no negotiations have ever been conducted with Pathet Lao for the prisoners it held. 🕊

---

## My Eighteen-Mile Ride Out

by **James R. Brunk** (Missoula '45)

---

*This is the fifth in a series former CPS-103 smoke-jumper James Brunk has named "Five Smokejumpers' Rescue Stories." Brunk was a conscientious objector during World War II. Jim earned his M.D. from the University of Virginia in 1954 and specialized in internal medicine.*

It happened the day **Dean Sommers** (MSO-45) and I had scooped coal out of a gondola coal car up into a window – above the car – in the Schlitz Brewery from morning to late afternoon to make a few dollars. When we got back to the "Fraternity House" where we were staying, we found our names on the jump list. We had to leave immediately for the airport, get our gear, and go out on a fire in the Ford Trimotor.

I jumped second behind **Lee Hebel** (MSO-44), an older jumper. As we came down, Lee landed in what looked from my height like a grassy patch.

But Lee shouted, "Don't come down here. It's full of rocks!"

Turning my chute around, I found myself facing a 30- to 40-foot-tall snag on top – or near the top – of a huge boulder. Having seen what happened to **Archie Keith** (MSO-45), I didn't want to hit that snag.

Flexing legs that were stiffening from my shoveling coal those long hours, I reached up to turn my parachute away from the snag, only to hit a down draft. My parachute collapsed, sending me crashing down on the big boulder so hard that it tore a hole in the knee of my canvas padded jump suit and caused the steel mesh mask of my helmet to "ring." Without that helmet, though, I wouldn't have had a tooth left!

I gathered myself up, thinking that maybe I was not hurt, and crawled around on the steep mountainside, laying out my yellow streamers to



signal that I was all right. However, as I put my suit and gear into my bag, I realized that I was not all okay.

Indeed, by the time I was able to drag myself and my gear up the 100-150 yards to the top of the ridge where the crew was setting up a fire camp, I realized that I would never be able to fight that fire or to walk out. I definitely did not want to be carried out, either, since I had helped to carry out three other men.

Fortunately a ranger rode in the next morning on a Rocky Mountain horse with a hackamore for his bridle (no bit in his mouth) and a McClellan split saddle. Since I had partially grown up on a pony and a horse, I asked to be allowed

to ride out.

With a severely sprained ankle, I was not able to put much weight on my stirrups. Also, the backbone of the horse stuck up through that split saddle. However, I rode him 18 miles out of the fire camp behind an amazingly fast pack train of 8-10 mules.

After sliding up and back on that horse's backbone, though, for all those 18 miles, I could neither sit nor stand comfortably for a couple weeks. But remembering Archie Keith's a bit shorter but tough 16-mile "pack out" in a make-shift stretcher carried by his determined crewmates, I was consoled by the knowledge that only a horse had had to carry me out! 🐾

---

## Bryant Cox Teaches Smokejumper Bridge

by John Snedden (Boise '73)

---

**M**y NED year was 1973 and **John Cramer** (MYC-63) was my trainer in Boise at the BIFC. Besides providing jump training, Cramer – along with **Ed Kral** (MYC-66), **Bryant Cox** (IDC-68) and maybe **Leo Cromwell** (IDC-66) – also provided some instruction in the grand card game of Bridge.

I had never played Bridge, but watched and asked questions while we were on standby in Boise and other bases.

Out of desperation, when there were only three players, they'd asked me to be the fourth player, usually as the designated "dummy" (which was appropriate). By the end of the jump season the game made sense, and it was always a fun way to spend time as we all waited to bump up on the jump list. After learning Bridge, all other card games are easy to play.

The next season, 1974, started slowly in Boise. With weekends free, my wife and I joined Bryant and Sherri, plus John Cramer's family, for perch fishing in Cascade Reservoir and the subsequent fish fry. John's boy Billy was about 4 years old and John had him doing laps on the BIFC

running track to prepare for smokejumping – it worked!

Boise finally sent a Doug load to Silver City for a fire bust. There were at least four Bridge players on the New Mexico load: squad leader John Cramer, future USFS pilot Ed Kral, friend Bryant Cox and me.

I seemed to jump a lot of fires with either John, Bryant or both my first two years.

The Boise crew arrived late and was low on the jump list. The next day Cramer, Cox, Kral and I started a bridge game. I'm not sure, but small sums of money for the winner might have been proposed. The amount was miniscule, as the bragging rights were the most important part of the whole game.

Cox and Snedden were partners and Cramer and Kral were partners. May Ed Kral forgive me if he was not there and it was either Leo Cromwell or **Jerry Ogawa** (MYC-67). But it would seem the two easiest marks for this story plot would be a future pilot and squad leader.

Cox and I were behind in the game. The cards were dealt and bidding started. Cox raised

our side's bid more than reasonable. Cramer and Kral bid, Cox raised their bid and then all were quiet. The hand was ours to play as we won the bidding. Something hit my shin under the table. Cox had three trump cards stuck in the toe of his old White boot and was holding it up for an easy catch.

We made the trade 3 for 3, won the game and won bragging rights. That was the day that Bryant Cox taught me the finer points of Smokejumper Bridge.

The next day we jumped – my first Silver City jump. It may have been punishment by God for card cheating as the landing would be better described as a high-speed, uncontrolled ground collision in strong winds. But I was thankful to get to jump in New Mexico and much was learned on that trip.

Bryant and his wife, Sherri, plus her mom and dad, later died in a Cessna T-210 crash with Sherri's dad at the controls. He was a career Air Force pilot; my understanding is that NTSB never knew what had happened as the plane was at cruise altitude in level flight (so I heard) and had a catastrophic in-flight breakup.

It was ironic that Bryant died this way as he had walked away from either two or three helicopter crashes in his brief jumping career. At least once, after the Hiller crashed, fate found Bryant upside-down.

Dazed but awake, he released his four-point harness, dropped onto the ground and put out a smoldering fire while surrounded by avgas-soaked ground and debris.

When he told the story he was almost bored with all the details. His excitement level was about the same as trying on a new shirt with his wife. Never was there alarm or concern for personal safety when he told of the details.

So the shop talk in Boise was a question: Is it better to be on the same helicopter as Bryant, knowing that if it crashed you might survive, or was flying with Bryant inherently more risky than most helicopter trips?

A hard question to answer, as no one else on the crew had ever been in two or three helicopter crashes – let alone walked away unscathed to tell the stories.

When irritated by inaction on a fire, the pitch

of Bryant's voice would drop to a quiet gravel tone that made him sound like he was closely related to **Neil Satterwhite** (MYC-65). Bryant then would grab the climbing spurs, chain saw, or pack or tool, and go take care of business – with no fan-fare or debate - and he would get it done!

On the way home to Sandpoint, Idaho, from the Spokane airport one day, there was an old Hiller tied down next to a small hut along the side of Highway 95 near Athol, Idaho. Beside the bird was a sign that read, "Rides." I pulled over and told the pilot I wanted 30 minutes of dual but did not need to log it.

My first drive in a helicopter and away we went –basic airmanship, hovers and just plain fun. Well worth the money! Afterward, while driving home, my mind drifted to Cox crashing in a Hiller; his bridge lesson; Cramer always sleeping head-to-the-north; Kral singing with his guitar in Utah; Ogawa trying to win in ping pong; driving a DC-3 engine to Harlingen, Texas, with **Earl "Winko" Fields** (BOI-70); **Tony Beltran** (IDC-69) riding bulls; and a great two-manner with **Leo Cromwell**.

Those were the days. RIP, Bryant Cox. 🕊

---

## Are You Going To Be "Temporarily Away"?

**A**s more of our membership moves with the weather, we are getting an ever-increasing number of *Smokejumper* magazines returned by the post office marked "Temporarily Away." Since we mail the magazine via bulk mail, it is not forwarded, and we are charged first class postage for its return.

If you are leaving your mailing address during the months of March, June, September and/or December, please let Chuck Sheley know. He can hold your magazine and mail it upon your return *OR* mail it to your seasonal address. Please help us save this triple mailing expense. Or join our email list. Chuck's contact information is in the information box on page three. 🕊

---

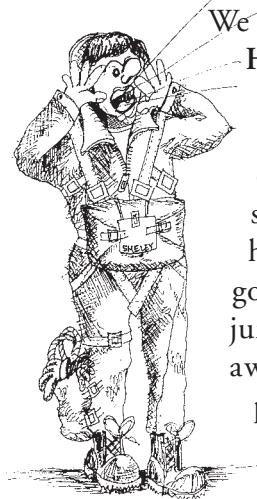


# SOUNDING OFF from the editor



## NSA Starts Photo Preservation Project

AN IMPORTANT PART of our Mission Statement states that we are “dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping.”



We recently teamed with **Bethany Hannah** (Associate), the creator of *The Smokey Generation*, a website dedicated to collecting, preserving, and sharing the stories and oral history of wildland fire. Our goal is to collect those smokejumper photos that are tucked away in your collection and preserve them for future generations.

This is a project that has been on our “to do” list for a long time. It has always been “a good idea.” Now we have found the person who is able to do the work. Bethany comes with a background that includes seven seasons in fire, six with Hotshot crews. You will see her featured in the Stihl ad on the back page of this issue.

I asked Bethany to come up with guidelines and directions for submitting photos, slides, and videos. The large part of our membership will not be doing this electronically, but the guidelines below for the photos will apply to hard copy pictures. Please read them.

### *Hard copy photos should be sent to:*

Bethany Hannah  
1008 Hanover Ct  
El Dorado Hills CA 95762

I’m sure that most of these photos are ones that you want returned. Be sure to let us know if they need to be returned. Remember that faces, names and dates are very important. Time is short and we need to establish a good photo gallery. Our aim is to link the smokejumper gallery to our website. Don’t let smokejumper history be lost.

## Guidelines and Procedures from Bethany Hannah

We ask that you go through your collection and send meaningful photos from your smokejumping career. Slides can be submitted, as well. Hard copy submissions will be manually



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

scanned, so please be selective. General guidelines for photo and video submission include the following:

### *What we are looking for:*

- Photos that have historical and/or cultural relevance to the smokejumping and greater wildland fire community.
- Images should be good quality, clear, and well composed.
- They should be unique with interesting content (e.g., people, places, etc.—images that have entertainment value are welcomed). Photos of people and images that really capture the culture are highly encouraged.
- Please provide as much information as you can about each image: Names of people in the photo, dates, base (if applicable), location, fire name (if you can remember), what’s happening, etc.

### *What we don’t want:*

- Photos that show common occurrences or subjects without identifiable people in the shot. For example, a photo of just a parachute hung up in a tree, or a sky shot of jumpers in the air during a standard jump.
- Blurry, unclear shots, or those without any historical or cultural relevance (such as pictures of a tree torching or a hillside on fire).



## Instructions for submitting your photos electronically

Photos (and video clips) can be submitted electronically through *TheSmokeyGeneration.com*. Just visit the “Upload your photos and videos” page under the “Support the Stories” section and follow the prompts.

- Before you upload your images, please change the file names to include: Description of photo\_Date taken\_Submitter’s Last Name. For example:
  - Johnny Smith on King Fire in CA\_2012\_Hannah
  - Susan Miller and Adam Jones hung in trees\_1978\_Hannah
  - Practice Jump at Ninemile\_1964\_Hannah
- Photos should be submitted at the highest resolution, highest quality possible. Large files are accepted and appreciated.
- Don’t crop or filter photos. Upload photos in their original, unedited form.
- Videos and raw clips should be submitted in HD or higher resolution.

- If you have any questions about submitting your photos electronically, please email Bethany at: [bethany@thesmokeygeneration.com](mailto:bethany@thesmokeygeneration.com). Direct link to uploading your photos or video clips: [http://thesmokeygeneration.com/photo\\_submit](http://thesmokeygeneration.com/photo_submit)

Please note that by submitting your photos and videos, you assert that this material is your own, you hold all necessary rights (copyright, etc.) to the material and the content therein, and freely give The Smokey Generation, National Smoke-jumper Association, and its affiliates nonexclusive license to make use of the material on the website, within videos, and for purposes of promoting The Smokey Generation project (e.g., commercial and non-commercial use). You also understand that you will not receive compensation for use of submitted content and that donation of your material to a public institution for the purposes of historical archiving may occur in the future. You may view the complete Terms of Use here: <http://thesmokeygeneration.com/termsphoto/> 🔒

# We Saw Pink Elephants

by Bob Whaley (Missoula '56)

**A**s an observation and low-altitude reconnaissance pilot with Marine Observation Squadron Six at Quang Tri Combat Base in July 1969, I had the mission of working with troops in contact (combat with enemy units) and the coordination and control of artillery, air and naval gunfire in support of that mission.

My sector of responsibility was the very northwest corner of South Vietnam; to the north was North Vietnam; to the west, Laos. I was flying the new OV-10A low-altitude reconnaissance, light-attack, twin-engine turbo-prop aircraft armed with 28 2.75-inch rockets, or 10 five-inch Zuni rockets and four machine guns with 2,000 rounds of 7.62-mm ammunition.

My sector included the infamous but abandoned Khe Sanh airfield and fire-support base. The terrain included low, rolling hills to the west of Khe Sanh that fell off gently toward Laos, but to the north-

east, the terrain rose abruptly with jungle-covered mountains, the highest of which we called Tiger Mountain.

Though I wanted for a long time to fly over this magnificent area, it was rare that we could ever do so because even on clear days the clouds lingered and were constantly forming and obstructing the mountain, due to the very humid climate and its 5,300-foot elevation.

I will always vividly remember this one day. I had a newly assigned, young aerial observer (A/O) lieutenant, a combat-experienced infantry officer, who recently extended his 13-month tour of duty to fly with us. He was in my rear cockpit.

It was a routine recon/observation mission looking for enemy movement in the myriad road and trail networks leading down from North Vietnam and across from Laos, often referred to as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

After flying over Khe Sanh, I glanced over at Tiger Mountain. It was almost totally clear. I told my lieutenant that he was really in luck. I had been flying up here for 10 months, awaiting the chance to have a good look at the mountains and waterfalls that were alleged to hold great beauty and majesty. They surely were everything I had hoped to see – high cascading waterfalls, thick, lush jungle, and beautiful rock outcroppings.

My lieutenant called out, “Look, major... at our 9 o’clock low, in the opening, near the falls in the pools. Elephants.”

I rolled the aircraft abruptly to the left, and gazed down on a herd of 8-10 elephants, including several calves, one of which appeared to be nursing from its mother. The lieutenant exclaimed, “I don’t believe it. They’re all pink.”

I mentioned that since elephants love to wallow and roll and the soil is predominantly red clay, they would probably have a pinkish hue. His next comment bothered me but I somehow expected it.

He asked if we were going to shoot them ourselves or call in an artillery fire mission. I told him that I realized in this hostile sector where there are no known humans and that beasts of burden, like elephants and water buffalo, are often used as pack animals by the North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong, and as such are to be destroyed since they often figure into their logistics network, which he obviously knew.

I added, however, that we were quite far removed from any known strategic trail or road networks or enemy sightings as reported by aircraft or Marine Force Reconnaissance patrols and that the poor elephants have probably finally found a safe haven, a respite from this crazy war and deserve to be left alone.

“But major, we’re supposed to ...” he said before I interrupted him and said, “We’re not reporting this and if I hear of anyone asking about this or word gets out and some trigger-happy SOB goes looking for them, I’ll have you over to see the flight surgeon and you can explain the pretty pink elephants you saw and which I’ll totally deny.”

I said, “Let’s be realistic. If I thought destroying that family of elephants would change the outcome of this war, I’d strongly reconsider my decision, but since they are not pack animals, no sign of pack marks, no easy access to their location, we let them

be. Do you understand?”

A formal “yes, sir” was the response.

We took another pass over them. The old bull was rolling on his back with all four legs in the air. The lieutenant exclaimed, “That’s what my dog likes to do.”

My point was made and accepted.

Since we didn’t always fly with the same observer, it was several days later before I saw him again. It was at night. He was at a table in our rustic officers club sitting with other aerial observers and young pilots. He’d had a few beers and was quick to catch my attention with a sly grin and a big thumbs-up. I knew our little pact was honored, our secret safe.

A week later I knew it would be honored forever. He was killed along with his pilot. At least we hopefully let something live on in that war that destroyed so much.

*WE ARE DEFINED BY NOT ONLY WHAT WE CREATE ... BUT BY WHAT WE REFUSE TO DESTROY.* 📌

## Get *Smokejumper* One Month Before Anyone Else

NSA members are signing up for the electronic version of *Smokejumper* that is delivered via email. It is sent in a PDF file that contains everything that is in the hard copy issue.

The advantages are: early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings. If you like the hard copy, you can download and print it at home.

NSA Director **Fred Cooper** (NCSB-62) says: “I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing. I think I mentioned in an earlier message that I’m having other magazines/newsletters delivered electronically. It takes less space to store them electronically and if I do want a hard copy, it is easy to print using the *Fast Draft printer option* which allows printing 48 pages in less than two minutes on my printer and uses a lot less ink.”

If you want to be added to the electronic mailing, contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59): [cnkg-sheley@earthlink.net](mailto:cnkg-sheley@earthlink.net). 📌



# RECORDING SMOKEJUMPER HISTORY



## The Quick Experiment of One-Manners

by Frank Fowler (Missoula '52)

MANY SMOKEJUMPING RECORDS were broken at the Missoula base during the 1953 season, but there's one record that perhaps is not well-known – one that took place at the end of the season in October.

Five fires were manned by solo jumpers, and while I was one of them I never understood how the events came to be. It certainly wasn't an established practice. And you can be assured that these were not in-flight, last-minute decisions; they were premeditated assignments made in the loft prior to boarding aircraft.

**Herb Oertli** (MSO-48) was the dispatcher at that time. I ran into him periodically through the years. We felt a connection because he, too, had made one of the solo jumps. He once told me that one-man jumping would never occur again.

I asked him how the decision for solo jumping was made, and he put me off by saying that he intended to write about it. I doubt that he ever did. Oertli died in 1992.

**Fred Brauer** (MSO-41) had been the administrative assistant in charge of training and operations. I visited Fred several times in his retirement in 2005. He always seemed pleased to talk with "one of his

boys," and would cheerfully expound on many subjects.

When I asked him about one-man fires, he said, "We tried lots of new things, and one-man fires were just one of them." I tried to get more information, but he obviously did not want to dwell on the subject.

With Fred's death in 2007, I realized that there were not many jumpers left who even knew about those fires and much less could provide answers to my questions. I studied the dispatcher log from that period and listed all the folks who were either involved in the five fires or might be knowledgeable about them. This led me to the following:

The hunting season started in October and elk hunters scoured the back country. An early snow seemed to assure the end of any fire danger; consequently many warming fires were left unattended. Unfortunately, the weather warmed, the snows quickly thawed, and abandoned fires began to creep. Man-caused fires became unusually numerous.

The dispatcher's log indicates that this activity started Oct. 6 and ended Oct. 15. Since the bulk of the summer workforce had returned to

college or other jobs, the jump list primarily comprised overhead. Ten of them jumped to a fire near Hidden Lake on Oct. 6. The list was totally exhausted after two more jumped in Sneakfoot Meadows. Both fires were on the Powell Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest (now a part of the Clearwater National Forest).

If overhead could not handle the fall fire load, it was common practice to recruit smokejumpers attending the University of Montana in Missoula. Some were so recruited and four men showed up at the loft at 8:45 a.m. on Oct. 7. **Martin Onishuk** (MSO-51) was to be the squad leader for a four-man crew, including him, **Paul Carpino** (MSO-52), **Dick Clearman** (MSO-52), and **Bob Nicol** (MSO-52). It turned out that they were split up and dispatched to three separate fires instead of one.

I asked Onishuk how it happened that this change occurred, and he replied, "I remember the situation well. **Wag Dodge** (MSO-41), the dispatcher at Powell Ranger Station, appeared at the loft at Hale Field and told Fred that the district had more fires than they could handle and needed more jumpers."

Wag had been the foreman



on the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire and subsequently left the jumpers to work for Ranger Bud Moore at Powell. Wag and Fred had a long history of friendship in the jumpers. Onishuk continued, "Fred told Wag that it wasn't a problem and that they could man fires with solo jumpers. Wag asked, 'You'd jump one man to a fire?'"

"Fred responded, 'We do it all the time.' "

Onishuk knew that "all the time" was a stretching of the truth. He concluded his explanation of how the decision was made by telling me, "Despite his exaggeration, Fred was serious about his intentions, and that's what we did."

The intention was that Onishuk be dropped on a one-manner named the Badger Creek Fire, but it was not putting up smoke and he was mistakenly dropped on a different one that was nearby. Next, Nicol jumped solo on a fire called Badger Ridge. He later signaled for reinforcements and four ground pounders gave assistance.

Lastly, Carpino and Clearman jumped a two-manner on the Squaw Creek Fire – the one the four-man crew was originally slated to jump. **Dick Tracy** (MSO-53) and **Bob Walkup** (MSO-50) were dropped as reinforcements two days later. All three of the fires were on the Powell district and within a few miles of one another.

Onishuk's was the easiest of the three. He landed in an opening and quickly arrived

at an escaped hunter's warming fire. He easily contained it, gathered his chutes and equipment and hauled some of it downhill to the road-clearing made for construction of the new Lochsa Highway. He returned to his fire to spend the night and left the next day when he was certain the fire was out.

During the time he made his trek to the Lochsa, a patrol plane passed over to check his fire, but the pilot flew over the place Onishuk was supposed to have jumped. It was now putting up smoke, but there was no evidence of a smoke-jumper in that vicinity. This created so much concern for the whereabouts of Onishuk that Ranger Moore walked to the fire late into the night, only to find it unmanned. Moore saw to its extinguishment.

Also on the afternoon of Oct. 7, brothers **Jim Austin** (GAC-52) and **Dick Austin** (GAC-53) and I reported to the loft. While suiting up I asked Brauer how big the fire was. He answered, "Three acres."

Then I asked, "How many men are going?"

"One crew is going and you're it," he replied without the slightest hint of a smile.

I knew he was kidding. "Great – just send me with a big lunch," I replied rather cockily.

As we approached the fire, the spotter, **Al Hammond** (MSO-46), said, "Okay, Frank – this one's for you." At that point I knew full well that I

was actually going alone. The Austin brothers were going to a different fire, but they would first act as backup in case I was injured in my jump.

Al agreed to drop me a marine pump the next day and to try to find another jumper. He did. **Joe Blackburn** (MSO-51) joined me the next day. Both of these fires were also on the Powell Ranger District.

It was several days later, Oct. 12, that **Len Krout** (MSO-46) and Herb Oertli were each sent on a solo jump. Their fires were close enough that they jumped into the same spot. Oertli sprained an ankle. He spent the night on the fire, but Krout's fire report indicates that Krout put out Oertli's fire and then fought his own.

Oertli came out the next day, but Krout did not return to base until Oct. 15. There were no reinforcements involved.

In conclusion, it appears that there were some pre-discussions about solo jumping, but particulars are vague at best. We do know that Fred was very much his own man. He had been tempered tough as a pilot in World War II and could comfortably shoulder heavy decisions. It seems likely that he unflinchingly found a way to help his friend Wag with his manpower problem.

One can only speculate how it was determined that there would be no more solo jumping. Perhaps the hierarchy deemed the practice too risky. It seems likely that a jumper who couldn't be found

for 24 hours probably weighed in there somewhere – as well as a guy with a sprained ankle.

Some may wonder how other jumpers would have

responded to an assignment to jump alone to a fire. I rather imagine it is the “nature of the beast” for a smokejumper to do what is asked, but I will

only speculate about those who were among “Brauer’s boys.” They would answer as I did: “Send me with a big lunch!”

# Smokejumpers Missoula 1953— A Bit Of History

by Virgil Myers (Missoula '53)

IT WAS IN 1945 that I first became aware of men called “smokejumpers.” The USFS was hiring as many 16 and 17 year-old boys as they could get to continue the work of the CCC, especially fire suppression. Our camp, CCC Camp Grayback, was located some 20 miles east of Cave Junction, Oregon. We quickly were made aware of the Conscientious Objectors south of town who were smokejumpers. They were religious and not too well received in that small community.

We knew that when we turned 18 we would be drafted and join the fight. The Japanese had been sending Balloon Bombs over the west coast, and we wondered if we might get to see one. We did see one on a sunny June day. It was reported to the US Army Air Corps and verified as a bomb.

On a recent visit to the Smokejumper Museum in Cave Junction, I was surprised to see a warning on the wall of the dangers of finding these deadly bombs in treetops. There must still be some out there in the trees.

That summer ended with me being on the Mt. Hood N.F., but it was memorable

because on August 15, 1945, the Japanese surrendered. At the time we were teamed with some Army Air Force veterans that had been “volunteered” to fight fires on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. These GI’s stole, hot-wired and rented any vehicle they could lay their hands on in order to get to the nearest town for booze and girls, not necessarily in that order. Some got back to the fire the same day but most came back on the second day. The real hardcore celebrants got back the third day. Boy, were they in sad shape. I did four more seasons with the USFS.

In 1953, I was restless and wanted to travel, so I thought about the smokejumpers. I sent a letter to Missoula detailing my experience. A quick reply came back with an application and a physical form for my family doctor to fill out. I soon had a reply telling me to come to Missoula and that I would be in the first of two jump schools that season. Actual training was to be at the CCC Camp at Nine Mile.

Jump school was interesting but tough on me because I had just come from sea level and

Nine Mile was at a much higher altitude. We also had a small detachment of Army Airborne soldiers with us. There were two Lieutenants and 10 Sergeants in that group. They were to study the way we did our landings using Frank Derry’s slotted parachutes. All of our chutes at that time were Army surplus, and Frank had done many of the modifications himself.

By the end of the 1953 season, we began receiving factory-made chutes with slots and tails that gave us a 5 mph forward speed, much easier to maneuver with.

Along with the usual training, we also had to study what went wrong and that did work at the Mann Gulch disaster of 1949. Even though I was a seasoned firefighter, there was a lot to be learned. Training days were started with calisthenics and a run. The GI’s did a lot of running.

Then we had our first parachute jump. I don’t really remember much about the first two jumps but by the time the third one came around, I had started realizing what was going on.

Life at Nine Mile was very

good. We had good cooks and the staff was exceptional. Frank was there regularly to answer any questions we came up with, a very nice guy. I decided early on that I wanted to be a rigger. First-year jumpers were not recruited for the rigging staff but I made a pest of myself and was brought on board.

After jump training we moved down to Old Fort Missoula – Army barracks with the first floor for living quarters and the mess hall. The parachute loft was on the second floor. Riggers lived there full time unless we were on the jump list and were at Gray Field.

Most of the jumps were routine, but on one jump the man behind me hit the top of my chute, slid off and swung through my lines. This was bad enough, but then he swung back out at another place in

my lines. I couldn't maneuver because of the way we were tangled, but we landed a ways from the DZ, took out some trees but were not hurt.

We had several planes that season. Two Tri-motors crashed early in the spring, so two more were brought in from South America. What instruments there were, were in Spanish.

There were still the remains of a POW camp at Fort Missoula. It was just a few yards from our barracks. We were told it was for Italian POWs. They were housed there and were sent out to help farmers in the area who needed a few extra hands during harvest and planting.

In 1952 Hollywood came to Missoula. They decided to film the Mann Gulch Fire (Red Skies Over Montana) in Hollywood style. Most of the

exterior shots were taken at Nine Mile as well as the training portions. The rest was shot in locations somewhere else. Many of the returning jumpers had been extras in the film and shared their impressions of the film with us newbies.

So the fire season of 1953 came to an end. We were laid off and returned to our homes or other places of work. I was at home in Vancouver, Washington, and thought I should maybe go see the Selective Service Office downtown. I found myself at Fort Ord, California, just ten days later.

I can say that I have lived in seven old CCC Camps, taken off in planes 16 times without landing, and climbed down from three trees that I had not climbed up. Now I am medically grounded, but life has been pretty interesting so far. 🔦





Order using  
the form on  
the insert!

# SMOKEJUMPER MERCHANDISE



## Three solid choices in our classic caps collection!

Choose from the smooth nylon of the navy blue SMOKEJUMPERS cap (top), the dignified khaki twill U.S. Forest Service Smokejumpers (right) or the Smokejumpers 75th anniversary cap. All feature attention-grabbing style and long-lasting construction!

The SMOKEJUMPERS cap offers gold embroidery and trim with a velcro strap. The U.S. Forest Service cap has a brass buckle and green-and-white "sandwich"-style bill, while the 75th anniversary cap offers a lighter shade of khaki as it commemorates the storied history of smokejumping's establishment in 1940. Why not order one of each?

• SMOKEJUMPERS cap \$20 • USFS Smokejumpers cap \$16 • 75th anniversary cap \$9 •



## Compact technology: Your all-time NSA record

This handy thumb drive contains every edition of *The Static Line* (1993-99) and *Smokejumper* magazine (1999-present) ever published.

Looking for an article about the early days of jumping? Trying to find a name of a smokejumper once featured in a story? Now you have total access. Makes an excellent, environmentally friendly gift! **\$24**

## Pin up this great new style

Stylish SMOKEJUMPERS logo pin with our new logo looks fantastic on a cap or lapel. Stays secure with double-post fasteners. Shiny chrome finish. *Order several ... you get FREE shipping!* **\$3**



## You've been framed!

Top of this license plate frame reads "Jumpin' Fires" while the bottom reads "Smokejumpers." White letters on a black background. Buy one for each of your vehicles, and save!



**\$3 each, or two for \$5**

## Polo shirt that brings you style and comfort! How will *you* wear it?

Honeycomb pique ... it offers breathability and outright comfort – combined with sharp, crisp looks – better than anything on the market. You get it all with this outstanding polo-style shirt ... with the SMOKEJUMPERS logo embroidered on the chest in gold.

Thanks to its outstanding style, this shirt looks great on the golf course, tennis court or with a pair of cotton slacks. Wear it to "dress up" a pair of jeans. You can't go wrong! M, L, XL and XXL. Navy blue only. **\$32**



## Are you still hangin' around?

These high-quality t-shirts feature spectacular artwork of an "old" smokejumper dangling from a tree. Ash-gray t-shirt will withstand many years of washing. Perfect for the gym, around the house or around town! M, L, XL and XXL. **\$17**



## Our most popular t-shirt!

People love this shirt ... and the quantity we've sold proves it! Shirt features stylized "SMOKEJUMPERS" on the front with fabulous artwork of jumping action on back. Hazy light blue (M, L, XL, XXL) with short sleeves. **\$17**



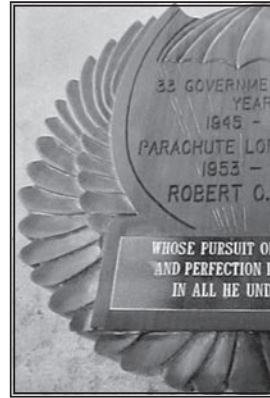
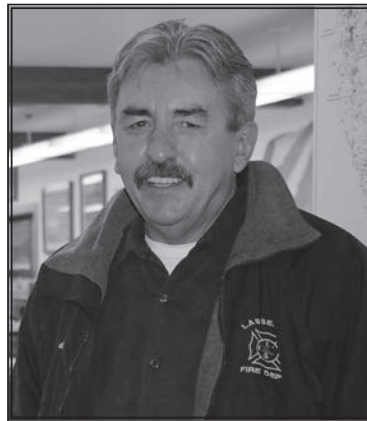
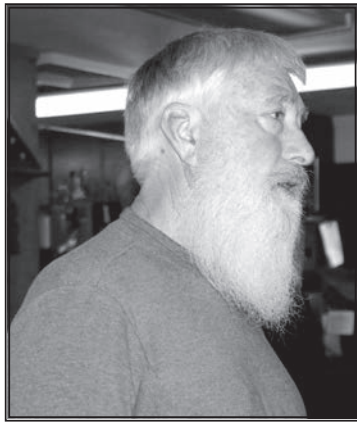
## Movie inspired many dreams of smokejumping for young men

Loosely based on the Mann Gulch Fire in which 12 jumpers and a firefighter died, "Red Skies of Montana" fascinated many young men about life "out West." Released in 1952. **\$15**



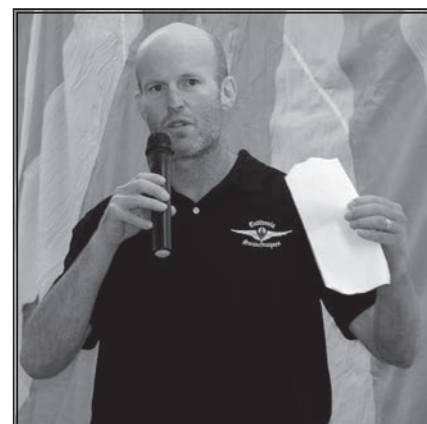
## Exhaustive DVD tells the story of smokejumping from beginning

"Smokejumpers: Firefighters From the Sky" is a definitive record of smokejumping, featuring 120 minutes of history from 1939 to 2000. Footage filmed at current bases and in the field. **\$15**



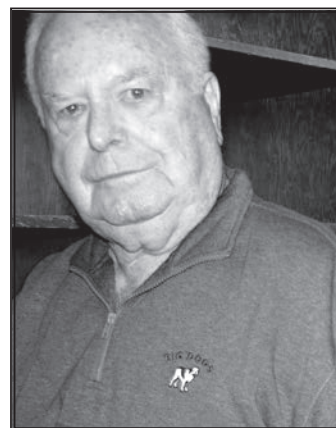
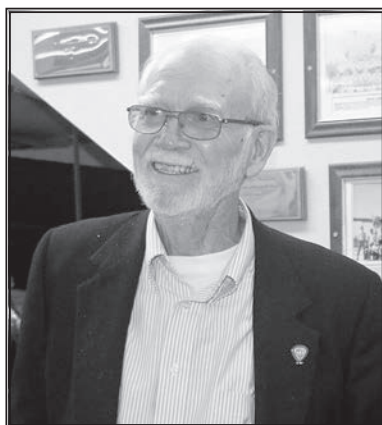
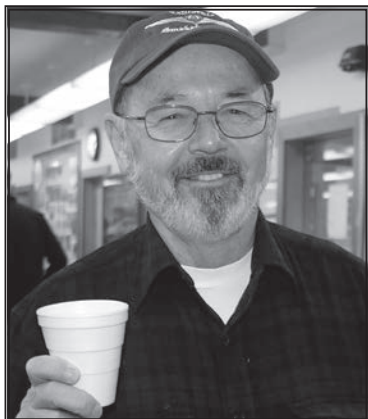
## Bob Kersh Loft Dedication

*Photos Courtesy of...*



*Layout Design: John...*





# Education Redding 2016

*esy K. Greene*



*my Kirkley (CJ-64)*





# BLAST FROM THE PAST



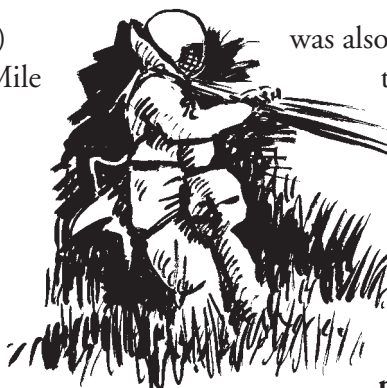
By Jack Demmons (Missoula '50)

AFTER REFRESHER TRAINING at Nine Mile in June 1951, a group of us were sent to Brown's Gulch on project work. In early July we were called back to Missoula as fire danger was worsening.

Harold "Mac" McElroy (MSO-51) had been with us, but he and I were sent on different fires. He was seriously injured on a jump in the Powell District when he slammed into a tree and suffered a broken leg. Eight jumpers were sent in on a rescue jump and two of them were injured. Lewis Thomas twisted an ankle and Wallace Campbell broke his wrist when he broke loose of a snag and fell 80 feet.

Mac was carried to the end of a road to a waiting ambulance. Thomas rode out on a horse and Campbell walked out. Mac was at Memorial Hospital the rest of the summer and most of the autumn with two pins in his leg. He was finally flown home, never to jump again.

Jim Forbes received two severe sprains of both ankles on a jump in the Salmon River area. My best friend during college days, Doug Wilkerson,



was also injured on that jump. He was thought to have fractured bones but was only badly bruised. That same day, Wade Peterson suffered an injured shoulder on a jump in Idaho. Smoke-jumper rescue teams went in after both men.

Over two years ago, I wrote a story about 18-year-old Barry Hammond who parachuted to a fire in the Helena N.F. When he landed in a tree, he was impaled by a stob that pierced his thigh and went into his abdominal cavity. Other jumpers had to climb up and cut him from the tree, leaving the broken stob inside him. Dr. Amos Little walked in two miles to aid him.

Dr. Little was one of 13 doctors who were trained by the Missoula Smokejumper Base. After that training he was sent to Fort Benning and went through airborne training. While in the service, he made 52 training and rescue jumps.

He had planned to jump in to treat Hammond, but because of the early morning darkness, that was not possible. Hammond made a full recovery but never jumped again. 🙏

*The Rice Cake Rangers in:*

## Flat Broke

by John Culbertson (Fairbanks '69)

*The sun was down and just up the mountain from the fields, Franklin Lundberg, top hand on the rice farm, stepped into the ranger's office.*

"Evening ranger."

"Hello Franklin, what brings you out at this hour?"

"Working."

"Don't you ever take a break?"

"Farmers feed America," Franklin smiled.

The ranger set a fist full of official looking papers

on the desk, "You know that's Federal water you're using."

"Yes Sir, and we appreciate it."

"I know you do, Franklin." The ranger looked at the ceiling, "We are diverting that water from, ah, something that's endangered." The ranger shuffled through papers on his desk.

"Smelt sir."

"Smelt? The ranger paused, "Well, I knew it was something we are concerned with."

"Yes sir, little fish. By the way I came to tell you something."

The ranger put the papers down.

Franklin said, "It's your new guy, Dick something or other. You know, the guy with the funny glasses."

"Google Glasses."

"Yes sir. That's him."

"Our environmental compliance officer. Documents everything. Very efficient they tell me."

The ranger looked doubtful, paused, and went back to the papers.

"Well, anyway, he's got a flat on his new mountain bike and he doesn't know how to fix it," said Franklin. "He's stuck up there by that toilet you had built and then he had fenced off. You know, kind of like an outhouse."

The ranger looked out the window then back to Franklin. "Didn't give him a ride?"

"We offered but he turned it down."

"Turned it down?"

"Yes Sir. Said it was against regulations."

"Well, I should go up and get him." The ranger said, "He's lobbying to get sent to mountain bike school in Atlanta."

"Atlanta?"

"Yes, Atlanta." The Ranger fished around in a desk drawer and pulled out a jug of generic ibuprofen. "The government is holding classes down there. They call it One Sizing or something like that."

"California is in the Atlanta region?" asked Franklin.

"No!" The ranger turned and looked out the window, gulped a couple of pills without water.

"Each region has a specialty. Atlanta specializes in mountain bikes. Other stuff. It's complicated."

"Well anyway, we told Dick we would pass the word. He said we had permission to do that."

The ranger rubbed his brow with a pencil, "He said that? I would go up there myself but I'm timed out on vehicle use."

"Timed out?"

"Franklin, you don't want to know."

"No sir, I suppose I don't."

"Say, why don't we just run by and pick him up with our welding rig," Franklin offered. "We are going up past there to fix a gate anyway."

"One of our gates?"

Franklin looked at the floor, "Well, I don't know. I told the fella that blew it out we would take care of it."

"Blew it out!" Who?"

"Oh, Scott Warner on the trail project with that smokejumper bunch."

"What's Warner doing blowing a gate out?" The ranger gulped down more ibuprofen.

"Well, I guess it had something to do with Dick sir. I guess he told them the 4N65 fire road was closed because it posed a silt hazard to dry creek. You know how it doesn't have any dips or drains and Warner said – well, I'm not going to say what he said - but anyway, he came down to the farm and asked if he could use our grader. He's a Forest Engineer you know."

"Our road to the trail project? And Dick told him not to use it?" the ranger said.

"Yes sir. You know ranger, you should eat something with those pills."

The ranger fished around in his desk again. Came up with a bag of organic rice cakes, started reading the label. "So you loaned Warner your grader?"

"Yes sir, plus they offered to fix that boggy patch down on our section of road. They are a likeable bunch working for free and all."

The ranger rolled his pencil on the desk – back and forth, back and forth. "You say you can fix that gate?"

"Couple of welds."

The ranger let the pencil go over the side, then handed Franklin a rice cake. "Wife says I have to cut down on fat." They both munched.

"Not a bad taste," said Franklin. "Good new product."

"So, Franklin," the ranger asked. "If you are fixing that gate, it's official business right?"

"Well I guess, but we don't mind doing it," said Franklin.

The ranger stood and extended his hand, "We appreciate it."

Franklin smiled, "Thank you ranger."

"And while you are up there on official business, tell that stupid SOB to get in your truck and stay with you till he's out of the forest."

"Yes sir, we will try."

"Thank you, Franklin."

"You bet." 🦋

# THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE THE FENCE



by **Chris Sorensen**  
(Associate)

IN MARCH, HOUSE Republicans introduced a bill that would abolish law enforcement within the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management and pay local police to patrol federal lands instead. It also demands that the Secretary of Interior provide states funding to manage law enforcement on public land. The bill, called "Local Enforcement for Local Lands Act of 2016," was sponsored by Utah Representatives Rob Bishop (R), chairman on the House Natural Resources Committee, Jason Chaffetz (R), Chris Stewart (R), and Mia Love (R). High Country news has done extensive coverage of the Forest Service and BLM law enforcement situation.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the cleanup of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge will cost four million

dollars, following the 41-day siege by militants. The cost of destroyed archaeological assets and the compromise of personnel files is unknown. I have seen photos of the site and it is a mess. I have not seen any estimate of what equipment might have been stolen or destroyed. Four million dollars would probably bring the West Yellowstone Smoke-jumper Base up to standards for the next 50 years and build a dorm in Redding. We have heard nothing new on the status of the West Yellowstone Base at deadline.

By the time you read this issue, two new books on the Yarnell Hill Fire will have been published: "My Lost Brothers: The Untold Story by the Yarnell Hill Fire's Lone Survivor" by Brendan McDonough and Stephan Talty and "The Fire Line: The Story of the Granite Mountain Hotshots and One of the Deadliest Days in American Firefighting" by Fernanda Santos. These two books marks the third and fourth books written about the Yarnell Hill Fire to date. John Maclean is also writing a book on the fire.

A movie on the Granite Mountain Hotshots and the Yarnell Hill Fire is in pre-production. The working title of the movie is "No Exit," and the movie is based on the article of the name written by

Sean Flynn and published in GQ magazine. Josh Brolin and Miles Teller have been hired to star in the film. No production date has been set. This movie seems to be just a little too soon after the tragedy, and I am not sure the last chapter has been written. I personally don't think there are many Directors, short of someone like Steven Spielberg, that can truly capture the essence of wildland firefighting on film, much less a fatal fire. Some things just don't lend themselves to cinema.

The April 5, 2016 edition of the Phoenix New Times has an article (entire article available on the NSA website under "news") in which **Ted Putnam** (MSO-66) alleges a cover-up in the Yarnell Hill Fire Staff Ride Facilitators Guide, which was published in February by the Arizona Department of Forestry. The guide is linked in the Phoenix New Times version of the article. The facilitators guide and a staff ride for family members was required as part of a settlement between the Arizona Forestry Division and family members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots.

The Air Force is considering moving the MAFFS unit from the North Carolina Air National Guard to the Nevada Air National Guard's 152<sup>nd</sup> air lift wing. The Montana Air Guard transitioned from



the F-16 to the C-130 several years ago. Part of the justification was having the MAFFS system in Montana for rapid response in Western States. Senator Steve Daines (R) Montana sent the Air Force a letter questioning the move. In part he said, "I am incred-

ibly disappointed with this decision as it denies a vital wildland suppression mission to the State of Montana, where almost three times as many wildfires occurred last year compared to Nevada." While the Air Force has the right to deploy assets as it sees fit, this

sure smacks of politics.

At deadline, on April 10, Missoula, Grangeville and West Yellowstone jumpers were working a 1000 acres fire in the Bob Marshal Wilderness. It is possible that this is the earliest fire in the season ever staffed by Missoula jumpers. 🧯

# Fire Jump At The Western Edge Of America

by Allen Biller (Fairbanks '82)

“This is a joke, right?” one jumper said as he approached ‘The Box,’ the operations desk of the Alaska Smokejumpers. “Where the hell is Little Diomedé?” said another.

The spotter and pilot were already standing in front of the large wall map of Alaska, trying to pinpoint the location. It was not a joke. There was indeed a fire on Little Diomedé, an island off the west coast of Alaska in the Bering Strait. It was Labor Day 1991.

Twenty minutes later we were airborne, headed west. The Alaska Smokejumper standard six-minute getaway time was extended while the logistics of the flight were worked out with the spotter, pilots, and dispatch.

There were only five jumpers on board, not counting spotters and pilots. Almost all the available Alaska smokejumpers were boosting jump bases in the Lower 48. One load of eight jumpers (referred to as the “hostage load”) were kept in Alaska to man late-season fires and to staff the one remaining jumpship on contract.

Jumpers on this load were **Lance Clouser** (FBX-85), **Rod Dow** (MYC-68), **Jon Larson** (FBX-89), **Rob Collins** (RAC-69) and me. The other three jumpers on the hostage load were off the list for one reason or another. The pilots were Roger Oppedahl and Gary Hunt.

The Short C-23 Sherpa jumpship landed at the BLM Galena fire station, 275 miles west of Fair-

banks. We refueled and continued on to Nome, on the Bering Sea coast. There, we refueled again and consulted with local Coast Guard personnel on what to expect in the vicinity of the island.

One of the Coast Guardsmen thought it would be impossible to jump because of high winds. Little Diomedé lies in the middle of the Bering Strait between Alaska and Siberia, 16 miles west of Cape Wales—the westernmost point on the North American continent. Little Diomedé is located just east of the International Date Line in the Bering Sea.

Big Diomedé, a larger island, lies 2 1/2 miles further west on the western side of the International Date Line. It belongs to Russia.

Upon departing Nome, we skirted the south coast of the Seward Peninsula, passed Wales, and headed out over the ocean. As we approached the island, it appeared to be nothing more than a big rock jutting out of the sea. As we got closer, I could see sparse brown vegetation growing on the mesa-like top of the island. There were also hundreds of boulders scattered about.

Near the middle of the island, an area of about three-quarters of an acre looked to be relatively free of large boulders, offering a possible jump spot.

As we circled we could see a small, wispy plume of smoke rising from the southwestern side of the island, which sloped steeply down to the

sea. The fire appeared to be creeping amid large angular boulders that covered the entire slope. I was unable to see any vegetation among the large rocks, but something had to be burning.

The Inuit village on the island, Inalik, also lay on the western side of the island. The 25 or so houses were perched on the slope amid the rocks just above the ocean on the northwestern side of the island.

Big Diomedé, a much larger island, loomed to the west. Beyond Big Diomedé, we could see the coast of Siberia, less than 25 miles away.

Diomedé is one of the most remote communities on earth. There are no roads or airstrip. The only access to the island is by boat or helicopter. In winter the Bering Sea freezes, allowing locals to sometimes carve out a runway in the ice.

As we orbited the island, we crossed over the International Date Line less than a mile away. Each time we crossed, we were effectively passing, time-wise, into another day and then back again. I'm sure we were being monitored on Russian radar.

Spotter **C.R. Holder** (MSO-70) and assistant spotter **Steve Theisen** (FBX-86) made their way to the back of the plane and opened the jump door. The only level spot on the island was the very top, an area of about 600 yards long by 300 yards wide. The remainder of the island consisted of boulder fields, steep slopes, and sheer cliffs that ran down to the ocean's edge.

We determined that the safest jump spot, indeed, the only jump spot, was the small grassy area on the flat cap of the island. C.R. threw the streamers.

Pushed by a stiff breeze out of the south, they quickly blew out over the sea on the north side of the island. C.R. threw a second set. They landed among boulders near the north rim of the island. He turned to us and said the streamers indicated about 600 yards of drift. Though none of us mentioned it, we all knew that if anyone missed landing on the top of the big rock and ended up in the sea, he was not going to survive.

All of us were jumping ram-air parachutes. The faster forward speed and increased maneuverability were obviously an advantage over a round canopy in these conditions.

Six hundred yards of drift is a lot of drift, even

for a fire on the mainland. If you screw up and miss the spot, you risk possible injury.

Six hundred yards of drift, when you are trying to hit a relative speck of land in the middle of the ocean, is another matter. If you missed landing in the DZ, you would be saddling your co-workers with a body recovery.

As the first jumper in the door, I became the fire boss. We dropped in altitude to get a closer look at the jump spot. I made my way down the plane and asked each jumper individually if he felt comfortable jumping this fire. All said yes.

---

*I made my way down the plane and asked each jumper individually if he felt comfortable jumping this fire. All said yes.*

---

I never asked the Diomedé jumpers what their inner thoughts were on that day. I know that I felt I could land in the designated landing area. But in the back of my mind I thought of the consequences if a major wind change occurred or something else unexpectedly happened.

I also considered if I were to screw up and do something stupid that would cause me to miss the top of the island. As all smokejumpers know, a potentially dangerous or hairy jump tends to up the pucker factor and focuses the concentration. There were no superfluous thoughts going through my mind when I left the plane.

We did one-man sticks. With all the factors to consider on this jump, maintaining separation from your jump partner was an element we didn't need and one we could eliminate. I think all of us did a longer-than-normal delay before pulling our drogue release (rip cords). This served to lower our altitude on opening and shortened our time under canopy, which in turn lessened our time at the mercy of the wind.

As it turned out, the winds on the day of the jump were the calmest winds experienced during our time on the island. For the rest of our stay, the wind blew 30-40 mph all day. Even though the air temperature was not cold – around 50 degrees

– the wind increased the wind chill to the point where we were forced to wear all the warm clothes we had.

Luckily, all of us had brought extra layers as well as heavy-duty wind/rain parkas.

The jump was anticlimactic. I had no trouble landing where I intended. I was more intent on getting my camera out of my PG bag so I could photograph the other jumpers as they came in for landing. All made the spot due to some good chute handling and the expert spotting by C.R. and Steve. And I got some good photographs.

We quickly got out of our jumpsuits and bagged up our gear. Now we had to figure out how to get to the fire. The side slope of the island was very steep and carpeted with rocks of all shapes and sizes. We had our gear and fire packs to move as well.

As if in answer to prayer, a helicopter appeared. It was the mail helicopter from Nome that flew out to Diomedes once a week. I flagged the pilot down and he landed next to me. I asked him if he was willing and able to shuttle our gear to the village. He enthusiastically answered yes.

I loaded the gear into the rear of the Boelkow BO-105 chopper. On the second shuttle, I climbed aboard and the pilot deposited the gear and me on a helispot fashioned from an old steel barge on the shore at Inalik. Children from the village had watched us jump, and several had walked up the steep slope to the jump spot. They led the jumpers over the lip and down a trail to the village.

Villagers greeted me as I got off the helicopter. I quickly unloaded the gear. The other jumpers and the local children arrived shortly after.

We introduced ourselves to several residents and briefly discussed our plan. We gathered up tools, food and water and headed to the fire. Luckily, a trail snaked out from the village almost all the way to the location of the fire. We didn't have to clamber over rocks on the steep slope and risk twisting an ankle or worse.

The fire was smoldering in peat deep among



*L-R: Rob Collins, Rod Dow, Allen Biller, Jon Larson, Lance Clouser (Courtesy A. Biller)*

the rocks and was about an eighth of an acre in size. There was no open flame. There were many empty fire extinguishers lying among the rocks. Apparently, villagers didn't want the fire to reach the fuel tanks supplying the village, and so they did what they could.

Accessing the burning peat was difficult. Some of the crevices in the rocks were too small for a Pulaski head. It didn't stop us from grubbing and mopping as best we could. Water would greatly help in this situation.

With the help of a local and a boat, we set up a Mark 3 pump at the base of the cliff beneath the fire, dropped the draft hose into the ocean, and attempted to pump water up to the fire. The elevation gain from the sea to the fire location was too great. The pump couldn't handle the load. We'd have to do without water.

Officials in the village had made arrangements for us to sleep on the floor in a room in the city office.

Each day for the next four days we woke, ate breakfast, and walked out to the fire location. Once there, we commenced the frustrating job of trying to dig the burning peat out from among the rocks where we could extinguish it.



Obviously, the fire wasn't going anywhere. Just as obvious was the fact that we were not going to be able to put the fire completely out and totally eliminate the smoke. The winter snows would accomplish that. As with all peat fires, it is often Mother Nature who finally extinguishes the fire, and I thought that would probably be the result in this case.

In talking to the village officials, I became aware that our presence was more political than practical. The native corporation, to which Inalik belonged, had requested Alaska Fire Service personnel for the fire. That is why we were there.

As far as the cause, I think some young boys started the fire. The purpose may have been to smoke out some of the thousands of sea birds that were nesting among the rocks. I watched as the boys lie on their bellies, reach into a crevice of rock and bring out Auklet chicks. They didn't save them to eat. There is little if any meat on chicks that are only days old.

Jon Larson told me the following: "I asked one boy how he thought the fire had started. He thought carefully, then answered that he figured the sun shining through the dew, like a magnifying glass, started the peat on fire. Very clever."

There were seabirds present on Diomedes that are rarely seen outside of the Bering Strait area. For the first time in Alaska I saw puffins. Other birds seen were murrelets and kittiwakes. There were other species that I did not recognize.

All during the day, tens of thousands of sea birds of different species skimmed over the cliffs and out to sea. Many of them had nests in the rocks. I've since read that more than a million sea birds nest on the island.

We walked around the village and visited with residents. There was a polar bear skin on a stretching frame outside one house. A large open boat, the hull covered with walrus skin, rested on a platform about 20 yards from the sea. A villager told me they still used it to hunt whales and seals.

One day a man asked us if we wanted to see the "meat hole." He led us over to a pit beneath the rocks that was covered by a hinged piece of plywood. He said he would get us some Eskimo food to eat.

He opened it. The stench of rotting meat wafted out of the hole. With a long-handled gaff,

he hooked a chunk of walrus meat and brought it to the surface. The smell was almost enough to make you throw up. He seemed surprised. After evaluating the situation, he said that the meat had spoiled and that they needed to clean out the "meat hole."

Whale and seal meat was in the hole, as well as walrus; all had been killed the previous winter. I'm sure there is no permafrost beneath the surface of Diomedes like it is on the mainland. The only refrigeration in the "meat hole" was the surrounding air, which explains the rotting meat. This was September.

There was a small grocery store in the town owned and operated by the village corporation. One of the jumpers asked if anyone in town might have some ivory carvings for sale. At that point a lady brought out a cigar box.

Inside were many figurines carved out of walrus tusk ivory and whale baleen. She explained that there were few jobs in the village and that most adults were unemployed. They still had grocery tabs, as well as phone and electric bills to pay. Quite a few people paid their bills by trading ivory carvings for food and phone and electric service. I purchased two carvings, and the other jumpers bought ones as well.

All the villagers were very friendly and eager to answer our questions concerning their culture and lifestyle in this remote corner of the world. They told us how their relatives on Big Diomedes were moved to the Russian mainland many years ago, preventing them from visiting in the wintertime as they had in the past. Only recently had they been able to re-connect with their kin.

When we were ready to leave the island, the mail helicopter flew our gear and us to Cape Wales on the tip of the Seward Peninsula. Lance Clouser told me later that flying across the open sea in the helicopter was as nervous as he's ever been demobbing a fire. As he said, "nothing but icy water below for 20 miles." A fixed-wing plane met us at the Wales airstrip and flew us back to Fairbanks.

I think all the jumpers present would agree that this fire was one of the most unusual and memorable experiences of our smokejumping careers. This was the westernmost fire jump in North America. 🦋



# ODDS AND ENDS



by **Chuck Sheley**

Congratulations and thanks to **Bill Hale** (MSO-53) and **Brad Willard** (MSO-58) who just became our latest Life Member(s).

**Cecil Hicks** (NCSB-62): "My wife blames me for starting a Hicks forestry fire fighting dynasty in north Idaho. Our oldest son, **Brian** (MSO-95), is the assistant fire management officer at the U.S. Forest Service district here in Sandpoint, Idaho. Our twin sons, Shawn and Matt, both work for the Idaho State Department of Lands. Shawn is the chief fire warden in Sandpoint, and Matt just took on a new assignment with the Idaho State Department of Lands as the state's fire training and safety officer. He'll be working out of Coeur'Alene, Idaho. Our grandson Devin (Brian's son) works for the Department of Lands on a fire crew at Priest Lake, Idaho, and will probably start back again for the state in April. Plus, a granddaughter of ours just got engaged to a man who works on the Forest Service fire crew at the Sandpoint district. I guess that would make him our grandson-in-law."

**Dale Soria** (NCSB-70): "I have my Whites that I bought in 1970 and would be happy to send them for the traveling museum. But first you have to listen to their story.

"I flew into Wenatchee in June 1970 from Monterey, California. I hitchhiked from Wenatchee to Okanogan, where I did all the paperwork required of a new jumper. I did not know hitchhiking was against the law in Washington. The gals in the office were concerned that I planned to hitchhike to Winthrop and arranged a ride with Ken Cavin, a crusty old salt who flew our DC-3.

"On the trip to Winthrop, Ken schooled me



on the ways of the smokejumping world. The main thing he told me was that they were not interested in how we fought fire in California. Then he asked me about my boots. I proudly showed him my J.C. Penny boots, which he called chicken skins. He took me to a store in Twisp, where I tried on a pair of Whites. They were \$95, \$100 with tax. I had maybe \$20 and told the salesman I would come back when I got paid. He knew I would not see my first check for a month and told me to take them and pay for them when I had money. I was blown away. The reputation of the jumpers was so good they extended credit to a new guy from California!

"The boots served me well during my four seasons of jumping, then for backpacking, and finally cutting wood while we lived in Yosemite. By the way I was **Jan van Wagtendonk's** (CJ-60) dentist while in Yosemite. Chuck, the boots are pretty worn, with cracked leather and p-cord laces. I am not sure why I have kept them. But as **Dick Wildman** (NCSB-61) used to say, "If these boots could talk." Being in the museum would be a glorious end for these old friends."

**Russell Graham** (Research Forester): "Read in the last issue about the '47 water bomb project. Harry T. Gisborne and Jack Barrows of the Northern Rocky Mountain Research Station led the research part of this project. Barrows was in the Air Force in WWII and that gave him connections to the military. They did a lot of work with Johnson Flying Service. Gisborne died on the fireline of Mann Gulch when he went there in November of '49 to investigate the fire behavior. In 1999 he was added as the 14th casualty of the fire. Jack Barrows went on to be the person that got the Fire Lab in Missoula started." 🦋

---

# READERS COMMENTS

---

[RE: “Smokejumpers—The Mission Has Changed? Why?” January 2016]

An excellent article. This has been what I have long suspected – the two-manners are not being manned.

Fires start small. Lightning ignites the snags and the single trees up there in the rocks and ridges of the high country. The environmentalists will cry, “This is nature’s way.” Their thinking is that they’ll burn themselves out. Not true. When the midday winds come up, embers from these burning snags will fly into the flammable forests below and a whole drainage burns out.

Now it takes people, planes, helicopters, and a half million dollars to suppress. The official doctrine is that the manning goes to protect the urban interface. Of course, but why? Is this some kind of a budget justification?

A group of folks believe the forests are overgrown because of the excellent fire suppression of the past. They listen to the experts, whoever they are, and the environmentalists, who think that nobody should be in the woods. Many of these folks are my friends, and they are sincere. They also don’t venture into the mountains much further than the authorized campsites. They don’t see the burned-out drainages of central Idaho.

It has been a long time since I have been under a parachute, but for the last five decades I have flown the Idaho backcountry by plane, have traveled the ridges on horseback and on foot. Believe me, too many large valleys exist, one after the other, with the terrain covered with nothing but black snags and brush. What little reproduction grows back in lodgepole pine in the draws and on the edges of the burn. Lodgepole, in 25-30 years, is susceptible to bug kill. Then what follows is a flammable forest tinderbox. Global warming, indeed!

Let’s go back to suppressing the two-manners. I’d like to see pictures of yellow-shirted firefighters throwing dirt instead of holding drip torches.

Bring back the spruces, the Douglas Firs and the Ponderosa Pines. That is what our National Forests used to be. If the feds buy into that, then double the budget for the FIRST IN – the smoke-

jumpers.

As you can see, I can get excited about fire and forest management on federal lands, our lands. Maybe I should write a book.

—Bud Filler (McCall ’52)

*Bud earned degrees in Forestry from Penn State and the University of British Columbia and was an officer in the U.S. Army, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He is the co-founder of the Filler-King Company, a manufacturer of structural wood products, and Jump Creek Lumber Company. Bud is the author of “Two-Man Stick, Memoirs of a Smokejumper.”*

[RE: “Is The Forest Service Making The Best Decision In Going To The Square Chute?” October 2015]

During the later portion on my smokejumper carrier with both BLM and the USFS, I was a strong proponent of using squares in USFS operations. This included my thesis for Technical Fire Management (TFM) in 1991, a cost-value analysis of using ram-airs in Region 6 of the USFS. I have since become somewhat less enthusiastic, but not for the reasons cited in Chuck’s article.

Early on, I had some misgivings about the technical complexities involved in deploying and flying ram-airs, but in a world of (daily) increasingly technical complexity, I accepted this as evolutionary. Routine jobs now require knowledge that used to be regarded as the domain of experts.

My concern is this: It is, I believe, inevitable that there will be fatalities associated with the use of ram-airs. These will not be due to issues inherent in their design or performance. I believe that they will result from a very simple fact - most smokejumpers are not skydivers, and some (many? most?) are not particularly comfortable in any kind of free-fall situation that results from a ram-air malfunction.

Despite the best design and training, which I honestly believe is provided by the agencies, some jumpers (and it may only be one in 1,000 or one in 10,000) will not follow the procedures in order to save their lives. It has happened, and it will



happen again.

In the aftermath of the **Billy Martin** (LGD-79) fatality, I did a great deal of research on this issue. A Navy study investigated the (rare) failure of its pilots to eject when their aircraft becomes disabled. The study concluded that these few highly trained and qualified individuals decided to ride their aircraft in because they felt in control in the cockpit environment, whereas they had no idea what would happen when they punched out. I maintain that some few jumpers will elect to attempt to correct their malfunction rather than cut away. As long as that main is there, even if it's junk, they will believe they can get it right rather than admit it's last chance time.

So, my question is this: Do we continue to maintain that the job of smokejumping is not really risky after all, or do we accept the inevitable and dispense with the handwringing and the searching for scapegoats when it does happen? I am quite sure that the agencies will continue to provide world-class training and equipment to jumpers, and will strive to be truly accident free. But! Somebody needs to own up to, affirm, and be responsible for the decision to use ram-airs. On whose desk is "The Buck Stops Here" sign?

— Mike Fitzpatrick (Redmond '78)

[RE: "Smokejumpers—The Mission Has Changed? Why?" January 2016]

The Obama administration sought a long-term fix for funding wildfire costs by classifying them as natural disasters – i.e. Tornados, Hurricanes, Earthquakes, Floods, etc. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee decided against that approach saying more review is needed "to make sure it would work as intended." What were they thinking? They weren't thinking!

But, why doesn't the Forest Service expand the Smokejumper Program? Chuck's excellent column suggests at least 200 more than the current 400+ smokejumpers would save money by reducing the number of large, high cost fires by getting to the fires early, before they become large and create their own weather. That makes so much sense, but maybe that's why it isn't done.

One reason might be that more forest areas are now accessible by road. Another, that areas like

the "Bob," other designated wilderness areas like the Frank Church Wilderness in the Salmon N.F., or most National Forests in Alaska are considered areas where wildfire helps restore the forest since there is no logging and replanting of trees taking place. Why aren't jumpers used within hours of a fire alert instead of days?

Smokejumpers were the airborne 1st responders for wildfire, medical assistance and evacuation, and rescues like the earthquake in Yellowstone N.P. But there is another reason smokejumpers haven't been expanded or used to their full potential. Wildfire suppression hasn't been "federalized." I could be wrong, if so I stand corrected, but some local forests still have control over the use of smokejumpers. If wildfire were federalized through the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), then smokejumper and hotshot assets could be deployed sooner to prevent the large runaway fires in areas considered endangering wilderness areas, populated areas, or areas with limited or no vehicle access. The control of how the fire is fought should be in the hands of the smokejumper and hotshot crews rather than local district personnel.

Maybe the fire policy has changed since 1956, and I sure hope it has, but my first fire in the Salmon N.F. was on Owl Creek with 16 fellow smokejumpers. Seven, including myself, were rookies from Missoula: **Jess Abney, Dave Barnhardt, Joe Janus, Art Jukkala, Ken Knoll and Joe Lord**. We jumped on Sunday afternoon, July 22, and split into two teams of eight and attacked each side of the fire. We worked through the night and had the fire controlled by mid-morning on Monday, checked and improved the line on Tuesday, and turned it over to a ground crew late Tuesday, and returned to Missoula on Wednesday. The District Ranger gave full control to our smokejumper team.

My second fire in the Salmon N.F. was on Horse Creek (Roan Ridge), but in a different Ranger District. Our Team Leader had been on fires in this district before and referred to the Ranger as "shithead"! We soon found out why, as we were told we could not work at night, had to take breaks, and had to rotate crews on the line. He micromanaged the crewleaders all the time.

The fire response started with 40 smokejump-

ers from McCall on August 13th, along with a 16-man crew from Missoula later that day. The rookies in that crew were **Ed Carmean, Don Courtney, John Grubb, Bill Murphy, and J.B. Stone**. Then on the 14th, McCall sent four more jumpers and Missoula sent 12. I was in that crew along with rookies Dave Barnhardt, Ken Knoll, and **Ray Schenck**. The fire kept jumping the line at night, and we would barely get control during the day, but lose it again during the night. Had the smokejumpers been in charge, the fire could have been controlled within two days rather than five!

The high cost of wildfire suppression has forced the Forest Service to take funds from needed projects like prescribed/managed burns, reforestation and research and development for improving forest ecology. It is time for the federal government to recognize wildfire as a natural disaster, remove the financial burden from the Forest Service's budget, and provide for the special funding of the smokejumpers and hotshots. In an ideal world it just may be possible. Not likely in the corrosive politics of a Presidential Election year.

—Jim Clatworthy (Missoula '56) 🌲

---

## Fires 2015 - Something is Wrong

by Bob Graham (Missoula '52)

---

**F**ire behavior has not changed over the years, however firefighting has changed and not always for the better.

Firefighting is a risky business. But with the correct policies and management decisions, much of that risk can be greatly diminished. Most of us firefighters thought it a privilege to fight fire, but none of us wanted to die or get injured for that privilege.

The 2015 wildfire program was one of the worst on record, and the worst on some parts of our forests and rangelands. Many issues have been raised since last year, and most of those involve: "What went wrong?" and "How can we reverse this trend towards larger, more expensive fires and the loss of valuable resources?"

I would like to make suggestions to those issues.

I participated daily as our Boundary County, Idaho, representative to the Federal and State firefighter overhead on two project fires, Bakers Camp and Parker Ridge, on the Idaho Panhandle Forest this past season. The FS did have what's called an After Action Review, but that was poorly attended and did not do anything in the area of identifying shortcomings or areas of needed improvement. The FS would benefit quite a bit by having a formal Board of Review on both fires. A good Board of Review is one of the best training tools for large fire

managers, and it usually points out areas needing attention.

It is my opinion that both fires were poorly planned and poorly managed, and may well be good indicators of a much larger National firefighting problem. Both were US Forest Service fires and under the management of level 3 ICS teams. Both fires started high on the slopes, and the second one started in bug killed, jackstraw Lodgepole Pine.

The first fire, Bakers Camp, was early in the season when most firefighting resources were available. This fire covered 49 acres and cost over 1.4 million dollars to fight. If I were ever involved in a 49-acre fire that cost a fraction of that amount, I would have fired myself. Perhaps there is such a point of being overly cautious or "Too Safe." The FS never got a control line around this fire as the managers claimed the ground was too dangerous to put manpower completely around the fire. Most of this expense was air resources of copters and fixed wing aircraft. The local ranger made the decision that it was unsafe for placing ground crews on the upper portion of the fire. Not lining any fire is normally a poor decision.

The second fire, Parker Ridge Fire, started on July 29 at a high level and slowly crept its way down to the valley bottom. A jumper crew might have been able to control this fire before it began its

slow travel downhill. The ranger felt there was no jump spot, but that should have been decided by ordering a jumper load and let the jumpers decide to jump or not. This fire blew out at the bottom on August 14, two weeks after its start. At the last public release, this fire was 6600 acres and cost over four million dollars, actual firefighting costs, not including resource losses. On September 3, the fire was declared only 50 % contained and was only 65% contained on September 24. Most of this fire had no line construction nor crew activity as the FS once more figured it was too dangerous to place line workers in unsafe areas. Air resources, other than jumpers, were used extensively. The upper 2/3rds of the fire did not ever have ground crews, nor did they have manpower backing up the retardant and water drops on the upper 2/3rds.

Since the FS had decided not to take any action on the top or sides of this fire, the only real objective of the fire plan was to keep this fire from crossing a main county road at the bottom of the fire. This objective was not achieved. The fire not only eventually crossed this road, it crossed bottom farmland and the Kootenai River itself, threatening quite a few homes and structures.

I will address some of the areas that wildland firefighters need to re-consider and hopefully improve on.

On both of these fires, the ranger and the overhead fire team thought that some of the terrain was too dangerous in which to build line and neither fire had completed lines. I have been on a lot of fires and do not remember any fire that we could not find a way to get a line around somewhere. It may require some burnout, but that is part of fighting fire and is good planning and execution. Neither fire was declared controlled until late in the fall.

The Parker Ridge Fire took two weeks to slowly creep down the mountain side on the lower three sides. The main portion of the fire was on a large timbered south-facing slope and for two weeks the fire came down that slope in multiple fingers, as many as 12 fingers at one time. This was a great opportunity to build handline across this area and burnout between fingers as you go. This would have stopped the spread of the fire long before it threatened the road and structures. Management decided to build a line just above the county road. When I asked if they would then burn out above

the line, they said yes. But they never did burn this line out, and once the fingers grew together, coupled with high winds, the fire did not slow down until it had crossed the road and the river. Farmers finally stopped the fire in their farmlands.

Indirect attack rarely works in moderate slope timber country. However, direct attack and placing crews near the fire appears to not be an option.

Apparently, once a decision is made at any level that an action would be unsafe, no higher level would ever countermand that decision. That is not bad in itself if the original decision maker is qualified to make the decision, or if someone up the ladder has the experience to evaluate that decision and change the approach where necessary.

Safety alone appears to have such a high level of weight, no one has the courage to invoke reason. Again, firefighting is a risky business, but safety should not be the only consideration. You must be more aggressive in firefighting, and I believe you can be more aggressive without sacrificing any reasonable safety goals. I believe that firefighters should have built control lines around the fires. Also, there seems to be a reluctance to fight fire at night. When burning conditions get real bad, you chase a fire in the day and catch them at night.

Is there a reluctance to make camps for crews and overhead at or near the fire itself? The firefighters and the overhead stayed in town, 25 miles from the fire. Sleeping on the ground is not that bad. Nor is eating rations if that increases the time for crews to be working on the fireline. Modern day rations are far better than the old "Cs" and Ks."

The managers had a briefing for all interested parties in town each morning. All the team members and some of the crew overhead attended this briefing. Time on the actual fire was limited to a few hours for all those attending. One has to wonder how much actual line construction time was spent compared to hours of time charged to the fire.

Are there too firm rules about hours and days on the job? Maybe instead of having a limit on how many hours one may work in a day, limit those hours to the line workers only, and only those hours actually building fireline. Place another greater time limit on other workers.

The FS apparently has a policy in the initial planning stage of "Less than Full Perimeter Attack" option. This sounds like they do not plan to build line

around the fire. I would hope that any such policy be carefully reviewed at higher levels, particularly in the early days of attack. Be more aggressive initially, then back off if it escapes the early stages.

I believe with proper fire management, these two fires could have been safely and aggressively attacked earlier, thereby limiting the damage to our National Forests and adjacent private properties. 🧑‍🔥

*Bob Graham retired under Firefighters retirement after 38 years of fire. His red card rating was the top rating in the national system for many years, including GHQ FIRE MANAGER as well as LINE BOSS 1 and PLANS CHIEF 1. He led one of the most successful fire teams in the US for 12 years. He taught the COMMAND function at Marana for Fire Generalship, Fire Command, and Fire Behavior.*

## 2015 Al Dunton Leadership Award Winners

**T**he Al Dunton (FBX-67) Leadership Award is presented annually to one BLM and one USFS smokejumper who goes beyond the requirements of the job and demonstrates excellence in leadership in one or more of the Wildland Fire Leadership Principles. This year's award winners are **Eric Messenger** (GAC-00) and **Ezra Butterfield** (FBX-06). The descriptions of these outstanding individuals from their nomination papers as follows:

**Eric Messenger** is a spotter with the McCall Smokejumpers. Aside from his responsibilities as a Smokejumper Spotter, Eric serves as a fully qualified ICT3 (Incident Command Type 3), DIVS (Division Group Supervisor), RXB2 (Prescription Fire Burn Boss) and SOFR (Safety Officer). Eric has also been actively involved with the McCall Smokejumper Rookie Training Program for eight years, including serving the last

two years as the Lead Rookie Trainer.

Eric has been a leader in fire management for over twenty years. He does not seek praise for his exceptional performance over the years. In fact, he would rather that praise fall to those that he leads and the team. His leadership during the 2015 training and field season as a field-going firefighter and trainer are deserving of the highest praise that the McCall Smokejumpers and the National Smokejumper Program can muster.

**Ezra Butterfield** was asked to help instruct the USFS Ram-Air training in 2008. No one knew it at that time, but the Alaska Smokejumpers had just stumbled on to one of the most capable instructors at the base. He is a natural instructor with a strong command presence, a great knowledge of the BLM Smokejumper System, and has an excellent ability to explain processes to a student. The entire smokejumper com-

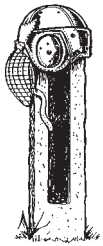


*Eric Messenger (Courtesy McCall Smokejumpers)*

munity has benefited from Ezra's ability to instruct. Since his initial involvement, Ezra has instructed multiple New Man Ram-Air classes, fire refreshers, parachute refreshers, rookie training, and tree climbing while holding a high professional standard.

Ezra is a solid decision maker, a team player, a good supervisor, accepts responsibility for his actions, leads by example, and is always looking out for the well-being of others. 🧑‍🔥





## Off The List

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

Chuck Sheley  
10 Judy Lane  
Chico, CA 95926

### **Phisit Indradat** (Associate Life Member)

Phisit died January 20, 2016, in Bangkok, Thailand. Many of us last saw Phisit when he attended the reunion in Missoula last July as a guest of Fred Rohrbach (MSO-65).

Phisit was a member of the crew of an Air America C-46 that was shot down September 5, 1963. Five people, including Gene DeBruin (MSO-59), parachuted from the flaming aircraft and were captured by Laotian forces. He survived being a prisoner in the jungle for three years, four months and four days before being rescued by a Cobra team of Laotian Rightist troops. During this time Phisit was involved in two escapes, both ending in his recapture.

Navy Lt. Dieter Dengler was also a prisoner with Phisit during the second breakout and his successful escape story was told in the movie *Rescue Dawn*. The film was filled with many inaccurate portrayals of the escape, especially downplaying the very important part Gene DeBruin played in that event.

After his rescue in 1967, Phisit returned to work at Air America until the U.S. withdrawal and fall of Indochina in 1975. He then worked for a Thai company and retired in Bangkok. Phisit was cremated wearing a Missoula Smokejumper t-shirt.

### **Joe N. Rumble** (Missoula '49)

Joe, 88, died January 5, 2016, at his home in Monitor, Washington. He graduated from Albuquerque High School in 1945 and studied forestry at the University of Idaho for a year before being drafted into the Navy in 1946. He returned to Idaho after being discharged in 1947, and graduated in 1952 with bachelor's degrees in both mining and metallurgical engineering.

He made his career with Alcoa, beginning at Wenatchee in 1956, and transferring to work as

ingot plant superintendent at Point Comfort, Texas, and Badin, North Carolina, retiring in 1987 with thirty-one years of service. He had bought an orchard near Wenatchee in 1970 and returned to manage it upon retiring. He was very active, enjoying running, biking, racquetball, skiing and hiking. He took up paragliding at the age of 70 and hiked the Appalachian Trail, finishing at age 76. Joe jumped at Missoula 1949-51.

### **William C. "Bill" Murphy** (Missoula '56)

Bill died February 23, 2016, in Dillon, Montana. Murph graduated from Hellgate High School and the University of Montana. He had a career with the USFS with positions in Oregon, Washington, South Dakota, Utah and Idaho. Murph jumped at Missoula 1956-64, and had 29 fire jumps during the busy 1961 fire season, and was the IC on many fires after his jumper career. He was very active in the NSA Trails Program and loved to ski. The Griz have lost one of their most ardent fans.

### **Robert O. "Bob" Rehfeld** (Missoula '45)

Bob died January 16, 2016, in Lewiston, Idaho. He graduated from the University of Montana, where he played tackle on the Grizzly football team, with a degree in Forestry in 1950. Bob served in the Army during the Korean War and returned to a career with the USFS, where he retired as Forest Supervisor for the Superior N.F. in 1982. Bob jumped during the 1945-46 seasons.

### **Jerry D. Blattner** (McCall '63)

Jerry died March 7, 2016, in Mesa, Arizona. After high school in Idaho, he went to work for the US Forest Service. Jerry rookie'd at McCall in 1962 and jumped there through the 1977 season. He had 252 jumps before retiring from jumping.

Jerry then took over the McCall Base Manager job replacing Del Catlin. In 1978 he was Fire Management Officer for the McCall R.D., retiring from the USFS in 1990. After retirement he and his wife split time between Flathead Lake and Arizona.

#### **John E. Carr** (Fairbanks '63)

John died March 16, 2016, at his home in Fremont N.H. After graduating from high school in 1962, John rookied at Fairbanks in 1963 and jumped that season. He joined the Peace Corps

in 1965 and spent several years in Africa before settling in New Hampshire in 1972 to work as an engineer.

#### **Thomas R. Uphill** (Missoula '56)

Tom, 80, passed away January 19, 2016. He was born in Fernie, B.C., and was a graduate of the University of Montana School of Forestry. He was a smokejumper from 1956 to 1963 and made over 100 fire jumps. Tom was a squadleader and foreman at Missoula and ended his years as a smokejumper as Administrative Officer for the

## **NSA Good Samaritan Fund Contributions**

### **Donor**

### **In Memory/Honor of**

|                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dave Shultz (MSO-61)       | Ed Bustamante (GAC-61)      |
| Brad Willard (MSO-58)      | Jon Rolf (GAC-57)           |
| Brad Willard (MSO-58)      | Dick Baumgartner (MSO-58)   |
| Chuck Fricke (GAC-61)      | Ed Bustamante (GAC-61)      |
| William Schroeder (MSO-61) | Ed Bustamante (GAC-61)      |
| MSO Class of 1961          | Ed Bustamante (GAC-61)      |
| Tony Peiffer (MSO-61)      | Ed Bustamante (GAC-61)      |
| Virginia Fitzjarrald       | Keith Fitzjarrald (NCSB-63) |
| Ron Stoleson (MSO-56)      | Tom Uphill (MSO-56)         |
| Bill Murphy (MSO-56)       |                             |
| Tom Kovalicky (MSO-61)     | Tom Uphill (MSO-56)         |
| Ed Bustamante (GAC-61)     |                             |
| Roy Korkalo (MSO-61)       | Ed Bustamante (GAC-61)      |
| Mike MacKinnon (MSO-57)    | Bill Murphy (MSO-56)        |
| Tom Uphill (MSO-56)        |                             |
| Brian/Courtney Fitzgerald  | John Carr (FBX-63)          |
| Jennifer Como              | John Carr (FBX-63)          |
| Jennifer Favela            | John Carr (FBX-63)          |
| Carrie Bienkowski          | John Carr (FBX-63)          |
| Wayne Charlie              | John Carr (FBX-63)          |
| Tom Hilliard (MYC-67)      | Del Catlin (MYC-47)         |
| Dick Lynch (MSO-64)        | Jerry Blattner (MYC-63)     |

**Contributions since the previous publication of donors April 2016**

**Total funds disbursed to smokejumpers and families since 2004—\$72,540**

**Mail your Good Samaritan Fund contributions to:**

**Chuck Sheley, 10 Judy Ln., Chico CA 95926**

Missoula Equipment Development Center.

Tom then began a career marked with promotions to increasingly responsible positions, moving to a position in Business Management for the Division of Engineering in the Forest Service's Region Five Regional Office in San Francisco, California. He then moved to a position with the Forest Service's Region Three headquarters in Albuquerque, New Mexico, followed by a tour in Eugene, Oregon, on the Willamette National Forest. His last move was to Portland, Oregon, the Regional Office for Region Six. While there, he was the Regional Budget Officer and was responsible for Program Development and the Resources Planning Act in one of the Forest Service's most complex Regions.

Tom was a Foursquare pastor and chaplain at Legacy Meridian Park Hospital.

**Ronald W. Swensson** (Missoula '57)

Ron, 78, died March 14, 2016. He graduated from the University of Montana with Bachelor's

and Master's degrees in Education. Ron jumped at Missoula during the 1957 season. He started his teaching career in Richland, Washington, in 1959 and moved to Great Falls, Montana, in 1969 where he taught until his retirement in 2000.

Ron was a talented artist and also loved fly fishing and taught fly tying with the Hooked on Fishing Program for 13 years.

**H. James "Jim" Oleson** (Cave Junction '53)

Jim died March 21, 2016. He graduated from South Dakota State University with an engineering degree. Jim jumped at Cave Junction 1953-56 before going into the Navy. After an enlistment in the Navy, he got his law degree from the University of Montana using his job as a smokejumper to pay his way through school.

Jim started his career in law in Kalispell, Montana, and worked there until December 2013. During that time he was a Flathead County Attorney and a U.S. Magistrate, along with his private practice. He was a Life Member in the NSA. 🕯

---

## Remembering Bill "Murph" Murphy

by Roland Pera (Missoula '56)

---

**M**y wife and I will be celebrating our 53rd anniversary in July. I met **Bill Murphy** (MSO-56) six years before I met her. Bill and I were part of the illustrious 1956 MSO Smokejumper training class.

I don't remember anything too unusual about Bill that summer. We hung around together quite a bit. I do remember that he lived in Missoula and most of the rest of us were from places far away, so we sort of leaned on him to tell us the places to eat and drink, and more importantly, where the girls hung out. Why did he know where all those campsites were in Pattee Canyon?

He could dig fireline and handle a chainsaw with the best of us. He joined the New Mexico crew one season, starting in May and typically returning to Missoula in July. That year he set the record for the most fire jumps in a single season. I believe the number was 29, a record that may still

be standing.

If the record has been broken, it has only been done in the last few years. My last season was 1961 and I know that Bill did a number of seasons after that.

After my last year I had little contact with him as we both married, had children, started careers, etc. – he in the Forest Service and I as a teacher in a suburb of Kansas City. We did not begin our later life relationship until 2001 when I did my first NSA summer project with him as the crew leader. The project, Dean Creek in the Flathead, seemed to be jinxed from the start.

We had a 13-mile walk-in, our cook did not show up, the mosquitoes were terrible, we cleared brush that towered above our heads, we had to pump all our drinking and cooking water, the beer was gone by Wednesday, and the sole of one of my boots literally fell off. Hooray for duct tape!



We walked out on our last day, arriving at the trailhead around 1 p.m. Our packers, who boasted that they would beat us to the trailhead, were six hours late. The good news was that there was someone camped at the trailhead who gave us plenty of cold beer.

We then stopped in Columbia Falls to have dinner and arrived in Missoula after midnight. I was riding with Murph, who was coming off of an eye injury that occurred while salmon fishing around McCall, Idaho. Luckily he had me along to drive his rig, as his sight was not good because of the injury.

**Jon McBride** (MSO-54) must have felt sorry for us, because the next summer, we had a delightful project at Webb Lake again in the Flathead country. On that project we had lots of beer with a cold stream nearby. I might add the surroundings were beautiful with the lake and all.

Bill and I had the job of cutting lodgepole trees for use in the corral. Murph and I were about the same size (which was not very big), but it was soon obvious that he was quite a bit stronger than I was.

From that point I was on the same project with him, probably five or six more times, and obviously got to know him better and better. He moved from McCall to Dillon, Mont., in 2005, I believe. Dillon was pretty much on my way driving from the K.C. area to Missoula, so I spent the night with him and Stevie a number of times. I usually was not in the house more than five minutes before he popped a cold beer in my hands.

Bill was pretty serious about his beer. He and I never graduated to the popular, trendy dark beers – we still drank Bud Light and Coors Light. That would probably not surprise any of you.

Back to the jinxed project in the Flathead, we realized very quickly that we did not have very much beer. Bill took it upon himself to ration the beer, and he kept a running total of cans remaining in his head. Like on Wednesday morning, he would say, “We have 11 cans of beer left.” Not being here to defend himself, I will say unequivocally that he did not drink to excess – no more than I drank.

Just like his beer, Bill didn’t seem to take too much to the latest gizmos. The last time I saw him was last summer and I believe he was still using

his flip phone. I also remember that after he got his home computer he would always call me if he had a message to convey. He simply did not believe that the computer’s email system could be trusted with a message.

In addition to the summer projects, Murph also invited me out to ski with him. He had a timeshare in Columbia Falls, and I was so fortunate to be his guest for four consecutive years starting in 2011. We skied Whitefish Mountain, formerly Big Mountain – a.k.a. Fog Mountain – where Bill was on the ski patrol in his early 20s.

I learned who “Frabert” was and saw Frabert in the bar on the mountain (inside joke with the ski patrol when Bill worked there). I have fond memories of those trips even though I hurt my leg one year trying to navigate the fog. Stopping at the Blue Moon in Columbia is also an experience not easily forgotten.

After skiing it was off to the hot tub and then to Whitefish to eat. We usually preceded dinner with a somewhat-lengthy cocktail hour, me with wine, and he with – guess what – Bud Light. Murph’s hearing was not good at that point in his life – too many fires with chain saws, airplane noise, water pumps, etc. My hearing is not 20-20 either, so our conversations grew louder and louder, sometimes wondering if most of the people in the restaurant knew exactly what we were talking about.

Bill could also laugh at himself. He liked to tell the story of when he and Stevie were living in McCall and had a tree behind their house that needed to come down. Stevie urged him to get it done by a professional tree service, but Bill told her that he knew everything there was to know about felling trees.

He carefully sized up the lean, the wind, posted a lookout, cut his notch, got his wedges ready, started his backcut, and soon yelled “timber,” but alas, the tree did not fall where it was supposed to fall. It tore down wires, started a bit of a fire, and knocked out a transformer.

Soon were heard the sirens of the fire department, police and medical emergency vehicles, who soon had everything under control. What do you think Stevie said besides, “Didn’t I tell you to ...”?

Bill was outgoing and usually cheerful, but

could sometimes give the impression of being a bit of a curmudgeon. In fact, he occasionally voiced his opinions on such topics as politics, welfare, immigration, the Forest Service, tree huggers, and his favorite football team, the Grizzlies.

“Now, Bill, why don’t you tell us how you really feel?” was sometimes spoken around the campfire by other jumpers. However, I was around him enough to realize that he had a very soft side. He and Stevie moved from the lovely resort town of McCall to Dillon to be near their daughter, Maria, and grandchildren. For a number of years after

his wife, Stevie, died, he could not talk about her without tears being shed.

He developed a beautiful relationship with Karen and thoroughly relished the short time they had together. Maria, Pat, and his grandchildren loved him dearly. He certainly was kind and generous to me.

So, Bill, rest in peace. You certainly had an interesting life. As in the beer commercial, you went for the “gusto.” We will all remember you and miss you. Traveling to Missoula this coming summer will not be the same. 🕯

## Phisit—An Interesting, Intriguing Life

by Jerry DeBruin (Associate Life Member)

**P**hisit Indradat passed away in a Bangkok military hospital January 20, 2016. Phisit lived an interesting and intriguing life.

With Bill Lair (CIA), Phisit became a member of an elite group, Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU). He was then employed by Air America as an air freight specialist along with my brother **Eugene H. DeBruin** (MSO-59).

On September 5, 1963, Phisit and his fellow crew members were shot down in Laos and taken prisoner. While in prison, Phisit employed the skills learned in the PARU whose instructors stressed high morale while enduring hardship under trying conditions, especially while in the jungle.

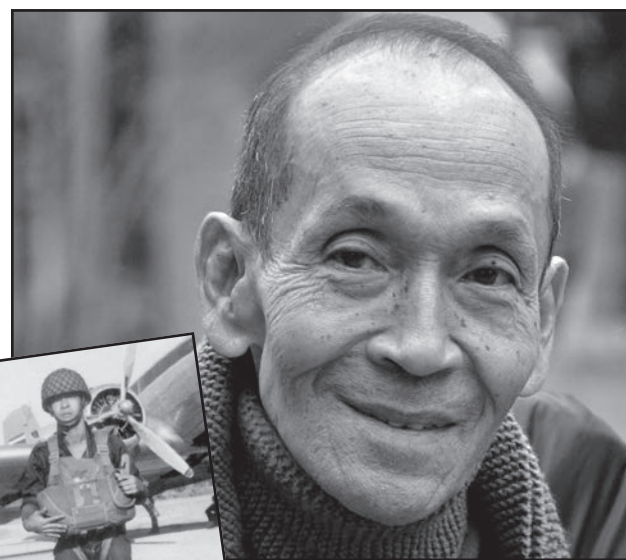
In late June 1966, Phisit and his crew members escaped from a prison in Laos. One (Dieter Dengler) reached safety. Phisit was recaptured, put in another prison and was freed as a result of a daring raid in Mahaxay on January 9, 1967.

While hospitalized, Phisit was reunited joyfully with his Mother, younger siblings, and paternal grandmother. Phisit rejoined Air America until it ceased operations in Laos.

His wife, Nid, and son survive Phisit. Upon the death of his Mother, Lady Kanyaka Intharathat, Phisit wrote a fifty-two-page book that detailed his life’s experiences. This book was dedicated to his Mother, who he described as “full

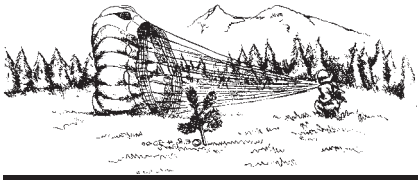
of kindness, gave birth to her children through perseverance and suffering, gave the family a good education so we could carry out our lives honorably and with pride.”

Friends include members of the Air America Association, National Smokejumpers Association, and many others, all of whom continue to admire Phisit’s strength of character and pride. 🕯

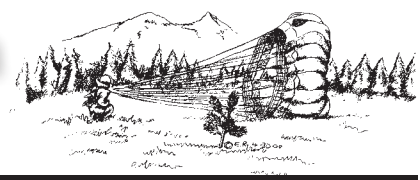


*Phisit Indradat (Courtesy Bob Dayton)*

*Phisit Indradat Thai PARU late 50s. (Courtesy Phisit Indradat)*



# Snapshots from the Past



by Jeff R. Davis  
(Missoula '57)

## The Airdrop On Skeleton Ridge

IT WAS THE fire season of 1966, and we smokejumpers had our hands full of wildfires, as we so often did, operating out of our spike base in Silver City, N.M., on the Gila National Forest.

I was a foreman, as I'd been for several years, in charge of a 20-man composite crew from Regions 1, 4, 5 and 6. We were in the midst of another fire bust. More than 50 fires were being reported daily, as the weather continued its hot, dry, windy pattern, and cumulus clouds continued to build. We were hard pushed to keep the numerous smokes from becoming project fires.

I'd just returned to the dispatcher's shack in Silver City after a busy day dropping men on fires throughout the Gila. It was 9 p.m. and I was done for the day. Our aerial observer aircraft – Birddog – was still airborne. He's been busy coordinating the

attack on a large fire requiring the three TBM air tankers we had on the base.

He was homebound but had discovered another fire that had the attention of every firefighter on the base. It was burning on Skeleton Ridge, a particularly nasty bit of real estate in the Gila Wilderness District, about six air miles southwest of Granite Peak.

The names on the map described the terrain: steep, craggy spills of rocky, timbered country difficult to man by air. There were few places on Skeleton Ridge where jumpers could be dropped. We'd have to hit it at first light, and by then the smoking menace may have developed into a real gobbler.

The dispatcher, Cal Salars, and I put together an attack plan to go into effect at dawn. We had the three air tankers and eight smokejumpers available. The rest were out on fires.

The tankers and the AT-11 Twin Beech aircraft would take off in the dark the next morning from Grant County Airport, arriving over the fire at first light. The tankers would get there first and start their drops. Normally tankers had priority over jumper aircraft, but my plan called for a change: as soon as I arrived with four jumpers I would take immediate priority and have the air-space to myself.

My plan was to see first if

I could risk dropping jumpers at all. Then, if the jump spot was marginal, I'd drop my best jumper by himself so he could start cutting a helispot to start the flow of manpower into the fire.

I really wanted to jump that smoke myself, but so did my second-in-command, a young squad leader named Tim, who was as capable as I of nailing a tight, rough spot. My job was to get as many men on that fire as fast as possible, and I knew I was better qualified than Tim to handle the coordinated attack.

Our plan clicked together the next morning as scheduled. As the tankers roared off into the darkness bound for Skeleton Ridge, I went airborne with the first four jumpers after telling the remaining four to stay close to the radio. By the time I neared the fire, I could see the tankers already dropping their loads. I notified the Birddog to clear the tankers out so I could begin my drop. I had my fingers crossed as I flew over the ridge above the fire, looking for a possible jump spot.

There it was! It looked no bigger than a postage stamp from our drop altitude of a thousand feet. It lay in a tiny saddle, bad-news landings dropping off on all sides.

The smoke indicated zero drift and so did my streamers. I dropped Tim and watched him settle directly into the spot. I



dropped the other three in one-man sticks, and they all nailed the spot as Tim had. They had orders to ignore the fire at first and start cutting a helispot. The slurry planes swarmed back over the fire, pounding it with salvo after salvo. Some were already on their second trip.

Twenty minutes out from the airport, I radioed the jumpers there to suit up; the jump was a “go.” I was back over the fire to see that the first four had nearly completed the helispot, and two of them were already attacking the fire. It was still

calm enough to get all four remaining men into the tiny spot.

By 10 a.m. the jumpers had controlled the fire, and a blaze with the potential of becoming a project fire became a dead statistic almost before the start of the official burning period. The jumpers, with the help from the helitack they’d brought in, had put a halt to a fire with the worst potential of any I’d seen that summer.

I was so proud of my fellow jumpers that day I thought I’d bust. I’ve always known

that smokejumpers are the best firefighters in the Forest Service, and today they had proven themselves both on the jump and on the fire beyond all doubt. I was proud to be a jumper – a job I’d taken on for a couple of seasons to finance my way through college that had turned into a 22-year career, and then turned into a love affair.

I never did complete college and I never regretted it. Incidents like the drop on Skeleton Ridge vindicated my decision and made it all worthwhile. 🧑‍🚒

---

## Australian and American Firefighting

by Michael Scott Hill (West Yellowstone ’95)

---

**D**uring the fire season of 2015, a contingent of Australian firefighters deployed to the US to help out and, during their deployment, many of them made American friends. Australian firefighters often fit well into the framework of US wildland firefighting system and, when they left to return home, a number of Americans were interested in knowing more about firefighting in the Land Down Under. I have been an Australian wildland firefighter as well as an American firefighter for many years now and can offer a brief overview of Australian firefighting from a viewpoint of similarities and differences.

Over the past few fire seasons, the lines between both countries have become increasingly blurred, as more and more interactions between the two nations on the firefighting level have been taking place. Now above the Australian firelines, it isn’t too out of the ordinary to see SEATs, a Coulson C-130, or even a VLAT coming in for a retardant drop. Australia’s helicopter fleet has undergone changes from being a mixture of lights and mediums to its recent addition of a few strategically placed Skycranes, Blackhawks, along with an S-61 and CH-47. Insertion into fires

by the means of helicopters with hoists, hover exit techniques and, in rare cases, rappelling are possible to see in Australia as well.

More and more Australians are being organized into groups trained to take on fires burning in remote areas away from their primarily truck-based firefighting traditions, and they have been making changes in their hand tools. The configurations of handtools being carried by the individual firefighters have been changing from their primary focus on McLeod (or Rakecos), and its close relative the Rinos, to a preference of using a Pulaski on the fireline. Australian fire teams call in helicopter bucket drops, as we do, but in so doing, they have developed more descriptive target indicators to assist their pilots.

There are other differences between the Australian and American firefighting systems. These differences can be found in terminology, such as referring to Sectors as Divisions, or in qualification systems, where an Australian crewleader is roughly equivalent to an American squad boss.

There are differences in tactics used in fighting wildfires in both nations. Australians are focused more on mopup while Americans are more focused

on aggressive initial and extended attacks. Fighting fire without the use of water is much more stressed in America than Australia. Matesmanship, or stepping up to looking out for each other, is much more stressed as part of their efforts.

The main politically powerful firefighting agencies in Australia can be found located in their Southeastern States. Their wildfires, or bushfires as they are usually called in Australia, can occur almost anywhere in this country where there is vegetation. Yet too, for these Southeasterners, the more remote locations of Tasmania, northern Queensland, and the Northern Territory are what my fellow Australian firefighters find are the unique and very special assignments.

What I've personally found different are the types of animals it's possible to encounter in the bush. Kangaroos, or their smaller cousins the wallabies, can be seen bouncing around fires at times. While the harmless bluetongue lizards are the local favorite, there can be the world famous koalas also around. Large hairy wombats and spiky echidnas may as well be seen going about their business on a fire. Huge wedge-tail eagles can be seen in the skies competing with helicopters, or colorful parrots chirping around in the burnt-out limbs. At times there can be

domesticated sheep found greatly affected by burns from the bushfires.

Firefighters have to keep a look out for snakes. Australia is home to several species, each of which carries venom dangerous to humans. The snake species often share many of the same variations of patterns and colors, but they can be identified by the structures of their heads. The Tiger snake is by far the most famous species and is usually considered timid, normally retreating at the approach of a human. They are a beautiful, highly toxic and interesting snake.

Firefighters are instructed that if they are bitten by any of Australia's poisonous snakes, their best chance of survival is to isolate the bitten extremity with a compression bandage, immobilize themselves and call for help. If the snake did inject toxin during its bite, only the timely delivery of anti-venom and the victim's immobilization will be of help to the firefighter. As such, snakes are respected in Australia.

Our countries similar cultural histories are a large part of the reason why Australian and American firefighters find they often share many commonalities. Any of their differences are not insurmountable when our teams collaborate on international emergency responses. 🦋

## Working For Food

### Former smokejumpers give back to National Forests

*Published in the Dillon Tribune, Dec. 16, 2015, with the cooperation and assistance from Dick Crockford, Publisher.*

**W**inter is fast settling here in southwestern Montana, and though the summer past is now part of history, the volunteer work done by a group of former smokejumpers nearly five months ago continues to serve backcountry hikers and skiers.

During the week of July 10-16, **Bill Kolar** (GAC-59) of Dillon and four of his former smoke-jumper friends banded together to work at Hogan's Cabin, located in the Trail Creek drainage 21 miles northwest of Wisdom, MT. Their primary job was to construct a jack-leg fence around the cabin, out-

house and barn.

The historic cabin, built in the 1920s to provide field quarters for trail crews, smoke chasers, timber cruisers, and grazing inspectors, is available for rent year-round. This time of year, it is a popular spot for cross country skiers and snowshoers.

The crew members with Kolar on this project were **Richard Trinity** (MSO-66), a retired surgeon from Red Oak, Iowa; **Jack Atkins** (MSO-68), a retired lawyer from Bozeman; **Rod Mciver** (MSO-64), a retired teacher and Christmas tree grower from Kalispell; **Chuck Fricke** (GAC-61), retired from the Forest Service from Florence; and Karin Connelly, retired teacher, packer and cook on several past projects from the West Glacier area. Kolar is retired from the Beaverhead/Deerlodge



*AmeriCorps volunteer Shawn, Richard Trinity, AmeriCorps volunteer Zoe, AmeriCorps volunteer Steve, Bill Kolar, Rod Mciver, Chuck Fricke and Jack Atkins. (Courtesy B. Kolar)*

National Forest.

Kolar said the motivation for the five former smokejumpers to spend part of their summer is to give back to the National Forests that “helped them to become the extraordinary people they are.”

Three AmeriCorps volunteers joined the group for a time, and had the opportunity to acquire new skills and learn about the careers of the crew, and most of all to hear some pretty wild and outlandish tales of the past.

Every day the crew was drenched with rain showers and dazzled by the electrical displays of lightning storms; however, construction of the fence was successfully completed by the end of the week. What made the project a little tougher was that all the posts and rails for 600 feet of fence had to be fell from standing dead lodgepole, cut to the proper lengths, carried down to the road, loaded on a trailer and hauled some two miles back to the project site. Before construction could begin, all the posts had to be notched at the proper angle to form the jack-leg. Jacks were spaced at ten foot intervals.

Another task the crew had was to fall 38 hazard trees that were located around the perimeter of the cabin, barn, and outhouse without taking out any of the structures. This job was assigned to their expert sawyer, Rod Mciver and his right hand helper, Richard Trinity.

Thanks to the cooking skills of Connelly, the crew ate well and enjoyed their stay at the cabin, Kolar said. During the week the crew was visited by Wisdom Ranger District employees John Ericson and Bob Hutton, who had arranged for the project through the National Smokejumper Association out of Missoula.

Since 1998, 150-175 former smokejumpers have been volunteering their services for the Forest Service on various projects, including trail maintenance, cabin and lookout preservation, and fence construction and maintenance, as well as trail bridge construction.

During the first six to seven years, most of the volunteer projects were located in the Bob Marshall and Absaroka/Beartooth Wilderness areas. As word got out of the excellent work performed by the former smokejumpers, there was a rush on to obtain services on all Forest Service lands outside the wilderness areas, Kolar said.

While most of the projects are located in Montana and Idaho, work has expanded to Colorado, California, Minnesota and eastern Oregon over the last nine years. All travel and lodging to and from the projects is strictly non-pay to the volunteers who come from all parts of the United States.

“Our motto is ‘We work for food’ and a place to throw out our tent and sleeping bag,” Kolar said. 🍌



# REAL PEOPLE. STIHL PEOPLE.

**BETHANY HANNAH**  
CHAIN SAW INSTRUCTOR

**JOIN US. #RealSTIHL**

## Meet an Instructor with a Passion for Power

When Bethany picked up her first chain saw at the age of 20, she was immediately hooked. Now, as a chain saw instructor, former Hotshot firefighter and sawyer, her appreciation for STIHL has only grown stronger.

"Having a reliable tool, like a STIHL, is critical. When you take off the bar to replace the chain, you can do it under a minute. Being able to quickly maintain your tools in the field is paramount for safety and productivity."





– Bethany



**MS 461 | 4.9/5 STARS**



Based on 46 reviews as of January 26, 2016.  
See all the reviews on the product pages at  
[STIHLdealers.com](http://STIHLdealers.com). Available at participating  
dealers while supplies last.

To find a Dealer: [STIHLdealers.com](http://STIHLdealers.com) | For product information: [STIHLusa.com](http://STIHLusa.com) |     /stihlusa

© 2016 STIHL

**STIHL®**