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National Smokejumper Association

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THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
JANUARY 2018

SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



by Jim Cherry
(Missoula '57)
President

AGAIN, IN THIS issue I must report the loss of a friend and colleague when **Chris Sorenson** (Assoc.), age 57, lost his life in a one-vehicle accident September 10 on I-90 near Cardwell, MT. The accident occurred when a tire blew out and the vehicle rolled. Chris was an associate member of the NSA and wrote the column *The View From Outside The Fence* for *Smokejumper* magazine. His passion for the NSA made him a highly valued contributor to the magazine and through his wide range of contacts he could keep us up-to-date on developments in the firefighting world. He also served as administrator for the NSA Facebook page. We are reminded once again of the very fragile thread that holds us to life. Life holds no guarantees. We live each day in a tension between our vision for the future and the potential that today could be our last. I suspect that for many death

comes as a surprise.

During September I shared about an NSA Trail Project in northern Minnesota, an area immediately adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. This was our 10th year working in this area. A total of 19 former jumpers, spouses, and associates took part in the project that worked for the Gunflint Ranger District and Wilderness Canoe Base, a camp that has a major focus on serving at-risk and disadvantaged youth. I'm looking forward to being able to read about all of the 21 projects that took place this past summer in eight states from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Montana to New Mexico. That trails report will come out in electronic form sometime in January 2018.

I live in Iowa. Not the sort of area that one thinks of as being impacted by wildfires. And yet, this past summer there were several times in Iowa when we had red sunsets and yellow-tinted days due to the smoke that was blowing in from fires in Canada and the western states. We even had some pollution alerts due to particulates in the air. I can only imagine what it was like for those of you who had those fires near where you live. I just looked at the **InciWeb Incident Information System...** one of the links available on www.Smokejumpers.com. As

I write this article, it's obvious that the fire season is still very active even at this mid-October date. As of today the fires in northern California are recording 13 deaths. That number is expected to rise. Over 1500 structures reported destroyed. It will be interesting to see the post-fire season reports on how many acres went up in smoke.

OUR NATION HAS experienced a year of devastating events from fire, wind, rain, and the evil that explodes out of the heart of man with all too great of frequency. Do your best to stay safe in uncertain times, seek wisdom and patience, be courageous in the face of danger, shun hatred, and pray for peace and unity of spirit. 🕯

The Wilderness Religion

by Earl Dodds (McCall '49)

I recently received a copy of Earl's book "Tales From The Last Of The Big Creek Rangers." In 1958, the Chamberlain District, Payette N.F., was combined with the Big Creek District, and Earl headed up an

area of almost 800,000 acres as District Ranger.

As a continuing part of preserving smokejumper history by this magazine, the second of three stories from Earl's book follows. (Ed.)

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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage.....ANC	Grangeville GAC	ReddingRDD
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	MissoulaMSO	Winthrop..... NCSB

When I was promoted to the position of ranger on the old Chamberlain District in June 1957, most of the backcountry on the eastern part of the Payette National Forest was classified as the Idaho Primitive Area. Forest Service management direction for the Primitive Area centered upon keeping the area wild and free of road building and logging, but with a heavy emphasis on fire control.

At that time, fire control played the major role in the management of all the national forests in the West. This emphasis had its origin in the big fires of the 1910 season that burned 3 million acres of prime timberlands in northern Idaho and western Montana and killed 87 people. The Forest Service was going all out to prevent anything like this ever happening again.

Consequently, the backcountry districts on the Payette were primarily firefighting outfits. The Forest Service had small initial-attack fire crews based at Chamberlain, Cold Meadows and Big Creek, a system of fire lookouts, and miles and miles of trails and telephone lines to tie everything together for communication and access purposes.

There were also three airfields on the Payette, part of the Idaho Primitive Area, that were originally constructed and maintained for fire-control purposes.

And then there was the smokejumper program



Earl Dodds (Courtesy E. Dodds)

that started in the late 1930s just before World War II, and seemed to be the answer to the problem of taking fast initial-attack action on remote fires in the backcountry that are difficult to reach by trail. By my time on the combined Chamberlain and Big Creek Districts in the late 1950s, it was pretty much standard practice to use jumpers to man all new fires in the backcountry and then retrieve them by helicopter.

All this with the major objective of putting fires out while they were small, and holding the burned acreage to a minimum. And for the most part, this management strategy worked, for in my 25 years on the Big Creek District there was only one large fire of consequence: the Flosse Lake Fire in 1966 that burned 5,500 acres – small potatoes by today's standards.

When the Wilderness Bill was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1964, and the old Idaho Primitive Area became the cornerstone for what is now known as the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, management philosophy changed in a big way. We were directed to conduct all of our activities in such a manner that we would have minimum impact on the land and the wilderness experience of those visiting the area.

The general direction was to return conditions

to those existing before the time of the Forest Service arrival in the backcountry – more like the conditions that Lewis and Clark would have found if they had visited the area.

We started off by getting rid of all of our motor-powered equipment. The power saws were sent out to the fire warehouse in McCall and replaced with the old hand-powered crosscut saws for trail maintenance and cutting firewood for the station. Likewise with the gasoline-powered lawn mower used to tidy up the lawns around the station. This was replaced with an old, human-powered push lawn mower like those commonly in use before the invention of a motorized mower.

About this time, the Forest Service started a nationwide policy of “You pack it in, then pack it out” regarding trash and garbage created on a camping trip. I don't remember whether this had anything to do with the passage of the Wilderness Act, but up until this time it had been standard practice to encourage visitors and our own Forest Service crews to bury their trash.

When we were camping away from the station, one of the first things we did was to assign someone to the task of digging a garbage pit. We encouraged the outfitters and the public to do likewise. This burying policy was a poor one in that the bears, coyotes and other critters frequently dug up the garbage and scattered trash all over the woods. But we never thought that we should pack our trash back to the station and eventually out of the backcountry.

However it came about, we started on a program of general cleanup of the new wilderness. As part of this cleanup program, we went around to all the outfitter and hunter camps and packed out all sorts of junk that had accumulated over many years.

This project proved to be very unpopular with all those involved. The crew didn't like collecting and packaging other people's trash. The packer and his mules didn't like packing out loads of old tin cans that rattled on the trail and tended to spook the pack stock. The pilots didn't like to fly the many loads of nothing but nasty old trash.

But the real dislike of this program was at the McCall Airport. The airport manager wanted the trash to be immediately unloaded from the air-

plane to a Forest Service truck and hauled to the dump. He didn't like the junk unloaded anywhere near where it might come in contact with the public. Of course, no Big Creek personnel were usually in town to help with this, so we leaned on the guys in the fire warehouse to help us out.

Like the rest of the Forest Service people in town, the warehouse guys felt that this was Big Creek trash and the Big Creek District should take care of it. Not easily done when the closest district personnel were a 45-minute airplane flight away. But we did the best we could and moved a small mountain of trash out of the wilderness.

There were a number of old junk cars and pickup trucks that had been abandoned along the old mining road down Big Creek to the Snow Shoe Mine that were now inside the wilderness. We didn't really have the proper equipment for towing vehicles, but we managed to get the job done, using our one and only three-quarter-ton Forest Service pickup truck.

Most of us didn't fully realize it at the time, but

we were in for a sea change in management direction. Fire control was on its way out as the principal activity and concern of the Forest Service in the backcountry, being replaced by a wilderness management philosophy – “the wilderness religion,” as I called it.

This trend has only intensified over the years; the current situation being that there is very little fire control in the historical sense and forest fires are allowed to burn freely, sometimes for weeks or even months, much like was the case in the days before the Forest Service came to the backcountry. The feeling is that forest fires are a part of the natural scene.

Of the many lookouts that were manned back in the days when fire control was king, only one – Sheepeater – is currently manned and that largely for communication purposes. Trail maintenance has been greatly curtailed. If the policy is to not fight fire, you don't really need as many trails, and smokejumper activity has just about become a thing of the past in wilderness. 🧑‍🔧

The 1959 Lava Fire – It Started On The Shasta-Trinity And Ended Up On The Modoc

by John Helmer (Redding '59)

The Pulaski was the first to go. I was loath to abandon it. A versatile ax-blade-and-grub-hoe combination, named after the famous forest firefighter and ranger who had designed it some 50 years earlier, was the only tool that I had used with any effect all morning. And even then it was prone to bouncing off the ultra-hard surface of the main limbs and trunks of the Manzanita brush we were trying to remove from the path of our small, but growing fire.

But it was either the Pulaski or my shovel, and I just couldn't part with the shovel. Not yet, anyway.

We called them “lady shovels.” They came out of the fire pack in two separate pieces. The

straight wooden handles were shorter than normal, with the bottom four inches steel-clad and tapered to match the receiver portion of the blade. The metal-on-metal contact produced a snug fit that never loosened in use, yet disassembled with surprising ease for the pack ride home.

The cutting edge of the blade had been filed at a 45-degree angle back at the Redding Fire Cache, and was razor-sharp. Most of us carried files to keep them that way.

In the hands of a skilled operator, and under the right conditions, this shovel was an impressive builder of fire trail, wide and fast. We learned to use our legs and back to spare our arms and shoulders, often using our thighs, knees and shins

as pivot points. The shovel could also sling large amounts of cool dirt and gravel directly onto the hotter portions of the fire, lowering the overall temperature, slowing its progress.

At the moment, however, this particular shovel was just getting in my way. I was trying to haul it and two seamless sack loads of jump gear through the thickest, widest stand of Manzanita brush that I had ever encountered. The suddenly explosive Porcupine Butte Fire was right behind me.

Renamed the Lava Fire after it grew and migrated from the Shasta-Trinity National Forest to the Modoc, the Porcupine Butte Fire had been ignited by a lightning strike late in the evening of Aug. 7, 1959. Dormant overnight, it was still producing smoke the next morning, was duly reported, and soon became the destination of the top four names on the Redding jump list, mine included. We traveled in the Twin Beech, a full load.

The location is easy to spot on California road maps published by H.M. Gousha. Look for a thumbprint-sized cluster of cartography artwork, labeled *LAVA FLOW*, running roughly north and south from just below Medicine Lake in Siskiyou County to just above Big Lake in Shasta County, near Fall River Mills. Porcupine Butte would be located around four miles southwest of Deep Crater. Our fire was somewhere in its vicinity; hence the original name.

The source of this lava was Medicine Lake itself, or rather the Mount Shasta-sized volcano that

once loomed above it. About 30,000 years ago, it exploded, creating a caldera and leaving many square miles of crusty lava that gradually decayed over the years, providing a mineral-rich host for the Manzanita.

This is where 60 Modoc Indians, led by Chief Kintpuash – better known as Captain Jack – went to ground in the Battle of the Lava Beds, successfully fending off federal troops 10 times their number, and slaying the only flag officer – Maj. Gen. Edward Canby – killed in the Indian Wars.

George Custer, we should note, had been riffed to lieutenant colonel at the time of his death in the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Now, some 86 years later, four seasonal federal employees were about to apply overwhelming force upon a miniscule enemy in the same location.

The results would be similar. A good, old-fashioned ass-whupping was in store for us, too.

You probably think that smokejumpers only work small fires. In an ideal world, yes. “Most of the fires that we go to are the fires that you’ll never hear about. They’re the fires that we’re going to catch,” said **Josh Mathiesen** (RDD-94), current Redding base manager, in a recently televised film clip.

In fact, when we first got there, our fire *was* small. Teeny, tiny even. Perhaps the size of a two-car garage, and obviously going nowhere.

Forrest “Buster” Moore (RDD-57) had been handed the map case, the badge of authority, and it was he who demurred when I suggested that we eat breakfast, *then* deal with our little fire.

“Let’s get a line around it, first,” he said quietly.

As it turned out, we neither controlled the fire nor ate anything.

The first line was probably started a little too close to the fire and we ran out of room. The second line was started



L-R: John Helmer (RDD-59), Jay Kelley (RDD-58), Bill Bowles (RDD-57), “Buster” Moore (RDD-57). (Courtesy J. Helmer)

a respectful distance away, but we still ran out of room.

The difference was that the entire Manzanita canopy began to burn.

When we first arrived, and throughout the night before, flames had been confined to the ground cover. The resulting heat was scorching the Manzanita leaves above, changing their color from green to brown, but not igniting them.

There was no single catalyst for what happened next. A gradual increase in the ambient temperature as dawn evolved into mid-morning, the evaporation of moisture remaining from the previous afternoon's thunderstorm, and a modest increase in the nascent breeze combined to dramatically change everything.

There was a snap, a crackle and, yes, a pop, as one at first, then a dozen elevated leaves caught fire, then an entire branch. We watched it happen, but were unable to prevent it. There was no cool dirt or gravel to throw on it. The Manzanita was growing out of a pile of lava boulders.

We had barely begun our third line when we began to worry about our jump gear. The still-slowly drifting breeze had reversed direction, and now smoke was streaming toward our jump spot, instead of away from it. We decided to get our equipment out of harm's way.

This explains how I found myself stuck in a vast, soon-to-be-blazing Manzanita field with my two heavy, seamless sacks and this not-yet-used shovel.

One sack held my 28-foot FS-2 candy-stripe main parachute, hastily gathered and stuffed inside along with several pounds of Manzanita twigs and leaves. The other contained my reserve chute, parachute harness, helmet with the distinctive wire mesh face mask, jump jacket and jump pants, the leg pocket of which held 150 feet of letdown line.

Also two signal streamers, normally to be laid out as double L's (LL), letting the spotter and pilot know that all jumpers had landed safely, and that it was OK to leave.

Buster had laid out his double L's about three hours earlier, shortly after we had arrived. All was serene then. Now all four of us were having serious problems.

My problem was that I couldn't drag the two

sacks full of jump gear through the Manzanita and carry the shovel, too. Getting rid of the Pulaski hadn't helped that much. The fire was growing hotter, noisier and, yes, closer. It wasn't moving very fast, but it was moving faster than I was at the moment. All things are relative.

So, I tossed the shovel. There were plenty more where this one came from, and our fire had grown to the point where one shovel couldn't have made a difference. A bulldozer or two, maybe; not a shovel.

Now I had no tools at all, but was no longer immobilized. I proceeded to force my way through the Manzanita, gradually increasing the space between me and the fire, which by this time was huffing and puffing in earnest.

But it was slow going and exhausting. Later, when I discussed the difficulty and lack of speed with **Jay Kelley** (RDD-58), he agreed with me: "You're right, John. It slowed me down to about 45 miles per hour!"

At length the four of us gathered at a large outcropping of lava rock, at least 30 yards wide. We briefly considered staying put and letting the fire go around us.

But we had also noticed a small stand of mature timber off to our left. It was fairly close to the main fire, which by now was heading in all directions, and was not that close to us, but there was no Manzanita in it. If we could reach the clearing, we would have room to run.

We decided to make a run for it, and did so, eventually putting some meaningful distance between the fire and us.

But first we had to find a safe place to cache the jump gear that we had so laboriously rescued. We took advantage of a large, shallow depression in the middle of the open space, and further excavated it into a large pit, into which we threw the seamless sack-loads of gear. Then we covered everything with a thick layer of lava rock. The rocks were light and bubbly and the work went quickly. Then off we went.

Later, when it had cooled down, we revisited our rock pile and discovered, to our complete astonishment and utter dismay, that several thousand dollars' worth of parachutes, reserves, harness and letdown lines were no longer there! Gone! Burnt up! A few pockets of molten nylon were

still putting out flames and black smoke; a buckle here and there; nothing else!

What about my helmet? My jump suit? I had spent the previous two months wearing them every day; rookie training plus a half dozen or so fire jumps. Yes, they were still government property, but I had literally invested large measures of sweat equity in them. Their loss was a personal one, truly mourned.

To this day I cannot explain how our stuff caught fire. On the other hand, I'm glad we weren't still there when it happened. This was before the widespread use of fire shelters.

According to **Bill Bowles** (RDD-57), the only piece of gear that didn't burn up was a paper sleeping bag that he found where we unloaded the fire packs. A tiny field mouse had crawled inside to escape the heat. He let it be.

By this time it was clear to everyone within 100 miles of us that things were not going well. The Beech returned and made several low passes.

Obviously, they were worried about us. This would have been a good time to lay out another set of double L's, and reassure everyone that we were OK, but our signal flags, like everything else, had burnt up.

The Beech made three more runs, dropping a large container of water which streamered in, narrowly missing Bill; an industrial-sized first-aid kit, which was promptly sucked directly into the fire; and a radio, which nearly met the same fate.

The ground crews had arrived, and it was time to leave. Buster apologized to the district ranger, and turned the charred remnants of the first aid kit over to him, explaining that it contained Demerol. We were told to follow one of several string lines back to a fire road, and transportation back to Redding.

String lines? Yes, ground crews entering the Modoc Plateau area face a risk seldom encountered elsewhere: getting lost.

Blame it on the topography of this area. There are no ridgelines to follow, no drainages to cross, and no landmarks to keep in sight. The world, or at least this part of it, is flat.

How many times have you heard or read news accounts of uncontrolled wildland fires that blame "high winds, extreme temperatures and

steep, rugged terrain"?

Rugged? Yes. Steep? No. Not here. But nothing can be as frustrating as not knowing where you are in relation to the truck. Especially the crew boss, the guy with a map and compass, whose every false move is duplicated a dozen times by the rest of the crew.

The solution was to equip one member of the fire crew with a gigantic spool of ordinary cotton string mounted on a pack board. His sole job was to tie on to the truck, play out the string, keep up with the rest of the crew, and provide a means to literally retrace your steps.

By this time there were half a dozen string lines to choose from, but they were all coming from the same general direction. No jumper has ever had an easier pack out. We had nothing to carry except the radio and no hills to climb.

We paused from time to time, looking over our shoulders at the growing destruction behind us, marveling at the cloud of smoke it produced.

The Lava Fire was ultimately controlled at 13,800 acres by a total of 1,170 fire fighters using 15 bulldozers and an equal number of pumper trucks. The total cost, including lost timber values, was \$9,570,300.

In the years that followed, I've worked trails with Bill and met with Buster at reunions and elsewhere. All three of us are still looking for Jay.

The subject of our conversations is always the same. Buster told me recently that the smoke was so concentrated in an enormous column that a giant thunderhead was formed, briefly producing rainfall.

"Buster, the Lava Fire had to be the biggest story of the season. It started on the Shasta-Trinity and ended up on the Modoc!"

"Nope," he replied, "not even close. Nothing can top the 1959 Redding rookie party," he said. "Five carloads of brave jumpers set out for the Clear Creek Crossing on the Igo-Ono Road. Three made it back! Do you remember that?"

"'Deed I do, Buster." 🦋

In the in the upcoming April 2018 issue of Smoke-jumper, "The 1959 Redding Rookie Party: Five Carloads Of Brave Jumpers Set Out For The Clear Creek Crossing. Three make it back."

T.V. Pearson And The Parachute Scheme

by Richard Elsom

This article was originally published at <https://text-message.blogs.archives.gov/> Aug. 29, 2017. Richard Elsom is an Archives Technician at the National Archives at Denver.

Original letters are condensed for space. These letters are transcribed from original USFS documents that are housed at the National Archives in Denver within the series: Historical Files, 1901-1962 (NAID 23944420). Please contact denver.archives@nara.gov for more information.

In the West, wildland fire is a regular threat to populated spaces as well as the rugged back-country found in forests and wilderness areas. In an effort to improve response time on fires in remote areas, the U.S. Forest Service began to experiment in 1939 with dropping firefighters from aircraft. These early parachute tests conducted in Washington state were so successful that they spawned a new type of wildland firefighter that still serves today – the smokejumper.

However, 1939 was not the first time the Forest Service tested the idea of dropping firefighters by parachute. The *History of Smokejumping*, produced by Region 1 of the Forest Service in 1976, states that T.V. Pearson “proposed and initiated” the first parachute tests in 1934 in the Intermountain Region (also known as Region 4), but the project stalled due to a belief it was too risky.¹

At the National Archives at Denver, we have documents relating to this first test in Record Group 95: Records of the Forest Service, within the series Historical Files, 1901-1962 (NAID 23944420).

While Pearson may have proposed parachute tests in 1934, there is no mention of it among the files of that year. However, there is evidence of Pearson’s parachute experiments beginning in 1935. These tests were fairly extensive with a total of 30 successful parachute drops, 28 using a 155-pound iron weight and two manned drops by professional parachutist J.B. Bruce.

Pearson likely would have made more drops, but an inspector from the Airways Division of the Department of Commerce halted his work in early April 1935 and required that Pearson obtain the proper permit in order to conduct additional drops. In the letter below, Pearson had to plainly describe what exactly his tests entailed in order to secure the permit.

The following is a brief of the letter from T.V. Pearson (4/9/35) to “The Forester” in Washington D.C. Communications referred to in this article will be shortened to save space (Ed.):

In conversation with the Dept. of Commerce at Salt Lake City, we were advised to state more specifically the items for which we need (a) permit. They are:

1. Desire to deposit men from an airplane to the ground using (an) old exhibition type parachute.
2. Same using the modern approved type of parachute.
3. Desire to do above using only one parachute. In our experiments the wearing of extra chutes constitutes a handicap.

While waiting for approval, Pearson wrote a memo May 13, 1935, explaining how dropping firefighters from the air would greatly reduce the time it takes to arrive at a fire and would thus limit the size and destructive force of a given fire. He also details his experiments and notes his desire to remain involved with the project if the Forest Service decided to conduct additional tests.

Unfortunately, Pearson could secure no converts to his method outside of Region 4 other than his partner in the experiments, the civilian parachutist Bruce.

This communication is very long - condensed to meet space limits. Pearson writes to the Regional Forester (Ed.):

Fires in central Idaho have cost us more than \$525,000 per season over the last six years – delayed arrival of firefighters has been responsible in part for size and cost – airplane-parachute method presented for your consideration – man can be dropped accurately from elevations down to 100 feet – practical to deliver men to high percentage of back country fires – 60 fires manned by airplane out of McCall would cost \$2,250 – 1934 over \$86,000 spent on 60 fires – we have done 28 deliveries of iron weight (155 lbs.) and two deliveries of a man at elevations from 150 to 450 feet – a 24-foot chute was used – difficulties in form of trees and rough topography can be mastered.

Bruce (civilian parachutist) wrote a letter to Forest Service headquarters asking to travel to Washington, D.C., and present the case for continuing the project, but his request was denied. In answer to JB Bruce's letter, Earl Loveridge (USFS/DC) responds in telegram:

JB Bruce wires suggesting he come to Washington outline parachute scheme. Please advise him nothing gained thereby but that we hope establish fire equipment laboratory Spokane and are referring your report there for further consideration.

The lack of support for the project in 1935 was due in part to the early nature of parachuting, but more importantly, Pearson failed to convince anyone from Region 1, Region 5, or Region 6 of the importance of his work.

With the seasonal fire danger in Region 4 largely confined to its portion of central Idaho, their ideas about fire policy were overruled by the major fire players of Regions 1, 5, and 6 with their extensive fire-danger areas in Montana, California, Washington and Oregon.

In a July 19, 1935, letter to Earl Loveridge at Forest Service headquarters in Washington, D.C., Evan Kelley, Regional Forester for Region 1, writes that he has heard from experienced fliers that "all parachute jumpers are more or less crazy" and parachuting men into mountainous terrain would be far too risky.

"The point of my letter is that I have no

hankering to assume the responsibility for men risking their lives in any such undertaking." Consequently, Pearson's promising results went nowhere.

Condensed letter (7/10/35) to Earl Loveridge (USFS/DC Office) from Evan Kelly:

Enclosed is letter from JB Bruce (parachutist) – Bruce scheme of dropping men from airplanes for firefighting - Pearson (T.V.) of Region Four was a party to the scheme – I'm willing to take a chance on most any kind of proposition that promises better action on fires – hesitant to go into thing that Bruce proposes – all parachute jumpers are more or less crazy – just a little bit unbalanced, otherwise they wouldn't be engaged in such a hazardous undertaking – we wouldn't have any great need for dropping men from the air – don't want to be responsible for a lot of compensation – Pearson's design (parachute) has merit but wouldn't rescue man from hanging on a snag or tree top – to make things practicable we would have to have a trained bunch of parachute jumpers who are skilled firefighters – can use available money more productively – if Washington Office wishes to carry on further experimentation, assign it to other quarters.

The parachute project remained dormant until 1939 after "strong sentiment [had] grown up for experimentation with dropping of firemen from aircraft with man parachutes," according to Roy Headley, chief of the Division of Fire Control at Forest Service headquarters. Headley's July 6, 1939, letter to the Regional Forester of Region 6 confirms that Region 4 lacked influence on fire matters when he states that he did not take the early parachute experiments seriously, but if "a group of men in any of the major fire regions comes to believe the idea worth experimenting with, I am quite ready to admit that I may have been wrong before."

C.N. Woods, regional forester for Region 4, writes Region 6 on Sept. 5, 1939, and forwards the 1935 memo from Pearson in which he details his experiments, but Woods notes that additional



Historic Photo: *Frank Derry instructing rookie jumper let-down training, August 1941. (Courtesy National Archives)*

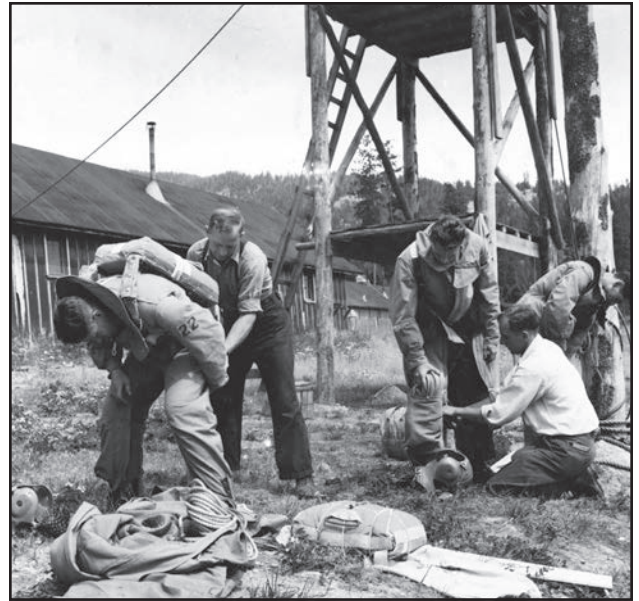
information on the tests is missing and likely stayed with Pearson when he left the region.

Despite being responsible for carrying out the first manned parachute tests in the Forest Service and paving the way for future work in the field, Pearson receives little more than a brief mention in the overall history of smokejumping. Who was Pearson, and why was he the one to give the idea of parachuting firefighters a serious test while others dismissed the “scheme” as the exclusive domain of barnstormers and crackpots?

Pearson, as a member of the regional staff in Ogden, Utah, in the Operation section, first appears in our records in Denver among the 1922 Administrative Bulletins within the series Historical Files, 1901-1962 (NAID 23944420).

In these bulletins, Pearson shows himself to be forward thinking with a short article encouraging forest rangers to continue to learn and try new things on the job. He also suggests that supervisors back at the office should spend time with their subordinate rangers in the field and see what they can do to work together and be a more efficient team.

Pearson oversaw the establishment in June 1922 of a centralized telephone-dispatch system on the Boise National Forest that connected the district ranger directly to his lookout posts and firefighting assets. Centralized dispatch also re-



Historic Photo: *August 1941 jumpers preparing for tower training. (Courtesy National Archives)*

moved the regional office from direct control during a fire and gave district rangers the authority to orchestrate the response as they saw fit.

Pearson touted the benefits of this new system and, once it was established on all Region 4 forests, stated it improved response time on fires and reduced related correspondence to the regional office by 98 percent.

Pearson next appears in 1932 in correspondence between him and the Goodyear-Zeppelin Corporation. Pearson writes to inquire about the possibility of using a Goodyear zeppelin to transport men and equipment into the backcountry to fight fire. In a very candid response, Goodyear cautions Pearson against the use of zeppelins and notes that they cannot fly in strong winds, are unable to carry more than 1,200 total pounds of personnel and equipment – further reduced if operating at the high elevations of the Intermountain Region – and are rather expensive at \$75,000 per zeppelin.

Despite the zeppelin dead end, Pearson continued to work on ways to improve transportation of firefighters and their equipment. He modified the standard parachutes he had access to and added a rubber tube running inside the outer edge that he would inflate after he packed the parachute into a bag or metal case.

This now-inflated tube ensured that the para-



Historic Photo: July 1956 tree climbing training Cave Junction. (Courtesy National Archives)

chute opened immediately upon release from its case and allowed for accurate drops as low as 100 feet from the ground. It was with this modified parachute, among others, that he conducted his experiments in 1935.

Our last glimpse of Pearson in our parachuting records comes in a letter dated Oct. 22, 1943, in which he asks for smokejumper stats from Region 4 while serving as acting chief of the Division of Fire Control at Forest Service headquarters. The records indicate Pearson left the regional office for Washington, D.C. at some point between his parachute tests of 1935 and the revival of the program in 1939, but did he continue to advocate for the development of aerial firefighters after leaving Region 4?

Based on his firsthand experience and his record of forward thinking, it is likely that he continued his efforts upon arrival at his new job in the Division of Fire Control, but that is a mystery for another time.

One final question we can tackle is what Pearson's full name was. In our records, he is only ever referred to as "T.V. Pearson," "TVP" or simply "Pearson." The July 2015 edition of *Smokejumper* magazine includes an article on T.V. Pearson that mentions his first name is Thomas.² From there, a quick search on *ancestry.com* turns up Pearson's draft card from World War I and we meet Thomas Virgil Pearson, Forest Service innovator and pioneer.³

Endnotes

1. Forest Service Region 1, *History of Smokejumping*, 1976.
2. Roland M. Stoleson, "As 75th Anniversary Approaches, We Should Remember These Smokejumping Trailblazers," *Smokejumper*, July 2015.
3. U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 [database on-line]; Original data: United States, Selective Service System. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918.

Sources

Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. Microfilm roll M1509.

All other information, images, and documents come from original records at the National Archives at Denver within the series, Historical Files, 1901-1962 (NAID 23944420), Record Group 95: Records of the Forest Service.

If you have any questions regarding this article or smokejumping records at the National Archives, please email denver.archives@nara.gov.

The Elusive JB Bruce

by Richard Elsom

I WAS LOOKING through some records relating to Region 4 fire training for district rangers from 1940 and found something interesting. Listed under attendees was a JB Bruce from the Caribou National Forest, so I immediately got to work digging through Caribou NF records to find out if it was JB Bruce the parachutist.

Unfortunately, this wasn't our JB Bruce as Pearson's records indicate he worked with John B. Bruce and this ranger was James B. Bruce. Also, having been born in 1891, he would have been 44

in 1935, not a likely candidate for daredevil parachute work.

I continued the search on Google and [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and came across several stories in the Ogden Standard newspaper that mentioned a professional parachutist named Buddy Bruce out of Pocatello, ID. An April 20, 1931, story puts his age at 27, so he would have been about 31 during Pearson's tests. An April 21, 1935, story mentions he has been parachute jumping for more than 10 years and has 215 jumps to his name. The paper identifies him as among the top five parachutists in the country and notes that he is a movie daredevil, having performed stunt work in the films *Hell's Angels*, *Wings*, and *Dawn Patrol*.

The paper from Nov 8, 1935, seals the deal with a story on Buddy Bruce's work with TV Pearson on the Forest Service parachute experiments.

Biographical Details of T.V. Pearson and J.B. Bruce

by Richard Elsom

THOMAS VIRGIL PEARSON was born in Utah in 1889 to Henry Pearson, a carpenter and Swedish national who immigrated to the US in 1862, and Sarah Pearson, a schoolteacher and native of Utah whose father was born in Kentucky and mother born in Tennessee. In 1900, twelve-year-old Thomas is living with his parents, three brothers, and one sister in Draper, Utah.

In 1910, Thomas is living in a boarding house in Bannock, Idaho, and is employed as a railroad fines keeper. Also in 1910, he marries Elsie Dilts and the couple has their first child, Verlin Louise Pearson, on March 27, 1913.

On his WWI draft card from 1917, Thomas is employed as a forest officer and living in Afton, Wyoming, with his wife and two children. By 1918, Thomas is back in Idaho serving as Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Weiser National Forest, which is now known as the Payette National Forest.

The census trail beings to go cold here, but we

know from Forest Service records that Thomas began working in the Operation Division of the Intermountain Regional Office in Ogden as early as 1922.

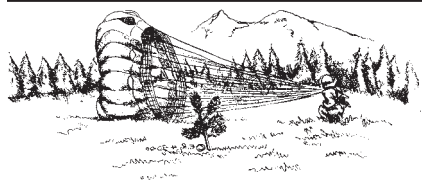
By 1930 his marriage has apparently ended as he does not appear in the census of that year, but his wife, Elsie, shows up in Utah with the children and is listed as divorced. Sometime between 1935 and 1940, Thomas relocated to Washington D.C. and began working in Forest Service Headquarters in the Division of Fire Control. The 1940 census lists his income as \$3,800, he has three years of college education and is married to 28 year old Clara H Pearson who is employed as a stenographer typist.

The last record of Thomas is his draft card from the 1942 "Old Man's Draft" in which he is 53 years old, living in Springfield, Virginia, with his wife Clara, and is still employed at the Division of Fire Control in DC. He is 5'10", 150 pounds, with blue eyes and gray hair. His whereabouts after 1942 are unknown, but he died on June 30, 1978, and is buried at Snowflake Cemetery in Snowflake, Arizona.

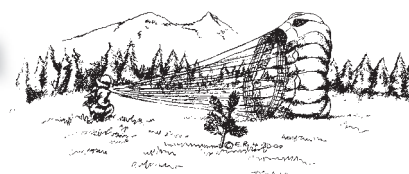
JB Bruce is more difficult to track as he went by the name "Buddy" and his birth name is unclear. Through the Ogden Standard Examiner of April 20, 1931, we learn that 27-year-old Buddy broke two ribs during an "airplane rodeo" after jumping from 2,500 feet with a loose parachute harness. This puts his date of birth around 1904 and subsequent issues of the paper identify his hometown as Pocatello, Idaho.

The April 21, 1935, issue of the Ogden Standard Examiner features a faded photo of Buddy and mentions that he is a nationally known movie daredevil and parachute jumper who has completed 215 jumps since 1925. The paper identifies Buddy as among the top five leading experts in the country on parachute jumping, and he has appeared in "moving pictures" such as *Wings*, *Hell's Angels*, and *The Dawn Patrol*.

Our last glimpse of Buddy comes in the November 8, 1935 issue of the Ogden Standard Examiner in an article about the parachute tests with TV Pearson that mentions that Buddy made the final two drops after several dummy drops. Where Buddy ends up after 1935 is currently a mystery. 🕵️



Snapshots from the Past



by Jeff R. Davis
(Missoula '57)

The Jump On Bull Creek

IT WAS THE fire season of 1961, the best I'd seen in years. Montana and Idaho were on fire, with the hopes that Oregon, Washington and California would soon follow suit.

I'd made my first fire jump June 5, and with a break for 24 days when I was training new men, I'd been at it ever since. It was now September. I'd made nine fire jumps so far, spotted 13 loads of new men, 27-seven loads of jumpers on fires, and 33 loads of cargo for fires all over the northwest. At one point I flew 30 consecutive days.

I thought the record-breaking season was over, but on Sept. 19 we got a fire call at 11:30 a.m. for four jumpers on the Salmon River. There were only three of us left in camp. **Jim Elms** (GAC-59), a new man, and I went airborne at 12:05 p.m. for the Bull Creek Fire on a little drainage which emptied into the

Salmon River on the Nez Perce Forest, Idaho.

Our new man managed to break his reserve open sitting on the deck of that AT-11 Twin Beech – we didn't use seats in any aircraft back then – so he was going back home. Jim and I jumped at 1:15 p.m. and by 1:45 we were both on the fire.

We'd jumped on a ridge top, a half-mile above the fire, where both of us had "treed up" in the 70-foot Douglas fir timber.

The fire was a royal bitch. Sixteen jumpers couldn't have controlled that blaze without time spent working around the clock for several days. It was burning hot and had already covered at least five acres, and it was burning in the worst possible terrain. The Salmon River country is as steep as a cow's face and the Bull Creek Fire was no exception.

Jim "Arky" Elms and I began flailing away at the fire. Two district men arrived at 3 p.m., both exhausted from the steep climb, and after helping themselves to our C-rations, they disappeared back down the ridge, never to be seen again.

We received slurry drops from several TMBs from 4 p.m. until 6:45 p.m. A DC-3 appeared over the fire at 5 p.m. with 16 troops back from other fires. But the winds that

were giving us hell on the ground also gave the spotters hell in the air. After a number of wild streamers drops, the Doug flew over at treetop level, dumped out six fire packs and left for home.

Arky and I were sick with disappointment, but we kept hammering away on that damned fire the rest of the afternoon and well into the midnight hours of that night. By then we were exhausted, and the fire seemed to be laying down somewhat, with the cooling effects of the Bentonite drops and the night's cold air.

We decided to take a break and grab some z's while we could. The problem was to find a safe place to bed down; the terrain was straight up and down in all directions. I finally found an old snag close to the fire where the ground was at least level enough I could curl myself around it on the uphill side. I fell asleep almost instantly.

Arky looked around for a suitable place to sleep, finally finding a spot about fifty yards from me, where a rock outcropping had pounded a flat space underneath it. Jim fell asleep almost as fast as I did, but he must have been worried about those rocks hanging over his head before he closed his eyes.

I knew none of this, of

course, but at first light I was awakened by a terrible racket over at Jim's bed site. He was still asleep, but reared straight up in his sleeping bag, beating his arms against his legs, and hollering, "Mah laigs, mah laigs – ah cain't find mah laigs!"

It seems he had drifted off into an uneasy sleep, worried about that rock outcropping, and like me, had lain as still as possible so he wouldn't roll down the hill. His legs went numb for lack of circulation, and when he reared up in the early morning, he was still dreaming that the rocks had fallen and crushed both legs. When he couldn't feel them, as he groggily reared up, he was certain his legs were crushed.

I laughed like hell. For long, loud minutes, the hills were filled with the cry, "Mah laigs, mah laigs – ah cain't find mah laigs!"

The morning of Sept. 21 dawned cloudy and cold. Since the fire was still lying quiet, we decided to climb back to the jump spot and retrieve our gear. A storm was brewing, and by 8 o'clock when we climbed back to pull our 'chutes from the timber, it was already too late.

It began to blow a blizzard. It took us two hours to pull those parachutes out of the timber – they were frozen stiff like bed sheets.

We'd gone up there with no chow or camping gear, figuring on a quick retrieval, cutting a chopper spot for a helicopter to remove our jump gear per instructions we'd received by

radio. (The district guys had left us their air net/ground net radio.) We thought we'd easily be done with this work and back on the fire to finish mopping it up by noon.

But we were trapped on top in a blizzard. I'd had it. Damned ground-pounders had abandoned us, the damned radio had quit working, we'd busted our butts, all alone, and actually put a halt to the fire, and now we were stuck in a snowstorm with no protection at all. Even worse, I'd been out of cigarettes now for nearly two days and I was grouchy as hell.

I told Jim I was going to

yelling into that defunct radio, telling those district guys they'd better, by God, bring in some cigarettes when they came to pick us up, etc. etc.

The chopper arrived at 2 p.m., but it remained in a hover 10 feet above the pad. I couldn't figure out why. We had cut a clean spot, and he should have flown right in. I looked up at the pilot; he was watching me like a hawk. Finally, from his hover, he slid open a side window and threw out a carton of cigarettes. My radio had been transmitting all along; it just wasn't receiving!

After he saw me grab a cigarette and suck it halfway

We'd busted our butts, all alone, and actually put a halt to the fire, and now we were stuck in a snowstorm with no protection at all.

fix us a shelter and hole up for the duration. He asked me how I planned to do that, and I pulled one of our reserves, spread it out in a circle, and weighted the skirt down with rocks and logs, stuck another limb we'd cut up into the apex, and bingo! We had us a tepee worthy of a Nez Perce Indian. We sat inside there for hours around a blazing fire, happily destroying \$300 worth of government property. We were past caring.

It got worse, a lot worse. We had to cut another helispot below the fire on Sept. 22. We were exhausted and hungry. I was out of smokes, and I vented my anger for several days by

down, he finally landed and off we flew, for an overnight at Dixie Ranger Station, to Grangeville and finally back to Missoula by 8 p.m.

I was paid for 49 and a half hours overtime on the Bull Creek Fire. I got about \$6 an hour then, straight time, overtime, no hazard duty pay – just six bucks an hour for the fifty hours OT. My pay for the Bull Creek Fire came to about \$300, plus the regular wages I would have earned sitting around the loft drinking coffee.

It wasn't the first time I realized I loved being a smoke-jumper for something other than money. 🧑‍🔧

Four Years

by Jim Hickman (Missoula '52)

Four years – from the first training jump to the first fire jump. At the end of May 1952, my family came to Oklahoma Baptist University to see me graduate with a bachelor's degree in Physical Chemistry. I returned home with them to La Junta, Colo., and two days later was on a bus to Missoula, Montana.

Arrived at Missoula in middle of night with several other recruits, and immediately drove to the Nine Mile Training Center. Next morning we rode back to Missoula to get new "White" boots. I was flat broke, so \$28 came out of my first paycheck.

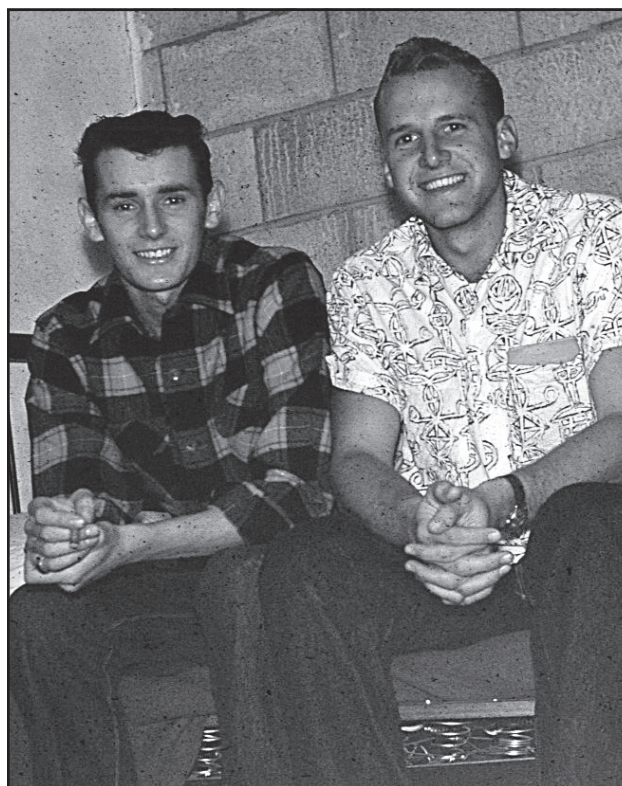
Many of you reading this know the story of the next few weeks. I don't remember the exact dates, but we finished our seven training jumps and were working on project, waiting for our first fire jump, when I had a call from home. A friend on the draft board in La Junta told my folks my selective service number was coming up in two weeks.

I had been deferred while going to school. It so happened during my last spring in school the U.S. Navy sent a recruiting team to the university, and I had taken and passed the entrance exam for Navy OCS.

On hearing what the draft board was about to do, I called the Navy. Their response was to send me orders to report to Denver for a pre-induction physical. Upon passing that, I received orders to report to Newport, R.I. I had missed my opportunity for a fire jump and was started on a different path.

Upon getting my Navy commission in December 1952, I received orders to Beach Jumper Unit One, Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado. This turned out to be a World War II pre-invasion unit being re-commissioned. I assumed the word "smokejumper" in my file triggered my orders.

BJU-ONE required two underwater demolition officers, and I immediately volunteered for the training and spent the next three months in



L-R: T.J. Thompson, Jim Hickman 1956 (Courtesy J. Hickman)

"frogman" training at Coronado. The next three years were interesting, and I had lots of time to contemplate the future.

I thought of the high school and college years I worked in the woods in Wyoming and Colorado as a logger, and I always remembered I didn't get a "fire jump" at Missoula. Rather than face three years of shore duty in a peacetime Navy, I enrolled at Utah State University Forestry School on the GI Bill, and started school January 1956.

I also called **Fred Brauer** (MSO-41) at the smokejumper base in Missoula, explained the situation, and was back on the roster for 1956 fire season. I also obtained my private pilot's license on the GI Bill in 1956.

After the last day of Utah State University Forestry Summer School at Logan, Utah, I headed my car toward Missoula, and that night checked in at the new facility at Missoula. I do



*L: Jim Hickman UDT Training 1953
(Courtesy J. Hickman)*



Jim Hickman (far left) and UDT crew USS Perch 1954 (Courtesy J. Hickman)

not remember the exact date. During the night there was a fire call, and I went with the other jumpers as a ground pounder. We got back Sunday night.

I checked in at the office Monday morning and immediately caused some confusion, as I already had fire time before being on the smokejumper roll. My refresher training started that day, and I remember one of the overhead being angry at the way I was allowed to start.

Fred Brauer straightened it out and all went well.

On my next to last refresher jump, we were out early, and as soon as we landed were told to hurry, load up and go back to base, grab a fresh canopy, and back in the plane for a second jump. As soon as we finished, we continued to hurry, grabbed our gear, loaded in the Doug and flew to Redding.

Several of us loaded in the Lodestar at Redding early the next morning. **T.J. Thompson** (MSO-55) and I jumped on a smoke on a high ridge in plain sight of Mt. Shasta. It took four years, but it fulfilled a dream and was just as wonderful as I had imagined it would be.

We had a good summer, though part of it we spent in the Billings area where about twenty of us flew in on a terrific fire bust, but operated from ground equipment instead of jumping. There were too many fires too close together.

My last fire that summer was on the Sula

Ranger District of the Bitterroot National Forest. Eight of us jumped on a high-country fire and were there several days. **Al Cramer** (MSO-43) was the overhead in charge.

The rains came and it was time to return to school. In the meantime I talked at some length with Fred Brauer, telling him of my desire to work full-time for the Forest Service. The last day of work he called me to the office to meet Roy "Corky" Korkalo, chief dispatcher and coordinator for the Lolo National Forest.

We visited for a while, and when he left I had been hired as the seasonal dispatcher and aerial observer for the '57 fire season on the Lolo N.F., along with **Don Stevenson** (MSO-55). In the spring of '58, when school was out, I received my permanent appointment to the USFS and started at the Plains Ranger District, Lolo National Forest.

There were many more wonderful years, and I retired in January 1993 as the director of Aviation and Fire Management, Region 3, in Albuquerque, N.M.

One thing is always outstanding in my memories. Through all those years, the fellow smokejumpers – one of them my brother, **Rich Hilderbrand** (MSO-66) – the Forest Service overhead, and the many different Forest Service acquaintances were wonderful people. I thank God for the opportunity and blessings I received to live and work with them. 🙏

First Canadian Smokejumpers Smokejumpers Were A Small But Brave Crew

by Dorothy Turcotte

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There are still many pieces to be found in the Canadian history jigsaw puzzle. In view of the recent outbreaks of wildfires in British Columbia, and elsewhere, this is the right time to tell the story of Canada's first smokejumpers, the original 125 men who worked in Saskatchewan jumping from planes to put out forest fires.

The Saskatchewan Fire Jumpers, as they were known, began their mission in 1947 and continued until 1967 when the group disbanded.

During that time period, these men were an important element in the fighting of forest fires. The water bomber hadn't yet appeared on the scene. Well-trained as firefighters and as parachutists, the jumpers would be flown to an area where a small forest fire had been started, usually by lightning strike, and would jump to the site where they would have to work hard on the ground to extinguish the fire.

This was not as easy as it may sound. For one thing, they would have to jump with all the equipment they would

need, as well as enough food to last several days. Once the fire was out, they would have to hike to a location on a lake or river where a floatplane could land and pick them up. This might be several miles from the fire site.

The whole process was a very strenuous one, so these men had to be in excellent physical condition. Regular exercise was an important part of their training.

In 2014, Hope Pedersen, wife of smokejumper Olaf "Swede" Pedersen, decided to write a book so that the history of the early smokejumpers wouldn't be lost or forgotten. There had been previous attempts to write about this group of brave men, but somehow they had fallen by the wayside.


When helicopters and water bombers came into existence, it was considered that smokejumpers were no longer needed. However, there are still many in North America, including Canada. These intrepid men are put to work, usually in remote and mountainous areas such as British Columbia. Most of us rarely hear about them and the work they do.

Modern aerial firefighting

is a very precise procedure. When there is a big fire, spotter planes circle the area with trained spotters who send information to aerial crews about where and when to drop their loads of water. The water bombers are large planes with a crew of only two.

The planes skim over the surface of a local lake, picking up huge loads of water that is then dropped on the fire at the designated location. Sometimes fire retardant is added to the water to help keep the fire in check.

Aerial firefighters played a large part in controlling large fires near Kelowna and Fort McMurray, British Columbia. Most summers, they put out dozens of smaller fires that threaten remote towns and villages. However, when there is little snow to leave moisture in the ground and too much rain in the spring, as happened this year, firefighters are often left "on standby" waiting for the order to take off.

In Southern Ontario we seldom think of forest fires and the effort that goes into keeping towns and villages, even cities, safe. The story of the first aerial firefighters, the Saskatchewan Fire Jumpers, is an important part of our history. 

The Jumper Connection And How It Has Affected My Life

by John P. Doran (North Cascades '72)

First, a brief recap on my becoming a smoke-jumper. Growing up in Twisp, Wash. – a mere five miles from the smokejumper base, and having many neighbors and friends who were jumpers – gave me an insight into the job, good and bad alike – e.g., the 1958 Eight-Mile tragedy.

I graduated from Twisp High School in 1970. This being a record fire year and having been a pickup ground pounder the season before, along with four years volunteer firefighting experience, it was easy to get work as a firefighter with the Twisp Ranger District. I stayed on until November and then left for Australia on a lark.

It was in Australia that the smokejumping mys-

tique played its hand. I found myself standing in front of the main office of the Forestry Commission of New South Wales in Sydney, and decided to go in and inquire about work. I was sent to talk with Dick Leck, the fire commissioner of New South Wales.

When he discovered I was from the Methow Valley, he asked what I knew of smokejumping. It seems that he had made a trip to the Northwest to study the feasibility of smokejumpers in Australia. My letter of recommendation was from the Twisp ranger whom Dick had met and stayed with.

Upon this revelation he immediately hired me and made arrangements for my transport out to the Snowy Mountains where I was put on a fire crew.



82nd Airborne jump into Medicine Tale Coolly 2009 (Courtesy K. Herron)

Smokejumping had started to enter my life.

I returned to the U.S. for the draft at 19. I was not called up and so decided to kill time until I turned 21, the age at which I could apply as a city firefighter.

I sent in my application and somehow was selected for the 1972 rookie class at North Cascades Smokejumper Base. The next three seasons were some of the best and most intense training I've ever received. I feel that the time spent jumping and the people with whom I worked with were the defining aspects of my future career.

I was hired at Wenatchee Fire Department in the spring of 1975. The fact that I had been a smokejumper made a big impact on my career there. Within a few months they put me in charge of the rescue equipment with the belief that my smokejumping experience trained me well for these types of emergencies.

With the help of **Bill Moody** (NCSB-57) and **Baynard Buzzard** (NCSB-65), I was able to update and upgrade much of the harness/rope rescue equipment at WFD. I ended up using this equipment on quite a few rescues and body retrieval missions during my 16 years with the department.

During this time I also helped convince several smokejumpers to take the entrance exam at WFD. Eventually there were five ex-NCSB jumpers at the department. Besides me, there were **Bob Brownlee** (NCSB-76), **John Picard** (NCSB-76), **Kirk Hinkley** (NCSB-79) and **Chris Paul** (NCSB-82). Jumpers were still in my life.

I was retired from WFD in 1990 due to a severe spinal injury. I returned to Twisp full-time and took over working our family ranch for my father. I began operating an outfitting/packing business which eventually expanded into running a cavalry school, specializing in the school of the mounted trooper 1860-1920 era. This in turn brought me in contact with the U.S. Army.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, I began working with the military training troops for mounted equine combat operations. In the course of this work, I was once again thrown into close proximity with jumpers. This time they were paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division and Special Forces.

When these paratroopers became aware of my smokejumping past, I was elevated to a position of some distinction and respect. It seems that these jumpers were made aware of how Maj. William Lee,

the father of the Army Airborne program, visited the Region One smokejumper program in 1940 and incorporated smokejumping techniques into the establishment to the airborne school in Fort Benning, Ga.

They all believed that smokejumpers, who would jump into some of the most inhospitable country that was also on fire, was all the proof they needed that we were all just a bit crazy. They were also amazed that I accrued more than 80 jumps in just three seasons (approximately 12 months).

In the after-hour "evening beer and bull sessions," these paratroopers all wanted to hear stories of smokejumping. Meanwhile, my crew and I wanted to hear their jump stories, especially the Special Forces who had demonstrated their HALO – High Altitude Low Opening – jumping, which to me seemed far more interesting than the jumps I had made.

When taking the Special Forces into the high Cascades for mule pack training, I'd point out different drainages and mountain peaks where smokejumpers had parachuted in to fight fires. They said that this definitely confirmed their initial belief that we were all crazy.

I was very surprised at the connections and bonds that we formed during this training. I was even offered a jump with the 82nd Airborne. As much as I would have loved to take them up on their offer, my body of more than 60 years, having had more than 20 orthopedic surgeries – including nine on my spine – forced me for the first time in my life to turn down a jump. Yep, jumpers were still in my life.

Just recently, a retired Army paratrooper stopped by the ranch on other business. When he learned that I had been a smokejumper, he began to relate how smokejumpers and the military still have a strong connection. He believed that without the smokejumping program the military airborne would not be as advanced and efficient as they are.

What I have learned most while working with our military jumpers is the commonalities between smokejumpers and our airborne troops. I've gained a tremendous respect for our veterans and I'm proud to say that I've been able to work with some of the finest military personnel this country has ever produced.

To all the veterans past and present I, an old smokejumper, salute you. 🇺🇸

A Louder Thump But No Real Injury

by Bob Shackelford (Missoula '52)

Carl J. "Joe" Wilson (MSO-52) spent his first 13 years at the Anaconda Bonner Mill, where his father was cook for large crews. His dad died, and he and his brother, **Paul Wilson** (MSO-50), moved to Osborn, Idaho, in the Silver Valley, to live with an aunt.

The aunt had a great heart for the boys but lived in a very small house. So the teenaged Wilsons skidded logs by hand, from a neighbor's hillside forest, into their new back yard and built a fair-sized log cabin.

I did seven practice jumps with Joe. In my memory, Joe weighed about 145 pounds and was just one chunk of muscle.

His head was good. He was a Linotype operator and a printer for the Silver Valley newspapers for years. He got away from the publishers for some four months, for a few years, but they finally told him he was too hard to replace. So, for the sake of a year-round job, he had to quit jumping.

On a cool May morning in 1952, all 13 of us early trainees, and a couple of "old" jumpers doing one of their two refresher jumps, loaded into the C-47 for our timber jump. During my first trip in the big plane, we hit some nasty air while circling. I was about middle of the load and could feel my nice, big breakfast beginning to move around, and the door began to look really good.

I finally got to the door and got out, but the opening caused a big burp and pieces of my breakfast were lodged in my facemask. I never ate much breakfast again before a jump.

I was about halfway down before I got my mask clear. I focused on three nice second-growth treetops and put my boots exactly between them, giving me a most soft landing and hung up about eight feet above the ground. The overhead knew what they were doing when they picked this timber jump spot. The trees were just the perfect height, in my opinion.

I had to do the rope letdown thing as a boss was watching. As I turned my head to thread the rope through the risers, much to my surprise I saw

a huge larch snag about 10 feet away. I could not believe I had not seen it while in the air. But, I had to memorize the eye chart in my doctor's office to pass the physical to get into the jumpers. I began to think a jumper really does need good vision.

Joe came out right after I got on the ground, but his experience was different. His chute just hooked the top of one tree, and he essentially free-fell the last 30 feet or so. The chute flipped him sideways, parallel to the ground. He landed with a mighty thump, flat to the ground; debris and dust flew.

I knew he must have been hurt. He was just dazed a bit – it had to be somehow a miracle – and in a minute or two he got up, ignoring any concern. He was very tough.

A few years later, when I was scaling logs on the Hope, Idaho, Diamond Landing, a log truck driver was killed by a top log falling off his own truck, and that thump was not as loud as Joe's. I did use my first aid then, to no avail.

The question must be: Why doesn't God help jumpers all the time, rather than most of the time? 🙏

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If you want to be added to the electronic mailing, contact Editor **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59): cnkgsheley@earthlink.net. 🙏

The Hat Makes The Man

by Gary Shade (Missoula '69)

I love hats. If I go outside without a “cover,” I feel exposed and yet I even still have this “original issue” full head of hair.

I just counted the hats in the house and the Jeep, and there are 12. My favorite is the NSA tan jumper hat. I have two – one beaten up and sweat stained, and one for more public display. Even if the NSA cover was absent the logo, I’d still have two.

The baseball cap is well designed, well made, and of quality material. The “Made in Vietnam” tag is prominently displayed. Given the jumpers’ role in working for the CIA during their nasty little secret war in Laos, the “made in” tag adds a nice juxtapositional touch. As jumpers actively supported the CIA’s Bay of Pigs invasion, it would be nice to also have a cap made in Cuba. But a cap made by a neighbor would be un-American, and verboten under the laws of the land.

I still can’t get my head around the fact that the good commies in Vietnam are now our homies, and yet the bad commies, on a small offshore island, are still seen as an existential threat to our American way of life. Okay – enough on America’s quixotic and schizophrenic relationship with the world community, and back to hats.

This summer I found myself working three part-time jobs as a professional commercial driver. I am driving tour buses, shuttle vans, and a 4,000-gallon bulk water tanker. Wine Hoppers provided me with a hat, but with Noah’s Rafting Adventures and Shasta Springs Water Service, I can wear my own cap. So, I find that I’m wearing my NSA cap this season, and something quite startling has happened with this public display of my history from many lifetimes ago.

This piece of cotton thread and cardboard is actually affecting my job performance, behaviors, and attitudes that I have about myself. Ya see, with the hat on, I can’t hide behind being normal. With this public display of my past, there is an elevated expectation of performance on the part of the public, employers, and co-workers I serve.

There is also an assumption of responsibility, on

my part, to measure up to the smokejumper tradition and work ethic. And, we are the kind of people you want to have around when the s— hits the fan.

As an example, the urban family from New York City wants to know that these river folks, to whom they are entrusting their families’ lives, are at home in the wilds. There is a subtle reassurance to the guests of Noah’s Rafting that though they’re out in the middle of nowhere, the driver and guides are people of the forest and river. Guests are in good hands.

I had only a few comments from the public that the hat initiated. One guide actually spent some time with me, asking intelligent questions about jumpers and their operations.

One of the roles of the driver – in helping out the guides with the guests – is to make sure that the personal flotation device (PFD) fits snugly. I was helping one attractive, middle-aged woman getting her PFD tight, and she noticed the hat and said, “Are you a smokejumper?”

I said, “Yes, but many generations ago.”

Just after she said “Wow” as I got in close and cinched up the side straps on her PFD, she couldn’t speak any longer.

The third incident was around the risk of wearing a hat like this. On one run, there were several young wise guys who got to making fun of me, as an old man showing off what he was no longer. This was out of my sight, of course, so when a guest told one about the tweakers disrespecting me, he asked how I felt about the ridicule.

I said, “Guys who make comments like that are frightened little men leading lives of quiet desperation, and if that makes them feel okay about themselves, then good for them. It’s no never-mind to me.”

I wore the hat to all three job interviews this spring to make some kind of statement, I guess, but I did get hired three times in one month. With my first day of work at Noah’s, I was thrust into the life circle of a river guide while wearing “the hat.” There are 15 guides leading the nomadic life of the profes-



Gary Shade (Courtesy G. Shade)

sional river rat, and I wanted to make a statement early on that I was one of them and could be relied on to do my job supporting their work.

Of course, any schmuck can buy a cap and put it on, so I needed to prove early on that I was there to serve them as well as our guests, and could do more than hold up my end of the raft.

After about three weeks, I sensed a genuine acceptance into their professional lives. At this time, I have felt a part of their brother/sisterhood and have demonstrated the work ethic – give 100 percent, no matter the task – and reliability of a jumper, and my colleagues know I have their backs.

I really enjoy hanging out with these young people. Reminds me so much of hanging out with my jumper colleagues way back. I did find one particular shared characteristic of the jumper and river rat: “What do you call a smokejumper or a river guide without a girlfriend?” “Homeless.”

In socializing with boomers, there seems to be three major topics of discussion: the economy, my health, and my politics. In socializing with this set of millennials, the three topics of discussion are guide stories, off-season work/school, and beer.

These guys are heavy into crafted beer, though

I live in a state where cannabis use is legal, and fields around the warehouse are full of pot plants. I’ve yet to see a young guide light up, or hear them even have a discussion about marijuana, but they’ll talk about beer for hours.

In the interview for the water tanker job, the work was described as very physical in that there was a lot of hauling and laying hose over rough terrain to get the water from the truck to storage tank, and many times several hundred feet away. And they were right; it proved to be just like fighting hose on the fireline.

In the interview, I was asked if I could physically meet the demands given my age. For Department of Transportation commercial driving jobs, the applicant is required to state his or her age. I’m 71.

As the boss man looked at my jumper cap and asked if I could do the job, without hesitation, I said, “Yes.”

Once again I was challenged to living up to the statement the hat was making. So the other day, I was driving back to the yard after a 10-hour day of dragging heavy, wet, muddy hose across the hot lava fields of Northern California. And I had this clarity of insight that this dirty, sweat-stained hat I was wearing was actually the motivating force to get me through a long slog of a summer.

I am pleased with myself in upholding the mystique around the jumper tradition, and it became very clear to me that if you are going to wear the hat, wear it responsibly. 🧢

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20TH vs. 21ST Century Jumper

Photos Courtesy

20th Century Smokejumper



Two piece canvas padded jacket & pants.

No chest protectors.

Leather football helmet with face mask & chin pad.

Weight-lifter's leather kidney belt.

WW II era reserve parachute packed by master rigger.

(Not Shown)
Small gear bag dropped separately on a drift chute.

Elbow & knee padding in suit.

Right leg pocket houses a 100 ft. let down rope.

High-heeled logger boots. \$25.00

Total weight of gear, 60 lbs.

Don Halloran, (MSO-53)

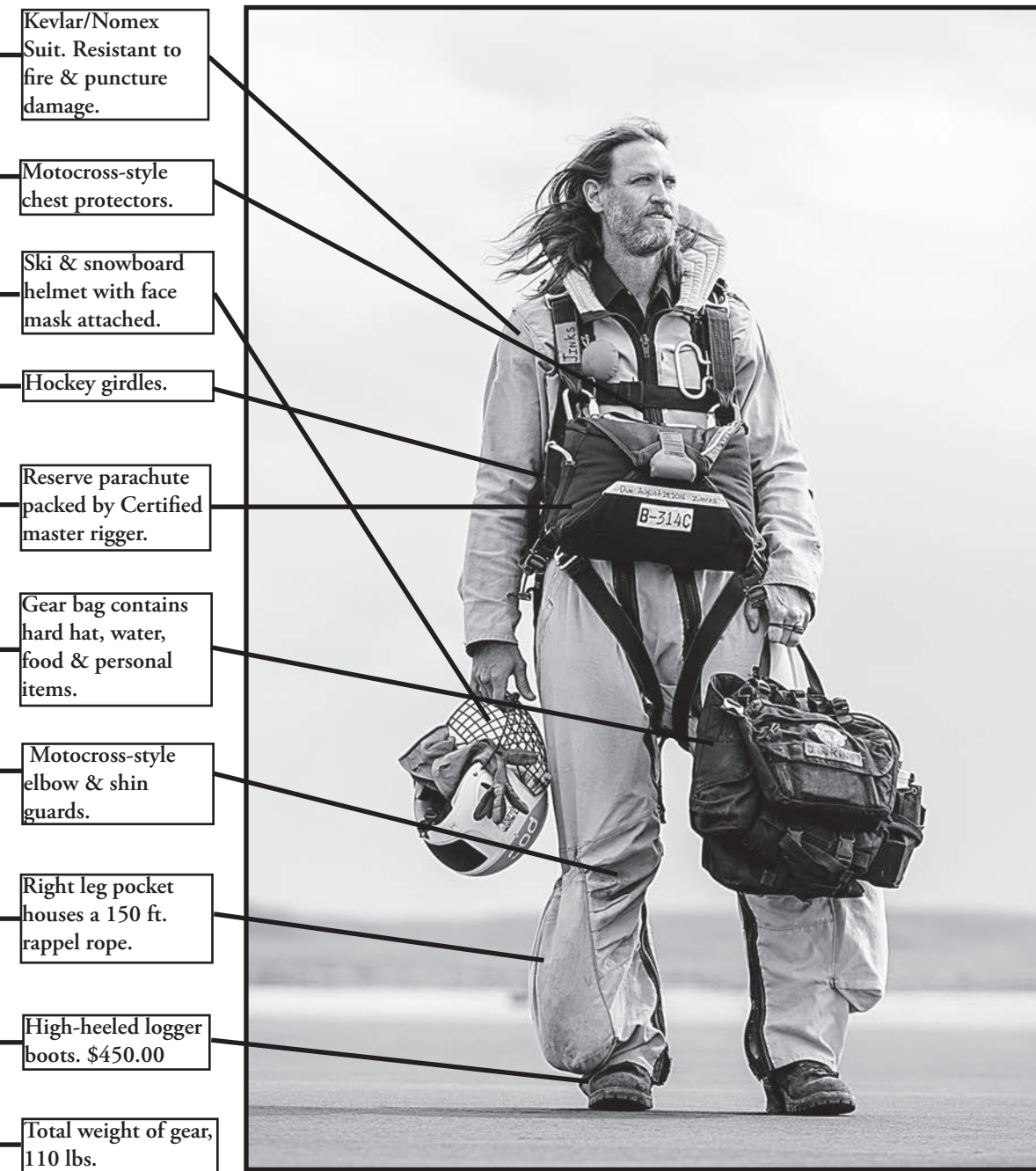
When I saw the photo of Todd Jenkins on the cover of Smokejumper magazine (July 2017), I was impressed with the equipment changes over the years. Overall, the equipment of both jumpers appears superficially similar. However, this is deceptive; we need to look deeper to see the changes. I included an intriguing photo of all the elaborate protective equipment used by present day jumpers. I'm sure that those of us who jumped in the past would be surprised. It frightens me to think of increasing that load to 110 pounds. I'd be glad to experience a sturdy handshake from our contemporary jumper.

Jump Suit Comparison

NSA Archives



21st Century Smokejumper



Todd Jenkins, (NIFC-98)

over the decades. His photo was also reminiscent of one taken of me outside the parachute loft at Hale Field, Missoula MT in August 1953. The original article about Todd Jenkins' career, published in the University of Wisconsin alumni magazine, *On Wisconsin*, (Winter 2016), decades ago will be impressed with what's now under the jumpsuit. In my day, I felt clumsy and restricted with about 60 pounds of gear. ers and salute them in their firefighting careers. — Don Halloran (MSO-53)

Layout: Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



John N. Maclean and Holly Neill at the site of the Granite Mountain Hotshot deployment, surrounded by a chain link fence. Note the crosses within the enclosure that mark the spots where the bodies of the 19 hotshots were found. (Courtesy J. Maclean)

John Maclean on the Yarnell Hill Fire

Writing and reporting that stand the test of time takes time. As of now, one movie has been produced and five books have been written on the Yarnell Hill Fire. The most recent, *Fire on the Wind*, is a personal and historical memoir by Diane J. Helm, who with her husband, Lee, weathered the fire at their ranch, the designated “bomb proof safety zone” at the mouth of the canyon where the Granite Mountain Hotshots were trapped by the fire. The real name of the ranch is not Boulder Springs Ranch, as it appears in the official investigations, but rather Not Muchuva Ranch, a wordplay by the Helm’s on their role as semi-retired desert dwellers. Full disclosure: I wrote a foreword for Helm’s book, which is a worthy addition to the

literature of the fire.

In answer to the question whether I am working on a separate book about the fire, the answer is yes, with a research partner, Holly Neill, a former firefighter who has devoted herself to researching the fire from the day it happened.

It’s already been four and a half years since the fire. Neill and I do not expect to have a full draft for several more years. I purposely have not sought a publishing contract yet, because I knew this was going to take a long time and I didn’t want the pressure of a publisher’s deadline.

The only reason to do another book is to take a long, hard look at the fire itself, going well beyond the two official investigations which contradict each other to such a degree, you wonder if they

are about the same fire. And to try, insofar as it's possible, to answer outstanding questions, especially the one about why the 19 hotshots left a relatively safe area to descend into that canyon, apparently without demur, at the height of the burn period, when they could see the fire coming their way.

Reporting on the fire has been hampered by more than the usual difficulties of access to key people, either because they have been deeply trau-

matized and do not wish to speak, or because their agencies have told them not to do so. Patience, persistence and passion, however, have brought some results, and some of them are startling and new. Yes, that's a tease line, but it's also true. It's also true we have a long way to go.

Chuck Sheley's invitation to write this note for *Smokejumper* magazine is much appreciated as a way to keep you informed of our efforts. All we can promise, at this point, is we'll keep at it. 🧑🏻🔥

Rebuttal – Hotshots History of Bad Decisions

by Holly Neill

In the October 2016 issue of Smokejumper I ran an article from InvestigativeMEDIA titled "USFS Ignored Information From Hotshot Leaders About Granite Mountain's History Of Bad Decisions." NSA Associate member John Maclean politely told me that this article was lacking in research and there is another side to the story.

John suggested that I run the following piece by Holly Neill who is working with him on his book about the Yarnell Hill Fire. Thanks to John making me more alert to checking my sources before printing an article. I've identified some of the players in parenthesis so that you can better understand the cast. (Ed.)

I would like to comment on a recent article titled "Forest Service Ignored Information From Hotshot Leaders About Granite Mountain's History of Bad Decisions." Here's the link to that article:

<http://www.investigativemedia.com/forest-service-ignored-information-from-hotshot-leaders-about-granite-mountains-history-of-bad-decisions/>

From the article: "In an interview with Investigative MEDIA, Provencio (**Dave Provencio** MSO-77 Hotshot Sup) provided details of a situation on the Horseshoe 2 Fire on the Coronado National Forest in southern Arizona in 2011 where Marsh (Eric Marsh-Granite Mt. Hotshot Sup.) was a division

supervisor and made a recommendation for work that was rejected by four hotshot superintendents. (Marsh was a division supervisor at the Yarnell Hill Fire where he oversaw Granite Mountain, which was under the command of his assistant, Jesse Steed.) ...

"Marsh's expectation was we can get this done in a short amount of time," Provencio said. "But Provencio and the other hotshot superintendents thought otherwise."

Without additional information, it might be easy to oversimplify and condense Provencio's account into a neat conclusion ... suggesting that Eric Marsh acted in an unsafe/dangerous manner as division supervisor with supervisory responsibility for multiple IHC's ... all leading to evidence of "Granite Mountain's history of bad decisions." However, I believe it is important to follow through and check facts for such serious allegations.

Marsh was not assigned division supervisor as stated, but was assigned crew boss (CRWB) on Horseshoe 2 Fire in 2011. There are no records or sources* to indicate that Eric Marsh was assigned division supervisor.

Personnel from the Horseshoe 2 Fire, including the Type 1 incident commander and other overhead, provided their accounts for additional clarification. The following recollection is from

overhead personnel on the Horseshoe 2 Fire, who wishes to remain anonymous:

"I remember flying it and seeing it. It was a pretty tight little area. We were debating if we should back up to the next ridge or not, and there were a lot of conversations like that going on.

"Eric (Marsh) had the crew (GMIHC). They were coming down a ridge bringing fire with them. He asked Geronimo and another IHC from California to hike up to them and grab it and take it the rest of the way down. Both crews turned it down.

"There were a lot of conversations going on about this. The ICs got involved when the two crews said they were turning it down. The two crews wanted to back up to the next ridge."

The Type 1 incident commander provided additional information about the refusal/turn-down protocol used by Provencio and the other IHC.

Marsh was not assigned as division supervisor on Horseshoe 2 Fire; he was assigned as Granite Mountain superintendent/crew boss. He was part of a group of 12-14 IHC superintendents. The planning and decision process was led by the Type 1 operations section chief, branch director and division supervisor.

The team had a very tricky piece of open line on the west side of the fire and they were trying to figure out how to best handle it. There were a multitude of options. Risk management and safety were the highest priorities.

There were some long, well-thought-out discussions on the go/no go decision to fight the fire aggressively on the west side, and at the end, everyone agreed to go with the plan.

When all the lines were constructed and in place – a couple days of extremely hard work by the hotshot crews that were there – and it was time to burn it out, there were a couple hotshot crews who decided it wasn't safe and refused the assignment. There weren't four crews, as Provencio states – the recollection being two crews, Geronimo and another IHC from California.

The refusal caught everyone off guard because of the earlier agreements. It caused a serious delay in the operational work, by setting everything back several hours and putting a lot of extra strain on all the other hotshot crews that continued with

the work.

The refusal was a huge thing to the incident management team. They immediately reviewed all of their plans, the thought process, the risk management, the values at risk, etc. *At the end they all agreed that it still was the best option, and the crews that were up there also agreed.*

When they were finally able to get on with the implementation, everything went off as planned. Crews burned and held some really difficult line. The lines held through the day, but early the next morning a spot fire took off, which erased all that the crews had gained – it was a sad time for everyone.

Was part of the reason being the delay caused by the refusal?

"Probably, but that was the hand we were dealt and we went with it. ... Those hotshot crews that implemented all the work were outstanding in their efforts and attitude – as good as it gets, as far as I am concerned," said Dugger Hughes, Type 1 incident commander.

Refusal/turn-down protocols were used by Geronimo and the other IHC, and alternative suggestions were made to "back up to the next ridge." But the original strategy and tactics led by the branch director, operations chief and division supervisor went forward as planned, although serious delays occurred as a result of the refusal.

The following link is to a letter and certificate of commendation from the Southwest Area Incident Management Team, to the Granite Mountain IHC for their professional work ethic, commitment to safety and exceptional performance on the Horseshoe 2 Fire:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B5LiZw3EBzOWdnU3MIJSY2k0bDg>

If one-sided accounts are taken at face value, we run the risk of over simplifying and making shortsighted insinuations. In this case, the importance of fact checking should be clear. I believe that we can and should be better. 🙏

Notes

* SAIT: H: Qualifications: Master Record: Eric Marsh: pg 335; Crew Fire Record 2011: Eric Marsh: pg 340; Other: personnel recollections and payroll records.



RECORDING SMOKEJUMPER HISTORY



Tragedy Out Of McCall

(Reprinted from the National Smokejumper Association newsletter, December 1993.)

The first smokejumper fatality in the history of this elite organization did not take place at Mann Gulch, north of Helena, Mont., on Aug. 5, 1949. Instead, the scene was in the Payette National Forest of Idaho.

The accounts of that tragedy were recalled from the recollections of **John P. Ferguson** (MYC-43) and **Wayne R. Webb** (MYC-46), who were with the McCall smokejumper unit at that time. They remember that of July 3, 1946, a lookout had reported a fire started by lightning, burning on Fall Creek Ridge, near the Middle Fork of the Weiser River.

Three jumpers – **Lester Lycklama** (MYC-46), **John L. Hennessey** (MYC-46) and **Costan T. Aguirre** (MYC-46) – were dropped on it. Bob Fogg was pilot. **Lloyd Johnson** (MYC-43) did the spotting and Ferguson assisted in dropping cargo.

The following day, July 4, the smokejumper base in McCall received a call that reported that one of the men who jumped on the Fall Creek Fire was seriously injured. Ferguson and Johnson

were the leaders of a rescue squad that included jumpers **Webb**, **Edward Case** (MYC-46) and **Bruce Froman** (MYC-46).

Fogg piloted the rescue ship, which first landed at Council, Idaho, southwest of McCall, to meet with Dr. Alvin Thurston, who gave them emergency instructions. They picked up a more complete medical kit, which included blood plasma. Dr. Thurston was to meet the rescue team along a road leading to the trail where the injured jumper would be carried out.

From the time of the initial call until the rescue team parachuted to the scene of the injury had only been 38 minutes. Lycklama was the injured jumper. He and Hennessey had been felling a ponderosa pine with a crosscut saw when the top third of the tree broke loose and fell, almost in an upright position.

Aguirre had shouted a warning and the sawyers had started running, but Lycklama tripped on a root and was struck in the head by a limb from the falling tree. He was knocked unconscious.

The accident happened at 9:30 p.m. July 3. Hennessey had taken off cross-country eight miles to a road on the Middle Fork of the Weiser River for help, while Aguirre stayed with Lycklama. A passing motorist picked up Hennessey and took him to Council, where he

called the forest dispatcher at McCall, requesting help.

The smokejumper rescue team carried Lycklama four miles on a stretcher to a trail, and started down a road leading to it when they were met by Dr. Thurston, who was heading a ground party. **Kenny Roth** (MYC-46), former smokejumper and pilot for Johnson Flying Service – now living in Missoula – was in the ground unit.

Johnson, Ferguson and Aguirre continued on with the group to the hospital, while Webb, Froman and Case went back to the fire and completed putting it out.

Lycklama died at 5:30 a.m. July 5 on the operating table. He had never regained consciousness. Lycklama became the first smokejumper to die in the line of duty.

It is now a little more than 47 years since the accident happened. Aguirre is now deceased. Case and Ferguson now live in Ogden, Utah, today and Webb resides in Yuma, Ariz. Each is a member of the association. 💡

Fred Brauer Profile

(Reprinted from the Static Line, April 1994.)

During the morning of Dec. 23, 1944, paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division –



Fred Brauer 1946 (NSA files)

the Screaming Eagles – were surrounded by Germans at Bastogne, Belgium, during the Ardennes Offensive. They were holding fast, but running out of ammunition, supplies and equipment. The area had been “socked in” for several days and friendly aircraft had not been able to reach them.

All eyes had been looking skyward as the weather cleared. Suddenly, to the west, there was the sound of heavy gunfire, and then the roar of approaching aircraft. A flight of C-47 transports swept in at low altitude, dropping cargo while undergoing intense anti-aircraft fire. At the controls of the lead ship of that flight was a young Army Air Force captain, a former smokejumper by the name of **Fred Brauer (MSO-41)**.

For his actions that day he would receive the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Fred was a veteran pilot who had dropped paratroopers and

pulled troop-laden gliders on a number of invasions. The beleaguered paratroopers of the 101st at Bastogne were “his boys.”

Fred had grown up near Missoula at what was called Finn Town, The Flat, or West Riverside, about five miles east of the Garden City. After graduating from high school he had attended the University of Montana on an athletic scholarship, and had been on the football team.

He had started fighting forest fires at the close of his freshman year in high school, telling a tall tale about his age in order to do so. He had fought fires every summer after that, and then joined the smokejumpers at Region 1 in 1941. He served with them until entering military service in 1943.

He had been trained initially as a fighter pilot and dive-bomber pilot. Upon his return from the Army Air Force he became the Region 1 Smokejumper Fire Suppression Foreman and ran the loft for the jump unit.

Those of us who knew Fred, and worked for him, would have gone through hell for him. We trusted him. He was a leader, one who demanded much from the jumpers, to include proficiency in parachuting in order that they be prepared for the rigors of jumping into mountain terrain and fighting fires in rough, dangerous country. He was known as a man who backed his people.

Fred had – and still has – a tremendous sense of humor. When he was sending you out on one of his projects – on one of Brauer’s good deals – he

made you feel like you were indispensable. **Martin “Onie” Onishuk (MSO-51)**, had been sent on a brush-piling project at one time, and was told he was getting one of Fred’s good deals in Idaho. On his return to the jumper unit, Onit hung a sack of fresh sheep manure on Fred’s office door doorknob, with a sign, “Fred’s Good Deal.”

Fred took over the smokejumper program in Region 1 in 1951. He stayed in that position until his 40th birthday in 1958. On that date, Aug. 23, he was suited up and ready to head out on a fire, but was not allowed to do so because of his age. From the jumpers Fred went into the Forest Service helicopter program and also fire retardant programs.

Fred has been asked what it was that made him return to the smokejumper program year after year. He responded, “Jumping was a challenge. It developed good fiber and real good character. I was proud of those kids. They were just kids when most of them began, and within a few years they went away as real, good-thinking young men.”

He was one of the men who did much to promote and further the smokejumper programs. He, like most of us, really misses those jump days. We remember words from a song some time ago: “We thought those days would never end ...” Fred had a severe bout with cancer some years ago, but he really bounced back. He would like to try one more jump. Fred retired to Missoula and lives there with his wife off Reserve Street. 🕯



SOUNDING OFF from the editor



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

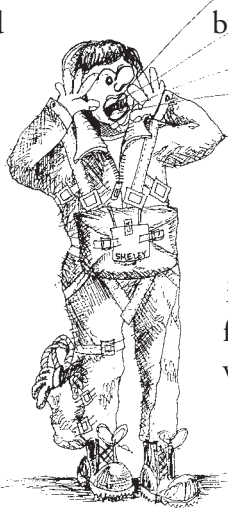
MY WIFE, K.G., and I had just come out of the Boundary Waters Wilderness from our annual NSA project in Minnesota. There is no Internet or cell phones at the Wilderness Ca-

noe Base, so we had been out of touch with the world for a week or so.

I usually get 25-30 NSA-related emails a day, so there was almost 200 waiting for me to go through before catching the flight from the Twin Cities to Sacramento. Two or three of that total came from members telling me that **Chris Sorensen** (Assoc.) had been killed in an auto accident on September 10, 2017. I wanted this to be a bad dream, but it was true.

I met Chris back in 2001 through the NSA website where I answer all the "contact us" communications. This was after the 9/11 attacks. Chris asked me for some information on a "hero" who had been a city fireman, decorated military veteran, a smokejumper and was being lauded for his work during the 9/11 attacks.

Thanks to the excellent work that **Roger Savage** (MSO-57) had done in constructing our smokejumper database, it was easy to quickly say that this individual had never been a smokejumper. Most likely, he had also never been a city fireman or decorated veteran. Chris had been communicating with this person over the Internet and was furious at being duped



by this pretender.

This started a friendship that has lasted over the past 16 years. I found that Chris was very interested in smoke-jumping, wildfire and was well read. He started forwarding me fire-related information from Montana and Idaho as well as obits of smokejumpers that appeared in newspapers in those areas. All of this was meaningful and helpful to me as editor of *Smokejumper* magazine.

Wanting to expand the scope of the magazine, I asked Chris if he would write a column covering political and legislative information. I thought it would be good to have a regular columnist for the magazine who was not a smokejumper. Chris responded and has been writing *The View From Outside The Fence* for the past 16 years. We came up with that name to relate to a person looking at our organization with a view of a person who was not a smokejumper.

When I would get a rumor of the passing of a person, I would ask Chris to help me research the Internet for more information. Early on, he put a search on his computer that would bring up any articles with the word "smokejumpers" in the text. That helped in the *Odds/Ends* column.

I found out that he played high school football in Montana and had a love for the game and



December 2, 1959 — September 10, 2017

sports in general. He kept me in the loop every Sunday as to the results of the Griz, Montana State, and the other schools in the state. Way back, my nephew played at Carroll College with Bobby Petrino and has coached with him for years. Chris told me there was really a Carroll College and they had been pretty good in football.

When Chris found out I was a track coach, he started keeping me up on high school Track & Field in the state. We compared marks and identified athletes who could and would come from small schools to become successful at the collegiate level.

We were in communication

two – three times a week. It's hard not to sit down on Sunday morning and go over the scores with Chris. It will be hard not to have his column in the magazine. After 16 years it has become automatic to reserve space for "The View" when planning my page count.

As smokejumpers, we have always been a "tight knit" group. I couldn't do without photo editor **Johnny Kirkley** (CJ-64), who has greatly improved the

quality of the magazine with his photo editing and quarterly centerfolds. At the same time, in my work with the magazine I've found that most of my help comes from outside the smoke-jumper community.

It was a lucky break back in 2001 when Chris Sorensen contacted me. It was tragic when he left us in 2017. For those who have read his column and have known Chris, the past 16 years have been our "lucky break." 🕯

Gathering at the Gobi June 2018

Mark down June 8-9 for a 2018 gathering at the Gobi. This is not a formal reunion, no registration, no fees, no program, just a chance to get together with friends and family. Pass the word around. Jumpers from all bases invited.

Update From National Smokejumper Program Manager Roger Staats

The following update from Roger was sent to the NSA Board of Directors for our October board meeting in Seattle:

It has been another crazy fire season. The jump program had steady fire business from June – September. Some bases, such as Redding, Redmond and Missoula, frequently jumped out. I will be working on an end-of-the-year report and a briefing paper on what is planned for the 2018 Ram-Air transition and will get those to you to share with the NSA members this fall.

"Good news on the project proposal analysis at NCSB. The decision was to keep the base at its current location. Now we just need the funding to build the facilities. The bad news for NCSB is that the bunkhouse will be condemned due to health and safety concerns. This is mostly due to the age of the building and it not meeting current fire code requirements.

"The Sherpa program did have some delays with the avionics contractor. Originally, we were planning to conduct SASES evaluations this fall, but will

now look at the winter or spring of 2018. The goal is to have two operational Sherpas for the 2018 season.

"The Ram-Air transition this year had a goal of 28 transition jumpers and 28 rookie jumpers. Twenty-six of the transition jumpers completed the training. Only 15 of the rookies completed the training. The majority of rookies who did not pass were due to physical fitness, tree climbing and units. I believe there were three folks who never reported to work. There was only one jumper during actual jumping that was removed from the program. The transition included all jump bases this year with the focus on McCall and Redding. Redmond and NCSB had two jumpers each that transitioned.

"Funding for the jump program and all fire programs in 2018 will be challenging. The jump program will be fine, but the challenge is how each region will work without P-code savings to pay base salary on fire assignments. So far, all are interpreting Washington Office Budget direction a bit different.

"As for me, I spent a total of 43 days on three fire assignments (all in Montana) with my incident management team. It took a little bit of getting used to

being the Deputy IC instead of the IC, but I figured it out. I have spent a tremendous amount of time away from home traveling to jump bases, observing

Ram-Air training, conducting base reviews, meeting with leadership and more. I can't express how happy I am to do that for the smokejumper program." 🧑

Remembering John "Mike" MacKinnon

by Don Courtney (Missoula '56)

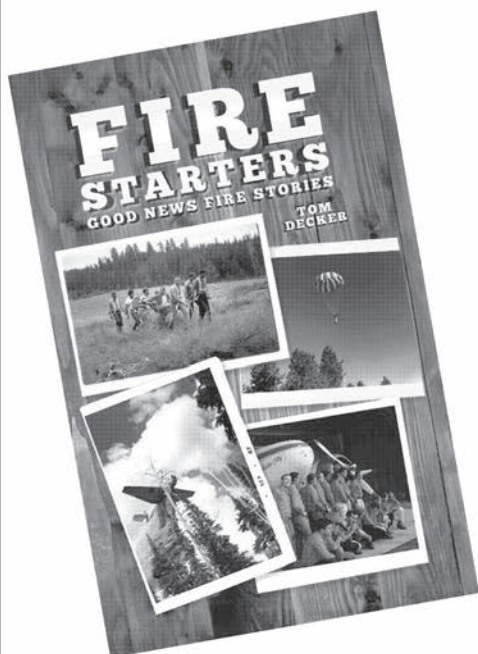
Mike McKinnon (MSO-57) was about the sweetest human being you ever saw. His name wasn't even Mike. Somebody (nobody knows who) called him Mike by accident early in his rookie year, and Mike just went along with it rather than put out a correction. Many of us didn't know for a long time that his name was John. But he was a Mike sort of guy, and in my head at least, he'll always be Mike.

Mike's wife died, and he raised the kids alone; raised and educated them and set them on the right path. His son became an Army captain, and a source of great pride for Mike. It was a hammer blow when he was killed in action in Iraq. But Mike seemed to take a deep breath and carry on

doing his duty, and pouring out his own personal brand of sunshine upon the world. All of this is worth knowing about this good man. But it is not legendary. What is legendary about Mike McKinnon involves a fire call and a Twin Beech and some other things that came together in a legendary way.

The fire was a perfect little smokejumper affair in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Everything went just fine. The spotter, **Hans Trankle** (MSO-51), found a good jump spot, put out the drift streamers until he was satisfied, put Mike in the door, got lined up, and gave Mike that happy swat on the shoulder that meant it was time for him to go. And Mike went. But he didn't go far. When Hans looked, he saw Mike right below the door,

The National Smokejumper Association presents



Fire Starters

Good News Fire Stories

by Tom Decker (Idaho City '65)

"Decker's *Fire Starters* is at once a collection of images that spark the imagination, refresh memories and bring a smile of familiarity to anyone who has loved time in the woods, worked a fire line or shared in the close relationships of the 'band of brothers.' It's also a challenge to dig deeper for the treasures that can be revealed through the eyes of faith and the wisdom that comes through accumulated life experiences."

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just hanging there.

You may remember that the Twin Beech had a wide jump step, room for both feet, and the idea was to sit your butt on the door sill, put both feet in the step, and at the right time just sort of raise up and hop off toward the rest of your life. Well, there was a very small gap between the top of the step and the side of the aircraft, right at the bottom of the aircraft door. A very small gap, but just right for the folded and sewed end of the parachute leg strap to fit down into. The tip of Mike's leg strap got in that gap, and when Mike's weight went downward, that folded tab of nylon strap just jammed and put an end to the entire operation. And there he was.

This was the era of the 28-foot candy-striped parachute canopy with slots and tails, and the parachute was packed onto a plywood board. The whole works was held onto the board with a canvas cover edged with a bungee. Hans laid down and reached out and held that canvas cover on, because a 28-foot canopy exploding open beneath the airplane would not be good, not for Mike's leg and certainly not good for the airplane and everybody in it. They headed south, out of the mountains.

Between the little town of Ovando and the south end of the Bob Marshall is an area of glacial outwash that grows hay and oats and anything else that can endure a very short season between frosts. It took awhile to get there. Mike reckoned a half hour or so, but he admitted to be not in the best

of a time-estimating frame of mind. Over a big field, Hans reached out with a knife and cut off that pesky folded nylon tab and set Mike free.

Everything went well for the rest of Mike's jump, except that his leg was totally numb from being in what was essentially a tourniquet for much of its recent past. The Beech kept circling, waiting for some signs of life, and after another twenty minutes or so, Mike could stand up, wave and put out a streamer L. About that time, a pickup arrived and gathered him up and took him to the ranch house.

What was happening there was an annual one or two-day retreat of the top management boys of the Caterpillar Corporation, one of whom owned the place. The rest of Mike's day was very pleasant, and a Forest Service rig arrived to take him back to Missoula.

Mike said that he went back to that ranch some years later and met a young lady whose family still worked there. He asked if she remembered him arriving there from out of nowhere. She said that she'd just been a little kid, and sort of remembered a spaceman or something doing that. Mike didn't say what he told her, but I think that he was too polite and gentle to correct her memory, and that she still remembers that there was a spaceman who came to the ranch one day.

Good by, Mike. You made us better people, just knowing you. 🕯

Mike passed away October 23, 2017.

BOOK REVIEW

Return To Phantom Creek by Bud Filler (McCall '52)

It took Bud six years, but his novel is finished and available. It is self-published and available through Bud.

Burning Mountain Press, PO Box 45534, Boise, ID, 83711

Casebound copies \$25 plus \$6.00 S/H = \$31.00

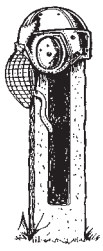
Softcover copies \$15.00 plus \$6.00 S/H = \$21.00

George Harpole (MSO-49): "*Return To Phantom Creek* is on track every step of the way. This is a novel that couldn't be written better if Hemingway had written it himself. This is the best I've read in a long time."

Suzanne Rainville (USFS ret. Payette NF Supervisor): "Entertaining, a fun read and fast paced. A great adventure story set in the mountains of Idaho where the author pulls you into the action from the very beginning."

Loree Nugent (USAF ret. Lt. Col): "*Return To Phantom Creek* is a plot with real life experiences developed into an exciting and overpowering scenario with the reader questioning whether it is fact or fiction." 🕯





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

Stewart S. “Lloyd” Johnson (McCall ’43)

Lloyd, 101, died September 19, 2017, in Fruitland, Idaho. He was born June 2, 1916. His parents were early McCall pioneers.

He graduated from McCall High School and attended the University of Utah and the University of Idaho. Lloyd was an avid outdoorsman and, at age seven, was proclaimed the “world’s smallest ski jumper” at the McCall Winter Carnival. He was active in skiing until age 90 and was instrumental in promoting Sun Valley and skiing in Idaho.

Lloyd worked for the USFS for many years and was the original smokejumper at McCall when the base was established in 1943. He jumped at McCall 1943-53 and has been recognized nationally as the oldest living smokejumper until his passing. Of smokejumping he said, “We never lost a fire because we got on them early.”

In 1954 Lloyd moved to Fruitland where he was the owner of a Westcott Oil distributorship until his retirement. After retirement, he managed the New Plymouth Cenex Farm Center for ten years.

Lloyd was a Pioneer Smokejumper and one of the founding fathers of the profession.

Christian M. Sorensen (Associate Life Member)

Chris, 57, died September 10, 2017, in an auto accident. According to the Montana Highway Patrol, the accident occurred when the left rear tire on his vehicle failed and the vehicle overturned. He was declared dead at the scene.

Chris was born in Casper, Wyoming, and graduated from Montana State University Billings with a degree in environmental studies and worked for the City of Great Falls, Montana, before moving back to Billings.

Chris was a regular columnist for *Smokejumper*

magazine for the last 15 years, writing his quarterly column “The View From Outside the Fence.”

Charles R. “Chuck” Mansfield (Cave Junction ’59)

Chuck died October 6, 2017. After getting his Ph.D., he was hired by NASA where he worked from 1969 to 1973 at the Space Optics branch at the Johnson Space Center. Chuck and his partner worked on an optical instrument for the Hubble Telescope.

In 1973 he accepted a position to work for the Los Alamos National Laboratory. From 1978-88, Chuck served as project leader for the Antares and Aurora Laser Systems – the Antares Laser was the largest carbon dioxide laser ever built. He then continued to work on the “Star Wars” laser defense program and retired in 1993.

After retirement he earned his private pilot’s license and started three businesses: Coyote Aviation, Coyote Aerospace, and Coyote Tales Publishing. Chuck was a founding member of the Los Alamos Retiree group and its president until last year. Over his career he published 37 scientific papers and co-authored 18 patents.

Chuck jumped at Cave Junction 1959-69. Due to the heavy timber and high Madrone in the CJ jump country, it was often difficult to find the climbing spurs and cargo after being dropped to the jumpers. In a preview of his scientific career, Chuck took used peach cans from the Messhall and attached a buzzer system inside the cans. The “Mansfield Buzzer” was then attached to the cargo and the buzzer activated just before being kicked out the door. Many a Gobi jumper found their cargo as they followed the sound of the “Mansfield Buzzer.”

James N. Sweaney (Missoula ’67)

Jim died July 17, 2017, at his home in Gardin-

er, MT. He graduated from Sturgis High School in South Dakota before attending the University of Montana as a forestry major. After graduation, he was commissioned as a Lt. in the US Army. Following his service in the Army, Jim returned to smokejumping. He jumped at Missoula 1967-68, GAC '69 and West Yellowstone 1970-77. Jim then was employed by the US Park Service until his retirement.

Ronald E. Gunther (Idaho City '54)

Ron died July 2, 2017. He grew up in New Jersey, and after graduating from Hackensack High School, enrolled at Utah State University, followed by medical school at George Washington University in Washington, DC. While in medical school, he joined the Air Force and was subsequently discharged with the rank of Captain.

While in the Air Force, he served his internship in southern California and began practicing in his field of OB/GYN. In 1991 he moved to McCall, Idaho, and was instrumental in establishing a women's clinic. He stayed active in the medical practice until retirement in 2001.

Ron trained in McCall in 1954, while a student at Utah State, and jumped out of Idaho City making six fire jumps.

Ian R. Pohowsky (Missoula '11)

Ian died August 7, 2017. He was born in Woking, England. After completing his secondary schooling in England, he finished up his studies at the North American Institute of Aviation in South Carolina. He joined Eagle Airlines, but his passion for the outdoors and rock climbing led to a career change in 2007 when he started wildland firefighting with the USFS.

Ian jumped at Missoula in 2011, West Yellowstone in 2013 and transferred to NIFC in 2014.

Robert A. Crowe (Missoula '46)

Bob died July 29, 2017, in Miles City, Montana. He joined the military in 1943 and was a paratrooper in the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment. Bob was a decorated trooper and survived the Battle of the Bulge. After the war he earned his degree in Forestry from Penn State. He was an avid motorcyclist and rode his Harley back and forth across the U.S. while he split time at school

and jumping at Missoula from 1946-49.

Bob moved to Missoula after graduation and went to work for the White Pine Sash Company until the mid-60s. He then went to work for the Montana State Forester's Office until retirement in 1979. Bob was active in scouting and was awarded a distinguished service award in 1971.

Harlan L. Hayes (Missoula '52)

Harlan, 83, died August 14, 2017, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He grew up in Missoula and graduated from the University of Montana in 1956 with a degree in Forestry. Harlan was a Reserve Army Officer and alternated military postings with his work with the USFS and BLM in Montana, Oregon and Colorado. He retired in his early 50s and was active in the Retired Federal Employees group and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Harlan jumped at Missoula during the 1952-53 seasons.

Raul D. Villagran (Boise '76)

Raul, 76, died September 25, 2017, in Las Cruces, N.M. He retired from the USFS as an Assistant Fire Management Officer after a 30-year career. Raul jumped at Boise in 1976. He had excellent horsemanship skills and enjoyed packing, riding and hunting. Raul lived in Mimbres, N.M., at the time of his death.

Claude A. Greiner (Missoula '54)

Claude died May 5, 2017, at a nursing home in Oklahoma. He jumped at Missoula 1954-55-58, Fairbanks 1962, Cave Jct. 1969 and Anchorage 1972. He was a "kicker" for Continental Airlines during the Secret War in Laos.

Thomas H. Greiner (Missoula '55)

Tom died October 1, 2017, at a nursing home in Oklahoma. He jumped at Missoula 1955-58, Fairbanks 1959-61-62, Cave Jct. 1968-69, and McCall 1970. Tom was a "kicker" for Air America during the Secret War in Laos.

David H. Evenson (Missoula '64)

Dave died October 20, 2017, after an extended illness. He graduated from Bemidji State University in Minnesota and moved to Montana and completed graduate work at the University of

Montana. Beside his work as a smokejumper, Dave worked for the National Park Service and the State of Montana. He retired from the Montana Univer-

sity System, Office of Higher Education.

Dave jumped at Missoula 1964, 65, 67, 68, and from West Yellowstone in 1966. 🧑

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Listening To Tanner: Finding Help For A Functional Gastrointestinal Disorder

by Jessica Cerretani, Boston Children's Hospital

The NSA Good Samaritan Fund has been involved with helping the Chung family with medical and other expenses associated with Tanner's illness. The following article from the Boston Children's Hospital in September 2017 does a good job in explaining Tanner's problems. Thanks to your generous support of our GSF, we have been able to provide significant help to Quincy and Michelle as they seek treatment for Tanner. (Ed.)

For most families, movie night is simply an opportunity to enjoy each other's company while soaking up some mindless entertainment. But for Tanner Chung – son of former smokejumper **Quincy Chung** (NIFC-03) – and his family, a trip to the theater was life-changing.

As they watched the tale of a young girl with a mysterious illness play out on the big screen, they were struck by the similarities to Tanner's own story.

The film was the 2016 drama *Miracles From Heaven*, which is based on the true [experiences](#) of a girl who was treated by [Dr. Samuel Nurko](#) at Boston Children's Hospital for a motility disorder.

"We had been hoping for some guidance, some help, for Tanner," explained his mother, Michelle. "The movie was full of signs." She and Quincy decided to contact Boston Children's. Within a day, they had a return call from practice liaison nurse Tracy Myers.

"She asked me for details about Tanner's situation and I told her it was really complicated," Michelle said. "She told me she had all day. That was the first time I felt like someone really listened to us."

A few weeks later, Tanner had an appointment with nine clinicians at the hospital's [Motility and Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders Center](#), including Dr. Nurko, and the family flew east from their home in Idaho.

'It's very real'

At a recent appointment, Tanner appeared healthy and happy as he joked with his care team. But his vibrant exterior is misleading. Now age 9, he's struggled with chronic joint and gastrointestinal pain for much of his young life.

The road to Boston Children's has been a long one for the Chungs. Despite traveling to see physicians in California, Washington and Utah, answers eluded them—and Tanner's pain remained.

"For a long time, it seemed like nobody believed us," Michelle said. "We even had some doctors tell us it was all in Tanner's head."

But in Boston, they found validation.

After speaking with Tanner and examining him, Nurko thought he had identified the problem. "He looked right at us and said, 'I know what this is, and it's very real,'" Michelle remembered.

Nurko made a diagnosis: a functional gastrointestinal disorder, which triggered pain when the boy ate, drank and went to the bathroom. Nurko then began a multidisciplinary approach to the problem, using a biopsychosocial model that addresses the many biological, emotional and social challenges a child can experience as a result of his or her symptoms.

A team approach

Since that first visit, the Chungs have returned twice to Boston Children's, where Tanner has also



received treatment for a compromised immune system and multi-joint symptoms. His orthopedic surgeon, **Dr. Travis Matheney**, is part of the multidisciplinary team working in concert with his local therapists and physicians.

It's an approach that Michelle and Quincy appreciate.

"I know doctors can get territorial, but from what we've experienced at Boston Children's, they really tend to work together," Michelle said. "They care about my son, not their egos."

While he still experiences the ups and downs of living with multiple chronic conditions, Tanner's in a better frame of mind knowing that he's in good hands. A diehard football fanatic, he also enjoys engineering LEGO buildings and wood-working with his dad. And his parents are relieved that they finally have the guidance they had hoped to receive.

"Every time our plane has landed in Boston, we've felt safe and protected," Michelle said. "It feels like we're home." 🕯

Oldest Surviving Smokejumper Dies at 101

An Interview With Stewart S. "Lloyd" Johnson (McCall '43)

by **Leo Cromwell** (Idaho City '66)

Lloyd Johnson died September 19, 2017. The following is a reprint from Smokejumper April 2006.

Stewart or Lloyd? He does not care what you call him, but he should be remembered as "The Father of Region 4 Smokejumping." Lloyd worked 23 seasons with the Forest Service. In 1943, he volunteered to be in charge of a new experimental firefighting program called Smokejumping. Only a few years earlier Evan Kelley, the Region 1 Regional Forester, said, "All parachute jumpers are more or less crazy and just a little bit unbalanced, otherwise they wouldn't be engaged in such a hazardous undertaking." Three years later in 1946, as the war came to an end, Lloyd hired McCall's first non-CPS smokejumper crew consisting mainly of returning veterans. Lloyd felt that he worked with the finest group of men that could possibly be put together during his ten years with the smokejumpers. What he did and why he left, this is his story.

Raised In McCall

Stewart Standidge Johnson was born in McCall, Idaho, on June 2, 1916. He grew up in McCall and loved the outdoors. Skiing, firefight-

ing, and smokejumping were a very important part of his life. Stewart's nickname, "Lloyd," was given to him by his father. Later in his life, he was called "The Whip" by his smokejumper crew. This title is said to have originated from **Bus Bertram** (MYC-47), who on a very long packout led by Lloyd said, "Even a government mule gets a break, Whip." He has always enjoyed skiing and was named "The World's Smallest Ski Jumper" on the 1925 McCall Winter Carnival official pin. Lloyd can still be found skiing on the slopes of Brundage Mountain every winter.

Forest Service Career

In 1930 at the age of 14, Lloyd began working for the Forest Service while in high school. He was hired as the custodian at the Forest Supervisor's Office. Emptying and cleaning spittoons permanently cured Lloyd of ever using tobacco products. Later that summer he worked for the district fixing telephone lines, trails and other types of maintenance work.

When he was 16 he received his first full-time forest service position with packers George Anderson and Harry Fritzer. As the camp tender, he was in charge of setting up camp and preparing meals.

When fires broke out during this 1932 season, he made his first appearance on a fireline. Lloyd had volunteered to be a much needed water boy. His job was to hike to the nearest stream or lake and fill a 5-gallon pack with water and return it to the fireline for the crew. Walking around the fire offering the crew water, Lloyd learned a lot about fire fighting procedures. Lloyd was fired three times that summer by a Regional Forest Supervisor from Ogden named Floyd Godden. Godden had spotted Lloyd on the fireline and knew he had to be too young to be fighting fires.

Godden approached the young, hard working youth and asked, "How old are you?"

Lloyd replied, "I don't know."

Godden said, "Well, you're not old enough. Collect your pay and find a ride back to where you belong."

Lloyd started to leave, then ducked out of site and reported back to his foreman, who said, "Disappear kid, we need you up here, so whenever you see old Floyd, just go the other way."

He worked on and helped build lookouts that do not exist on today's Payette National Forest. Some of the lookouts he worked on were Black-mare, Eagle Rock, and Teapot Dome.

Later, before taking on the smokejumping project, he worked as an alternate ranger on the New Meadows District. He also spent time in the Supervisor's Office working alongside the Forest Dispatcher, Harold "Slim" Vassar.

How It All Began In 1943

"No one else was crazy enough to do it," is how Lloyd answers the question about why he took on the challenge of starting a new smoke-jumper firefighting unit. "It was strictly an experimental program and it had to be voluntary. A lot of Forest Service personnel thought that it would not work. I was chosen because I knew firefighting and I believed that this new idea would get firefighters to the line faster without the long walks.

"I can tell you how the McCall Base got started. I got into it even before they started the smokejumpers. They developed a seat that would work out of a Travelaire. You would sit in the seat and pull on a lever and you would go out the bottom of the plane, and then you would pull

your ripcord. That was never approved, but I volunteered for the first deal. When they decided to give it an experimental try here in Region 4, I volunteered for this great challenge. **John Ferguson** (MYC-43) and I were both working for the Forest Service here in McCall, so they chose the two of us to go to training in Seeley Lake, Montana. **Frank Derry** (MSO-40) headed up the training. So Ferguson, the conscientious objectors and I trained together. We then returned to McCall along with three conscientious objectors: **Lester Gahler** (MYC-43), **Jerry Hofer** (MYC-43), and **Keith Utterback** (MYC-43). After the training was completed, I was placed in charge of the new program."

During the first three years of smokejumping at McCall, the crew consisted of two Forest Service employees and the rest were CPS (Civilian Public Service or Conscientious Objectors) jumpers. Lloyd had a lot of respect for the conscientious objectors, even though he did not agree with them for not going into the military service. He understood it was the way they were raised and what they believed in. The CPS crew would do anything they were asked to do in McCall in those early years. That first year the CPS jumpers were not prepared for the sub-zero temperatures. He had to "beg, borrow, and steal" for clothes to get them through the long winter months. The CPS program was run by their own organization and, after training, they received their jumper base assignment. In 1944, McCall received sixteen of these jumpers and expanded to thirty-five for the final year of the program in 1945.

"We had absolutely nothing to work with here in McCall. With no money, everything that we got was taken out of the forest funds, and they handed out money like you would to your kids as they were growing up. Our base was started on the forest property above an old nursery building that was used for raising trees. It was abandoned at that time, so we took over this building. A cook shack was set up in one corner of the building. It had an upper story that we set the smokejumpers up in. A parachute loft was constructed to inspect and dry the chutes. We had a pulley system set up to the apex of the building to pull the chutes up for inspection. John Ferguson and I were the only trained riggers the first three years.

“The building was a portable military building. When the Great Depression came along, they had to have buildings to house the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). So then they shipped in these portable military buildings; they were molded together in sections.

“Up the hill we built a barracks with a basement in it. When the forest supervisor, Jimmy Farrel, would leave town, we would slip out there and build another building because he would never have authorized it if he knew about it. When he came back he would say, ‘Well, what’s this?’ It was a kitchen.

“In 1946 the war was over and we hired local boys and veterans to replace the CPS jumpers who provided jumper manpower during the war. We built a baseball field near the jump tower. I hired **Wayne Webb, Kenny Roth, and Dale Fickle**, who were great athletes, and they wanted the baseball field. Others hired that year included: **Smokey Stover, Bob Caldwell, Bruce Egger, Wally Henderson, Ray Mansisidor, Ace Nielsen,** and brothers **Ralph and Paul Wilde**. We went and leveled off the field behind the base and got the equipment by the ‘beg, borrow, or steal’ method because we had no money. If I needed a dollar, I would have to go over the hill and get down on my hands and knees. We had a great team until the fire season got hot and heavy. I encouraged the baseball because it kept the guys in shape. I must say some of the guys were better ballplayers than workers.”

The First Smokejumper Buildings In McCall

“We got most of the buildings from the CCC camps at Lake Fork Creek, near McCall and French Creek, up river from Riggins. We would go out and tear them down and reassemble them back at McCall. The last of the buildings we got from Gowen Field in Boise. They were already torn apart and lying out in the sun. They were warped and we had a heck of a time putting them back together, but we had to have them. Each panel was about eight foot wide and we bolted them together. They had 2x4 frames and we put the buildings up and finished them inside. We put up wallboard and covered them with gallons

and gallons of paint. We used the spray gun on everything we had; that’s what held the buildings together. We painted the floors gray and built lockers for each individual jumper.

“At the food cache each jumper made up his own food bag for the fire. Everybody did not like the same things, so they chose what they wanted to take to the fire. You know, everybody does not like beans, so you didn’t take beans if you did not like them.

“Everything was set up in camp. We had a roster and when we got a fire the top guys went and when you came off the fire you returned to the bottom to rotate up again. You worked your way up the roster until you reached the top and when you got a fire, then away you went. We did not have a fire buzzer at first because we didn’t have anyone to ring the buzzer. We waited for a call from dispatch over the hill at the supervisor’s office informing us that we had a fire. When we got a call we suited up in our ready room and then got into a pickup that had seats along the sides of the bed. Jumpers were all suited and chuted up and went right to the airport and got into the plane, and we were off in around 15 minutes.”

The First Jumps From McCall

“The first jump was made from the Travelair with Penn Stoor as pilot and I was the spotter. It was on Captain John’s Creek near Riggins on August 14, 1943, on the Idaho Forest. John Fuguson and Lester Gahler made the jump using 30-foot diameter Eagle parachutes.

“The second jump of the 1943 fire season was on August 27. I was jumping with Jerry Hofer and Keith Utterback, and John Ferguson was the spotter. The fire was near Sloan’s Point in Paddy Flat, only a few miles southeast of McCall.

“The wind was really blowing, and I managed to get my canopy draped over the top of the tallest fir tree in Idaho. We carried letdown ropes that were only sixty feet in length. I looked down and I knew that with 60 feet of letdown rope. I could not get even close to the ground. The fire was burning right next to the tree I was in, and I felt like ‘a pig on a stick.’ I unhooked my canopy and took off all my jump gear and threw it out so that the only thing I had left was my rope. I climbed down through the limbs and tied off on the lowest



Lloyd Johnson 1944 (Courtesy L. Johnson)

one and dropped the rope. It came within 15 feet of the ground.

“I slowly worked my way down this big sloping fir. There were little clumps of broken branches that made it difficult to work around. I was doing fine until I ran out of branches and I swung out. Now all I had between the ground and myself was

my rope. I started down the rope and the friction burned my hands through my gloves. Today I can still remember the feeling as it burned through my gloves into my flesh. Boy, were they smoking! I got down to the end of my rope and just cut loose and did a good roll. Fortunately, outside of my rope-burned hands, I had no problem, but the fire

was crowning right next to me, and I was naturally a little excited. We got on the ground and soon controlled the fire.”

McCall’s report of the fire jump says that Dick Johnson was the pilot of the Travelaire. The fire was running fast and snags were falling. The three smokejumpers and a Paddy Flat guard held the fire in check until a crew of 15 firefighters arrived several hours later and prevented a major fire.

The 1946 Season

In the 1946 season, the McCall Unit had forty-three jumpers in the first year after the release of the CPS jumpers. Forty were in their first year, as most of the new recruits were veterans of the war. Lloyd made up rules with the help of the new crew and appointed new squadleaders from their midst. Weight limits were established from 120 to 180 pounds. “If you are over 180 pounds you will hit too hard and if you weigh under 120 you will drift too far,” Lloyd informed the recruits. An age limit was placed at 40 years of age after which it was believed the jumper was “over the hill.”

Lloyd preferred to hire the college students instead of the “career jumpers.” The students came back from college when the fire season needed them and returned to college as the season came to an end. He soon had doctors, lawyers, school-teachers, forest service leaders, and other professional people as part of his earlier crews.

July 3, 1946, was the date of the first Forest Service smokejumper fatality in the nation. First-year jumper **Lester Lycklama** (MYC-46) was killed after being hit in the head by a limb from a tree that he and rookie **John Hennessey** (MYC-46) were attempting to fall with a crosscut. Lloyd jumped the rescue along with four others. He administered blood plasma to Lester, who later died in the Council Hospital. His Decision To Leave The Smokejumpers

Under the National Security Act of 1947, the Central Intelligence Agency was established and by 1949 the CIA went recruiting for candidates in the smokejumper organization. The CIA wanted smokejumpers because of their knowledge of jumping and surviving on the ground after the jump. One of the first people they were interested in was Lloyd Johnson. The CIA talked to Lloyd and he pledged his secrecy to the organization and

never even told his wife of their interest in him. But the forest supervisor was informed when they contacted him to reach Lloyd and had discussed the possibility of losing smokejumpers to the new organization.

Soon fellow Forest Service employees were telling Lloyd, “We hear you are leaving us to take a job with the CIA.”

The FBI and the forest supervisor accused Lloyd of “letting the cat out of the bag” about the CIA. Lloyd was upset over becoming the “fall guy” and, along with a few other things, he felt like it was time to find a new career. He was not forced to quit but made the difficult decision on his own.

In the spring of 1953, after training his crew for the new fire season, Lloyd quit the Forest Service as he promised he would. Lloyd was a proud man and was very well respected by his crew. Wayne Webb wrote a letter that protested the way the Forest Service was treating Lloyd, and the rest of his loyal crew signed their support. Webb’s letter is said to have cost him his chance of ever replacing Lloyd as the new Project Leader in McCall. Lloyd trained the 1953 crew and turned the job of managing the project over to **Reid Jackson** (MYC-49).

In 1953, after 23 years of working for the Forest Service, Lloyd left and moved his family to Fruitland, Idaho, to begin his new career as an oil distributor for Westcott Oil. Lloyd had a very successful business career and life in Fruitland. He currently lives in the same house he bought in 1953, and his home contains a treasure of smokejumper history. This year on June 2, he will celebrate his 90th birthday with his family, friends, and smokejumpers.

The story of Stewart S. “Lloyd” Johnson has been preserved by the Heritage Program of the Payette National Forest, written in 2003 by Richard H. Holm. Lloyd’s knowledge and contributions to smokejumping have been preserved on video by hours of interviews by **Bob Webber** (MSO-62). Bob has captured Lloyd’s life and his memories of the forest workers, pilots, and smokejumpers so that we will never forget them. Lloyd Johnson is the person that made the smokejumping experiment work in Region 4. He truly is the “The Father of Region 4 Smokejumping.” 🕯

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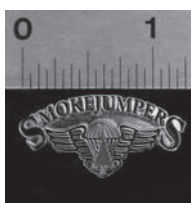
This handy thumb drive contains every edition of *The Static Line* (1993-99) and *Smokejumper* magazine (1999-present) ever published. Looking for an article about the early days of jumping? Trying to find a name of a smokejumper once featured in a story? Makes an excellent, environmentally friendly gift!

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These high-quality t-shirts feature spectacular artwork of an "old" smokejumper dangling from a tree. Ash-gray. Perfect for the gym, around the house or around town! M, L, XL and XXL. **\$14**



Our most popular t-shirt!

This outstanding 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. **\$14**



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**" was released in 1952. Starring Richard Widmark. **\$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. Interviews with many former jumpers. **\$10**



ODDS AND ENDS



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to **Jim Lancaster** (MYC-62) who just became our latest Life Member.

Dwight Zwick (MSO-55): “**Karl Seethaler** (MSO-55) asked in the July 2017 issue of *Smokejumper* if any other jumpers had a similar experience to his ‘big tree’ landing near Mt. Shasta. I did.

“In 1956 a DC-3 load out of Missoula was sent to Redding and assigned to a large fire on the Trinity NF.

“When I was dropped I did not like the landing site and steered toward a little bush near the ridge top. Unfortunately, the little bush was the top of a Ponderosa Pine. I threaded the 110-foot letdown rope through the D-rings and it was two feet above the ground.

“Five days later I retrieved the chute using spurs, a belt with D-rings and a short rope. The tree was five feet in diameter so I had to run the rope around the tree, tie it to one D-ring and shorted it as I climbed. The remainder of the crew enjoyed themselves as they shouted advice as I climbed. I cut one branch, the crew pulled, and the chute came down. I was still 110 feet off the ground.

“Several months later, one of my classmates from VMI sent a 35mm picture showing me cutting the limb.”

Hank Brodersen (MSO-54): “Chuck - I have the sad duty to forward to you an obituary of a very close friend of mine, **Ron Gunther** (IDC-54). He and I grew up together on the same street in northern New Jersey just one block apart. We met in 1944 when we were nine years old and went all through school together until high school graduation in 1952. He headed west to Utah State University while I went north to University of Maine, but unbeknown to either of us, we both trained and jumped in 1954. I was in Missoula while Ron



jumped out of Idaho City. We stayed in touch all through the years and visited often when I came west for several Trail Projects and reunions.”

John Culbertson (FBX-69) on the passing of **Dave Laws** (RAC-66): “I enjoyed being with Dave over the days we were at CJ, and I will not forget him running on the tarmac at dusk, long pants and all, stopping to do push-ups and sit-ups. The old PT drill has served many of us well over the years. Each carrying on in our own way. Like so many things we learn when we are young. Consistency and perseverance. Skills that serve big throughout life.

“I laid on the ramp behind the loft one night and watched Dave run. Light faded, runway lights came on. I imagine everyone who has ever worked at CJ or been on standby like myself has done that. Feeling the heat of the day coming off the concrete and tarmac. A nice contrast to lying in the creek that flows through the base. Dave recommended we do both and we did, and I remembered.”

Karl Brauneis (MSO-77) with some comments on July 2017 issue of *Smokejumper*: “Outstanding Issue. **Dick Rath** (MSO-73)- *Fighting Fire in North Dakota*: The last time I worked with Dick was down in Texas in 1999. I was a Division Group Supervisor and Dick was the Safety Officer. It was one of my best assignments. I had a Strike Team Leader and Engines from Oklahoma, a dozer and Dozer Boss, Field Observer and access to Air Operations. We backed up the rural fire departments. We kept our resources staged at the motel until we received a fire call. That left Division and up at the ICP (run by the Texas Forest Service) at Round Rock. Dick led the morning briefings and afterwards we would head to the local coffee shop and then return to ICP. It truly was another day in Paradise.

“The Texas folks were just outstanding from

the Texas Forest Service to the local communities we served.

“Eisenhower’s Remarks of September 22, 1954: Thank you for printing. What a great lesson in Civics and the role of government.

“Karl Seethaler - Enough Excitement. Karl, you lucky When my parachute collapsed out of a huge Douglas Fir in Oregon, it flipped me backwards and I passed out tumbling to be awakened when I impacted the ground. The jumpers and helitack were just outstanding to get me out of there on the rescue jump and helicopter egress to Eugene. I went to Disneyland there for two weeks on Morphine. Figure the parachute must have pulled some drag for me to have survived.”

Jim Hickman (MSO-52): “I just finished writing a historical novel titled ‘Mule Shoes To Santa Fe.’ I grew up along the Santa Fe Trail, and some of the story is an actual account of some of my Mother’s family, the Greenup’s of Kentucky. It’s about two tough brothers and their equally tough cousins from the Smoky Mountains who take horses and mules from Kentucky to Santa Fe in 1840, when everything south of the Arkansas River was in Mexico. There is much action, some tragedy, some humor, and a lot of human nature. The book is available through Amazon or any major book distributor.”

Jim’s book added to the NSA webstore at www.smokejumpers.com

Richard Hildner (MSO-67): “I wanted to give a big shout out to **Glen Johnshoy** (MSO-67). This past June 16, Glen completed the 100-mile Bighorn Trail Run, Dayton, WY. Out of 331 starters, there were only 174 finishers, or a drop rate of about 48%. Glen did all smokejumpers proud by finishing in 32:13:01. At age 70, he was the oldest finisher. The next oldest finisher was 62. Bighorn is no walk in the park. Elevation gain is 18,300 feet and is run almost exclusively on trails and cow paths. Rain all night long and a little snow at the turnaround at 8,900 feet turned the course into a snot-slippery hog wallow of shoe sucking mud two inches deep. He finished with a smile. Congratulations, Glen. You can see the full race report in the September 2017 issue of *Ultrarunning*.”

From a press release run on national internet news in Sept – “A firefighter from Saipan Island

in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands works a Northern California fire in this recent photo. He is part of a 31-man firefighting crew that spent two weeks on a fireline in the Modoc National Forest, and another stint in the Six Rivers National Forest, before returning 8,000 miles to their Pacific homes. Through the U. S. Forest Service’s Cooperative Fire Program, resources from the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau, American Samoa, and the Federated States of Micronesia can be called to fight fires on the mainland. The crew was hosted by the Mendocino National Forest during its stay in the U. S.”

Chuck Sheley (CJ-59): “I have a hard time understanding why we need to import firefighters from 8,000 miles away when we have so many young people who would love to have summer work as a firefighter.

“During my 17 years as Organized Crew Coordinator on the Mendocino N.F., we trained between 3,000 and 4,000 seasonal firefighters for Type II Crews. They were local Northern California kids who were called when needed, effective and low cost. Another example of having a blank check footed by the taxpayers.”

Davis Perkins (NCSB-72): “I’ve just returned from the Florida Keys with a Mobile Medical Team from Heart to Heart Int’l (HHI). Terrible destruction there from Hurricane Irma. HHI is the same great organization that has sent me to West Africa (Ebola), Nepal and Haiti. We were busy in Florida doing wound care and giving tetanus shots. I was with a great team, most of whom I’d worked with before. It was endearing to see how the locals were all looking out for each other. The best of our human nature.”

The Taos News printed a great article in one of their Sept. editions featuring the work done by one of the NSA Trail Crews. Headed up by **Mike Overby** (MSO-67), seven volunteers put together “logs on the biggest bridge the Camino Real R.D. of the Carson NF. has built in many years.” Big pat on the back to Mike and his crew.

Kathleen (Bevan) Sallee: “Thank you so much for sending copies of the October 2017 issue of *Smokejumper* magazine to my sister, Margie Shouman, and to me. Our brother, **Dave Be-**

van (MSO-55), was one of the smokejumpers honored last May with a star on the CIA Wall of Honor. The articles by Ken Hessel and Ivan Shapira of the *Washington Post* explain this amazing story as well.

"We are also grateful for copies of the book 'Smokejumpers and the CIA', which we received earlier this year. From the book and conversations with the six fine former jumpers pictured on your magazine cover, we learned more details about Dave's time in Southeast Asia. Fifty-six years after his death, we are so proud that he is still remembered.

"Dave loved his time as a jumper – the adventure, the challenges, and the great people he worked with. We're very proud of our family's connection with the Smokejumpers."

We just got an update from **Karen (Weissenback) Moen** on the project to excavate the site of Air America #293 that was shot down December 27, 1971. **Ed Weissenback** (RAC-64) was on that flight.

"The (flight) 293 families confirmed that the excavation team and local Detachment team in Laos leave on October 23 – one group from Honolulu and the other from Laos. Three sons of Capt. George Ritter and I depart from Atlanta, Dallas, and SFO on 10/29 and meet up in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on the 30th and head to Laos after a day of rest. We'll cross the border in NW Laos and go by riverboat down to Pak Beng where a driver and guide are driving over from Luang Prabang to meet us. We only plan to visit the site two days. We feel being there is important but know our presence is distracting and we don't want to give them any reason to not finish the job if at all possible."

"Only the Brave" - About the time this issue went to layout the movie *Only the Brave* was released. The Yarnell Fire and the loss of the Granite Mountain Hotshot crew is the subject of this film. The film has created some lively discussion among our membership and the general public. The question in many people's minds is: In the face of a rapidly approaching fire, why did the crew leave a safe zone in the black?

Barry Hicks (MSO-64) was involved in the post-fire investigation and gave permission to print one of his emails in this discussion.

"One of the reasons we will not ever know, perhaps, is the fact that the Forest Service refused to allow us investigators the chance to talk to Forest Service employees who were some of the last people to shed light on 'why.' But I can share what we do know.

"The Granite Mountain Hotshots were trained and mentored by an Assistant Chief of the Prescott Fire Department by the name of Darrel Willis. When I interviewed Darrell, he made the statement directly to me that no aggressive firefighter is going to sit in the black if structures are threatened (paraphrase from my memory, but I have the recorded interview).

"I asked Darrell twice if he really meant that, to give him a chance to recant what he had said. He also made this comment on TV interviews that he did.

"So, short of having better information, I have to think that they were trained with this mindset and executed it. I don't think they had any idea the fire was going to move as fast as it did toward Yarnell.

"There is also a theory that they were risk takers and had taken risks on other fires that were witnessed by other hotshot crews. I don't personally have the documentation to support that theory."

Since the fire in 2013, there have been a number of books written on this fire. It seems like there is a rush to publish and take advantage of the public interest and sales potential.

I contacted NSA member **John Maclean** asking about progress on his book. If you have read any of John's books (*Fire On The Mountain*, *Fire and Ashes*, *The Thirtymile Fire*, *The Esperanza Fire*), you will know that he puts in an enormous amount of time in research. John's book on the Yarnell Fire is still two years away. See additional information in this issue on that subject. 📖

Gathering at the Gobi June 2018

Mark down June 8-9 for a 2018 gathering at the Gobi. This is not a formal reunion, no registration, no fees, no program, just a chance to get together with friends and family. Pass the word around. Jumpers from all bases invited.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

by Jack Demmons
(Missoula '50)

The Daily Missoulian,
June 12, 1944

Colorful Ceremonies Sound Signal For 5th War Loan Drive

The colorful ceremonies at Dornblazer Field fittingly served as a solemn memorial to the men who have given their all for their country. It also served as a resounding rallying signal to the army of workers who will take up their task backing the gallant armies engaged in the world's most monumental struggle. The



5th War Loan drive opens this morning and continues until July 8th.

Swinging out of the sky, seven jumpers of the Forest Service, giving their services in a daring exhibition of para-

chuting, brought the spectators right up out of their seats. The jumpers landed all around the football gridiron and on the slopes of Mount Sentinel.

There was a hush when the too-long list of names (WWII veterans) echoed across the field.

Then came the parachuters, followed by the Star Spangled Banner. 🇺🇸

I was at the ceremony and never forgot those jumpers as they bailed out of the Johnson Flying Service aircraft. I had just finished the 8th grade. Jack

75 Years of Smokejumpers 1940–2014

This spiral-bound directory contains the names of all 5,884 smokejumpers who completed training during the first 75 years of smokejumping.

The alphabetical list contains the names of all smokejumpers. The book also features each base with their rookies listed chronologically by year trained.

The last time this listing was done by Roger Savage (MSO-56) was for the 2000 National Reunion in Redding and it sold out in a short amount of time.

All-Time Smokejumpers listing \$15/\$5 Shipping. Use the order form on the merchandise insert.